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Mehngai Man Modi's collection begins: Opposition hits out at PM after fuel price hike

Congress and other opposition parties accused Prime Minister Narendra Modi of burdening the common man with fuel price hikes immediately after elections.

New Delhi.(Agency)

The opposition parties on Friday launched a sharp attack on Prime Minister Narendra Modi after petrol, diesel and CNG prices were hiked, accusing the Centre of burdening the common man soon after the conclusion of elections.

The Congress took a swipe at the Prime Minister, calling him "Mehngai Man Modi" and alleging that the government had begun its "collection" from the public after the assembly elections concluded. Mehngai translates to Inflation.

"Elections over, Modi's collection begins," the Congress said, accusing the BJP-led Centre of imposing additional financial strain on citizens already grappling with inflation and rising living costs. Petrol and diesel prices were increased on Friday by Rs 3 per litre after state-owned oil firms ended a four-year record hiatus in rate revision. In Delhi, the petrol price was hiked to Rs 97.77 per litre from Rs 94.77. Diesel now costs Rs 90.67 as against Rs 89.67 per litre previously. The increase comes 16 days after assembly elections

concluded in Assam, Kerala, Tamil Nadu and West Bengal. The Trinamool Congress slammed the move, calling it "pathetically predictable" that fuel



prices would rise after the polls, and questioned whether the newly sworn-in BJP government in West Bengal would reduce Value Added Tax (VAT) on petrol to ease the burden on people.

"First they loot your vote, then they kick you where it

hurts. Pathetically predictable. Diesel and petrol prices hiked. Will Bengal Govt reduce VAT on petrol & diesel now that there's a Delhi-controlled government which doesn't have to worry about funds being blocked by the Centre?" Trinamool MP Derek O'Brien asked.

Samajwadi Party chief Akhilesh Yadav shared a sarcastic post, saying, "If you want to move forward, the bicycle is the only option". He shared a caricature of himself riding a bicycle, along with the caption, "We had already said that we will continue travelling by bicycle!" The bicycle is also the party symbol of the Samajwadi Party.

Fuel prices had remained unchanged throughout the polling period despite a sharp surge in international crude oil prices triggered by the conflict in West Asia.

The basket of crude oil imported by India averaged around USD 69 per barrel in February, before the outbreak of the war in West Asia. In the months that followed, prices climbed to an average of USD 113-114 per barrel.

Breach in chain of command: Government takes responsibility for NEET leak

Speaking at a press conference on May 15, the Education Minister acknowledged a "breach in the chain of command" and said the government was taking responsibility for the NEET paper leak controversy.

New Delhi.(Agency)

Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan, in a press conference held today, said the NEET re-examination will now be held on June 21 after the government concluded that the original paper had been leaked under the cover of so-called "guess papers".

Pradhan in his address said, "despite following the recommendations of the Radhakrishnan committee, there was a breach in command chain. We accept it and take responsibility to improve it." The Union Minister was referring to the high-level committee led by former ISRO Chairman K



Radhakrishnan and constituted after the 2024 NEET paper leak.

The committee had reportedly made 95 comprehensive recommendations for reforms in the exam process, but those were not followed as per instructions. According to him, the exam

was conducted on May 3, but by May 7, the NTA had received complaints that several questions circulating in guess papers matched the actual exam. The Higher Education Department then launched an enquiry and involved central agencies, which worked with state authorities before confirming by May 12 that the real question paper had indeed been compromised.

During the press conference, he was asked about the alleged involvement of insiders in the National Testing Agency (NTA), and he responded by saying, "CBI will investigate the matter thoroughly. CBI is a trustworthy agency, and it will probe matter smoothly."

'500, 600 Marks': NEET-UG Exam Paper Leak Accused's WhatsApp Guarantee

After Maharashtra, the leaked paper reportedly spread to several states, including Haryana's Gurugram, Rajasthan's Jaipur and Sikar - a major coaching hub - as well as Jammu and Kashmir, Bihar, and Kerala.

New Delhi. (Agency)

Shubham Khairnar, one of the key accused in the NEET-UG 2026 exam paper leak scam, would assure candidates between 500 and 600 marks, details from his WhatsApp chats have revealed. The CBI investigation into the NEET exam paper leak scam - which caused the results of the May 3 exam to be scrapped and the test rescheduled for June 21 - revealed that in April, Khairnar informed his supplier, Yash Yadav from Pune, that a copy of the paper was sought. Sources said the deal for the leaked paper was finalised by April 29, after which Khairnar and others lured candidates sitting for NEET - the national qualifying exam for undergraduate medical courses - with promises of high marks and admission to prestigious colleges. During the investigation, details of digital communications exchanged via WhatsApp between the prime accused and other accused individuals came to light.

Sources said Khairnar - arrested in Nashik - had assured others of the scheme's success and, in those messages, offered a 'guarantee' candidates would get between 500 and 600 marks.

The NEET-UG paper is graded on 720 marks.

Chats recovered from Khairnar's mobile phone indicated that he was in constant contact with a criminal syndicate for the purpose of sharing the leaked question papers. The CBI has seized chat logs, copies of the leaked question papers, and other crucial digital evidence from Shubham's mobile phone. After Maharashtra, the leaked paper reportedly spread to several states, including Haryana's Gurugram, Rajasthan's Jaipur and Sikar - a major coaching hub - as well as Jammu and Kashmir, Bihar, and Kerala.

Who Is Shubham Khairnar And How He Was Arrested

Shubham Khairnar, a 30-year-old resident of the Indiranagar locality in Nashik, is a Bachelor of Ayurvedic Medicine and Surgery (BAMS) student. He allegedly bought the leaked NEET-UG paper from a Pune-based suspect for Rs 10 lakh and sold it to a buyer in Haryana for Rs 15 lakh, earning a profit of Rs 5 lakh. Shubham was detained by the CBI on Tuesday afternoon while reportedly travelling to a temple for prayers. Investigators said he had changed his appearance by cutting his hair in an attempt to evade detection. However, officials allegedly identified him by comparing his current appearance with older photographs and using technical surveillance data.



Alleged Honeytrap and Extortion Conspiracy Against Jain Monk Sparks Major Controversy in Gujarat

Claims of Blackmail, Character Assassination, and Multi-Crore Extortion Under Investigation

Mahanagar Metro Desk / Pawan Makan

Ahmedabad: A major controversy has erupted in Gujarat following serious allegations surrounding an alleged honey-trap and extortion conspiracy targeting Jain monk Muni Rajilak Sagarji Maharaj. The matter, which has triggered intense debate within sections of the Jain community, involves accusations of blackmail, defamation, and attempts to extort large sums of money through what supporters of the monk describe as a "planned character assassination campaign." According to claims made by individuals associated with the monk, the controversy is not merely a legal dispute but part of a wider conspiracy allegedly aimed at damaging the reputation and spiritual standing of the Jain saint. Supporters allege that certain individuals attempted to use legal complaints and social media narratives to pressure the monk and those connected with him. Allegations of Organized Extortion- Sources connected to the case allege that a group of individ-

uals orchestrated a systematic extortion operation by exploiting sensitive accusations and threatening reputational harm. It is claimed that when alleged monetary demands were not fulfilled, efforts were made to publicly tarnish the monk's image through digital platforms and legal proceedings. However, these allegations have not yet been fully proven in court, and investigations remain ongoing. Names Emerging in the Controversy Several individuals, including Hardik Hudiya, Jagat Parekh, Vikram Sanghvi, and Vikram Bafna, have reportedly come under scrutiny in connection with the case. Supporters of the monk have accused them of betraying the trust of the Jain community and participating in activities intended to damage religious institutions and spiritual leadership. At present, authorities have not publicly confirmed the extent of involvement of any accused individuals, and all parties are entitled to legal defense and the presumption of innocence. Key Questions Being



Raised The controversy has led to several major questions within social and religious circles: Was there a larger mastermind operating behind the scenes? Will law enforcement agencies pursue the matter against influential individuals without pressure? How will the Jain community respond to the allegations and internal divisions created by the controversy? Community Reactions Intensify The issue has generated emotional reactions among followers and community members, many of whom are demanding transparency and a thorough investigation. Social media discussions and public debates around the mat-

ter continue to intensify as more details emerge. Investigation Continues Police investigations and legal proceedings are reportedly ongoing. Officials have not yet released a final conclusion regarding the allegations, and further developments are expected in the coming weeks. Observers say the case could have significant implications not only for the individuals involved but also for the reputation and internal unity of religious institutions connected to the controversy. More developments are expected as the investigation progresses.

BJP seeks details of 'Rahul's undeclared 54 foreign trips' since Congress says 'tactic to divert attention' from setbacks

New Delhi.(Agency)

TERMING IT a matter of national security, the BJP on Thursday accused Leader of Opposition Rahul Gandhi of having made undeclared and "secret trips" abroad, and sought to know the reason for the visits and the source of the funds. The Congress hit back saying the BJP's allegations were a tactic to divert attention from "setback after setback" for the NDA government's foreign policy.

BJP national spokesperson and Lok Sabha MP Sambit Patra, addressing a press conference at the party headquarters, alleged that Gandhi had made 54 personal foreign trips in 22 years of his public life. Approximately ₹60 crore was spent on his travels while his declared income over the past 10 years was only about ₹11 crore, said the BJP leader.

2026), Rahul Gandhi has undertaken 54 foreign trips to countries such as Italy, United Kingdom, United States, Germany, Vietnam, Cambodia, Singapore, Bahrain, Maldives, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates," Patra said.

"According to the available details, in the past 10 years, Rahul Gandhi's total income was ₹11 crore. On one hand, there is an income of ₹11 crore, while on the other hand, ₹60 crore was spent on foreign trips," he said.

According to Patra, five "major mismatches" emerged with regard to his foreign trips: financial year 2014-15, when his total income was approximately ₹86 lakh, nearly ₹4.5 crore was spent on a single foreign trip;



crore, while approximately ₹6 crore was spent on foreign travel.

Similarly, in 2019-20, Gandhi's income stood around ₹1.29 crore, whereas nearly ₹4.6 crore was spent on foreign travel, in 2021-22, against an approximate income of ₹1.03 crore, around ₹2.6 crore was spent on

"So far, six of Rahul Gandhi's trips have been described as undeclared, and if the Oman trip is confirmed, it will be the seventh undeclared trip... No public programme related to this trip was announced, no host was disclosed, and it was not revealed who had invited him... No permission letter under FCRA Section 6 has been shown either," Patra alleged. "If Rahul Gandhi went on a foreign trip, he should have written to the Central government and the Ministry of Home Affairs to seek prior permission, because that is the rule for a Member of Parliament. The Congress should make that permission letter public by this evening," he said. Patra sought to know who hosted the visit, whether it was an Indian or a foreign entity, was permission obtained from the

• **The Congress hit back saying the BJP's allegations were a tactic to divert attention from "setback after setback" for the NDA government's foreign policy.**



Security guard dies after speeding car overturns auto on Golf Course Road

GURGAON.(Agency)

A 54-year-old security guard died during treatment after the auto-rickshaw he was travelling in overturned following a collision with a speeding car near Sector 42/27 Chowk on Golf Course Road on Tuesday afternoon.

The deceased, Bijendra Singh, had been living with his family in DLF Phase 1 for the past four years. He worked as a security guard at a residence in DLF Aralia, Sector 42. According to a complaint filed by his son, Ritik Singh, the accident took place around 2pm when Bijendra was travelling in an auto-rickshaw from Sikandarpur towards Aralia. Near the U-turn before Sector 42/27 Chowk, a speeding car allegedly overtook the auto and suddenly took a U-turn, colliding with it and causing the vehicle to overturn. The driver fled the spot after the crash.

Police said multiple passengers travelling in the auto sustained injuries. Bijendra and another injured passenger were taken to a private hospital. Due to the severity of his injuries, he was later shifted to Paras Hospital, where he died during treatment.

A forensic team visited the spot and CCTV footage from the area is being examined to identify the accused driver. An FIR has been registered under relevant sections of the BNS.

Pregnancy termination at illegal clinic sparks foeticide probe

Ghaziabad.(Agency)

Gurgaon: A 17-week pregnant woman developed severe complications after an illegal abortion at an unauthorised clinic in Rewari, prompting a probe into female foeticide and sex determination practices. A joint team of health department, police and drug control authorities raided a clinic in Chilahad and arrested Sukhbir Singh Yadav, who is accused of illegally operating a medical facility equipped with an operation theatre and equipment used for abortion.

An FIR was registered at Rewari Sadar police station under provisions of BNS, Medical Termination of Pregnancy (MTP) Act and Indian Medical Council Act. According to the FIR, the woman, identified as Priyanka, was around 17 weeks pregnant and has two daughters. Health officials said her family approached the accused for termination of pregnancy after a sex determination test.

Officials said Priyanka was initially given medicines and was later taken to the clinic, where the abortion was allegedly carried out. Her condition worsened during the procedure, after which she was shifted to Jeevan Jyoti Hospital in Rewari and later referred to another hospital in Jaipur. Officials said she remains on ventilator support.

The complaint was filed by Dr Vidya Sagar, deputy civil surgeon and nodal officer for PCPNDT and MTP, after hospital authorities alerted the health department about the woman's critical condition. "We are investigating the case further. The accused has been sent to judicial custody. The family is in Jaipur at present with the woman who is on ventilator," Dr Sagar told TOI, adding, "It is a case of termination of foetus."

During the raid, conducted around 5.30pm on Tuesday, officials found a facility operating with an operation table, surgical instruments and medicines. Investigators seized several items. Officials said the clinic was not authorised to conduct medical procedures. The health department is also examining if provisions of PCPNDT Act related to sex determination should be invoked during the investigation.

The case has renewed concern over Haryana's declining sex ratio at birth (SRB). Despite enforcement measures launched by the state govt last year to curb suspected gender selection and female foeticide, SRB for the first four months of this year fell to 895 from 925 last year, prompting another govt review. Statements of the woman's family members have been recorded, and further investigation is underway to identify others who may have been involved in the racket.

Audit flags suspected 22L irregularities in Nuh Red Cross accounts

NOIDA.(Agency)

Nuh: A surprise inspection by Haryana Red Cross Society uncovered alleged financial and administrative irregularities worth over Rs 22 lakh at the district Red Cross Society and St John ambulance branch in Nuh, raising suspicions of fund misuse and embezzlement, according to an official report.

The audit team from the state headquarters in Chandigarh found that nearly Rs 20.7 lakh collected during the 2025-26 financial year, including donations, was not deposited into the official bank account for months, with the pending amount rising to Rs 22.33 lakh during the review period.

The findings also placed the branch secretary under scanner, with officials indicating that his role in the alleged irregularities will be examined in detail.

According to the report, Rs 40,000 remained undeposited for 13 months, Rs 2.2 lakh for 10 months and Rs 18.23 lakh for nearly three months. Officials noted that cash deposits totalling around Rs 20.5 lakh were made only in April 2026 after the inspection process began.

The inspection also reviewed the scanning project being run across different tehsils in the district. The audit found that revenue generated through the project was allegedly kept outside official accounts. While most of the amount was later deposited during the 2025-26 financial year, the report said Rs 1.05 lakh is still pending.

Apart from the financial discrepancies, the audit highlighted several administrative violations. Secretary Mahesh Gupta was accused of appointing his son through outsourcing and granting him a salary scale without proper approval. The report also stated that the accountant posted at the Nuh branch was receiving nearly double the salary paid to accountants in other Haryana districts, with recovery of the excess amount reportedly recommended. The inspection team further observed that proper financial records were not maintained regularly. Cash books and ledgers were either incomplete or not updated, while several vouchers lacked supporting documents. The report also mentioned that the accountant was paid separately for writing the cash book despite rules prohibiting such payments. Investigators also flagged possible tampering with receipt records.

Expenditure on vehicle fuel and repairs in Nuh and Palwal also came under scrutiny, with officials directing the branch to provide verified logbooks and supporting records.

Workers protest at 2 factories in Gurgaon over wage hike, overtime

GURGAON.(Agency)

Workers at two factories in the city staged separate protests on Thursday, alleging that Haryana govt's revised minimum wage order was being flouted and that years of experience, skill levels and overtime were being ignored in pay packages. The twin protests — one inside a leather goods unit in Udyog Vihar and the other on the campus of a glass factory in Narsingpur — come barely weeks after wage-related labour unrest turned violent in Noida and Manesar and raised concerns over simmering tension on factory floors again.

At the Udyog Vihar leather unit, around 200 workers went on strike and began a sit-in inside the premises. Their primary allegation was that the management had collapsed all categories — helpers, unskilled, semi-skilled and skilled workers — into one wage bracket and denied them the differentiated pay mandated under the revised structure. Kamlesh Kumar, a worker at the factory,



said employees had repeatedly asked the company management to implement the 35% hike in minimum wages announced by the state, but were ignored. "Officials are telling us to either work on the same pay or leave. How can we leave? We have EMIs and rent to pay," he added.

Others said the dispute goes beyond basic wages. Md Tabrez alleged that labourers were being made to work 12 to 16 hours a day, including Sundays, without overtime being paid at the legal rate. "Unskilled, semi-skilled and skilled workers are all being treated as one

category. Moreover, we are all being paid less than the mandated wages," he added. Karan Kumar said overtime was also being wrongly calculated. "It should be paid at double the regular wage and calculated on the basis of 24 working days in a month. Instead, it is being worked out over 31 days. So, we are losing money," he added. Miraz, another worker, said the protest was continuing inside the factory because employees believed the company was refusing to follow the govt's direction on wages.

At the glass factory in Narsingpur, workers protested outside the gate over similar issues. Deepak Kumar, one of them, said employees with more than 20 years of experience were earning about Rs 15,000 a month, while those with less than five years of service were getting nearly Rs 12,500.

"We have been asking the company to implement the revised minimum wages, but it has refused," he said.

Haryana Class 10 boards: Gurgaon slips to 18th rank, Charkhi Dadri tops state

Gurgaon.(Agency)

Haryana Board of School Education (HBSE) on Thursday declared the Class 10 results, with Charkhi Dadri emerging as the top-performing district with a pass percentage of 96%, followed by Jind at 94.6%. Nuh recorded the lowest pass percentage at 68.9%, down from last year's 73.9%.

Gurgaon's performance declined, with the district slipping from 14th position in 2025 to 18th this year. The overall pass percentage dropped from 92.8% last year to 89.4%. "The dip in performance will be analysed and focused academic support and remedial measures will be introduced to improve results in the coming session," an education department official said.

Across the state, girls outperformed boys by 3.95 percentage points. Girls recorded a pass percentage of 91.64%, while boys registered 87.69%. Deepika from

Bhiwani topped the state with 499 out of 500 marks. Ronak from Bhiwani and Khushi from Hisar secured the second position with 498 marks each.

In the Gurgaon district, Durvish emerged as



the topper with 494 marks, followed by Nicki with 493 marks. Durvish, who studied at Devki Kailash Public School in Pataudi, scored 100 marks each in Mathematics and Physical Education, 99 in Sanskrit, 98 in Social Science, 97 in

English and 86 in Hindi.

His father, Anil Sharma, is a priest, while his mother, Chetna Sharma, is a homemaker. Durvish said he focused on regular studies and tuition support, especially in subjects where he needed improvement. He has now taken admission in the Commerce stream in Class 11 at Keshav Vidya School in Pataudi and aims to become a chartered accountant.

Across Haryana, rural students performed better than urban students, recording a pass percentage of 90.25% against 87.94% in urban areas. Private schools recorded a pass percentage of 92.45%, against 89.4% in govt schools.

In the Haryana Open School Class 10 fresh category, 5,772 candidates appeared and 645 passed, resulting in a pass percentage of 11.17%. In the re-appear category, 1,885 out of 3,957 candidates passed, taking the overall pass percentage to 47.64%.

Noida to repair sewage lines in 5 villages

Noida.(Agency)

Noida Authority will lay new sewer lines and set up sewage pumping stations in five villages — Barola, Sarfabad, Wazidpur, Hazipur and Chhijarsi — to address chronic overflow problems. GB Nagar MP Mahesh Sharma and Noida MLA Pankaj Singh joined Authority officials on Thursday to lay foundation stones for the projects.

"We were getting complaints about sewage problems in these areas and have decided to resolve the overflow woes permanently," said RP Singh, general manager, Noida Authority.

The largest outlay is a 10-million-litre-per-day sewage pumping station in Barola at Rs 10 crore. In Chhijarsi, Rs 1.65 crore will go toward maintenance of a 1,280-metre sewer line, pipe replacement and repair work.

Wazidpur will see Rs 1.64 crore spent on a 1,300-metre stretch for similar repairs and replacement of rusted pipes, while Rs 1 crore has been earmarked for maintaining 3,344 metres of sewer

pipeline in Sarfabad.

MLA Singh said residents had flagged the issues and the Authority had acted. The works carry added urgency ahead of the monsoon, when rainfall sharply increases



pressure on underground networks — damaged or undersized lines can cause sewage to mix with rainwater, triggering waterlogging and backflow into homes.

The Authority will also spend Rs 1.65 crore

on maintenance of a 1,280-metre sewer line, replacement of old pipes and other repair work in Chhijarsi village. In addition, it will spend Rs 1.64 crore on maintenance and repair of sewer lines and

replacement of old, rusted pipes along a 1,300-metre stretch in Wazidpur. The Authority will spend Rs 1 crore on maintenance of 3,344.10 metres of sewer pipeline in Sarfabad. MLA Pankaj Singh said, "With these projects, the sewer problems will be properly resolved in the villages. We asked the Noida Authority to address these issues after the residents raised these key issues in the past."

Resolving sewer overflow and drainage issues is important as monsoon rainfall sharply increases pressure on underground sewer networks. If damaged or undersized sewer lines are not repaired in advance, rainwater mixes with sewage, leading to overflowing drains, waterlogging and backflow into residential areas.



five floors and gutted eight flats in Tower D of Gaur Green.

The board approved 13 agenda items in all. Apart from fire safety, it kept open all three routes — land pooling, mutual consent and acquisition — for procuring 200 hectares for the proposed Aero City project in Morti. It also cleared a framework for a proposed international cricket stadium as a joint venture between GDA and the UP Cricket Association, with both sides as equal stakeholders in land procurement, construction and operations. The board also gave its nod for a land-use change for 6,959sqm in Indirapuram from commercial to group housing, aimed at creating more dwelling units in a land-scarce township.

To push the second phase of the Harnandipuram township project, it sanctioned a budget for acquiring 123 hectares across Bhawapur, Morta and Shahpur Nij Morta through mutual consent at an estimated cost of Rs 2,179 crore.

‘Ghost plantations, bad roads’ Fbd corpn officers face stinging rebuke from min

Gurgaon.(Agency)

Two days after Union minister and Faridabad MP Krishan Pal Gurjar publicly lashed out at officials of the Municipal Corporation of Faridabad (MCF) during a stormy District Development Coordination and Monitoring Committee (DISHA) meeting, the civic body on Thursday suspended assistant engineer Sanjay Bansal.

MCF has also constituted an inquiry committee headed by additional commissioner Saloni Sharma to investigate the allegations and submit a report within 10 days.

The minister's outburst, captured on video and widely circulated on social media, came amid allegations of poor infrastructure, corruption and misuse of public funds. Gurjar accused senior MCF engineers of allowing roads to deteriorate despite repeated repairs and questioned expenditure running into crores on plantation drives that allegedly showed little visible impact on the ground.

"This is the public's money, you will rot with worms and your children will bear its brunt... Roads are built, they break down. When someone says it broke in 10 days, you say that we will get it repaired. But why did it break in 10 days?" Gurjar said



during the meeting. "The money you are taking is sinfully earned. You have turned the municipal corporation into a den of looting of public money. You want money for everything. God above is watching you," he added. Gurjar also alleged that nearly Rs 10 crore had been spent on plantation work, but officials could not

explain where the trees had actually been planted. He said such irregularities were tarnishing the image of the Haryana govt.

Two BJP MLAs present at the meeting separately raised allegations against the civic body's functioning. Ballabgarh MLA Mool Chand Sharma accused MCF officials of reconstructing

roads that were still under warranty. "This is not your father's money," Sharma told officials while questioning the repeated rebuilding of roads.

Badkhal MLA Dhanesh Adlakha alleged that some officials were operating through middlemen and raised concerns over the quality of recent construction work.

"They've kept thieves at MCF office. Sanjay Bansal is taking commissions; they've turned it into a hub for middlemen," Adlakha alleged. "Check the roads built 10 years ago — not a single one in the whole city would have been broken like this. But the roads built in the last 10 years are in terrible condition," he added.

Following the meeting, MCF suspended Bansal while taking cognisance of the allegations levelled against him.

Sources said Gurjar's sharp criticism of the civic body has triggered political discussion beyond the immediate corruption allegations. In political circles, the timing and intensity of the attack are being viewed as a reflection of the factional rivalry between Gurjar and Vipul Goel, who currently holds the urban local bodies portfolio in the state govt.

Gurjar and Goel could not be reached for comment despite repeated attempts.

5 Killed, 23 Injured After Blast At Firecracker Factory In Madhya Pradesh

The death count has risen to five after two more workers, who were severely injured in an explosion at a firecracker factory in Madhya Pradesh's Dewas district on Thursday, died.

Bhopal. (Agency)

The death count has risen to five after two more workers, who were severely injured in an explosion at a firecracker factory in Madhya Pradesh's Dewas district on Thursday, died, while 23 others are undergoing treatment, officials said.

Dewas Additional District Magistrate (ADM) Sanjeev Jain told PTI, "Two workers admitted to a private hospital in Dewas succumbed during treatment. This brings the total number of deaths to five." Officials said Anil Malviya, the licensed owner of the firecracker factory operating in the Tonk Kalan area has been arrested under the stringent provisions of the National Security Act (NSA). According to officials, Malviya's firecracker

license has been suspended. Three workers who were injured in the fire have been admitted to the Government Maharaja Yashwantrao Hospital in Indore.

Chief Minister Mohan Yadav visited the hospital to enquire about the well-being of the victims.

He told reporters, "We have taken action against the owner of the firecracker factory under the National Security Act (NSA). We are conducting a detailed investigation into the incident, and further action will be taken based on the investigation report." The chief minister said, "The state government will not spare anyone guilty in this case. This incident serves as a lesson,



and we hope it will not be repeated." Deputy Chief Minister Jagdish Dewda said that along with the factory owner's arrest, a magisterial inquiry has also been ordered.

Home Department Additional Chief Secretary Sanjay Shukla said that officials from the central government's Petroleum and Explosives Safety Organization (PESO), the State Pollution Control Board, and the Forensic Science Laboratory are investigating the explosion at the firecracker factory. District Magistrate Rituraj Singh said that two licenses for manufacturing and selling firecrackers were issued to factory owner Malviya.

He said, "These licenses were first issued on December 23 last year. They were renewed on May 6 this year." According to Singh, the factory had begun manufacturing small firecrackers only 15 days ago.

Patwari arrived at the scene and criticised the state government over the incident. Patwari said, "This incident shows that the gunpowder mafia, which imports raw materials from China, has established its dominance in the state." He alleged that the owner of the firecracker factory enjoys the patronage of leaders of the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP).

Patwari claimed that firecrackers manufactured at the factory were being illegally stored in agricultural produce warehouses and that more than 40 minor boys were working at the factory. He demanded the immediate suspension of the district magistrate for his alleged failure to prevent irregularities at the factory.

Short news

Police arrest 10 foreigners for illegally casting votes in Tamil Nadu polls

Chennai. (Agency)

Chennai police arrested 10 foreign nationals – four of them women – for allegedly casting illegal votes using fraudulently obtained identity documents in the recently held Tamil Nadu Assembly elections, officials said on Thursday.

According to a press release, the individuals were intercepted by immigration authorities at Chennai international airport while



attempting to leave the country after the polls, which were held on April 23.

Investigations revealed that despite holding foreign citizenship and not being Indian citizens, the accused had stayed in various parts of the state to allegedly exercise their franchise illegally, the release said.

Following a complaint by immigration officials to the Greater Chennai Police Commissionerate, cases were registered between May 7 and May 14 by the Central Crime Branch and local police units. All the accused were produced before a court for further legal proceedings, the statement added.

Beers, whiskeys get cheaper by 20-25% in Karnataka

BENGALURU. (Agency)

Good news for beer lovers! Prices of mild and lager beers in Karnataka have dropped by 20-25 per cent, effective May 11. The Excise department has rolled out the new price list under the Alcohol in Beverage (AiB) policy for beers and spirits, under which the Maximum Retail Price (MRP) of beers, with 5 per cent alcohol v/v has dropped by 20-25 per cent.

As per the new price list, the MRP on 650ml of some of the most popular mild beer brands with 5 per cent alcohol v/v – Kingfisher Premium, Kingfisher Ultra, Budweiser, UB Export, Heineken etc – have been reduced by Rs 75 (KF Premium, Ultra), Rs 70 (Heineken), Rs 25 (UB Export) and Rs 20 (Budweiser Premium). There's a price reduction in premium Scotch whiskeys by 20 per cent as well. The MRP on 750ml bottles of Black Label (43 per cent alcohol v/v) and Chivas Regal (40 per cent alcohol v/v) has come down from Rs 5190 to Rs 4100.

The burden of the new Excise taxation policy will be felt most on the first five Excise slabs (lowest) of Indian Made Liquor (IML), which sells in 180ml (nip) tetra packs. The prices in these slabs have shot up by 20-25 per cent. This is where the AiB policy may hit lower to middle income consumers.

The first five slabs contribute between 75 and 80 per cent towards Excise revenue. The new MRP on the most popular rum brand Old Monk, with 42.8 per cent alcohol v/v, has been revised from Rs 765 to Rs 850. OM falls in the fifth Excise slab. "The final new MRP list of all brands has still not been released. Though the new MRP kicked in on May 11, people are still not aware of the new pricing. We will have to wait and watch the market response," said industry sources, who didn't wish to be named. The AiB has replaced the over six-decade-old taxation policy on bulk litre of alcohol.

Special Investigative Report: Allegations of Crime, Bootlegging and Political Protection Shake Gujarat's Kheda District

Nadiad | Special Correspondent

Serious allegations regarding illegal gambling, bootlegging, political protection, and alleged corruption within local law enforcement have sparked controversy across Gujarat's Kheda district. Critics claim the district is increasingly becoming a safe haven for organized illegal activities, while public confidence in the local policing system continues to weaken. The allegations, many of which are circulating through local discussions and complaints, have not yet been fully verified in court. However, growing public pressure has intensified demands for action from the Gujarat State Monitoring Cell (SMC). Allegations of Illegal Gambling Networks According to local claims, several gambling operations are allegedly functioning openly in different parts of the district. Tundel Bullet Train Area A man identified as Pravin has been accused by locals of allegedly operating gambling activities near the bullet train corridor under the protection of influential political figures. Reports further allege that the gambling location had been handed over on a daily rental arrangement to another individual known as "Romi." Unverified allegations also suggest that certain local police personnel and intermediaries may have ignored the activities or failed to take effective action. Davda Bullet Train Track Region Another alleged gambling operator identified as Wasim is accused of frequently changing locations to avoid police raids while continuing large-scale



gambling operations. Critics say the situation raises concerns about possible information leaks and weak enforcement mechanisms. Concerns Over Alcohol and Youth Exposure Keriya-Anandpura Canal Area Residents have alleged that illegal liquor gatherings are being organized in the area by a bootlegger known locally as "Lotiyo." Concerns are growing that young people and college students are being exposed to gambling and alcohol networks. Kanipura Sindhi Chali An individual identified as Arun alias "Meliyo", reportedly previously externed from Vadodara, is alleged to be operating gambling activities in the Nadiad Town jurisdiction. Local discussions have linked the matter to alleged political and police protection, though no official confirmation has been issued. Allegations of Political-Criminal Nexus The controversy has also drawn political attention after allegations surfaced against local political figures, including claims that certain individuals received protec-

tion despite criminal accusations. Supporters of the opposition and local activists have alleged that organized groups are being used to intimidate critics, suppress dissent, and target journalists raising sensitive issues. No court has yet established these allegations as fact, and the accused individuals have not publicly responded to all claims. Questions Over Local Crime Branch Functioning-

Further allegations have emerged regarding the functioning of the Local Crime Branch (LCB), with critics accusing some officials of failing to act decisively against illegal liquor and gambling operations. Salun Chopati Area Residents claim large quantities of illegal foreign liquor are regularly distributed in the area without significant enforcement action. Near Kala Mandir Locals also allege that illegal liquor sales are taking place openly near a police station, raising serious questions about enforcement credibility and public accountability. Public Demand for SMC Action Amid growing frustration, residents and activists are reportedly urging the Gujarat State Monitoring Cell (SMC) in Gandhinagar to directly intervene and conduct independent operations against the alleged nexus of criminals, bootleggers, and corrupt elements. Major Questions Being Raised Will the State Monitoring Cell launch an independent crackdown on the alleged crime network?

MP textbook body chief served notice over 50-vehicle convoy

Bhopal. (Agency)

A major impact of an India Today report has once again been seen in Madhya Pradesh, with newly appointed Madhya Pradesh Textbook Corporation chairperson Saubhagya Singh Thakur being served a show-cause notice and barred from all official activities until further orders. The action comes after India Today highlighted how Thakur allegedly ignored Prime Minister Narendra Modi's public appeal for fuel conservation by travelling from Ujjain to Bhopal with a convoy of nearly 50 vehicles to assume charge of his new post.

Following the controversy, Chief Minister Dr Mohan Yadav had earlier issued directions discouraging rallies and public processions linked to assumption of office ceremonies. The matter has now escalated further, with strict restrictions imposed on Thakur for allegedly failing to follow appeals and directives issued in the national interest.

According to the order, Saubhagya Singh Thakur has been prohibited from entering the Madhya Pradesh Textbook Corporation office or premises until further instructions. He has also been barred from using any corporation facility, vehicle, staff or office resources.

The restrictions further state that he will not be allowed to participate in or chair any meeting related to the corporation. He has also been prohibited from taking part in any administrative or financial decisions or signing official documents until further orders.

The controversy erupted after visuals surfaced showing a long convoy of SUVs and supporter vehicles travelling from Ujjain to Bhopal with repeated halts and public welcome programmes along the route. The visuals drew sharp attention because they appeared just days after PM Modi urged citizens to reduce unnecessary fuel consumption amid tensions in West Asia and concerns over rising pressure on India's economy.

Addressing a BJP rally in Telangana, PM Modi had appealed to people to minimise petrol and diesel usage, use public transport, adopt carpooling and increasingly shift towards electric vehicles. He had also encouraged virtual meetings and work-from-home practices to conserve resources.

Southwest monsoon may arrive early in Kerala as IMD signals advanced onset near Andamans

The India Meteorological Department indicated that the monsoon is likely to reach the Andaman and Nicobar Islands around May 16 — four days ahead of its normal onset date.

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM. (Agency)

The countdown to the southwest monsoon has begun, with the India Meteorological Department (IMD) indicating that the monsoon is likely to reach the Andaman and Nicobar Islands around May 16 — four days ahead of its normal onset date.

According to experts, if the conditions remain favourable, monsoon could arrive early in Kerala.

IMD director Neetha K Gopal told that under normal conditions monsoon reaches the Andaman and Nicobar Islands around May 20 and Kerala around June 1. "Though this suggests a gap of around 10 days, the interval is not fixed. During the 10-day period, fresh low-pressure systems and other weather disturbances can either accelerate or delay the monsoon's advance," Neetha said.

She said the movement of the monsoon is a dynamic process and does not progress at a constant pace. "So, an early onset over the Andaman region does not necessarily mean that Kerala will receive the monsoon ahead of schedule," she said.

According to IMD, the early advance is being aided by a low-pressure area that has formed over the Bay of Bengal. The system is expected to move northwestwards or weaken over the next few days, creating favourable conditions for the monsoon current to progress into the Andaman Sea.

IMD is expected to issue its official forecast for the onset of the southwest monsoon over Kerala on May 15. This year, the state is set to enhance weather monitoring with a

new X-band Doppler Weather Radar (DWR) being installed at a cost of Rs 6 crore at Pulpally in Wayanad.



"The radar is in the final stages of installation, and we are aiming to commission it before the onset of the monsoon. Only minor work, including site

clearing and final system checks, remain to be completed," Neetha said.

The radar, being set up on the land provided by the Pazhassiraja College, is a joint initiative of IMD and the Kerala State Disaster Management Authority (KSDMA). A 30-year lease agreement was signed between IMD, KSDMA, and the college authorities. Once operational, the radar will provide high-resolution, real-time weather data, significantly improving rainfall monitoring and short-term forecasting, particularly for northern Kerala and vulnerable hilly regions.

Currently, there are two operational DWRs in Kerala -- an S-band DWR in Kochi and a C-band DWR at the Vikram Sarabhai Space Centre in Thiruvananthapuram.

Modi must tax the rich, not just middle class

Let us begin with some numbers — sadly, we cannot escape them. Since the Iran war began, global crude prices have gone up by 50%. Meanwhile, the rupee has slid from Rs 91 to a dollar to Rs 95.70 at the time of writing these words. Add to this, the fact that Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) are taking their money out at an alarming rate, and you will understand why we are in a right royal mess.

Before the war began, we were all worrying about how AI will eat up jobs, especially white-collar IT jobs that India's middleclass depends on. Now the war has added one more thing for us to worry about. That is what economists call the Current Account Deficit (CAD). That is the difference between what we earn from exports, what Indian companies earn doing business abroad, and Indians living abroad send home, and what we spend on importing goods and services.

There is nothing wrong with running a Current Account Deficit, especially for developing countries like ours. Such economies have to import machines, equipment, energy and other inputs, to build capacities. And, during the development stage, countries like ours, will not be able to match our import bill through exports or income transfers. In our case, a high import bill is also unavoidable, because we import 80% of our crude oil needs. After all, that is what fuels our economic engine. But a big part of our CAD is also because we import a lot of gold. Not just the average Indian, but increasingly also the Reserve Bank of India, which has been trying to reduce its dollar dependence by converting it.

Now, unlike other assets, gold has no productive use. People buy it because it has been traditionally seen as a store of value. The demand for gold has shot up in the past couple of years because the rich are worried that other (productive) assets will not give them good returns, and also because the dollar is fast losing its dominance. In India, the benchmark Nifty 50 has given virtually zero return in the past two years; real estate prices have been stagnant for over a year, and in some cases fallen in the past few months; even fixed deposits have left very little on the table after taxes. So, it is but natural for the affluent, to buy gold with their savings.

When we buy gold or crude oil, we spend dollars. Normally, this would not be a problem if FIIs had been flocking to our markets, and flooding our economy with dollars. Right now, the exact opposite is happening — FIIs are steadily selling Indian financial assets. So, there is a double demand for dollars — from Indian importers and from foreign investors selling and exiting India. Naturally, this has driven the rupee drastically down in the past year. Last year, around this time, you could buy one US dollar for Rs 85, now it is on its way to Rs 96. The Iran war has come as a double whammy. Right before the war began, we were buying crude oil at an average price of \$70 to a barrel. And back then, the rupee was trading at Rs 91 to a dollar. So, a barrel of crude cost about Rs 6,370. Today, we are buying crude at \$105 per barrel. At the current exchange rate, it is Rs 10,000 per barrel.

In dollar terms, crude oil costs 50% more, but in rupee terms it has gone up by 57%. So, we are not only facing a higher dollar import bill because of the Iran war, but an even higher rupee import bill, because the rupee is weakening. That is why, economists, including the government's Chief Economic Advisor, V Anantha Nageswaran, are warning that our Current Account Deficit could more than double, from less than 1% of GDP to more than 2% in 2026-27. This is the most severe economic stress test that the Modi government has faced since it first came to power in 2014. What is the solution?

When incumbent govts misread voters

Hubris never fails to bring overconfident politicians down

IN the recently-held elections to five Assemblies, three sitting governments were ousted — in Kerala, Tamil Nadu and West Bengal — while two, in Assam and Puducherry, saw a strong return to power by the incumbents. Why is it that seemingly entrenched political parties fail to read the growing impatience of the electorate correctly in adequate time to make amends? The more popular a leader today, the more careful he or she should be, since his confidants may have a vested interest in blocking ground-level information from reaching them, more so when toadyism is mistaken for loyalty.

Conversely, when do voters give incumbents yet another term in office? It simply means that the governments have broadly delivered on promises, and additionally not done the things that irritate voters.

In Assam, Himanta Biswa Sarma also tapped into the Assamese Hindu and smaller communities' fears about being deluged by the rising Muslim demographic. The combination worked this time, but it cannot be invoked all the time. In 2031, it may be a different story. After three terms in power, there may be a desire for change.

But how did the incumbents in Kerala, Tamil Nadu and West Bengal fail to read the tea leaves? The Kerala outcome, where the LDF was sent packing after two terms in office, was largely because the state has had a history of alternating governments, with Pinarayi Vijayan's second term being the result of a demoralised Congress party in 2021. The Congress-led UDF merely had to tap into the anti-incumbency sentiment against the LDF. It won handsomely, though the BJP ate into the LDF's Hindu vote this time, making the UDF victory massive. The BJP's rise in the future cannot be ruled out, provided it works out a Kerala-specific strategy that brings three communities together — the Nairs, Ezhavas and some Christian groups. The party has won three seats in the Assembly, with 11.5% of the vote.

That brings us to the main questions: How did the seemingly entrenched Dravidian parties lose to a rank outsider like Joseph Vijay's Tamilaga Vettri Kazhagam (TVK)? How did a BJP, which failed to capitalise on the growing anti-incumbency against Mamata's Trinamool Congress in 2021, manage to turn the tide this time?

In West Bengal, it was rather easy to start believing that the deletions related to the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls may have been a factor, but one would be wrong. The deletions of people who may be dead or have permanently migrated cannot be seen as invalid

deletions. What matters is the 2.7 million voters whose names were flagged as having "logical discrepancies", which could include some non-citizens who may have been added illegally.

But the actual vote share difference between the BJP and the Trinamool was around 3.2 million, and even if the 2.7 million exclusions were to be added back to benefit only the Trinamool, the BJP could have won. Especially since a large share of the Trinamool vote was in concentrated pockets. The real reasons why Mamata lost are the following: One, she assumed that with 27% of the Muslim vote in the bag even before the counting started, she only needed 20% of the remaining vote to secure victory. It turned out even Muslims were looking for



alternatives. Two, she also believed that she was popular with women, and that most would vote for her. But women were as concerned about safety as they were about cash in the bank. Three, having turned the local media into her fan club, she was unable to see the tide of Hindu resentment and the anti-incumbency wave building against her. She also failed to see how the second centre of power in her party, her nephew Abhishek Banerjee, had managed to alienate many in her own party with his high-handed ways. The worst thing a leader can do is to start believing the hype building around her own personality, happily ratcheted up by a pliant media. We saw this happen at the national level too in 2024, when the media hyped up Narendra Modi's '400-paar' slogan, and ignored the growing internal dissidence in the party in Uttar Pradesh,

Maharashtra and Rajasthan, among others.

Hubris never fails to bring overconfident politicians down.

The BJP has corrected this fault, but it still may have issues to deal with in the forthcoming Assembly elections in Uttar Pradesh in 2027 and the general election in 2029. In Tamil Nadu, we saw another political earthquake — a totally unexpected one. While West Bengal has been in economic decline, Tamil Nadu is not only the second largest state by gross state domestic product, but has also been topping the growth indices in recent years. Then why did MK Stalin fail to win another term? Corruption and women's safety were said to be big issues for the electorate, but this did not benefit the primary opposition alliance. Tamil Nadu's results are important not only

because the anti-incumbency tide overwhelmed the party in power, but also the party in waiting, the AIADMK-led National Democratic Alliance. This can only be explained as a growing weariness with Dravidianism and anti-North rhetoric, with the voter tiring of ideological rigidity.

Vijay's TVK steered clear of these old tropes and appeared different. For someone looking for change, both the DMK and AIADMK seemed like more of the same. The voter was not looking to choose between Tweedledum and Tweedledee when she had a third option.

The lessons for political parties are clear. One, don't fall for your own hype and media willingness to praise you to the skies. The media tends to be kind to those who are in power, and cannot be relied upon to test your own popularity. Two, even if you have a solid base in a state, you should be constantly looking for disruptors

who may challenge the status quo. Just as new technology threatens traditional businesses, new political entrepreneurs can always capture the imagination of voters. Three, no party can afford to be arrogant and take any voter for granted. Elections can be lost even if you have delivered on the economic front, and sometimes the voter may also respond positively to a party that seems to be doing its best even if it hasn't delivered. After demonetisation, which caused lots of hardships to people, the BJP won a huge mandate in Uttar Pradesh because the voters believed that the Modi government was trying to root out corruption. No party can afford complacency at any time. All leaders should worry about personal hubris, which the voter can send crashing down in one day. Leaders must be as wary of naysayers as yeasayers, the acolytes of the boss.

Heads must roll: NEET cancellation demands accountability

Both babus and politicians must be held responsible for the trauma they have caused 22 lakh children

THE first part-cancellation of the NEET-UG exam in 2024 was bad enough. The second, on Tuesday, is criminal. Lakhs of students, after years of relentless preparation, sleepless nights and immense emotional strain, have been told that their career-defining examination stands nullified because the authorities entrusted with safeguarding its integrity failed to protect the sanctity of a "guess paper". Heads must roll for allowing a repetition of this unforgivable scandal. The emotional devastation caused by this fiasco cannot be repaired by announcing revised dates. Every paper leak strengthens criminal syndicates while punishing honest students. There must be transparent investigations, criminal prosecution and administrative accountability. In 2024, NEET was rocked by allegations of paper leaks, inflated ranks and

controversial grace marks. Though the entire exam was not cancelled then, the episode triggered nationwide outrage, judicial scrutiny and promises of reform. The



government assured students that safeguards would be strengthened and lessons had been learnt. Instead, the

rot has deepened. The cancellation of the 2026 exam proves that the authorities hardly treated the earlier crisis with the seriousness it deserved. The National Testing Agency's credibility is in tatters. Nor can Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan escape accountability. Such a monumental failure affecting millions of young citizens calls for an overhauling of the entire system of education. The whole cycle of infamy — from coaching classes which practically hold the student's life to ransom, to large-scale fraud in "guess papers" — must be reimagined.

India needs to break the stranglehold of this magic bullet, three-hour test that decides whether you are worth becoming a doctor or not. The shift to NEET, replacing multiple state and private exams, was intended to create a standardised, merit-based admission process. Clearly, it hasn't worked. Both babus and politicians must be held responsible for the trauma they have caused 22 lakh children.

Hantavirus outbreak is a call to action

Research into emerging and re-emerging viruses should be prioritised, along with surveillance

ON April 1, a group of people boarded a cruise ship, MV Hondius, at Ushuaia in Argentina on a long-distance expedition marketed as the Atlantic Odyssey. The 33-day cruise was designed to bridge the gap between the Antarctic and the Arctic seasons with stops at exotic island locations like South Georgia, Gough Island and Saint Helena, with Praia (Cape Verde) being the final destination. Instead, it ended up in a nightmare for the passengers as some of them reported severe respiratory illness, and three died due to the illness, which was subsequently identified as a result of hantavirus infection. The first death occurred on April 11, but the cause remained unidentified. As more people fell sick with similar symptoms, the outbreak was reported to the World Health Organisation (WHO) on May 2. Although the outbreak has been limited to the ship and the virus involved is not new, it has still raised global concern due to the fact that 147 passengers and crew members onboard came from 23 countries, and 34 of them disembarked before the outbreak was identified as hantavirus. This highlights global vulnerabilities in interconnected travel networks.

So far, 11 cases have been reported, including three deaths. All cases are of passengers or crew on the ship. Nine of the 11 have been confirmed as the Andes strain of hantavirus. There have been no deaths after May 2, when the WHO was first informed of the cluster of cases. The health agency took swift action by sending its experts to the ship and coordinating the evacuation of the passengers in accordance with the International Health Regulations (IHR). Under these rules, the nearest port with sufficient medical capacity must be identified to ensure the safety and dignity of those on board. Tenerife (Spain) met that standard, and the Spanish government permitted passengers to disembark on its shore as per

IHR and EU regulations.

At present, there is no sign that we are seeing the start of a larger outbreak, according to WHO Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus. This is not another Covid-19, he says. The current public health risk from hantavirus remains low, but the situation could change. Given the long incubation period (about 42 days) of the virus, more cases might emerge in the coming weeks.

Each of the countries to which the passengers have been repatriated is responsible for monitoring their health. Two of the crew members are Indians; they have been evacuated to the Netherlands, where the ship proceeded after disembarking all passengers in Tenerife. Both Indians have been reported to be asymptomatic as of now. Hantavirus cardiopulmonary syndrome (HPS) is a viral respiratory disease caused by hantaviruses of the genus Orthohantavirus, in which 20 viral species have been identified. At present, there is no specific antiviral treatment for HPS. Human hantavirus infection is primarily acquired through animal-to-human transmission, mostly through contact with the urine, faeces or saliva of infected rodents or by touching contaminated surfaces. However, the Andes strain is capable of spreading among people, as it has happened on the ship. In the present case, it is suspected that an elderly Dutch couple contracted the virus during a bird-watching tour in Ushuaia before they boarded the cruise ship. The couple may have been exposed to infected rodent droppings or urine at a landfill site during their outing. The hantavirus outbreak has coincided with five years of the deadly second wave of Covid and revived memories of containment measures like quarantine and contact tracing. Since the Covid pandemic, the world has seen several serious outbreaks and public health emergencies of international concern — Mpox, H5N1,

Marburg Virus — and local outbreaks of Nipah virus in India and Bangladesh. The Covid experience has shown that underestimating a virus or its pandemic potential contributes to delayed action. Various studies and models have pointed out that the world remains poorly prepared for pandemics. With environmental changes and greater human mobility, the world is likely to see more outbreaks linked to zoonotic diseases due to



pathogens that originate in wildlife. Deforestation and other human activities in forested areas are affecting the dynamics of rodent populations, and also modifying transmission rates of rodent-borne zoonotic pathogens such as hantavirus, as found in a 2025 study of rodents in North America. Researchers discovered six new rodent species that host hantavirus, and they consider it an emerging disease of pandemic potential with symptoms that resemble severe Covid

infection. The hantavirus outbreak has once again reminded the world that human health is inseparable from animal and environmental health. Factors like deforestation, fragmentation of ecosystems, climate change and even intensive farming are bringing humans and animals into closer contact, creating opportunities for frequent 'spillover' for viruses.

Conserving forests and biodiversity is the best natural protection against such opportunistic transfer of zoonotic pathogens. Brazilian scientists have specifically studied the presence of rodent species hosting hantavirus in the Brazilian Atlantic Forest, and have found that forest restoration could significantly reduce the risk of hantavirus transmission to human populations living close to the forests. Given factors like rich biodiversity, rapid urbanisation, deforestation and the impact of climate change, India is considered a hotspot for emerging infectious diseases, including zoonotic diseases. In the wake of the Covid pandemic, the government launched the National One Health Mission in 2022, emphasising a unified approach to human and animal health. Subsequently, the National Institute of One Health was conceived to coordinate mission activities. The mission talked about stronger surveillance, early warning systems, research, infrastructure development and the integration of data across human, animal and environmental health.

The progress has been slow, particularly when it comes to research in zoonotic diseases, integrated surveillance of zoonotic and human diseases and risk assessment studies. Research into emerging and re-emerging viruses should be prioritised, along with surveillance on the ground. The hantavirus outbreak is yet another wake-up call.



Mowgli land

After three hours of a rather bumpy drive from Kanha to Pench, we were about to make it to the enchanting land of Mowgli. As we drove closer to Sarrahiri, a hamlet near Karmajhiri gate of Pench National Park, thick grassy lands surrounded us on both sides. The bright green landscape, peppered with tile-roofed mud huts, made for a beautiful pastoral terrain. We checked into our tree lodge, perched on top of a mahua tree and the next few minutes were spent gazing at the deciduous forest from our balcony.

Feeling alive



Having grown up reading The Jungle Book, I was excited to traverse the national park, the land of the famed characters - Bagheera, Balloo and Shere Khan.

The guide suggested we also take in the other little pleasures of the jungle while looking for wild cats on our safaris, which are not difficult to spot in the peak summer season. So, we decided to make the most of the open-jeep jaunt by breathing in fresh air, soaking up the sun, the musty smells of the earth, cacophony of the birds and much more.

Into the wild

Unlike other forests like Kanha and Bandhavgarh, Pench is a lot drier and sparse, allowing you to take a sneak peek into the intimate moments of the resident birds and animals. At the same time, it is refreshingly

diverse in its topography - undulating scrublands, bamboo patches, stunningly large water bodies, hills and jungle valleys form a beautiful landscape. With more than 200 species of birds, including wagtails, horn bills, kingfisher, barbets and minivets, and rich fauna, the jungle is a treat for anyone keen on photography. Watch out for the Indian Ghost Tree, a beautiful tree with a white trunk and peeling paper-thin skin. It eerily stands out, and yes, it does glow in the dark!

Man is an outsider

While you are likely to spot a tiger with her cubs by following the alert calls from deer and langurs, leopards and sloth bears are the elusive creatures here. The closest we got to Collarwali (the celebrity tigress of the forest), were fresh pugmarks, but what exhilarated us more was the 15-minute intense jeep chase where our naturalist and the forest guide managed to create a tale full of mystery and suspense.

How to get there

Fly to Nagpur and drive for about two hours or more to your hotel or take a train to

Nagpur railway station (94 km) followed by a two-and-a-half hour drive. Since the roads here aren't in great condition, avoid a road trip.

When to go

The best months to visit are between Nov and June. Visit during the winter season to enjoy pleasant days and cold mornings and evenings. Summer is sweltering hot, but chances of spotting a tiger are higher. Plus, this is also the time when chitals shed their antlers.

Did you know?

The character Mowgli originated in Pench National Park, but his creator Rudyard Kipling never actually visited the park. It is believed that a 19th century British official wrote about a wolf-boy he found in the jungle. Kipling read his journal and got inspired to pen The Jungle Book.



Miami Beyond the beaches

Pore over cutting-edge street art, learn to roll a Cuban cigar or simply monkey around...

For someone who tips the weighing scale a little (okay, a lot) over 100 kg, visiting the beach town of Miami can be quite scary. Most of the people here are not only fit, but they also like to flaunt it. So, on a recent trip to the beach city, to avoid further guilt of bingeing on massive American burgers, I decided to skip the surfboard and zone off to the 'other' side. You might wonder what's more to Miami than beaches. Well, lots more.

The Cuban Corner

The one place that adds oodles of character to Miami and gives a happy twist to its facade is a neighbourhood called Little Havana. Home to Miami's ever-expanding Latin community, this is the place that many migrating Cubans have called home since Mr Castro took charge of Cuba in the late 1950s. Extremely different from the rest of Miami, Little Havana has a sub-culture all its own. It is always time to party here - you will generally find people tapping away to folksy tunes or engrossed in their little board games at the Domino Park. Little Havana is also home to many cigar makers; you can always walk in to one of them and watch as they roll a fresh batch of leaves for you. From the finest cigar cutters to other accessories, this place is like a candy store for all cigar lovers.

The Wall Of Rebellion

Now who would have thought that Miami would be home to some of the finest graffiti in the world. Wynwood Art District is for those who wish to step out of comfortable galleries and experience the maniacal thoughts that reside in the head of artists, who literally use the world as their canvas. Here you will find art in every imaginable form. From abstract art to geometric patterns that can only be created once your mind is pushed into an overdrive... Wynwood has it all. The entire district is a massive canvas - you won't find a single wall or street that's not covered.

Tripping on art

Museums is something I am happy to give a miss. But when my charming tour guide



suggested a quick stop at the Perez Art Museum, we obliged, albeit grudgingly. What we expected: an hour-long snooze fest. The reality: a mind-blowing experience. This haven for modern and contemporary international art of the 20th and 21st centuries is unlike any other museum. From the first exhibit to the final one, there was not a single piece that didn't transfix us. From using light to mirrors and sound to miniatures, the works at Perez are such that they take you on a trip that's parallel to this universe, and yet not from our realm. Sounds absolutely bonkers, but Perez is a sensory overload that's a must-do in Miami.

The Wild Zone

Like most cities, Miami too has its own little paradise for animal lovers. The Jungle Island is a place that both kids and adults would love to visit. Built about 80 years ago, most of the

animals are kept in massive enclosures that mimic their natural habitats. You also get to spend quality one-on-one time with certain four-legged friends. Your head can be a dance floor for the a bunch of lemurs or your can get some much-needed TLC from a baby Capuchin monkey (the same breed that Ross had in Friends) - all-in-all a once-in-a-lifetime experience.

Fun detour

If you have a couple of days to spare, do visit Orlando. It might not have the glitz and glamour of Miami, but what it scores high on is a strong dose of testosterone in the form of some crazy simulation rides at Universal Studios. Also, if you have grown up binge watching cartoons, a trip to the Walt Disney World will rake up some memories.

Nordic adventure

My summer adventure in Iceland had a big plus point, the travel part apart. For company, I had a local writer, poet, social activist and a political adviser - all rolled into one! My friend Halla Gunnarsdottir is a brilliant multi-tasker, like most Icelanders, and she made sure I saw her country not like a tourist but as an insider. So, armed with hiking boots and our driving licences, we designed a road trip that was to begin in Reykjavik in the west and take us to Borgarfjörður Eystrí on the eastern side.

In a loop

Iceland has one main road called Route 1, or the ring road which goes around the island - with inroads leading to fjords, towns, peninsulas and highlands. Over the next two weeks, Iceland revealed itself to me in a series of arresting visions, untouched by man, as it has existed for scores of centuries. I also got the chance to mingle with the natives, experience their culture (two weddings and a ceremony accepting me as an honorary Viking) and try some of Iceland's unique culinary treats like fermented shark, minke whale, puffin and, of course, Iceland's famous hot dogs.

Gushing start

Two hours from Reykjavik, is one of Iceland's most magnificent waterfalls — Seljalandsfoss — that drops down from a height of 60 metres. Keep your rubber boots and raincoat handy if you want to walk to the big cave behind the falls. (If you are warm enough, you'll never want to leave this picturesque icy cold wonder.) Another 30 minutes of driving got us to another impressive waterfall, Skogafoss. Most tourists attempt a one-day hike from here to reach the famous Eyjafjallajökull volcano.

Blacked-out

When Halla mentioned a visit to a black beach called Reynisfjara, I didn't take her seriously. Not even after I was standing in the middle of this vast blackness! The black escapade continued with a hike to Svartifoss aka Black Waterfall. Why black? Because of the dark basalt columns here.

Eastern Fjords

Iceland's eastern coastline is full of numerous mountains, beaches and countless majestic fjords (long, narrow inlets created by glacial erosion), which are home to the country's diverse wildlife - wild reindeer, seal colonies, birds. The jagged, snow-capped profile of the



Eastern Fjords provides the first glimpse of Iceland. Each fjord looks more amazing than the last one, so take a deep breath and enjoy the ride. We were lucky enough to get to see a couple of swans strut around the Swan Fjord, as it is known.

The last stop was Borgarfjörður Eystrí, a quaint little town that ended the trip on a high note - literally. The Daler Mehendi-crazy crowd here (yes!) threw a party for their "friend from India" and we danced all night to paaji's bhangra beats. In the end, words like beautiful, amazing, must-visit fail to describe my Iceland experience. Life altering comes close...perhaps.

Hill stations Near Delhi

that are perfect for long Weekends



7 reasons to visit Kullu-Manali

From the snowy delights of Rohtang Pass to the soothing warmth of the surrounding thermal springs, there are several places to visit in Kullu Manali for nature lovers and thrill seekers. With its picturesque views of snow-clad mountains, river valleys, charming cafes and laidback vibe, this hill station in Himachal Pradesh is an immensely popular vacation spot with both domestic and foreign tourists. Its widespread appeal draws everyone from adventure sport enthusiasts and vacationing families and honeymoon couples and hippie backpackers. Here are seven places you must visit during your holiday.

Hadimba Temple

This wood and stone temple is dedicated to Hadimba, the wife of Bhima, one of the Pandava brothers from the Mahabharata. It was constructed in 1553, and is located in the middle of the Dhungri Park. The structure has a four-tiered pagoda-shaped roof, and a carved doorway that is embellished with figures of Hindu gods and symbols. Ghatotkach, the son of Bhima and Hidimba, is also worshipped as a sacred tree.

Gadhan Thekchokling Gumpa

Manali houses a small Tibetan community, and has a couple of peaceful Buddhist monasteries. Built in 1969,

this prayer hall is decorated with wall paintings and contains a statue of Shakyamuni. Nearby, the Gelukpa Cultural Society Gumpa has statues of 'bodhisattvas' and Buddhist lamas, and a workshop for Tibetan carpets.

Rohtang Pass

This snow-covered pass is located on the highway to Leh, and is only open from June to October every year. It lies at a height of 3979 metres, and offers spectacular views of glaciers, mountain peaks and the Chandra River. The pass is a gateway to Lahaul, Spiti, Pangl and Leh. Due to its increasingly popularity, the route to Rohtang is often clogged with traffic during the peak tourist season. However, once you reach, there are facilities for skiing and sledging near the pass, and plenty of photo opportunities for snap-happy tourists.

Naggar

The former capital of Kullu, this town lies on the left bank of River Beas, 21 kilometres from Manali. It was founded by Raja Visudhpal and remained the political centre until the capital was shifted to Sultanpur in 1460 AD. Its major attraction is a beautiful castle, which has now been converted into a heritage hotel operated by the Himachal Pradesh Tourism Development Corporation. The building was once the residence of the rulers of Kullu, and is an excellent example of western Himalayan architecture. It is made of wood and stone, and has carved doors and windows. There is a small museum, a temple and a nice restaurant within the premises. Naggar was also the home of Russian painter Nicholas Roerich, who lived here from 1929 till his death in 1947. His house has been converted into an art gallery, which exhibits his colourful paintings of the surrounding Himalayan ranges.

Solang Valley

Around 13 kilometres away from Manali, this pretty valley is a popular spot for adventure sports, especially skiing. Situated between Solang village and Beas Kund, it offers panoramic views of the surrounding snow-capped mountains and glaciers. In summer, it has facilities for paragliding, zorbing, mountain biking and horse riding. In winter, especially between January and March, it is used for skiing, snowboarding and sledging. It also hosts a winter skiing festival. The Directorate of Mountaineering & Allied Sports in Manali also organises basic, advance and intermediate level courses in skiing. For the less-adventurous, there are also plenty of walking trails all around.

Dharamshala

Top attractions in Dharamshala Best known as the base of the Dalai Lama in India, and its strong Tibetan influence, Dharamshala is a small hill station that lies on the spur of the Dhauladhar range high up in the Kangra Valley in Himachal Pradesh.

Bhagsunag

The Bhagsunag shrine is about as old as the Dal Lake, and originated around a myth about a great fight between the demon king (Bhagsu) and the snake god (Nag). It has been rebuilt more than once, and although it is presently covered in white tiles, there is something about the place that draws you in.

Dal Lake

Legend has it that a king who went to bathe in the sacred Manimahesh Lake below the Kailash Mountain lost his gold ring. The ring later re-surfaced in the Dal Lake. This water body was considered the poor man's Manimahesh for those who couldn't afford to go to Kailash for salvation by bathing in it. What remains today, is no more than a pond, but nonetheless, the lake is sacred to locals. A beautiful walk from the town, the lake is inundated with goldfish, and is worth a visit.

Norbulingka Institute

The most recent Tibetan institution near Dharamsala, Norbulingka embodies all the old-world charm of Tibetan architecture and has been modelled and named after the Dalai Lama's summer palace near Lhasa. Sprawled across seven acres, this traditional Tibetan building has been constructed by master craftsmen who fled from Tibet along with the Dalai Lama, and has been made so as to blend with the surrounding landscape. Comprising a complex of buildings that include a temple, library, college, design studio, guest house and even a cafe, it is set amidst a beautiful garden of meandering paths, flowing streams, waterfalls, bridges, and koi ponds, with the stunning backdrop of the Dhauladhar mountains. Stay at the guesthouse and immerse yourself in the Tibetan culture, all the proceeds go directly towards the Norbulingka Institute to further the preservation of the culture.



Darjeeling's most charming Tea estates

Glenburn Tea Estate

Step into the idyllic world of Glenburn, a tea estate established by Scottish tea planters in 1860. It sprawls over 1600 acres of verdant forests, rolling hills, tea picker villages and a pair of river valleys. Set in the heart of the tea estate, two colonial-style planter bungalows overlook the rolling hills on one side and the mighty Kanchenjunga mountain range on the other. The aroma of fresh flowers hangs in the air and the four-poster beds, hand embroidered linen and open verandas lend a very English country air to the bungalow. Signature Glenburn experiences include exploring the plantations and villages within the tea estate, nature and bird walks, overnights in the log cabin by the river Rangeet, picnics in the tea gardens, tea tours and excursions around Darjeeling.

Makaibari Tea Estate

Makaibari Tea Estate, the producer of Darjeeling's costliest

tea, was established in 1859—making it one of the oldest family-owned tea gardens in Darjeeling. Located at Kurseong, the land of the white orchid, the tea estate offers a peek into the daily life of plantation workers with numerous home stays. Local families at the estate have opened up their homes to visitors providing them with simple accommodation and hearty meals. With 70 percent of its entire area still under forest cover, the eco-diversity at Makaibari is astonishing. The dense forests of the estate house numerous species of flora and fauna and visitors can explore the estate through activities like tea plucking, tea tasting or scaling the slopes where the tea grows.

Happy Valley Tea Estate

Wandering through tea gardens settled on the gentle hill slopes of Darjeeling is the perfect way to start your day at the Happy Valley Tea Estate. With plantations as old as 150 years

Besides its quaint eateries, vibrant markets hidden in busy lanes and hilltops that are home to stunning vistas, there is a range of charming tea estates that stand apart in the list of places to visit in Darjeeling. Tea was first introduced to this Himalayan city in West Bengal in the mid-19th century by the British, and these sprawling tea estates are still reminiscent of that culture. A trip to these vast stretches of tea plantations is all about misty mornings, tea leaves blooming under the sun, endless walks discovering various types of tea and of course, sipping your favourite brew. Here's your guide to exploring the best tea gardens of Darjeeling.

and picture-perfect stretches of lush green tea bushes beckoning you, this tea estate will floor you with its scenic charm. Stop by the gardens during the process of plucking, processing and packaging and you'll be privy to one of the most fascinating tea garden experiences. Tea lovers can pick up a handful of fresh tea from here or sip a cup of their favourite aromatic tea at the nearby Happy Gold Cafe. A few routes around the estate offer great trekking paths, along with spectacular views of the sprawling landscape.

The employees at the estate help guide you around the aromatic factory and explain the withering, rolling, fermenting and drying processes.

Chamong Tea Estate

Nestled in the misty hills of Darjeeling, Chamong Tea Estate stretches over 900 acres of lush green land that houses a tea plantation, a tea factory and a village for the tea pickers. Most of the land is forested, with an abundance of flora and fauna. The incredible splendour of the rolling hills, the verdant tea bushes and the quiet daily life makes this area popular amongst visitors. The tall, deciduous forest makes way for multiple scenic walking trails and you'll soon discover monkeys frolicking amidst the ferns and shrubs. The Chamong Tea Estate is a part of the Chamong Tea Group and is one of the prime producers of Organic and Fair Trade teas in North India.

Gomtee Tea Resort

Lesser known than its famous neighbours Makaibari and Glenburn, visitors at Gomtee get to stay in a 100-year-old heritage bungalow at a height of about 4000 feet, with sweeping views of the valleys and mountains. Located in south Kurseong, the estate has a total area of about 500 acres, out of which 50 percent is currently used for tea plantation. Producing mainly black tea and employing over 300 workers, the garden originally belonged to the pioneering British tea planter Henry Lennox in 1899. Visitors at Gomtee can spend the day in the tea gardens, visit the tea factory, don the role of a tea taster, converse with tea pickers and taste freshly-brewed tea from the factory.



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 the 'Delhi Parks and Garden Society' scheme. The data further revealed that in 2025-26, the number of associations

the 'Delhi Parks and Garden Society' scheme.

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

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.



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

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

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.

Oil rises after Trump says he is losing patience with Iran

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 re 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 EBITDAaL ratio stood at 0.79.For the week, Brent has climbed nearly 6%, while WTI has jumped more than 7%, on uncertainty over the shaky ?ceasefire ?in the Iran conflict."I am not going to be much more patient," ?Trump said in an interview aired on Thursday night ?on Fox News. "They should make ?a ?deal." U.S. Trade Representative Jamieson Greer said on Friday morning that China was being very pragmatic about involvement with Iran, and it was important to China to have the Strait of Hormuz open, in an interview ?with Bloomberg. Trump and China's President Xi Jinping are set to meet on Friday to wrap up a two-day state visit that has featured pomp and business deals."With the Beijing summit not delivering any breakthrough on Iran, market focus is back on the deadlock and a blockaded Strait, with a tail risk of ?renewed military escalation," said Vandana Hari, founder of ?oil market analysis provider Vanda Insights. Among deals ?the market was looking out for from the summit, Trump said China wants to buy oil from the United States.In incidents around the Strait of Hormuz, a ship was reported seized by Iranian personnel off the United Arab Emirates and headed for Iranian waters on Thursday, and an Indian cargo vessel carrying livestock from Africa to the UAE was sunk ?on Wednesday in waters off the coast of Oman.The White House said Trump and Xi had agreed on the need to keep the shipping lane open. Iran's Revolutionary Guards said 30 vessels had crossed the Strait of Hormuz since Wednesday evening, still far short of 140 that ?were typical daily before the war, but a substantial increase if confirmed.

Rupee falls 30 paise to 95.94 against US dollar in early trade

MUMBAI .(Agency)
The rupee opened on a weaker note and fell 30 paise to 95.94 on Friday after hitting new lows over three straight sessions, as elevated crude oil prices, a strong dollar, and concerns over the West Asia crisis weighed on investor sentiment.Forex traders said USDINR is under pressure and hovering very close to the 96 mark as dollar buying continues amid upside in oil prices.Moreover, the Summit between US President Trump and Chinese President Xi did not yield any fruitful results, particularly on the US-Iran front, denting investor sentiments further. The USD/INR pair, which had slumped to 95.96 against the American currency on Thursday, recovered sharply after reports surfaced that India is considering a major cut in taxes paid by foreign investors on Indian bonds.On Friday, the government hiked the petrol and diesel prices by Rs 3 per liter in the latest move to curb the demand of these fuels.At the interbank foreign exchange market, the rupee opened at 95.86, then fell further to 95.94 against the US dollar, registering a fall of 30 paise from its previous close. The rupee weakened to a fresh record low of 95.96 before closing with a marginal gain of 2 paise at 95.64 against the US dollar on ThursdayMeanwhile, the dollar index, which gauges the greenback's strength against a basket of six currencies, was trading at 99.05, higher by 0.24 per cent. Brent crude, the global oil benchmark, was trading up 1.30 per cent at USD 107.09 per barrel in futures trade.On the domestic equity market front, Sensex rose 239.14 points to 75,637.86 in early trade, while the Nifty was trading 78.30 points higher at 23,767.90.

US agrees to drop criminal fraud case against Gautam Adani after settlement deal

NEW YORK.(Agency)
IThe US government has agreed to settle a lawsuit filed against Billionaire Gautam Adani, who is accused of duping investors by concealing that his company's huge solar energy project in India was being facilitated by an alleged bribery scheme, according to court filings published Thursday. In the lawsuit filed in late 2024, the Securities and Exchange Commission accused Indian billionaire Gautam Adani and his nephew Sagar Adani, both leaders of the energy company Adani Green Energy Limited of promising to pay Indian government officials the equivalent of hundreds of millions of dollars in exchange for government contracts to purchase energy at inflated rates. At the same time, the company secured several billions of dollars from Wall Street investors who were allegedly assured that the company had a robust anti-bribery compliance program and were given promises from senior management that no bribery would take place. Those actions, the SEC said at the time, violated antifraud provisions of U.S. securities laws.Court documents show that Gautam Adani agreed to pay civil penalties of \$6 million while his nephew agreed to pay \$12 million. The proposed settlement doesn't include an admission of guilt.The Adani Group denied the allegations at the time, calling them baseless. Messages left with both the Adanis' attorneys were not returned on Thursday.

Beyond the petrol pump: How higher fuel prices could hit India's economy

The Rs 3-per-litre petrol and diesel price hike may only be the start of a new cycle of fuel price increases as crude oil prices remain high, with economists warning of wider pressure on inflation, growth, household budgets and the rupee

New Delhi,.(Agency)
The Rs 3-per-litre hike in fuel prices announced on Friday may be only the beginning if global crude oil prices remain elevated.Economists warn that sustained fuel price increases could ripple across India's economy through higher inflation, weaker consumer spending, pressure on the rupee and slower growth.Petrol and diesel prices were hiked on May 15, marking the first major fuel price increase in nearly four

years as global crude oil prices surged amid ongoing tensions in West Asia. Brent crude prices were trading around \$107 per barrel on Friday, and analysts warn petrol and diesel prices in India could rise further in the coming weeks if global crude oil prices remain elevated.The hike comes at a particularly sensitive time for India, which imports nearly 85% of its crude oil requirements. That makes the country highly vulnerable to global energy shocks, especially when geopolitical tensions threaten key oil supply routes such as the Strait of Hormuz.Higher retail fuel prices may also help moderate domestic fuel demand and reduce some pressure on India's import bill, economists say."This was a long-anticipated move in light of the sharp rally in global crude prices and the rising burden on domestic oil marketing companies as well as fiscal books," said Radhika Rao, Senior Economist and Executive Director at

DBS Bank. Experts say if crude oil prices remain elevated for an extended period, the consequences could include higher inflation, weaker consumer spending,



pressure on the rupee, rising import costs and slower economic growth.Beyond the petrol pumpFuel prices play an unusually important role in India's economy because transportation costs feed into nearly every sector.Diesel powers trucks transporting vegetables, fruits, grains, medicines and consumer goods across the country. It is also widely used in

agriculture, logistics, mining and industrial activity.When diesel prices rise, businesses often face higher transportation and operating costs. These additional expenses are eventually passed on to consumers through higher prices."The hike will raise inflation by increasing transportation and production costs, thereby increasing prices of essential goods," Dr Manoranjan Sharma, Chief Economist at Infomeries Ratings, told IndiaToday.in.Economists say fuel inflation tends to spread quickly because logistics sits at the centre of supply chains. Even sectors not directly linked to fuel consumption eventually feel the pressure through higher freight and input costs.How higher fuel prices can affect inflation

One of the biggest risks from rising fuel prices is inflation.As transportation and production become more expensive, companies often raise prices to protect margins.

Sensex, Nifty open higher despite rise in fuel prices; IT stocks lead gains

New Delhi.(Agency)
Benchmark stock market indices opened higher on Friday, despite the government raising petrol and diesel prices amid an energy crisis arising due to the West Asia war.The S&P BSE Sensex was up 292.55 points to 75,691.27, while the NSE Nifty50 gained 83.70 points to 23,773.30 as of 9:34 am.Dr. VK Vijayakumar, Chief Investment Strategist, Geojit Investments Limited, said that the 789 point rise in Sensex yesterday was mainly triggered by short covering.

"FIIs were positioned heavily on the short side. There are rumours of measures to shore up the rupee and attract capital into the economy. We will have to wait for clarity on this," he added.

After the opening bell, Infosys Ltd led the Sensex gainers, rising 2.87%. It was followed by Tech Mahindra Ltd, which gained 2.77%. Tata Consultancy Services Ltd moved up 2.14%, while

HCL Technologies Ltd added 1.87%. Kotak Mahindra Bank Ltd also opened higher, rising 1.57%.Reliance Industries Ltd saw the sharpest fall, dropping 1.34%. Eternal Ltd declined 1.30%, State Bank of India Ltd was



down 1.10%, Trent Ltd slipped 0.78%, and Bharat Electronics Ltd fell 0.70% in early trade.The market did not see any negative effect in early trade of the petrol, diesel prices rising by Rs 3 per litre.The decision to increase the price

of petrol and diesel by Rs 3 a litre and CNG by Rs 2 a kg indicate that the government is playing it safe through small increases, perhaps stage by stage, without triggering a sharp spike in cost-push inflation. This is a welcome step," said Vijaykumar."There are some trends in the market which investors have to watch. The market is responding hugely positively to good Q4 results with double-digit price rises in some cases, and punishing poor results with double digit price crashes in some cases. This reflects the gap in market expectations and actual results," he added.Another important trend is the continuing weakness in IT stocks and sustaining strength in pharmaceuticals stocks. This reflects the market perception of the prospects of these sectors in the present challenging environment," concluded Vijaykumar.

8th Pay Commission: What happened at the Cabinet Secretary-led NCJCM meeting

New Delhi,.(Agency)
The 49th meeting of the National Council-Joint Consultative Machinery (NCJCM) was held on May 11, 2026 under the chairmanship of Cabinet Secretary TV Somanathan, where employee unions and government officials discussed a wide range of issues related to salaries, pensions, recruitment, promotions, allowances and service conditions of central government employees. ndiaToday.in has been continuously reporting on developments linked to the 8th Pay Commission, including employee demands, union consultations and salary-related discussions.The meeting assumes significance as it comes in the middle of ongoing consultations under the 8th Pay Commission, which has already begun discussions with employee unions and staff associations across

the country.According to documents shared by the Staff Side of the NCJCM, senior officials present at the meeting included the Chairman of the Railway Board, Secretary Expenditure, Secretary Personnel, Secretary Department of Posts, Secretary Education, Secretary Health and officials from multiple ministries and departments.The Staff Side was represented by leaders including Shiva Gopal Mishra, Secretary Staff Side, M. Raghavaiah, Dr N Kanniah, Guman Singh, J.R. Bhosle, C. Srikumar and several other employee representatives. The meeting also coincided with the Diamond Jubilee year of the JCM Scheme, which completed 60 years in 2026.S T A F F S I D E F L A G S I R R E G U L A R N C J C M M E E T I N G S Before discussions on agenda items began, employee representatives

raised concerns regarding the functioning of the NCJCM mechanism itself.The Staff Side pointed out that under the JCM framework, three ordinary meetings are supposed to be held every year. However, it said only 49 meetings had taken place in 60 years."After 2016 no meeting of the Department Council JCM of Ministry of Defence has taken place," the Staff Side said in the document. Employee representatives urged the Cabinet Secretary to ensure that regular meetings are held so that staff grievances can be resolved in a time-bound manner.The Staff Side also raised concerns over increasing court cases on service matters and alleged that several ministries continue to file appeals and review petitions even after court rulings, leading to delays and employee hardship.



gold and silver opened at Rs 1,60,790 and Rs 2,80,000 on the MCX, respectively.Weakness in gold and silver prices was also visible in international markets. COMEX gold was trading 1.54 per cent lower at \$4,615 per ounce, while COMEX silver declined 4.47 per cent to \$81.49 per ounce.According to commodity market experts, gold prices remained under pressure globally as rising US inflation strengthened expectations that the US Federal Reserve may keep interest rates elevated for longer.They noted that persistent geopolitical tensions in West Asia and disruption in energy shipments through the Strait of Hormuz have fuelled inflationary concerns and supported the US dollar, weighing on precious metals.

Experts further said silver prices also extended losses amid broader weakness in the metals complex, although the metal continued to draw support from expectations of strong industrial demand from sectors such as electronics and solar energy.

India's fuel crisis could push a long-overdue rethink of how cities move

PM Modi's seven appeals are the right signal at the right time. But fuel security and clean air require infrastructure, not just intention, and that demands a place in every state and central budget.

New Delhi.(Agency)
In the 1970s, an oil shock forced European nations to reimagine how their cities moved. The Netherlands built cycling networks that remain the envy of the world.Norway began its long journey toward elective vehicle (EV) adoption — a journey that today sees nearly 96% of new car sales being electric. Those emergency decisions became the foundations of healthier, more productive cities half a century later. India now stands at a strikingly similar crossroads.With Brent crude above \$100 a barrel and the Strait of Hormuz in crisis, Prime Minister

Modi addressed the nation in Hyderabad on May 10 with seven appeals: work from home, use public transport and carpooling, adopt EVs and railways, avoid foreign travel, cut gold purchases, reduce cooking oil and fertiliser use.

He framed these as acts of national duty, "Nation First." While this is a welcome call, as someone who has spent years working on the streets of Indian cities trying to make them walkable, breathable, and safe for a child to cross, I must say plainly: citizens cannot be asked to use public transport that does not exist, or walk safely on footpaths that have never been built.More than 50,000 pedestrians die on Indian roads every year and another 50,000 die due to accidents associated with two-wheelers. This is not a transport failure alone — it is a public health crisis, an urban planning failure, and a question of social equity, as per MoRTH Road Accidents in India Report 2023 and 2024.Take Gurugram, Noida, or most Indian cities. How does a worker, a student, or a child get from A to B without a private vehicle? In most of

our cities, the honest answer is: they cannot. Not safely. Not reliably. Not with dignity. DATA GAP WE REFUSE TO CONFRONT Delhi is our most transit-served city. The



Metro handled 235.8 crore passenger journeys in 2025, an average of 64.6 lakh riders every single day, with a peak of 81.87 lakh on a single day in August 202, as per DMRC Annual Statement, March 2026.Combined with DTC and cluster buses serving over 40 lakh passengers daily, Delhi's public transport system moves well over one crore people each day. Yet bus ridership has fallen nearly

20% since 2019-20, even as the fleet grew, as per Delhi Economic Survey 2025-26. The reason is straightforward: buses are slow, unsafe, and unreliable when they have to fight the same congested roads as private vehicles. If as the capital, Delhi, struggles to retain public transport users, the challenge everywhere else is orders of magnitude harder.This is the context in which the PM's appeal lands: a country that has over 87 lakh vehicles registered in Delhi alone, as per the Delhi Economic Survey 2025-26, where 50,000 pedestrians are killed on roads each year, and where most cities have no continuous footpath infrastructure at all.WHAT THE WORLD IS ALREADY DOINGOther nations did not wait for a crisis to move. Norway began its EV push in the 1990s; today, nearly 96% of new car sales are electric, as per the IEA Global EV Outlook 2025.China sold 13.2 million electric vehicles in 2025 (53% of its new car market) powered by government fleet mandates and industrial policy that made EVs cheaper than petrol alternatives.

Short news

No digging, BWSSB fixes underground pipelines with robotic tech

BENGALURU.(Agency)

The Bengaluru Water Supply and Sewerage Board (BWSSB) has been using advanced robotic technology to inspect underground pipelines at 399 sites over the past six months, instead of going for road excavations that creates traffic gridlocks.

The state-of-the-art technology was launched by Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar in November last year to address pipeline leaks and sewage line faults without the need for ground excavation. The board surveyed over 32 km of infrastructure by sending robotic units directly into the underground networks to inspect, identify and repair critical faults without tearing up the asphalt.

“We understand how frustrating road excavations can be for motorists and the public in a metropolis like Bengaluru. Previously, digging up entire stretches of roads was inevitable to detect pipeline leaks or sewerage faults, leading to massive traffic jams. Following the directives of the DCM, we deployed this robotic technology. These machines travel inside the pipelines and accurately pinpoint faults without the need for surface digging, saving the public from immense hardship,” said BWSSB Chairman Dr Ram Prasath Manohar. From November 2025 to May this year, the robotic units scanned 32 km inside the city’s pipeline network to conduct precise and scientific inspections, accurately identified 394 specific defects allowing engineers to execute targeted repairs with minimal damage to road infrastructure and resolved 399 of 404 public complaints received during the period.

Sewage and garbage choke major canals of Vijayawada

Vijayawada.(Agency)

The pathetic condition of the three major canals passing through Vijayawada has once again raised serious concerns over public health, environmental safety and civic negligence. The Eluru Canal, Bandar Canal and Ryves Canal have now virtually turned into giant sewage drains and garbage dumping yards.

Every stretch of the canals within city limits presents a horrifying picture. Heaps of plastic waste, household garbage, food waste and floating debris can be seen across the canals, while in several areas black coloured sewage water stagnates for days, spreading an unbearable foul smell across nearby localities.

The canals are now struggling under the burden of unchecked pollution and civic neglect. The Eluru Canal runs for nearly 16 kilometres within Vijayawada city limits, while the Bandar Canal stretches around 12 to 14 kilometres and the Ryves Canal about 6 kilometres. Together, the three canals cover more than 32 kilometres inside the city. Their total network length under the Krishna delta system exceeds 198 kilometres, with the Bandar Canal extending about 77.8 km, the Eluru Canal 63 km and the Ryves Canal around 57.7 km. Despite being important irrigation channels originating from the Prakasam Barrage, the canals today resemble stagnant urban drains rather than freshwater channels. Hundreds of feeder drains, sewage outlets and outfall drains continue to discharge untreated wastewater directly into the canals round the clock. Adding to the crisis, several households located along canal embankments openly release sewage and domestic waste into the water bodies without any monitoring.

Man held for cheating, raping women after marriage promise: Police

Surat.(Agency)

THE VALSAD Rural Police arrested a 27-year-old man who allegedly posed as a tribal and cheated a woman belonging to the scheduled caste community on the pretext of marriage.

On Thursday, another woman contacted the police, alleging that earlier, the accused used the same modus operandi and raped her after falsely promising marriage. She also alleged that she was a minor at the time and gave birth to a child, after which the accused refused to marry her. Earlier in the day, the accused, Arbaz Makrani, was arrested on the basis of a complaint lodged by a woman in her 20s, police said.

She claimed in her complaint that she came in contact with Makrani, who had used a fake ID, on a social media platform in 2025. They later entered into a relationship. A few months later, she found out about his real identity and returned to her home, severing ties with him. The FIR alleges, “The accused posted their private photographs online. The accused also threatened her relatives when they did not allow him to meet her.” On Wednesday, several people linked to right-wing organisations gathered at the police station concerned and staged a dharna till late evening.

Orissa HC rejects bail plea of man held for posing as advocate in poll petition

Cuttack.(Agency)

The Orissa High Court has rejected the bail plea of Subash Mohapatra, who was arrested in December 2025 for impersonating as an advocate and conducting an election petition.

Rejecting the petition, the single judge bench of Justice Gourishankar Satapathy observed that the allegations against Mohapatra were serious in nature and amounted to “a crime against society”.

According to the prosecution, the High Court had directed registration of an FIR against Mohapatra in an order dated September 12, 2025. The allegation was that despite having no licence issued by any Bar Council, Mohapatra allegedly posed himself as a lawyer and conducted an election petition before the court by impersonating himself as an advocate. The court recorded that the enrolment number furnished by Mohapatra in the vakalatnama was later found to belong to

one Gitanjali Sharma. “The allegation against the petitioner is that the petitioner having no licence issued from any Bar Council to practice in any court has posed himself as a lawyer and conducted an election petition before this court by impersonating himself as an advocate,” the order stated.

The bench further observed that despite being given opportunities to produce a valid enrolment number and licence to practice law, Mohapatra failed to do so. Consequently,

the co-ordinate bench had ordered registration of the FIR. During the hearing, the counsel for Mohapatra argued that since the charge sheet had already been filed and the petitioner had spent more than five-and-half months in confinement, his detention should not be prolonged further.

Appearing for the state, the specially-engaged counsel for the case submitted that Mohapatra had “nine criminal antecedents” and, along with his associates, was allegedly instrumental in registering around 80 cases against different persons “for adopting arm twisting method to obtain certain privileges”. The court also took note of the petitioner’s alleged failure to disclose his criminal antecedents in the bail application, terming it “material suppression”. “In the aforesaid facts and circumstances, this court is not inclined to grant bail to the petitioner,” Justice Satapathy said while rejecting the bail plea.

Marathi signboard crackdown: BMC has collected over Rs 1 crore in fines, 395 shop owners went to court

Mumbai.(Agency)

The BMC has lodged cases against 1,423 establishments for not displaying Marathi signboards since November 2023, collected Rs 1.05 crore in penalties, and sent notices to 3,774 shops. Mumbai has over five lakh shops and establishments. That gap is now at the centre of a political storm.

At a civic law committee meeting on Monday, BJP corporator Tejinder Singh Tiwana accused the BMC of going after small traders while letting large establishments off the hook. “The civic administration is biased in their action against commercial shop owners who have not set up Marathi signboards yet.

They are only penalising and taking action against common shop and business owners while owners of rich hotels and industrial units are not being penalised,” he said. Mumbai’s Deputy Mayor and Shiv

Sena corporator Sanjay Ghadi responded with a warning that shop owners yet to comply within a month will face “Shiv Sena style action.”

following which an action taken report will be submitted to the BMC’s law committee,” a senior official told.

Fighting back in court

Not everyone has quietly complied. Of the 1,423 establishments against whom cases were lodged, 395 have approached local courts challenging the action taken against them. Another 1,014 have decided to comply.

The process works in stages. The BMC first sends a notice. If the shop doesn’t respond, a penalty of Rs 2,000 per registered employee is imposed, with seven days to put up a new board. If the establishment still doesn’t comply, the BMC files a case in the local court and

seeks suspension of the business until the signboard goes up. “After the cases were lodged, some business owners challenged our decision and the case would continue, while most of them obliged,” a BMC official said.

Four charred to death after bus-tanker collision in Surendranagar

The bodies of the four deceased — believed to be a woman and three men including the bus driver — were so badly burned that it will require DNA analysis to identify their remains, said Bhadoriya.

Ahmedabad.(Agency)

Four persons were charred to death and 10 others suffered burns when a bus caught fire after crashing into a tanker near Chotila town in Surendranagar district in the wee hours of Thursday, police said.

The incident occurred between 1:30 am and 2 am near Sangani village on the Chotila-Rajkot National Highway, Surendranagar. Deputy Superintendent of Police SS Bhadoriya said. The private luxury bus was going to Jamnagar from Ahmedabad when it collided with an asphalt-laden tanker moving ahead of it.

Police said just before Chotila, the driver of the tanker suddenly applied brakes and the bus crashed



into the tanker and burst into flames. There were a total of 27 people in the bus including 26 passengers and the driver. Of these, four lost their lives and 10 suffered injuries while

13 passengers managed to escape or were rescued from the burning bus.

The bodies of the four deceased — believed to be a woman and three men including the bus driver — were so badly burned that it will require DNA analysis to identify their remains, said Bhadoriya.

The DySP said that some persons had reported that the truck driver applied brakes following a tyre burst but the matter is under investigation.

An FIR has been filed against the absconding driver of the tanker for rash and negligent driving at Chotila police station on the basis of a complaint by one of the surviving passengers of the bus.

OAV students post impressive results in CBSE Class XII board examination

BHUBANESWAR.(Agency)

Students of science and commerce streams from the Odisha Adarsha Vidyalaya (OAVs) in the state have posted commendable success in the Class XII board examination, whose results were declared by the CBSE on Wednesday. Out of the 4,721 students in the science stream, OAVs recorded an impressive pass percentage of 73.5, an improvement by 1.5 per cent from the previous year’s result of 72 per cent. A total of 112 students secured above 90 pc marks in the science stream.

Priyadarshini Behera of OAV-Dhobotata in Kandhamal emerged as the topper in science stream with a score of 97.6 pc. Other achievers in the science stream included Piyush Ranjan Swain (97.2 pc) from OAV-Frezorpur, Bargarh; Shaktivandan Purohit (97.2 pc) from OAV Tetelenga, Boudh; and Lavyanish Meher (96.6 pc) from OAV Bedi, Nuapada. In commerce, 423 students from 31 OAVs appeared for the exam. The pass percentage has increased to 88.9, compared to 77.6 pc the previous year. Around 14 students secured above 90 pc marks. Disha Saha of OAV-Sanmouda, Mayurbhanj secured 96.8 pc and emerged the highest scorer in commerce. Other top performers included Anchal Agarwal (96.2 pc) from OAV Sanmouda, Mayurbhanj; Biswajeeta Prusty (95 pc) from OAV Jamdhar, Jajpur; Ankita Behera (95 pc) from OAV Jamdhar, Jajpur; and Ritik Khurana (95 pc) from OAV Ranibhol, Mayurbhanj.

No car washes, no garden hoses, and maybe no swimming pools: How Mumbai’s housing societies are preparing for the water cut

Mumbai.(Agency)

Locked car wash points. Buckets instead of showers. Gardeners told to water only roots. Swimming pools that may go dry before summer ends. With a 10 percent water cut kicking in from May 15, housing societies across Mumbai are drawing up emergency conservation plans, some already in effect, others being discussed for the weeks ahead. At Jal Kiran Housing Society in Cuffe Parade, pipeline water for car washing has already been stopped. “We have locked the supply point and asked cleaners to use a single bottle of water and a wet cloth to clean vehicles,” said Dr Padmakar Nandekar, secretary of the building and vice-president of the Cuffe Parade Residents’ Association (CPRA), a cluster of 81 buildings. Residents have also been advised to use

buckets instead of showers, while gardeners have been instructed to water only plant roots and avoid splashing water on leaves. “These are small changes but they save a lot of water,” Nandekar said.

In Mulund’s Runwal Chestnut complex, a cluster of three 21-storey buildings, residents are discussing whether to temporarily shut the swimming pool despite the ongoing summer break. “While no immediate closure has been announced, there have been discussions among society members to close the pool and save water,” resident Ulrich Kamath said.

At Evershine Towers in Malad’s Evershine Nagar, residents say backup reserves built over time may help tide over the immediate crisis. “On a daily basis, there



is always some surplus water left unused, which we have been storing for situations like this,” said resident Harish Chaudhary. The reserve currently stands at 5,000 litres and can last about a week. But if the cut continues longer, the society plans to suspend operations of swimming pools, gyms and banquet halls.

Even before the official cut has kicked in, some parts of the city have already begun depending more heavily on private tankers. In Chandivali’s Nahar Amrit Shakti area, societies have started procuring tanker water over the last few days after receiving what residents described as inadequate supply. Mandeep Singh Makkar, chairman of Synchronicity Housing Society, which houses over 266 flats, said residents had already been alerted last week to store water carefully and prepare for tanker dependence. “We have appealed to all our residents to use water carefully and store some. In such times, we also have to ensure tankers remain adequately available and rates do not get inflated,” he said.

NEWS BOX

Sanju Samson next India T20I captain? Ravi Shastri gives his seal of approval for CSK star

New Delhi. (Agency)

Former India coach Ravi Shastri feels that Sanju Samson is a serious contender for being the next T20I captain for the national team after his impressive performances this year. Samson was the Player Of The Tournament as India retained their crown at home. In the final three matches, Samson hit match-winning knocks, ending the competition with 321 runs from just five matches. There has been speculation around Suryakumar Yadav's position in the team as he has struggled for form with the bat in recent times. Shreyas Iyer has been a name rumoured to be in the running but Shastri has given his seal of approval to wicketkeeper-batter. Speaking to ICC, the former Indian coach said that Samson is a certainty in the T20I side for the next few years. Shastri also pointed out to Samson having experience leading Rajasthan Royals in the past. "India,



come the next (T20) World Cup (in 2028), might be looking for a new captain, depending on how Surya goes over the next couple of years," Shastri said, speaking to Sanjana Ganesan on The ICC Review. "But Sanju Samson has put himself there for a leadership role because he's done that in the past for Rajasthan (Royals). "And he's a certainty in the side, at the top of the order, extremely destructive. So I see him, this is just the start of something more you'll see from Sanju over the next two or three years." "NO LONGER QUESTIONS ON ABILITY" Samson has carried his form into the IPL, where he has scored 430 runs from 11 matches for CSK, including two hundreds. Shastri said that Samson has answered his critics and there are longer questions about his ability. "I think he (Samson) has put a lid on all those question marks.

Mumbai Indians players are happier when Hardik Pandya is not there: Kris Srikkanth



NEW DELHI. (Agency)

Are the Mumbai Indians happier when Hardik Pandya isn't playing? Former India captain and selector Kris Srikkanth feels that is the case after seeing how MI played and celebrated during their win over Punjab Kings in Dharamsala on Thursday, May 14. With Hardik still on the sidelines, and with Suryakumar Yadav also missing the match, Jasprit Bumrah was installed as the stand-in skipper. Immediately, there seemed to be a new energy within the bowling group as Mumbai were able to wreck Punjab during the middle overs with Shardul Thakur picking up four wickets. In the end, Tilak Varma's blitz ensured they got the win in the final over, leading to massive celebrations in the Mumbai dugout, with Rohit Sharma leading the way. Speaking on his YouTube channel, Srikkanth said firstly it was a good move to have Bumrah as the captain as he was proactive with his calls.

"It is a good call. I think Bumrah coming in as captain is a fantastic move," said Srikkanth. Srikkanth said that there was a noticeable shift in energy within the side as Hardik wasn't there, and they showed the will to succeed. "Definitely, definitely there is some issue. Definitely, the team's mood was more lighter. The team suddenly looks more united overall." "Surya too didn't play in that match. He was not playing the match for personal reasons, he did not play the match. But whatever it is, the young side suddenly like you are saying. They come and Deepak Chahar is bowling well. That Raj Angad Bawa fellow is bowling decently. Everyone is performing. Tilak Varma performed brilliantly. Ryan Rickleton smashed and dominated with aggressive shots early on." "Overall, like you said, the will to win, they will to succeed. Even though they were down in the dumps, they showed the will to succeed. That is the key in cricket. That energy was there," said Srikkanth.

Kylian Mbappe captain, Camavinga out as France announce FIFA World Cup 2026 squad

Didier Deschamps has named France's 2026 World Cup squad with Kylian Mbappe as captain and Eduardo Camavinga omitted. It sharpens the focus on France's depth ahead of what is expected to be Deschamps' final World Cup in charge.

New Delhi. (Agency)

France unveiled a talent-packed squad for the upcoming World Cup on Thursday, though one major name was missing from Didier Deschamps' final selection — Real Madrid midfielder Eduardo Camavinga. Ranked No. 1 in the latest FIFA Men's World Rankings, France head into the tournament as one of the strongest contenders.

FIFA WORLD CUP 2026 COVERAGE

Captain Kylian Mbappe headlines the squad alongside attacking stars Ousmane Dembele and Michael Olise. The midfield will feature Aurelien Tchouameni and veteran N'Golo Kante, while the defence includes William Saliba, Jules Kounde and Theo Hernandez. Mike Maignan will serve as the team's first-choice goalkeeper. Despite being part of France's runner-up squad at the 2022 World Cup and featuring in the March international fixtures, Camavinga failed to make the final 26-man list. At club level, he has recently fallen behind Thiago Pitarch in Real Madrid's midfield pecking order.

"He had a difficult season for him where he played less. He also had injuries," Deschamps said, as quoted by Reuters. "It's true that he's a player who came very early with us. He is still a young player." Because I have choices to make the squad structure also has to be even

among the defenders, the midfielders and the forwards. But I understand and I imagine his enormous disappointment this evening." Deschamps selected Brice Samba and Robin Rissner as Maignan's understudies,



with the latter earning recognition after an impressive Ligue 1 campaign. Their inclusion meant there was no place for Lucas Chevalier, who lost his starting role at Paris Saint-Germain earlier this year to Matvei

Safonov. Before heading to their World Cup training base in Boston, France are scheduled to play warm-up matches against Ivory Coast and Northern Ireland. Their Group I campaign begins against Senegal on June 16, followed by fixtures against Iraq on June 22 and Norway on June 26. Other high-profile omissions included Tottenham forward Randal Kolo Muani and Rennes striker Esteban Lepaul, who finished as Ligue 1's top scorer this season. Meanwhile, Jean-Philippe Mateta earned a recall despite missing the March friendlies while recovering from a knee injury. He is expected to help cover for the absence of Hugo Ekitike, who has been ruled out with a ruptured Achilles tendon.

The tournament is also expected to mark Deschamps' final World Cup in charge of France. The manager guided Les Bleus to World Cup glory in 2018 and is widely tipped to hand over the reins to French icon Zinedine Zidane after the competition. France previously lifted the trophy on home soil in 1998 as well.

Why has BCCI picked Vaibhav Sooryavanshi for India A and not India

UPDATED. (Agency)

For months, Indian cricket has been locked in one debate: is Vaibhav Sooryavanshi ready for the senior team? Some believe throwing a 15-year-old into international cricket is a risk not worth taking. Others feel the Bihar prodigy has already shown the temperament and fearlessness that most senior players spend careers chasing. Either way, the debate itself speaks to the extraordinary impact Sooryavanshi has made in so little time. Robin Uthappa had wondered aloud whether Sooryavanshi's stunning IPL 2025 campaign was a one-season burst. The teenager came back in 2026 and lit up the tournament all over again. The doubters went quiet. The question grew louder. Now, Indian cricket has dropped its biggest hint yet. On Thursday, Sooryavanshi earned his maiden India A call-up for the upcoming tri-series in Sri Lanka — a clear sign that the BCCI sees him as a serious long-term prospect, but is unwilling to fast-track him recklessly into senior cricket just yet. The Sri Lanka



assignment, scheduled between June 9 and 21, gives the youngster a platform to don the India colours without the crushing weight of senior international expectations. It also, on the surface, appears to keep Sooryavanshi away from India's tour of the United Kingdom — seven T20Is across Ireland and

England. But here is the thing: the UK series does not begin until June 28. Sri Lanka ends June 21. The window exists, and the BCCI knows it. If Sooryavanshi lights up the tri-series the way he has lit up everything else he has touched, the selectors may find the argument for leaving him behind increasingly difficult to make. THE SMOOTH PATHWAY

Let's get one thing straight: not everyone is Sachin Tendulkar. More importantly, just because one pathway worked for Tendulkar does not mean it will work for everyone else. Prithvi Shaw, once hailed as the next Tendulkar, is currently struggling to find a place even in an IPL playing XI.

That is precisely why the BCCI deserves credit for the measured approach it has taken with Sooryavanshi. Instead of getting swept away by the hype surrounding the teenager, Indian cricket's decision-makers have chosen to move him through the system gradually, step one, then step two, rather than throwing him straight into level five.

I only listen to Rohit Sharma: Tilak Varma's heartfelt tribute after MI's win vs PBKS



Dharamsala. (Agency)

Mumbai Indians batter Tilak Varma was in a fantastic mood following his sensational match-winning performance to take down Punjab Kings in Dharamsala on Friday, 15 May. The youngster single-handedly anchored a massive 201-run chase, but rather than soaking in all the personal glory, he chose the immediate aftermath of the victory to pay a deeply heartfelt tribute to the legendary Rohit Sharma. Right after hitting the winning runs to complete a thrilling six-wicket victory for his side, Tilak was seen celebrating on the field by gesturing the number 45 with his hands. This was a clear and deliberate nod to the iconic jersey number worn by Rohit, showcasing the immense respect the young prodigy holds for the former skipper. A Cheeky Dig and Fierce Loyalty

Following the conclusion of the high-stakes game, the Mumbai Indians franchise released a behind-the-scenes video on social media that perfectly captured the camaraderie between the two players. In the clip, both Tilak and Rohit were seen having a relaxed chat with Murtuza Hussain, the team's sidarm specialist. During the light-hearted conversation, Rohit praised the youngster's brilliant knock, mentioning how he genuinely needed to go back and watch Tilak's innings properly. The senior opener also showed his humorous side by taking a cheeky dig at his own performance in the same game, where he struggled for timing during a scratchy stay at the crease. However, Tilak stayed fiercely loyal to his senior teammate and refused to let Rohit downplay his value. Making a distinct heart symbol gesture with his hands, the left-handed batter expressed his absolute devotion to Rohit's guidance, stating, "Hamesha RS45, unka hi sunta hu," which translates to "Always Rohit Sharma, I only listen to him." Finding Positives Amid Franchise Speculation

This emotional public display of unity comes at a very crucial juncture for Mumbai Indians, who have endured an incredibly tough season.

Sreejesh was insulted: Former captain Jude Felix tears into Hockey India

LOS ANGELES. (Agency)

It was March 27 at the Hockey India Awards. Every Indian team and coaching staff member was present under one roof. It was a day of celebration, with players and coaches freely interacting with the media. Yet one man seemed detached from it all, unusually withdrawn for someone known for his warmth and energy around the media. The often talkative PR Sreejesh stayed away from the spotlight, avoiding questions throughout the evening. When we finally got a brief chance to speak to him, the legendary goalkeeper politely said he did not wish to interact with the media that day. There was a quiet sense that something was simmering beneath the surface. But the event moved on, and so did everyone else. And then May 13 arrived. The storm that had been building inside Sreejesh finally broke over Indian hockey. In an explosive social media post, the 38-year-

old revealed that he was no longer the head coach of the Indian junior men's hockey team — a role he had taken up immediately after India's emotional bronze medal



triumph at the Paris Olympics. Despite delivering five medals, including a podium finish at the FIH Junior Men's Hockey World Cup, Sreejesh was suddenly out. He slammed Hockey India, claiming the

federation had removed him in favour of a foreign coach, later revealed to be Frederic Soye. Hockey India quickly attempted damage control, insisting Sreejesh had not been "sacked" and had instead been offered the role of coaching the development squad — a position they described as crucial to preparations for the Los Angeles Olympics in 2028. Sreejesh explained his reasons behind not accepting the role in another explosive tweet. The federation also argued that it was time for greater experience to come into the junior setup, suggesting Sreejesh still needed more exposure as a coach. Another point Hockey India highlighted was their focus on fostering grassroots and homegrown coaches, claiming they already had over 600 such talents within their coaching pathway system.

MI batting coach Pollard cops hefty fine after outburst at umpire in PBKS clash

PBKS vs MI: Mumbai Indians batting coach Kieron Pollard has been fined 15 per cent of his match fee for using abusive

language towards the fourth umpire. The penalty came during a tense six-wicket victory over Punjab Kings in Dharamsala.

Dharamsala. (Agency)

Mumbai Indians batting coach Kieron Pollard has been fined 15 per cent of his applicable match fee for breaching the IPL Code of Conduct by using abusive language for the fourth umpire. The legendary former West Indies all-rounder also accumulated one demerit point for the Level 1 offence.

According to an IPL press release issued on Friday morning, Pollard was found to have breached article 2.3 of the Code of Conduct, which relates to the use of an audible

obscurity during a match.

The flashpoint occurred in the 19th over of the second innings during Mumbai Indians' match against Punjab Kings on Thursday night. Pollard admitted to the offence and accepted the sanction imposed by match referee Pankaj Dharmani. This is not the first time the long-time associate of Mumbai Indians has been penalised for breaching the code of conduct in the past.

Tilak Varma Stars in Last-Ball Thriller

The disciplinary incident took place during a dramatic last-ball thriller in the hill town of Dharamsala, where Mumbai Indians emerged winners by six wickets. The defeat severely dented the playoff hopes of Punjab Kings, who have now slumped to their fifth straight defeat and must win both of their remaining matches to stay in contention for a top-four finish. Chasing a competitive target of 201, Ryan Rickleton came out blazing for Mumbai Indians. He single-handedly propelled his side to 59 for no loss during an

explosive 23-ball 48, tearing into the attack despite Rohit Sharma's scratchy 25 at the other end. Arshdeep Singh delivered two outstanding overs with the new ball for



Punjab, conceding just eight runs, but lacked support as Rickleton took toll of Azmatullah Omarzai, Marco Jansen, and Xavier Bartlett. Punjab Kings fought back with three wickets for 57 runs between the seventh and 13th overs, with Yuzvendra Chahal bowling a

superb spell to pull things back and castle Rohit. However, Tilak Varma anchored the chase superbly with an unbeaten 33-ball 75. Varma first stitched a 61-run stand off 42 balls with Sherfane Rutherford and later combined with Will Jacks to steer Mumbai home in 19.5 overs, hitting two sixes in the final over to knock off the winning runs.

Shardul's Four-Wicket Haul Limits PBKS Earlier in the evening, Punjab Kings were asked to bat first and crossed the 200-run mark for the eighth time this season. Prabhsimran Singh smashed 57, adding a 33-ball 50-run opening stand with Priyansh Arya and a further 57 runs with Cooper Connolly to take Punjab past the 100-run mark in the 12th over. Shardul Thakur brought Mumbai Indians back into the game with a four-wicket burst, finishing with figures of 4 for 39. Shardul struck twice in three balls to remove the well-set Prabhsimran and stand-in skipper Shreyas Iyer.



Alia Bhatt

'Has Reached Places Many Only Dream Of': Aly Goni Defends Actor's Cannes Red Carpet Appearances

Alia Bhatt is currently at the 79th Cannes Film Festival, and her looks are going viral every day. While many are appreciating Alia at Cannes, a certain section of the internet is also trolling the actress for allegedly being ignored by the international media. Amid the online chatter, actor Aly Goni has come to Alia's defence by penning a note on social media. Taking to his Instagram Stories, Aly shared a clip of Alia posing on the red carpet and wrote, "It's sad when our own people try to pull down someone who has worked so hard to put India on the global stage. Alia Bhatt has reached places many only dream of, representing our country at Cannes with grace and pride."

The actor also added, "Instead of mocking and trolling, we should celebrate and support those who make India shine internationally. We rise higher when we uplift our own, not when we try to demean them." Many fans of the actress have also taken to social media to defend Alia.

Meanwhile, for the most recent appearance, Alia Bhatt graced the red carpet for the film screening of *Vie D'une Femme* (A Woman's Life) wearing a custom Danielle Frankel gown. Continuing her love for pastels, Alia's custom look was crafted in a dreamy and gorgeous shade of steel blue created by the renowned bridal wear designer.

Alia Bhatt looked like a Disney princess, and her style mirrored the iconic fairytale character – Cinderella. The stunning gown was enhanced with a heart-shaped pendant, adding a royal soft romance and opulence to Alia's style. Alia Bhatt kept her glam understated and minimal, letting her natural beauty shine on the red carpet.

Meanwhile, on the work front, Alia Bhatt will soon be seen in *Alpha* with Sharvari and Bobby Deol. *Alpha* will be YRF's latest entry into their spy-verse. She is also shooting for Sanjay Leela Bhansali's *Love and War* with Ranbir Kapoor and Vicky Kaushal. Reportedly, Alia Bhatt will also be a part of *Tumbbad 2*. However, there is no confirmation on this yet. The actress also has *Jee Le Zara* in her kitty.



Mouni Roy Ignores Paparazzi, Makes First Appearance Amid Divorce Rumours With Suraj Nambiar



Mouni Roy made her first public appearance on Wednesday night amid her divorce rumours with Suraj Nambiar. The Bollywood actress was spotted by the paparazzi outside a restaurant in Mumbai. In a video that surfaced on social media, Mouni was seen stepping out of the restaurant with her friends. However, she seemingly ignored the paparazzi. The actress neither responded to the shutterbugs nor stopped to pose for the cameras. Reports of Mouni Roy and Suraj Nambiar's separation first made headlines earlier this week after the two, who tied the knot in 2022, unfollowed each other on Instagram and deleted their wedding photos. Later, ABP News' Saas Bahu Aur Saazish claimed that Mouni and Suraj have already separated and are not living together. The report claimed that Suraj 'cheated' Mouni to gain fame and also 'used her money' during their relationship.

Reportedly, Mouni and Suraj have been living separately for six months now. Recently, journalist Vicky Lalwani took to his Instagram handle and claimed, "Suraj has also been feeling how Amitabh Bachchan felt at Jaya Bhadri's recognition in the 1973 Hrishikesh Mukherjee classic *Abhimaan*; a source reveals that while he maybe loaded with money, Suraj often felt whenever he was in Mumbai, that hardly anybody seems to know him unlike his wife who's recognised almost everywhere." On Wednesday, the actress also took to the stories section of her Instagram handle and urged everyone not to spread 'false narratives'. While Mouni did not confirm if she and Suraj are heading for a separation, she sought privacy from everyone. "Humbly requesting all the media houses to not publish false narrative and give us space and privacy. Please," she wrote.

Mom-To-Be Deepika Padukone Returns To Mumbai After King Shoot With Shah Rukh Khan



Bollywood superstar and mom-to-be Deepika Padukone was seen returning to Mumbai after wrapping an important shooting schedule of her upcoming movie, *King*, co-starring Bollywood megastar Shah Rukh Khan.

The actress was spotted at the Mumbai airport in the early hours of Thursday, in the same outfit that she was spotted while flying out of India, on April 28. In the airport video, the actress was seen dressed in an oversized cobalt blue co-ord set paired with sunglasses and bright yellow sneakers. She was seen smiling ear to ear for the paparazzi present.

Recent reports suggest that Deepika had been shooting in Cape Town for a major schedule of the film. A few days ago, leaked behind-the-scenes videos from the sets of 'King' had gone viral online, showing Deepika filming what appeared to be a romantic song sequence with Shah Rukh Khan in Cape Town. In some of the clips circulating on social media, Shah Rukh was seen being attentive towards a pregnant Deepika between takes, seemingly to ensure she was comfortable during the shoot. Despite being pregnant, Deepika has continued to fulfil her professional commitments.

Directed by Siddharth Anand, *King* is being produced by Gauri Khan, Siddharth Anand, and Mamta Anand under Red Chillies Entertainment and Marflix Pictures. The film features an ensemble cast including Shah Rukh Khan, Suhana Khan, Deepika Padukone, Jaideep Ahlawat and others.

The action thriller is currently slated for a Christmas 2026 theatrical release. On the personal front, Deepika and Ranveer recently announced that they are expecting their second child. The couple shared the happy news through an adorable social media post featuring their daughter Dua holding a pregnancy test kit showing a positive result.

For the uninitiated, Deepika and Ranveer tied the knot in November 2018 in an intimate ceremony at Lake Como, Italy, after dating for several years.

The couple reportedly fell in love while working on the movie *Goliyon Ki Raasleela Ram-Leela* directed by Sanjay Leela Bhansali.

Shraddha Kapoor

Wraps Up Eetha With A Song Shoot In Maharashtra: Report

Shraddha Kapoor has reportedly wrapped up shooting for *Eetha*, the much-anticipated biopic based on legendary Tamasha artiste Vithabai Narayangaonkar. The film, which focusses on her extraordinary journey between 1940 and 1990, concluded its shoot with a grand montage song sequence filmed in Bhore, Maharashtra. As reported by Mid-day, on May 5, the makers reached its finish line with a massive montage song, featuring Kapoor and a crowd of 800 people, shot in Bhore, Maharashtra. "The final song has a montage that chronicles the journey of Shraddha's character from a young woman to her brush with fame and finally how she falls on hard times. Like the remaining numbers, this too has been choreographed by Vaibhavi Merchant," said a source.



The portal also informed that it was the end of the 60-day schedule that began in March. The team shot in Madh Island in Mumbai, Solapur, Aundhewadi, Satara, and Nashik. In November, 2025, Shraddha Kapoor started shooting for *Eetha*. Directed by Laxman Utekar, the project marks Shraddha's first collaboration with the filmmaker and is being produced by Dinesh Vijan's Maddock Films. The news spread rapidly after a photo of the film's clapboard, titled *Eetha*, went viral on social media, sparking excitement among fans.

Vithabai, one of the most revered figures in Marathi folk theatre, is remembered for her dedication to Tamasha — a vibrant form of traditional performance that blends music, dance, and storytelling. Her life, marked by artistic brilliance and personal challenges, continues to inspire generations of performers. A Powerful Role For Shraddha Kapoor *Eetha* promises to showcase Shraddha in one of her most intense and performance-driven roles to date. The actress, who last appeared in *Stree 2: Sarkate Ka Aatank* (2024), has been selective with her recent projects, focusing on scripts that allow her to explore diverse characters.



NEWS BOX

US brokers between Israel, Lebanon and says progress with China

WASHINGTON. (Agency)

The United States on Thursday sought to extend a shaky ceasefire between Israel and Lebanon as President Donald Trump voiced optimism at China's efforts on Iran. A ceasefire between Lebanon and Israel -- considered to still be in place despite hundreds of deaths in Israeli strikes -- ends on Sunday and violence again flared as the two governments met in Washington. Israel has pounded Lebanon and invaded its south in response to retaliatory fire from Shia movement Hezbollah following Israel's killing of Iran's supreme leader at the start of the war on February 28. Israeli and Lebanese ambassadors held the first of two days of talks at the State Department, with Israel bringing along military officers.

"We had a full day of productive and positive talks," a senior State Department official said, expecting more to say on Friday. A Lebanese official told AFP that the country would seek "the consolidation of the ceasefire" and said: "The first thing is to put an end to the death and destruction." The two sides last met on April 23 at the White House, where Trump announced a three-week ceasefire extension between the countries, which have technically been at war for decades. Trump at the time made the bold prediction that during the three-week extension 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 has not happened, with Aoun saying a security deal and an end to Israeli attacks were needed before such a landmark meeting. Israel has vowed to keep pursuing attacks against Hezbollah. The Israeli military said Thursday it struck more than 65 more Hezbollah sites across Lebanon. Lebanon's state-run National News Agency reported Israeli airstrikes on the south and east on Thursday, including on areas not mentioned in an earlier Israeli evacuation warning.

Hezbollah said it targeted Israeli troops in northern Israel with a drone. The Israeli military said several Israeli civilians were injured and evacuated for medical treatment. Hezbollah lawmaker Ali Ammar denounced the talks in Washington, calling them "free concessions" to Israel. Israeli attacks since March 2 have killed more than 2,800 people in Lebanon, including at least 200 children, according to Lebanese authorities, a toll Hezbollah says includes its fighters.

Former Oklahoma death row prisoner freed from jail as he awaits retrial in 1997 killing

world. (Agency)

Former Oklahoma death row prisoner Richard Glossip was released from incarceration for the first time in nearly 30 years Thursday after posting bond while awaiting retrial for a 1997 killing that put him on the brink of execution three separate times. Glossip wore a gray short-sleeved shirt and jeans as he walked out of the jail hand-in-hand with his wife, Lea Glossip.

"I'm just thankful for my wife and my attorneys. Just thankful," he said. "It's overwhelming, but it's amazing at the same time." Earlier Thursday, Judge Natalie Mai issued an order setting bond at \$500,000. Glossip must wear an electronic monitoring device and will not be allowed to travel outside Oklahoma. He also must not contact any witnesses in the case, or consume any drugs or alcohol. His attorney Donald Knight had suggested Glossip was counting on contributions to raise the money. "Mr. Glossip has many supporters and we are hopeful those supporters can afford the bail," Knight said. Last year, the U.S. Supreme Court threw out his conviction, and his longstanding claims of innocence have drawn support from Kim Kardashian and other prominent figures. Glossip had been sentenced to death over the 1997 killing in Oklahoma City of his former boss, motel owner Barry Van Treese, who was beaten with a baseball bat in what prosecutors have alleged was a murder-for-hire scheme. The Supreme Court ruled last year that prosecutors' decision to allow a key witness to give testimony they knew to be false violated Glossip's constitutional right to a fair trial.

Tensions flare near Strait of Hormuz as a ship is seized and another is sunk

World. (Agency)

A ship anchored off the United Arab Emirates was seized and taken toward Iran and another -- a cargo ship near Oman -- sank after being attacked, authorities said Thursday, as tensions escalated near the Strait of Hormuz. It wasn't immediately clear who was behind these incidents, but they happened as a senior Iranian official reiterated his country's claim of control over the waterway and another said it had a right to seize oil tankers connected to the U.S. The turmoil in the strait, which a fifth of the world's oil passed through before the war, has been a sticking point for weeks in talks between the U.S. and Iran to end the conflict. Iran's grip on the vital waterway has jolted the world economy and spiked fuel prices far beyond the Middle East. The ongoing instability in the region comes as U.S. President Donald Trump met with Chinese leader Xi Jinping in Beijing. The White House said both sides had agreed that the Strait of Hormuz must remain open. Just last week, tensions flared in the strait when U.S. forces fired on and disabled Iranian oil tankers that it said were trying to breach its blockade of Iran's ports.

Seizures and attacks in Hormuz ongoing

The United Kingdom Maritime Trade Operations center said it received reports that the ship seized Thursday was taken by unauthorized personnel while anchored 38 nautical miles (70 kilometers).

'Increasing insurgency': Study finds surge in violence followed Trump's USAID cuts in Africa

While the authors did not blame the USAID cuts for the increase in violence, they said the findings demonstrate that "large-scale, sudden aid cuts can destabilize fragile settings."

DAKAR. (Agency)

US President Donald Trump's decision last year to abruptly dissolve the US Agency for International Development -- once a leading global aid donor -- has been followed by a significant increase in violence in several African countries that the agency had supported, according to a study published on Thursday. While the authors did not blame the USAID cuts for the increase in violence, they said the findings demonstrate that "large-scale,

sudden aid cuts can destabilize fragile settings." They, however, added that this is not evidence that more aid reduces conflict, instead it only shows "the effect of a sudden and unexpected disruption."

For many years, USAID had provided crucial support to African countries wrecked by conflict and violence. By eliminating more than 90% of foreign aid contracts, the Trump administration effectively cut some \$60 billion in funding. The study by researchers from several universities in Europe and the United States said the abrupt withdrawal of USAID resources also interrupted contracts, staffing and aid procurement. "The abrupt withdrawal of USAID led to a significant and sustained increase in conflict across Africa's most USAID-dependent regions," said the study, published in the Science journal. The researchers said they examined whether the abrupt shutdown of USAID was followed by an increase in violence in regions of Africa that had historically received the most support and found that there was a correlation. Africa is facing a threat from

jihadis more than any other region in the world, conflict experts say. The Armed Conflict Location & Event Data, or ACLED, said Wednesday in a new report



that jihadis in the region have been more involved in violence across the board and have been increasingly targeting civilians in the last four years. USAID had long been the key funding partner for many African countries, helping to provide funding that helped governments and aid groups respond to multiple crises across different sectors. In Nigeria for example, USAID support had helped victims of the militant Boko Haram group, which emerged in

2002. In Ethiopia's fragile Tigray region, officials relied heavily on US funds as full-scale recovery efforts were yet to start after the war there killed hundreds of thousands.

And in northern Ivory Coast, a front line of the global fight against extremism, USAID had made significant financial commitments to counter the spread of al-Qaida and the Islamic State group. The findings from the study underscore the lasting impact of funding cuts, said Nathaniel Raymond, executive director of the Humanitarian Research Lab at the Yale School of Public Health, who was not among the authors of the study. "The lasting problem with the shuttering of USAID is likely going to be that for much of its conflict prevention work, even if you put back all the money... the experience is gone," Raymond said. Also, some USAID programs may have helped prevent spillover from conflict zones, said Ladd Serwat, senior Africa analyst at ACLED. "We now see increasing insurgency and spillover, so some of those programs may have supported."

Six passengers from hantavirus-hit ship arrive in Australia for three-week quarantine

MELBOURNE. (Agency)

Six passengers from a cruise ship hit by a hantavirus outbreak arrived Friday in Australia for a quarantine expected to last at least three weeks. The Gulfstream long-range business jet carrying them from the Netherlands landed at RAAF Base Pearce outside the Western Australia state capital, Perth. The passengers and crew were to be moved to the nearby Bullsbrook quarantine facility. Australian Health Minister Mark Butler said Thursday the government would implement "one of the strongest quarantine arrangements in response to this virus outbreak you'll find anywhere in the world." The five Australians and one New Zealand citizen are expected to spend the three-week quarantine

period in the facility that had remained largely unused since it was built in 2022 in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

A decision had yet to be made on what



precautions should be taken for the remainder of the 42-day period of potential incubation that the World Health Organization had identified, Butler said. Butler said passengers of

the cruise ship MV Hondius who returned to the United States and Britain would spend most of their quarantine periods at home.

The six passengers all tested negative for the virus before they left the Netherlands and none had displayed symptoms, Butler said.

Three people among the 11 cases in the hantavirus outbreak aboard the MV Hondius cruise ship have died.

The ship was on a cruise from Argentina to the Antarctic and then to several isolated islands in the South Atlantic Ocean when the outbreak was identified. With the evacuation of all passengers and many crew members completed, the MV Hondius is now sailing back to the Netherlands, where it will be cleaned and disinfected.

Trump says made 'fantastic trade deals' with Xi

BEIJING. (Agency)

President Donald Trump said he had made "fantastic trade deals" with China's Xi Jinping, as the pair met on Friday at final talks of a superpower summit that according to the US leader has also reaped a Chinese offer to help open the Strait of Hormuz. Trump had arrived in Beijing seeking to seal deals in sectors including agriculture, aviation and artificial intelligence, as well as to contain differences between the two sides in a number of tense geostrategic areas -- not least the Middle East war. Trump's overtures to Xi, whom he described as a "great leader" and "friend", have so far been met with more muted tones by the Chinese leader. But the US leader said "a lot of good" has come out of the visit.

"We've made some fantastic trade deals, great for both countries," he said after a walk with Xi among the rosebushes in the gardens of Zhongnanhai, a central leadership compound next to Beijing's Forbidden City. "We've settled a lot of different problems that other people wouldn't have been able to solve," he added, without providing details. Xi said it was a "milestone visit", and that the

two sides had to date established "a new bilateral relationship, which is a relationship of constructive strategic stability". Help on Hormuz In an interview with Fox News after the first day of the summit wrapped, Trump said Xi had agreed to several US wishlist points. On the topic of the war in Iran, the US president said Xi had effectively assured his counterpart that China was not preparing to militarily



aid Tehran, which has essentially closed the Strait of Hormuz.

"He said he's not going to give military equipment... he said that strongly," Trump told Fox. "He'd like to see the Hormuz Strait open, and said 'if I can be of any help whatsoever, I would like to help,'" Trump added.

Asked whether the two leaders had discussed Iran, the Chinese foreign ministry on Friday released a statement calling for "a comprehensive and lasting ceasefire".

"Shipping lanes should be reopened as soon as possible in response to the calls of the international community," it added.

Taiwan policy 'unchanged'

The warm handshakes and pomp on Thursday were somewhat overshadowed by a blunt warning from Xi on a much longer standing geopolitical flashpoint, Taiwan.

Shortly after talks started, Chinese state media reported Xi had told Trump that missteps on the sensitive issue of Taiwan could push their two countries into "conflict". The Fox News interview did not touch upon Taiwan, and Trump did not comment to reporters when asked about the matter on Thursday. US

Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent told CNBC the president would say more "in the coming days".

Secretary of State Marco Rubio told NBC on Thursday though that "US policy on the issue of Taiwan is unchanged... as of the meeting".

Israel threatens to sue NYT over report on sex abuse of Palestinian inmates

JERUSALEM. (Agency)

Israel on Thursday threatened to take The New York Times to court over a piece it published denouncing allegedly widespread sexual abuse against Palestinian detainees. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Foreign Minister Gideon Saar have ordered the "initiation of a defamation lawsuit against The New York Times", according to a joint statement issued by their offices. The offices said that the piece by Nicholas Kristof, a prominent opinion columnist, was "one of the most hideous and distorted lies ever published against the State of Israel in the modern press, which also received the backing of the newspaper". Kristof's investigation is based on testimonies gathered in the Israeli-occupied West Bank from 14 men and women who said that they had been sexually assaulted by Israeli settlers or members of the security forces. The report described "a pattern of widespread Israeli sexual violence against men,



women and even children -- by soldiers, settlers, interrogators in the Shin Bet internal security agency and, above all, prison guards". The New York Times responded that any legal claim over the "deeply reported opinion column" lacked merit. "This threat, similar to one made last year, is part of a well-worn political playbook that aims to undermine independent reporting and stifle journalism that does not fit a specific narrative," Danielle Rhoades Ha, a spokesperson for the newspaper, said in a statement.

Kristof's piece said there was no evidence that Israeli leaders ordered rapes. The Israeli foreign ministry alleged that Kristof had based his piece "on unverified sources tied to Hamas-linked networks". It also accused the paper of deliberately timing the publication to "undermine" an independent Israeli report on Hamas sexual violence perpetrated during its October 7, 2023 attack on Israel, which was published on the same day. Israeli forces have detained thousands of Palestinians in the West Bank since Hamas's 2023 attack, which triggered the war in Gaza.

Russia pummels Kyiv, killing at least 21 and denting peace hopes

KYIV. (Agency)

Ukrainian emergency services said early Friday that a massive Russian missile and drone attack that pummelled Kyiv the previous day killed at least 21 people, further shredding hopes of a halt to Moscow's grinding invasion. AFP journalists in the capital heard air raid sirens wailing across the city on Thursday before several hours of thunderous explosions and flashes in the sky sent Kyiv residents running to shelter in metro stations. The Ukrainian air force said Russia had launched 675 attack drones and 56 missiles, mainly at Kyiv, adding its air defence units had downed 652 of the drones and 41 missiles. "Everything was burning. People were screaming... people were shouting," Andriy, a Kyiv resident still wearing a nightgown and with blood stains on his shirt, told AFP near a collapsed Soviet-era residential building.

President Volodymyr Zelensky said 20 sites in the capital were damaged, including homes, a school, a veterinary clinic and

other civilian infrastructure.

"Work is still ongoing in Kyiv at the site of the strike on the building -- a Russian missile strike that literally levelled a residential block, from the first to the ninth floor," he said in an evening address.

Twenty-one people including three children were killed in the attacks, Ukraine's emergency service said early Friday, updating a previously announced death toll of 16. Seven bodies were pulled from the rubble of a single destroyed residential building -- three men, three women and a young girl, police said.

Another 45 were wounded.

Ballistic challenge

Russian attacks also wounded people in the southern regions of Odesa and Kherson, and in the eastern region of Kharkiv.

"These are definitely not the actions of those who believe the war is coming to an end. It is important that partners do not remain silent about this strike," Zelensky said.

Ukraine said it shot down 94 percent of all drones and 73 percent of the missiles fired

by Russia. "The most difficult challenge is defending against ballistic missiles," he said. A slew of Ukraine's allies, including the United Kingdom, Estonia, Latvia, Finland, the Netherlands, Moldova and Slovakia, condemned the fatal attacks. "By bombing civilians, Russia demonstrates



less its strength than its weakness: it is running out of solutions on the military front and does not know how to end its war of aggression," French President Emmanuel Macron said. EU chief Ursula von der Leyen said the attacks on Kyiv showed that Russia "openly mocks" efforts

to end the war. Russia, which invaded Ukraine more than four years ago, said the wave of missiles and drones had targeted military-linked sites and energy facilities that support the Ukrainian army.

The conflict is the worst in Europe since World War II and has killed hundreds of thousands of people and displaced millions more.

Chaotic rescue scenes

At daybreak Thursday, AFP journalists witnessed chaotic scenes as rescue workers dug through mounds of debris from a collapsed residential building.

Emergency service workers were seen hauling from the site those wounded and killed in the strikes, and residents cried as they waited for news of loved ones and neighbours. The barrage is the latest setback for efforts to end the conflict after US President Donald Trump raised faint hopes for peace by brokering a three-day ceasefire between Kyiv and Moscow last week. Russia's leader Vladimir Putin also suggested the war could be winding down.