



MAHANAGAR METRO

VOICE OF THE CITY, PULSE OF THE NATION

India to have **strategic petroleum** stock in UAE. A massive 30 million barrels

► **Calling the UAE an "important partner in India's energy security," the MEA said both sides agreed to pursue "new initiatives for a comprehensive energy partnership" covering crude oil, LNG and LPG supplies.**

New Delhi.(Agency)

India and the United Arab Emirates have agreed to significantly deepen their energy partnership, with the UAE set to store up to 30 million barrels of crude oil in India's Strategic Petroleum Reserve, the Ministry of External Affairs said on Friday after Prime Minister Narendra Modi's short visit to Abu Dhabi.

The agreement emerged from wide-ranging talks between Prime Minister Modi and UAE President Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, with both leaders also stressing the importance of "safe transit passage and unimpeded navigation through the Strait of Hormuz" amid rising regional tensions. In a statement, the MEA

said the two leaders "welcomed the conclusion of a Strategic Collaboration Agreement between Indian Strategic Petroleum Reserves Limited and Abu Dhabi National Oil Company to enhance UAE's



participation in India's Strategic Petroleum Reserves to 30 million barrels." The move is expected to strengthen India's energy security at a time when global crude supplies remain vulnerable to disruptions in

West Asia.

The two countries also agreed to work together on setting up strategic gas reserves in India and welcomed a separate arrangement between Indian Oil Corporation and ADNOC for long-term LPG supplies.

Calling the UAE an "important partner in India's energy security," the MEA said both sides agreed to pursue "new initiatives for a comprehensive energy partnership" covering crude oil, LNG and LPG supplies.

Beyond energy, the visit also saw the announcement of USD 5 billion in UAE investments into India across banking, infrastructure and finance sectors, alongside new agreements in defence, maritime cooperation, shipbuilding and advanced computing.

Bihar: Samrat Choudhary govt's first 30 days bring reform push, execution challenge

Patna.(Agency)

One month after Samrat Choudhary took oath as Bihar Chief Minister on April 15, his government has moved quickly to announce a series of decisions aimed at improving infrastructure, education, public services, women's safety and law and order across the state. The first 30 days of the government have been marked by policy announcements and administrative reforms, though the real test will lie in effective implementation and delivery on the ground.



Among the government's major development initiatives is a plan to build 11 satellite townships across 10 districts of Bihar. The proposed townships are expected to include planned

residential zones, commercial markets, wider roads, parks and green spaces, with the aim of easing pressure on existing urban centres while improving living standards.

In an effort to strengthen women's safety, the government has introduced the Police Didi scheme. Under the initiative, 1,500 scooters will be purchased for women police personnel who will patrol areas near schools and colleges to prevent harassment and crimes against women.

FIR against Abhishek Banerjee over 'provocative' poll speeches

Police have registered an FIR against Abhishek Banerjee over alleged provocative election speeches. The case follows a complaint alleging inflammatory remarks and a threat to Amit Shah.

New Delhi.(Agency)

An FIR has been registered against Abhishek Banerjee at the Bidhannagar Cyber Crime Police Station over alleged provocative speeches made during the 2026 West Bengal Assembly election campaign.

According to the FIR, social activist Rajib Sarkar filed the complaint on May 5, a day after the election results were announced. Sarkar lodged the complaint at Baguati Police Station and alleged that Abhishek Banerjee made inflammatory remarks during multiple campaign events held between April 27 and May 3.

The complaint alleged that the speeches promoted enmity, disturbed public tranquillity and included threats directed at Union Home

Minister Amit Shah. Sarkar also submitted links to several speeches as part of the complaint. Police registered the FIR on May 15 at 2.45 pm at the Bidhannagar Cyber Crime Police Station. The case was filed under Sections 192, 196, 351(2) and 353(1)(c) of the

Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS), along with Sections 123(2) and 125 of the Representation of the People Act.

The FIR said that the speeches allegedly contained provocative, threatening and inflammatory content capable of creating public disorder and disturbing communal harmony. Police also alleged that the accused used aggressive language against opposition workers during public events. Sub-Inspector Somnath Singha Roy has been directed to take up the investigation.

Talking about the FIR, BJP leader and Minister of Panchayat and Rural Development, Dilip Ghosh, said, "Mamata Banerjee, Abhishek Banerjee and their leaders have acted tyrannically. People did not complain at that time because of fear. However, they are now ready to complain, and the police are ready to act on it, so justice will be served."

MAHANAGAR METRO EXCLUSIVE

Sin in the Name of Faith: Alleged Honeytrap Plot Against Jain Monk Exposed, White-Collar Blackmail Network Under Scanner

Mahanagar Metro Desk / Pawan Mekan

Ahmedabad: A sensational controversy has erupted in Gujarat after serious allegations surfaced regarding an alleged "honeytrap and extortion conspiracy" targeting Jain monk Rajtilak Sagarji Maharaj. The matter, now drawing widespread attention within religious and social circles, is being described by supporters as a calculated attempt to damage the reputation of a respected spiritual figure. According to allegations made by individuals close to the monk, a group of alleged blackmailers attempted to use a woman as part of a larger extortion scheme aimed at extracting crores of rupees. The accusations have triggered intense debate across sections of the Jain community and on social media. How the Alleged Conspiracy Was Planned: Sources associated with the matter claim that a vulnerable woman was allegedly manipulated and used as a tool in an attempt to trap the monk and pressure his followers financially. Character assassination campaign: After the alleged extortion demands were re-



portedly resisted, accusations began surfacing online and through legal channels, leading to what supporters describe as a coordinated character assassination campaign. Names of several individuals surface: Allegations have also linked individuals identified as Hardik Hudiya, Jagat Parekh, Vikram Singhvi, and Vikram Bafna to the controversy. No official findings establishing guilt have been released so far, and investigations, if any, remain subject to legal scrutiny. Explosive Questions Raising Concern: Who is

the alleged mastermind? Questions are being raised about whether influential individuals may be operating behind the scenes in the alleged extortion network. Will authorities take strict action? Observers are closely watching whether law enforcement agencies in Gujarat will conduct an impartial investigation into the matter. How will the Jain community respond? The controversy has sparked discussions within sections of the Jain society regarding accountability, transparency, and the protection of religious institutions

from alleged misuse. A Developing Controversy: The allegations have intensified tensions within religious and social circles, with supporters of the monk demanding strict legal action against anyone found involved in blackmail, defamation, or conspiracy. At the same time, legal experts emphasize that all allegations must be investigated fairly and that guilt can only be established through due process of law. As the controversy unfolds, more revelations and counterclaims are expected in the coming days.

Head of criminals: RG Kar victim's mother slams Mamata Banerjee after cops' suspensions

New Delhi.(Agency)

Samajwadi Party (SP) president Akhilesh Yadav demanded on Saturday that elections in India be held through ballot papers and appealed forms government," he added.

The mother of the RG Kar Medical College rape and murder victim, now BJP MLA Ratna Debnath, launched a blistering attack on former West Bengal chief minister Mamata Banerjee after the new state government suspended three senior police officers over alleged mishandling of the case. Debnath,

is the "head of criminals" and claimed that if she is jailed, the truth behind the case and the identities of others involved would come out. Speaking to reporters after the suspensions, Debnath alleged a larger conspiracy behind the crime and the subsequent investigation. "There are many criminals, and the head of them is Mamata Banerjee. If she is caught and jailed, then the names of all the criminals will come out," news agency ANI quoted her as saying.



daughter that night have not been investigated yet. Only the principal is in jail," she added. The remarks come a day after West

Adhikari announced disciplinary action against former Kolkata Police Commissioner Vineet Kumar Goyal, former Deputy Commissioner of Police (North) Abhishek Gupta and Deputy Commissioner of Police (Central) Indira Mukherjee over alleged lapses in the investigation into the August 2024 rape and murder at RG Kar Medical College and Hospital. The state government has also

against the officers.

Ratna Debnath also directly accused the Trinamool Congress president and senior health officials of being responsible for the incident.

"College authorities, including Mamata Banerjee, are responsible for this incident. Also, our then Health Secretary Narayanswaroop Nigam is also involved in the murder of my daughter," she alleged.

Her husband, Sekharanjan Debnath, echoed the accusations, alleging that the case was deliberately covered up from the

► **After three officers were suspended in the RG Kar Medical College and Hospital case, Ratna Debnath renewed attacks on Mamata Banerjee as the family sought more arrests and the probe**



CM YK

News box

Man strangled after confronting neighbour over daughter's harassment in Faridabad

GURGAON.(Agency)

A 50-year-old man was allegedly murdered by his neighbour in Faridabad on Thursday after he objected to the harassment of his daughter. The accused allegedly strangled the victim and dumped the body in a forest area, police said, adding that he has been arrested.

The victim, Mukesh Kumar, a native of Meerut in UP, lived with his family in a rented house in Faridabad's Thakur Mohalla area near Sarang Chowk and worked at a private company. According to the victim's family, the accused, Karan, lived nearby on rent and had allegedly been harassing Mukesh's daughter for a long time. They alleged that he would stop her on the way and harass her despite repeated objections from the family and other residents. Police said the situation escalated on Thursday when the accused allegedly created a disturbance outside the family's house. Mukesh and some neighbours tried to calm him down, but an argument broke out during which the accused allegedly abused and misbehaved with people before leaving the Police said Karan returned between 4pm and 5pm and allegedly called Mukesh outside on the pretext of settling the dispute through conversation. Mukesh left with him but did not return home. As the night progressed, family members began searching for him. Neighbours informed them that Mukesh was last seen with Karan. When confronted, the accused allegedly avoided answering questions, following which the family approached the police. During interrogation, the accused allegedly confessed to strangling Mukesh and dumping the body in a forest area, police said.

Acting on his statement, police recovered the body around 2am from a forest stretch between Nangla and Nekpur. "A murder case has been registered against the accused. He is being questioned and further investigation is underway," police spokesperson Yashpal Singh said.

Chief census officer warns of strict action against negligence in survey work

Ghaziabad.(Agency)

MCG commissioner and chief census officer Pradeep Dahiya on Friday warned against negligence in census duties, saying laxity and delays could lead to action against employees. During a review meeting at the MCG office, Dahiya went over the progress of field surveys, employee attendance and pace of the exercise. He instructed departments to register FIRs against employees found not adhering to deadlines and urged the field staff to conduct census duties with "full responsibility and seriousness." The official has sought regular progress reports to help formulate frameworks for more such projects in the future. Joint commissioners have been told to conduct regular inspections and visit sites to assess the status of the census operations, stressing that the inspections should focus on the quality of work, employee attendance and communication with residents. Recently, MCG recommended filing FIRs against 13 employees under Section 11 of the Census Act, 1948, for performing their duties negligently and remaining absent from training programmes.

Under provisions of this act, if any person refuses to conduct census duties or obstructs govt work, punitive action can be taken against them. If found guilty, the concerned person may also be sentenced to imprisonment extendable up to 3 years.

Fire guts record room at Faridabad govt school, files destroyed



Faridabad.(Agency)

A fire broke out in the record room of a govt school in Faridabad on Thursday, destroying several documents and damaging furniture and equipment stored inside.

The incident took place at Govt Model Sanskriti Senior Secondary School in Nangla Gujran area. Fire department officials said smoke was noticed coming from the record room during school hours, following which they were alerted.

Firefighters reached the spot and controlled the blaze before it could spread to classrooms and other parts of the building. No injuries were reported.

School authorities said old admission records, students' transfer certificates, attendance registers, examination-related files, salary records, service books and other administrative documents were destroyed in the fire. Chairs, tables, cupboards and electronic items kept in the room were also damaged. Officials said preliminary investigation suggests the fire may have been caused by a short circuit, though the exact cause is yet to be confirmed. "Most of the material stored in the room consisted of paper files, due to which the fire spread rapidly," an official said.

Officials from the education department visited the school to assess the extent of the damage and verify whether backup copies of the records were available. Staff members were seen sorting through partially burnt files and documents after the fire was brought under control. The incident has raised concerns over fire safety arrangements and the storage of records in govt schools. Residents said schools should conduct regular inspections of electrical wiring and ensure proper fire safety systems are in place. "Important documents should be digitised and stored safely so that such losses can be prevented in future," a resident said.

'Operation Lagam': Haryana Police targets social media hooliganism, road rowdies

GURGAON.(Agency)

Palwal Police on Friday launched a crackdown on gangster-style social media content and reckless road behaviour under a district-wide campaign titled "Operation Lagam - Na Reel Mein Gundagardi, Na Road Par Manmani", registering FIRs in six cases, counselling dozens of social media users and taking action against more than 8,000 traffic violators in the past 40 days. According to DSP Traffic Manoj Verma, the campaign has been launched under the direction of SP Nitish Agarwal to curb hooliganism on roads, online glorification of violence and improve road safety across the district.

In a major push against road indiscipline, Palwal Police has constituted five special teams, including SWAT units, to crack down on stunt driving, rash behaviour and traffic violations. Police said stringent action is also being taken at police station and police post

levels. Data shared by the district police revealed that action has been taken against 8,050 violators for offences including drunk driving, illegal red-blue lights, black films, pressure horns, modified "bullet pataka" silencers and driving without number plates.

The violations included 872 cases of drink-and-drive, 2,238 challans for black films, 27 cases involving illegal red-blue lights, 209 modified silencers, 2,469 vehicles without number plates, 2,021 without prescribed pattern number plates and 214 pressure horn violations. The campaign has also intensified its focus on social media platforms where videos promoting gangster culture, weapon display and intimidation tactics are being circulated. Police said a dedicated Social Media Monitoring Cell has been



constituted for 24x7 surveillance of objectionable online content. So far, FIRs have been registered in six cases related to promotion of gangster culture and weapon flashing on social media. Around 38 social media users were

counselled, while nearly 1,000 objectionable reels and posts were deleted. Officials said several users voluntarily removed such videos during counselling sessions after being warned about legal consequences and the negative influence such content could have on youngsters. SP Nitish Agarwal issued a stern warning, saying Palwal Police would not tolerate any attempt to spread fear or glorify violence through social media or public behaviour. "Any person

displaying weapons, showing firing scenes or spreading fear on Instagram, Facebook or any other platform will not be spared. Operation Lagam will continue relentlessly," he said.

Breaking point: City will need Rs 3,500 crore to keep pace with its growth

Gurgaon.(Agency)

The city's breakneck growth is now colliding with the limits of its civic backbone. As new housing clusters rise, vehicle numbers swell and denser construction reshapes neighbourhoods, officials have estimated that the city will need nearly Rs 3,499 crore over the next five years to build infrastructure capable of supporting its expanding population. The pressure is already visible — from waterlogged roads in the monsoon and overflowing garbage to traffic snarls, parking chaos, sewer overflows and erratic water supply in several colonies.

The estimate, shared by officials in the department of town and country planning (DTCP), lays bare the scale of the challenge. Of the projected requirement, Rs 1,083 crore is expected to go towards strengthening the master sewerage network, nearly Rs 374 crore towards expanding and improving water supply, and Rs 2,041 crore towards road infrastructure and traffic management.

The city's civic capacity has come under renewed scrutiny after the govt's stilt-

plus-four policy was challenged in high court. Officials said vertical growth and four-floor housing, especially in licensed colonies and residential sectors, have sharply increased population density in



areas where infrastructure was originally designed for far fewer residents.

"The demand for infrastructure upgrades has risen significantly in many parts of the city. Road widening, sewer augmentation and traffic management projects are being planned with future growth in mind," a

DTCP official said. The strain is most acute in fast-growing belts such as Southern Peripheral Road, Golf Course Extension Road and sectors 58 to 115, where residential development has accelerated. Officials said these areas will need substantial support through new sewer lines, upgraded water systems and road reconstruction. "These sectors have been seeing rapid residential growth. Infrastructure planning is being aligned with projected demand," the official said. Several such projects are already underway, including flyovers, underpasses, junction redesign, internal road widening and other measures to ease congestion on key corridors. DTCP officials said GMDA has spent more than Rs 493 crore on road strengthening and traffic management works since 2021-22, while projects worth nearly Rs 175 crore are proposed in the next phase. Even so, residents across several colonies continue to flag worsening congestion, inadequate parking, sewer overflow and irregular water supply during peak demand.

House listing starts in only 72% of Gurgaon census blocks

Noida.(Agency)

Fifteen days into the census exercise, house-listing work has started in only 3,427 of Gurgaon's 4,756 blocks, with officials attributing the slow progress largely to lack of cooperation from residents in several areas. The house-listing phase of the census is scheduled to conclude on May 30. Officials said the administration is closely monitoring progress and has set up a control room to assist enumerators facing difficulties during field visits. Enumerators, particularly in upscale localities, have reported challenges in conducting surveys and collecting information.

Deputy commissioner Uttam Singh said the census exercise is being carried out "with full responsibility and in an organised

manner".

"All charge officers are regularly visiting the field to inspect house-listing work. Officers are interacting with enumerators in various areas to review survey progress and issue necessary directions," he said.

He added that both the pace and quality of the exercise are being continuously reviewed to ensure timely completion. The DC also appealed to RWAs and residents to cooperate with enumerators and provide accurate information, stressing that the census plays a key role in national planning and development.

According to the latest progress report, work has commenced in 73% of areas in MCG Gurgaon zone 1, 48% in zone 2, 58% in zone 3, and 75% in zone 4. In Manesar Municipal Corporation, work

has begun in 87% of areas.

Among other regions, Sohna tehsil has recorded 94% coverage, while Sohna MCI stands at 77%. Pataudi tehsil and Pataudi Mandi MCI have each reached 99%, while Manesar tehsil has also achieved 99% coverage. Wazirabad tehsil is currently leading, with work initiated across all areas. Farrukhnagar tehsil has recorded 91% coverage and Farrukhnagar MC 96%. Officials said several regions are nearing full coverage and efforts are being intensified in the remaining blocks to complete the exercise swiftly.

The DC has directed enumerators to immediately begin work in areas where the exercise has not yet started and warned that negligence at any level would invite action as per rules.

Arbitration can't stall statutory action against illegal construction: SC

Gurgaon.(Agency)

Supreme Court on Thursday questioned the relief granted to parties accused of unauthorised construction on disputed land in Gurgaon, observing that arbitration proceedings between private parties could not stall statutory action against illegal structures. The case concerns a 1.4-acre land parcel in Chakkarpur village, where it was alleged that there had been illegal encroachment and shops built without necessary approval. The bench was hearing a contempt plea filed against Haryana govt officials by Rajdarbar Iconic Venture Pvt Ltd, pertaining to alleged violation of an SC ruling on Dec 17, 2024. The order had laid down a framework to regulate building construction and ensure compliance with sanctioned plans.

A bench of Justices J B Pardiwala and Ujjal Bhuyan noted that Municipal Corporation Gurgaon had already concluded that the structures were "absolutely unauthorised and illegal" and a demolition order had been issued. The court was informed that the respondents had challenged the demolition order before the commissioner, Gurugram division, under Section 261(2) of Haryana Municipal Corporation Act, 1994. The appellate authority stayed coercive action and directed maintenance of status quo till arbitration proceedings between the parties were completed. The apex court observed that the arbitral tribunal was only examining competing claims over the land and not the legality of the structures on it. The bench said statutory authorities were duty-bound to independently act against illegal construction under municipal and town planning laws. "Prima facie, the appellate authority ought not to have made the arbitration proceedings one of the grounds for interfering with the demolition order," the bench observed.

The corporation said it was preparing to challenge the appellate authority's order before the Punjab and Haryana HC. Directing the civic body to "act fast", the bench said the HC should examine the matter expeditiously. SC also directed the district town planner (enforcement), Gurgaon, to proceed in accordance with Haryana Development and Regulation of Urban Areas Act, 1975, particularly,

Act against builders on groundwater misuse, CGWA tells UP

NOIDA.(Agency)

Central Groundwater Authority has asked UP groundwater department to act against alleged over-extraction and wastage of groundwater by real estate developers in Noida, following a complaint by an environmental activist.

In a letter to the state department, CGWA administrator VK Dhaundiyal said groundwater development and management in UP was being regulated by the state and requested its intervention, asking it to report back on action taken. The letter was accompanied by the complaints received by the authority.

Environmental activist Vikrant Tongad had filed a complaint with the CGWA, the UP govt, and Noida Authority, flagging rampant groundwater extraction at construction sites in sectors 145 and 153. He said water being pumped out during basement excavation was being discharged into sewage pipelines and drains, accelerating the decline of the local water table.

"We have been receiving regular complaints from local villagers, social activists, and nearby residents about hundreds of pumps deployed at construction sites running round the clock. Despite complaints, no effective action has been taken by Noida Authority or the groundwater department,"



Tongad's complaint stated. Earlier this week, the state groundwater department had separately directed the Gautam Buddha Nagar district magistrate to act against groundwater wastage in Greater Noida.

While acknowledging that de-watering was necessary for basement construction,

Tongad told TOI that builders should restrict excavation depth once water aquifers are reached rather than continuing to pump out and drain the water. He also noted that the National Green Tribunal has prohibited the use of groundwater in construction projects, requiring builders to use treated water

from sewage treatment plants instead. "On one hand, we talk of preventing groundwater wastage in construction, and on the other, water is being pumped out and discharged into drains. This is pure wastage and causes the water table to drop considerably across the entire area," he said.

Government sanctioned Rs 397 crore for urgent canal restoration works: Minister Nimmala

Ramanaidu directed officials from the Chief Engineer level to field staff to closely monitor the works and ensure timely completion.

Bhopal. (Agency)

Water Resources Minister Nimmala Ramanaidu has said that the State government has intensified efforts to restore the irrigation canal network. He charged that the previous YSRCP regime led by former Chief Minister Y S Jagan Mohan Reddy destroyed the irrigation network causing hardships to farmers between 2019 to 2024.

Reviewing the progress of Operation and Maintenance (O&M) works and the Veligonda Project through a video conference with irrigation officials at his Camp Office in Vijayawada on Friday, the Minister announced that the coalition government had allocated Rs



708 crore in two phases for O&M He said a third phase involving Rs 397 crore has now been sanctioned for works within its first year in office.

urgent canal maintenance works, including weed removal, desilting, and repair works. Ramanaidu stressed that these works must be completed at the earliest by the commencement of the Kharif season.

The Minister alleged that basic maintenance works of canals were ignored during the regime of the YSRCP, resulting in severe hardships and losses for farmers.

He stated that to speed up emergency works, the Cabinet had approved a mechanism allowing short tenders to be called within seven days for projects exceeding Rs 10 lakh.

Out of 6,502 identified works, nearly

5,943 works (about 91 percent) will be executed through Water Users Associations. Ramanaidu directed officials from the Chief Engineer level to field staff to closely monitor the works and ensure timely completion.

He also instructed irrigation authorities to submit weekly progress reports and coordinate O&M activities with the Jaladhara programme to improve groundwater levels.

The Minister said a review meeting on Jaladhara would be conducted later this month with the participation of Union Jal Shakti Minister C R Patil, Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu, district collectors, and irrigation officials.

Short news

Lapses flagged at Kakinada dialysis unit after 15 deaths

KAKINADA. (Agency)

Several lapses have been identified at the Nephroplus dialysis unit on the premises of Kakinada Government General Hospital. These allegedly resulted in multiple deaths over the past three months. Following a PGRS complaint, Dr Pasupuleti Radha Krishna, NTR Vaidya Seva's Kakinada district coordinator, inspected the dialysis records on Friday and flagged the lapses. He told TNIE that the matter will be reported to the Kakinada district collector and the Director of Medical Education (DME).

The government pays Rs 1,136 per dialysis session under the MoU, which mandates a nephrologist and two medical officers. Patient attendants alleged the nephrologist visits only once a month and no duty doctor has attended for three months. In-charge superintendent of Kakinada GGH, Dr Srinivasan, told that the dialysis unit is under DME control, not Kakinada GGH. He said the NTR Vaidya Seva district coordinator monitors the unit, and the PGRS petition will be forwarded to the DME.

NTR Vaidya Seva district coordinator Dr Pasupuleti Radha Krishna stated that many lapses related to the deaths have been found. He said these would be reported to the collector and the DME as soon as possible.

T Suresh Kumar, cluster head of the Nephroplus Dialysis company, speaking on the dialysis unit's operations, said the unit doctor has resigned but is still serving the notice period. He added that a manager was recently appointed, and doctors will be appointed to cover three shifts within 10 days.

Kerala HC allows transgender man to preserve eggs; affirms right to parenthood

KOCHI. (Agency)

Hari Devageeth's fight was never just about a medical procedure, it was about preserving the possibility of parenthood while affirming his identity. The 28-year-old transgender man, who was assigned female at birth, finally found relief after the Kerala High Court allowed him to cryopreserve his eggs by approaching an ART bank of his choice.

In a compassionate order, Justice Shoba Annamma Eapen directed that the chosen ART bank should take necessary steps to retrieve and preserve Hari's oocytes (immature egg cells) so they may be used for reproduction in future.

Hari told the court that he is yet to complete his gender-affirmation surgery. Once it is done, he will permanently lose his reproductive capacity, including through the removal of his ovaries and uterus. Before taking that irreversible step, he wanted the opportunity to preserve his gametes, to fulfil his hope of one day having a biological child. The court said the petitioner, being a biological woman, had all the rights to preserve the oocytes since the Supreme Court has held that the right to reproduction is a fundamental right under Article 21 of the Constitution, right to life.

The petitioner also said none of the authorities concerned informed him about the aspect before he obtained the certificate under Section 7 of the Transgender Act or before the removal of breasts.

The court said it was the duty of the appropriate government to give proper awareness to transgender persons regarding preservation of their oocytes or sperms before they start treatment to change their gender. No document was produced by authorities to prove that such awareness or counselling was provided to the petitioner, the court said.

Prateek Yadav death: A royal lifestyle, fitness empire and sudden end

Lucknow. (Agency)

Prateek Yadav, the younger son of Samajwadi Party founder and former Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Mulayam Singh Yadav, passed away at the age of 38 following a cardiac arrest, sending shockwaves through political and business circles in Uttar Pradesh. Though he stayed away from active politics, Prateek had carved out a distinct identity in the world of real estate and fitness, becoming known for his luxury lifestyle, high-end businesses and social media presence.

Unlike most members of the Yadav family, Prateek chose not to enter electoral politics. Instead, he built his career around business ventures and fitness entrepreneurship while maintaining a relatively low political profile. Yet, his connection to one of Uttar Pradesh's most influential political families ensured he remained in the public spotlight.

Prateek was often associated with a lavish lifestyle. He reportedly owned a Lamborghini worth nearly Rs 5 crore, purchased through a major bank loan, and



was known for his fascination with luxury cars and premium living. Government records also reflected substantial movable and immovable assets linked to him, including an upscale bungalow in Lucknow's Gautampalli area, residential properties in the cantonment region and commercial establishments in Gomti Nagar.

One of his major business hubs was a large office complex near Fun Mall in Gomti Nagar, from where several of his ventures were reportedly operated. Though investigations reportedly found that no company was directly registered in his own name, multiple real estate and infrastructure businesses were allegedly managed through close associates and relatives.

Sources familiar with the family's business network said companies linked to infrastructure, construction and real estate were operated with the involvement of Aman Singh Bisht, the brother of Aparna Yadav, along with other associates. People close to the family claimed that Prateek maintained effective control over many of these ventures, even if his name did not formally appear in company records. These business dealings occasionally became the subject of disputes and speculation within political and business circles.

Bengal Records Highest-Ever Voter Turnout In Any Assembly Poll, Beats Tripura

West Bengal. (Agency)

West Bengal has surpassed Tripura by registering the highest-ever voter turnout in an assembly election since Independence, latest data shared by the Election Commission shows. At 93.61 per cent voter participation in the 2013 assembly polls, Tripura so far held the distinction of recording the highest turnout in a state poll. But according to the latest EC data as made available on Thursday, West Bengal has recorded a turnout of 93.71 per cent.

Tripura, Nagaland, and Manipur have been witnessing high voter turnouts of 90 per cent and above in assembly polls over the years.

On May 1, West Bengal surpassed



Nagaland and Manipur by registering a 92.67 per cent provisional turnout, the state's highest since Independence, in the April assembly polls. West Bengal's previous highest voter turnout of 84.72 per cent was recorded in the 2013 elections. Tripura recorded a 93.61 per cent turnout in the 2013 polls.

On April 9, Assam and Puducherry surpassed their highest-ever poll participation by recording a voter turnout of 85.38 per cent and 89.83 per cent, respectively.

Tamil Nadu recorded a voter turnout of 84.69 per cent, bettering its previous highest poll participation of 78.29 per cent in 2011. In the state, women's participation was 85.76 per cent against men's 83.57 per cent. In West Bengal, 92.69 per cent of women voters turned up at the polling stations in the first phase, compared to 90.92 per cent of men. Tamil Nadu, where all the 234 seats went to polls on April 23, has 5.73 crore voters.

West Bengal, where polling was held in two phases, has 3.6 crore voters.

Midnight queues continue outside petrol pumps across Odisha despite rise in price

Some fuel stations temporarily ran out of stock for the second consecutive day due to the sudden surge in demand in the last three days.

KOCHI. (Agency)

Even as the Centre hiked petrol and diesel prices by Rs 3 per litre, panic buying fuelled by rumours of fuel shortage sparked heavy rush and long queues at petrol pumps in different parts of the state for the fourth consecutive day on Friday.

Despite claims of adequate stocks in the state, people lined up at petrol pumps in Bhubaneswar, Cuttack, Rourkela, Berhampur and other areas till late into the night. Some fuel stations even shut down from the morning, adding to inconvenience of the vehicle owners.

The state capital saw heavy rush of motorists in petrol pumps from midnight on Thursday. At one fuel station in Rasulgarh, police had to drive away motorists at around 3 am and barricade

the premises to prevent a jam.

Some fuel stations temporarily ran out of stock for the second consecutive day due to the sudden surge in demand in the last three days. General secretary of All India Petroleum Dealers' Association and Utkal Petroleum Dealers' Association Sanjay Lath reiterated that the situation is largely driven by panic buying and misinformation, while the disruption in supply, despite adequate stock, has made things worse. The oil companies must ensure the supply remains smooth to prevent panic buying, he said.

The representatives of State Truck Owners' and Bus Owners' Associations who met

transport commissioner on the day, said the government has sought 48 hours time



to resolve the issues related to oil supply. "Hundreds of trucks are stranded in different places or waiting at fuel stations. The government must find an immediate solution," general secretary Pranab Parija

told mediapersons.

All Odisha Private Bus Owners' Association (AOPBOA) secretary Debendra Sahoo said the body has demanded dedicated petrol pumps for heavy vehicles, buses in particular, to prevent disruption in public transport service during the ongoing crisis. The heavy rush of two-wheelers and four-wheelers is preventing us from getting fuel on time, he said.

Fuel prices hiked

The Utkal Petroleum Dealers' Association said price of petrol rose by Rs 3.22, while diesel price increased by Rs 3.19 in the state. The regular petrol after price revision now costs around Rs 104.51, while diesel costs Rs 95.99 per litre, Lath said.

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.

Resistance to antibiotics is making it difficult to treat even milder illnesses like typhoid, the incidence of which has gone up significantly in Delhi over the past few days due to increased consumption of contaminated food and water. Doctors said that while earlier oral drugs could cure most patients, they now needed to give injectable antibiotics to 20-30% of the patients to

treat typhoid symptoms. "In few cases, even the injectable drug doesn't help and we have to give add-on antibiotics to bring down fever, one of the characteristic

Drug resistance making Typhoid tough to treat

symptoms of typhoid," said Dr Rommel Tickoo, senior consultant, internal medicine, at Max Hospital Saket.

TOI spoke to doctors at Apollo, Sir Ganga Ram (SGRH) and Safdarjung hospitals who confirmed the trend. Over-the-counter use of antibiotic is a major culprit, said Dr B K Tripathi, professor of medicine at Safdarjung Hospital. "Many patients take

anti-fever drugs and even antibiotics on their own to treat typhoid symptoms. When it doesn't help, they rush to hospital. In many cases, both we have to put patients on both injectable drugs and add-on antibiotics," Dr Tripathi said.

Typhoid, a major public health infection, is caused by Salmonella typhi bacteria and leads to symptoms such as persistently high fever, nausea, headache and abdominal pain. Earlier most people could be treated at home, but now more need to be hospitalised, increasing the cost of treatment, said doctors. "In rare cases, treatment failure

can cause severe complications and death even," a doctor said.

According to Dr Atul Kakar, vice-chairperson of medicine department at SGRH, multi-drug resistance has is an emerging public health crisis. "When I was a student, we used to give chloramphenicol - a type of antibiotic - to treat typhoid. Its use was discontinued later due to high toxicity. Recently, we have observed that the same drug is sensitive to the typhoid-causing bacteria when new drugs fail. This means that we may have to go back in time and use older drugs with known side-effects if the drug-resistance pattern continues to grow like this," he said.

A research published in Journal of Global Infectious Diseases in 2010 by Safdarjung doctors had pre-empted the problem. Ciprofloxacin, they wrote, has become a norm for treating enteric fever or typhoid, but in future novel molecular substitutions (new antibiotics) may become frequent owing to irrational use of ciprofloxacin in human and veterinary therapeutics, in a population endemic with nalidixic acid-resistant strains. "The therapeutics of ciprofloxacin-resistant enteric fever narrows down to third and fourth generation cephalosporins, azithromycin, tigecycline and penems. The first-line antimicrobials ampicillin, chloramphenicol and cotrimoxazole need to be reconsidered," the microbiologists predicted further.

Preventing infections is equally important. Typhoid, for example, spreads from person to person by food and water that are contaminated with traces of infected faeces or urine. Dr Suranjit Chatterjee, senior consultant (internal medicine) at Apollo Hospital, said improved sanitation, hand hygiene and availability of clean drinking water could reduce infection rates significantly.

Apart from typhoid, medical experts say, drug resistance is also becoming a major problem in treatment of pneumonia, urinary tract infection and tuberculosis. "Over-the-counter use of antibiotics must be stopped. The government must take steps to restrict their sale so that they can be used only when needed," Dr Tickoo said.



Perk up mommy Energy



Make some park time
Mums need to get out more often. Short mindful breaks spent amid nature can be very therapeutic for overworked nerves. Eliminate all unnecessary thoughts and just listen to yourself breathe for 60 seconds. Be in the moment.

Keep a pencil box

So many ideas, so little time. Maintain a journal. Every time you remember a chore or a must-do, make a note of it. Then prioritise the errands. Plan the day's routine by listing the most tedious work at the start of the day as you are most energetic then. Don't be a picky eater

You are probably missing out on important nutrients like vitamin B12 and vitamin D. B12 anaemia causes tiredness and fatigue. Mothers need to think of food as fuel and eat foods that are alive - green vegetables, seasonal fruits. The natural sugar in fruits provides a quick pick-me-up when you're down and out. Nuts are a good source of magnesium which helps in converting sugar to energy. Lay off unhealthy, high-glycaemic foods (cookies, cakes, etc). Fix a play date
Motherhood doesn't mean hibernation. Perhaps you need play dates as much as your li'l one. The power of connection boosts mommy energy.

Why you should not drink bottled water

Bottled water is our go to choice whenever we step out. Even doctors and experts recommend drinking only bottled water when one is outside. And understandably so - water borne diseases are rampant and can be extremely dangerous.

The scenario of water-borne diseases is complex for a variety of reasons. In the past 10 years, these diseases have become not only comprehensive but also presented forth some new infections along with the re-emergence of those we already know.

So why did we warn you against bottled water? Well, celebrity nutritionist Rujuta Diwekar in her recent Instagram post mentioned - "Strict NO to bottled water. It takes three liters of groundwater (a common resource) to make one litre of bottle water, which is then sold for an exorbitant price. Not to mention,



the non-biodegradable plastic it generates."

For the sake of our environment and good health, next time you step out of your house, carry water with you. Rujuta recommends drinking matka water with khus khus or vetiver soaked in it to beat summer blues.

Summer is also the perfect time to indulge in seasonal sherbets like varyali, bel, panha, kokum and nimbu pani. Coconut water is also a healthy option to have.



Combat your hangover the natural way

Nutritionist Jacquie Newson doles out tips on how one can remain fine after a few drinks, reports femalefirst.co.uk.



Eat lots of ginger: Feeling nauseous? Alcohol can be a real irritant to the stomach lining and can increase the production of stomach acid which is why we often experience nausea and vomiting the morning after over indulging. Recent research has found that sipping hot ginger tea throughout the day can help counter nausea and upset stomachs.

Boost your Glutathione levels naturally: Glutathione is the powerful antioxidant which helps detoxify the liver after a night of drinking. However, when alcohol intake is excessive, our glutathione levels are seriously depleted. It is, therefore, vital that we give our liver a helping hand by eating foods which are rich sources of glutathione, such as fresh, raw vegetables such as tomatoes, broccoli and spinach, as well as garlic and raw eggs.

Stay hydrated: Alcohol is a diuretic, which if consumed in large volumes can cause dehydration, so be sure to sip on water throughout the day as rehydration is key to recovering from a hangover.

Invest in a good quality Vitamin C supplement: Vitamin C can accelerate the liver's ability to detoxify so it is a must-have for your hangover kit.

Pop a milk thistle: Milk thistle contains crucial substances that help protect the liver from alcohol damage. One of these substances is Silymarin, which has antioxidant properties that are known to help protect the liver by preventing the depletion of glutathione and promoting the growth of new liver cells.

Cool tips for a summer workout



The sweltering summer heat is a good excuse to skip exercise and once again gain those extra kilos that you lost with so much effort and work out. However with a few tips and precautions, summer can be a good time to workout as well. Following some expert advice, dehydration and heat related illness can be avoided, and exercising can be fun even when the mercury is rising. Experts suggest that the best time to workout in the summer is early morning or evening, when temperature is lower. A German study has shown that a pre exercise cooldown works wonders in the summer and hopping into the shower before working out may not be a bad idea after all.

Dressing correctly is another important step. Wearing loose clothing is always a good idea and sweat absorbent materials should be used. If working out in the open, shaded areas should be chosen.

If your usual running route leaves you boiling in the sun, it is time to pick up a new route for those early morning jog. It is also a good idea to walk, run or cycle on dirt or gravel paths since asphalt and concrete radiate heat and reflect the sun's rays. Those living near water bodies can always utilize the breeze on a steamy summer day.

Just before workout, dabbing a little eucalyptus oil or some drops of peppermint on the back of the neck and temples provides a cooling effect. It also opens up the nasal passage making it easier to breathe in the humid air.

One of the most important things that should be kept in mind is that alcoholic or caffeinated beverages are diuretic and take fluid out of the body and hence should be avoided at all costs before and after exercise.

Tips to de-stress at Work place



With a demanding boss, a long list of to-dos, and negative environment, you get stressed in office. Beat the stress by downloading an app or gorging on oranges.

Huffingtonpost.com shares a list of ways to de-stress in office:

Take a two-minute mini vacation:

Choose one of your favourite vacation memories and relive it without spending on the airfare! All of us have memories from our favourite places. You can relive the best moment of your life to feel like you did when you were there. It helps you recognise you have a choice in how you feel in a stressful moment.

Download a de-stressing app:

Your smartphone might be partly to blame for the stress you're feeling (non-stop emails), but it's also a great resource for de-stressing tools so try a couple of de-stressing apps.

Keep essential oils at your desk:

A whiff or two could actually help you relax. Aromatherapy has been shown to decrease stress levels, so shop around for a scent you fancy and get sniffing.

Handwrite your to-do list:

Think of your handwritten to-do list as a sacred document. You'll know exactly where to find it when you need to refer back to it since it won't be lost among the many open tabs of your browser. Also, the act of physically writing down your tasks may help you organise your thoughts and remember them more clearly which, in turn, will help you to be more focused and less stressed.

Snack on an orange:

A 2002 study found that a dose of vitamin C helped people bounce back more easily from a stressful situation.

Multi-tasking may actually improve Performance

Those who say you cannot do two things at once and do them both well may actually be wrong, says a new study that recorded benefits of multi-tasking on exercise.

In the study of older adults, who completed cognitive tasks while cycling on a stationary bike, the researchers found that participants' cycling speed improved while multi-tasking with no cost to their cognitive performance.

The surprising discovery challenges the prevalent notion that multi-tasking causes one or both activities to suffer.

"Every dual-task study that, I'm aware of shows when people are doing two things at once they get worse," said Lori Altmann, associate professor of speech, language and hearing sciences at University of Florida in the US.

"Everybody has experienced walking somewhere in a hurry when the person



in front of them pulls out a phone and that person just slows to a crawl. Frankly, that is what we were expecting," Altmann said. During the study, 28 participants with Parkinson's disease and 20 healthy older adults completed 12 cognitive tasks while

sitting in a quiet room and again while cycling.

Tasks ranged in difficulty from saying the word 'go' when a blue star was shown on a projection screen to repeating increasingly long lists of numbers in reverse order of presentation.

Participants' cycling speed was about 25 percent faster while doing the easiest cognitive tasks but became slower as the cognitive tasks became more difficult.

Yet, the hardest tasks only brought participants back to the speeds at which they were cycling before beginning the cognitive tasks.

The findings suggest that combining the easier cognitive tasks with physical activity may be a way to get people to exercise more vigorously.

Get rid of a nagging headache, Naturally

Many people instantly reach out to allopathic medicines (aspirin, paracetamol, etc.) as soon as they get a headache. It is not that they are unaware of the side-effects; they are, but situations such as an important meeting ahead, a toddler nagging them, etc., increase the urgency to be rid of the headache!



Understandable! Nobody likes headaches. But, next time, please try one of these home remedies

before you pop a pill.

1. Boil water. Add a spoonful of coriander seeds. Let it boil for a while till you are able to smell the coriander strongly. Switch off the stove and add half a spoon of tea leaves to the concoction. Close the vessel, and let it stand for a few minutes. Filter and drink it as it is without adding any sweeteners. Sleep or sit down and relax for just ten minutes. If you are lucky, your headache will be gone by this time.

2. Ginger is also a wonderful medicine for headache. If you don't mind munching on a piece of peeled ginger as it is, perhaps with a dollop of honey, nothing like it. Else, add a spoonful of chopped ginger to 1 ½ cups of hot water, and let it boil for a few minutes. Then, filter, add some honey and drink it. What a tasty way to banish your headache!

3. If your headache is due to tension, then chamomile tea works wonders for it! Nowadays, dried chamomile flower is available in most organic shops. You just need to add a spoonful of the flowers to a glass of freshly boiled water, allow it to infuse for a few minutes, filter and enjoy with a dash of honey. Else, you can buy pure chamomile tea bags (Korakundah is a good brand). This will come in handy when your head aches during office hours!

Here's how your summer routine should be like



With the scorching heat upon us, here are a few basic rules that you can follow to keep heat at bay.

Food: ? 1. Keep hydration levels high. Thirst is the last indicator of dehydration. Consume water or fluids throughout the day.

2. Include cold beverages like lime water, coconut water, iced tea, cold coffee, buttermilk, whey protein shakes. Can add stevia/sugar free to sweeten any of these to keep body fat in check.

3. Consume cold soups, cold salads and low fat curd

4. Include good amount of fruits like melons and citrus fruits to maintain hydration.

Exercise: Exercising outdoors should not be a problem if the body is well hydrated and an optimum level of nutrition is maintained. Avoid coffee and diuretics that can cause dehydration. Vitamin c, both taken as supplement and applied topically is one of the most important nutrients for skin health and inhibits damage from the sun. Sunscreens with vitamin can make spending time in the sun a much safer activity.

Robert Vadra granted pre-arrest bail in Shikohpur land deal money laundering case

Robert Vadra appeared before court after summons in the Enforcement Directorate case linked to alleged money laundering in the Shikohpur land deal in Haryana.

New Delhi.(Agency)
In a major setback to the Enforcement Directorate (ED) in the Shikhopur land deal case, Robert Vadra was on Saturday granted bail by Delhi's Rouse Avenue Court after appearing before it in compliance with summons issued earlier while taking cognisance of the investigation agency's chargesheet. The matter came up before Special Judge Sushant Changotra, who directed Vadra to furnish bail bonds. The court made it clear that no additional conditions were being imposed while granting him relief. "I am asking to file a bail bond, not any other considerations," the judge observed during the hearing. Vadra appeared before the court after a summons had been issued to him and eight others when the court took cognisance of

the prosecution complaint filed by the ED. The complaint relates to allegations of money laundering arising out of a land transaction in Haryana's Shikohpur village. During the proceedings, ED counsel Zoheb Hossain appeared virtually and informed the court that the agency was filing a status report in compliance with court directions. However, he sought two additional weeks to file a detailed report regarding further investigation in the case. He told the court that the agency was still examining certain aspects and needed more time to complete the process. The ED also informed the court that Vadra had



challenged the order taking cognisance of the chargesheet before the Delhi High Court. The trial court then listed the matter for further hearing on July 10. **WHAT'S THE MATTER?** The case stems from an FIR registered in

September 2018 over an alleged irregular land transaction involving a 3.5-acre plot in Gurugram's Shikohpur. According to the ED, Vadra's company allegedly purchased the land from Omkareshwar Properties in February 2008 for Rs 7.5 crore and later sold it to DLF for Rs 58 crore. The agency suspects that the transaction generated proceeds that formed part of a money laundering operation and initiated an investigation into the financial trail. The prosecution complaint filed by the ED in July 2025 named Vadra and several other individuals and entities. The original FIR also included former

Haryana chief ministers Manohar Lal Khattar and Bhupinder Singh Hooda, along with a property dealer and the real estate company. Charges cited in the case include corruption, forgery and cheating. **ROBERT VADRA ATTACKS ED** Speaking to reporters after the hearing, Vadra launched a sharp attack at the ED and claimed that its integrity was compromised, while also expressing complete faith in the country's judicial system. He said, "I believe in the judicial system of this country. I know that the ED is being managed by the government, and it will keep on working at the behest of it. So, it's not fair from the ED's side. But I believe in the judicial system of the country. So, I am always going to be here and answer all the questions. Whatever the formalities are, I will complete them".

Audit flags former Delhi Medical Council registrar's irregular service extension, losses worth over Rs 10 crore

New Delhi.(Agency)
From expensive Diwali gifts and foreign trips to irregular extension of service and enhancement of retirement age of its registrar, a special audit conducted by the Delhi Health department has flagged financial and administrative irregularities in the functioning of the Delhi Medical Council (DMC), estimating losses worth over Rs 10 crore to the government exchequer. The audit report observed that the then Registrar Dr Girish Tyagi, in his official capacity, was responsible for the government losing more than Rs 5.57 crore between 2019 and 2025 due to a reduction in renewal fees that doctors had to pay while they renewed their registration with the DMC. In addition, the report recommended that the government should recover monetary benefits exceeding Rs 3.23 crore from Tyagi that he had received in the form of salary, allowances and related expenditures. Responding to the allegations, Tyagi termed the audit findings "misleading" and maintained that they appeared aimed at "deliberately creating a false public perception of corruption where none has been established". Allying that the issue regarding extension of service was being selectively projected, Tyagi said that as the registrar, he was merely an employee of DMC. "An employee cannot grant an extension to himself. The extension of service was approved by a duly constituted 25-member Delhi Medical Council through its competent decision-making process. Significantly, many of the very persons now attempting to raise false allegations were themselves signatories to or participants in those decisions," he added. He maintained that the matter is sub judice and any attempt to publicly pronounce guilt or create a media narrative was "premature, improper, and contrary to principles of natural justice".

Only electric three-wheelers to be registered from January 2027: CAQM

New Delhi.(Agency)
From mandating electric three-wheelers to restricting fuel for polluting vehicles, the Commission for Air Quality Management (CAQM) on Friday issued a set of directions aimed at tackling key sources of air pollution across the NCR. At its 28th full Commission meeting, the panel decided to allow only electric three-wheelers (L5 category) — both passenger and goods — to be registered in a phased manner. The rollout will begin in Delhi from January 1, 2027, extend to high vehicle-density districts including Gurugram, Faridabad, Sonapat, Ghaziabad and Gautam Buddha Nagar from January 1, 2028, and cover the remaining NCR districts from January 1, 2029. This also means that existing CNG or diesel three-wheelers would still be allowed to operate until they are gradually phased out. The Commission also directed to restrict the sale of fuel to vehicles without a valid Pollution Under Control Certificate (PUCC) across the NCR from October 1 this year, tightening enforcement against polluting vehicles. Flagging a spike in crop residue burning, the Commission noted that Punjab recorded 8,986 stubble burning incidents between April 1 and May 14 this year, and directed state authorities to step up enforcement measures to curb such cases. It is also for the first time that paddy stubble burning will be officially monitored on ground. To implement this, the Commission also directed for the implementation of the Action Plan for prevention and control of paddy stubble burning in 2026 with a target of complete elimination of paddy stubble burning in the NCR states. According to a statement by the Commission, state governments have prepared and updated state-specific action plans for this year's paddy harvest season in line with the broad framework provided by the CAQM. The Commission also reviewed the expansion of the Continuous Ambient Air Quality Monitoring Stations (CAAQMS) network, noting that 46 additional stations are proposed across the NCR, taking the total to 157. Under revised norms, monitoring density will be one station per 25 sq km in Delhi and contiguous cities, and one per 50 sq km in other districts, with directions issued for faster installation.

Delhi government plans Miyawaki forest plantation at Asola-Bhatti Wildlife Sanctuary

The move comes amid a broader push by the Delhi government to enhance green buffers, particularly in the city's southern ridge areas.

New Delhi.(Agency)
Delhi's Forest department is planning a Miyawaki plantation drive at Asola-Bhatti Wildlife Sanctuary in South Delhi. The department has floated a fresh tender with a proposal to plant and maintain 40,000 saplings and 20,000 shrubs. According to the tender notice issued by the South Forest Division, the project will be implemented over a one-year period, during 2025–26, focusing on dense, fast-growing Miyawaki forests aimed at improving green cover and local biodiversity. Officials said the initiative is part of the government's ongoing efforts to strengthen urban afforestation in

ecologically sensitive zones, which are close to the Asola-Bhatti Wildlife Sanctuary and have seen



sustained plantation drives in recent years. The Miyawaki technique is known for creating compact forests with high survival rates. The Forest department has been adopting the

technique for increasing greenery in urban spaces rapidly. The e-tender, released on May 8 this year, has invited bids from agencies under a two-bid system. A pre-bid meeting is scheduled for May 20, while the deadline for submission is May 29, with technical bids set to be opened the same day. The project will be overseen by the Deputy Conservator of Forests, South Division. The move comes amid a broader push by the Delhi government to enhance green buffers, particularly in the city's southern ridge areas.

Noida workers' protest violence: Kin allege custodial torture, Supreme Court asks UP govt to produce before it two arrested men

New Delhi.(Agency)
The Supreme Court on Friday asked the Uttar Pradesh government to produce before it two of the men arrested in connection with the April 13 violence in Noida following a worker's protest after their families alleged that they were tortured in custody. A bench of Justice B V Nagarathna and Justice Ujjal Bhuyan asked the counsel appearing for the state government to produce Aditya Anand and Rupesh Roy before it on May 18 at 2 pm. The bench was hearing a writ petition filed by Keshav Anand, brother of Aditya. According to the police, Aditya and Rupesh had used WhatsApp groups to instigate violence during the protests. Appearing for the petitioner, senior advocate Colin Gonsalves said Aditya was an engineer and also operated a children's library. Seeking an independent investigation into the matter, he said Aditya campaigned for workers' rights and his speech recordings were proof of this. The

counsel also claimed that lawyers were not being allowed to effectively assist Aditya. The counsel appearing for the UP government, however, denied the allegations of torture in policy custody. All requirements of arrest were complied with, including supply of grounds of arrest, the counsel said.



Hearing the arguments, the court said, "We direct respondent no.1/State to produce the brother of the petitioner, Aditya Anand, and Rupesh Roy, before this court on 18.05.2026 at 2 pm." In the meantime, judicial custody of the two will continue, it added. On April 17, Noida Police had identified three persons as the alleged masterminds in the case: Rupesh Roy, who claimed to be an autorickshaw driver; Manisha Chauhan; and Aditya, a BTech graduate from NIT Jamshedpur. A day later, a joint team of Noida Police and the Uttar Pradesh Special Task Force arrested Aditya from Tiruchirappalli railway station. He was carrying a cash reward of Rs 1 lakh for his arrest.

She hoped to clear NEET after 2 failed attempts, found hanging after exam cancelled

New Delhi.(Agency)
Third time lucky. She had told her family that she finally felt hopeful that this year, she would clear the National Eligibility cum Entrance Test (Undergraduate) after two failed attempts. After failing to clear the exam by four marks last year, a 20-year-old aspirant from Lal Bagh in North Delhi's Azadpur had returned from this year's exam on May 3 feeling confident about her performance. But soon after, the National Testing Agency would cancel the examination over an alleged paper leak and announce a re-test on June 21. And she would have to appear for the exam a fourth time. On Thursday afternoon, the woman was found hanging inside her room at her home in Azadpur's Lal Bagh in a suspected case of suicide. The incident came to light when the police found her family at Kewal Park Shamsan Ghat after receiving a PCR call alleging that they were attempting to cremate the body without informing authorities. According to the woman's relatives, the woman had been preparing for NEET for the last three years. "Last year, she missed by just four marks.



Her father had pinned all his hopes on her," said her maternal aunt. The woman lived with her parents, twin sister and two brothers in Lal Bagh — a dense cluster of shanties, temporary shops and tangled overhead wires. Located opposite an Atal Canteen, a 3-ft wide lane, hardly wide enough for two people to walk side by side, leads to the family's two-room home through a steep staircase. Her father works as a cab driver, relatives said. "She was a little stressed for the last few days... her mother had told me. It was because she wanted to get admitted to a medical college for years now," the uncle told mediapersons. At the time of the incident, the woman's parents were not at home. "I came home yesterday evening, and that's when I got to what had happened," he added.

The dual-use Great Nicobar Island Project

India's most significant port project is a geopolitical project of enormous ramifications.

New Delhi.(Agency)
India's mammoth project to build a transshipment port on the Great Nicobar Island has sparked controversy, with Leader of Opposition Rahul Gandhi calling it "destruction dressed in development language". Defence analysts have questioned the commercial utility of a project 1,400 kilometres away from the Indian mainland. The Great Nicobar Project seeks to transform the island into a strategic maritime and economic hub by leveraging its proximity (about 40 nautical miles) to the East-West shipping route and reducing India's dependence on foreign transshipment ports. The core of the project is a 14.2 million twenty-foot equivalent unit (MTEU) International Container Transshipment Terminal (ICTT) at Galathea Bay which will reduce India's reliance on foreign ports like Singapore and Colombo for transshipment. Other elements include a Greenfield International Airport (4,000 Peak Hour Passengers), a 450 MVA gas-solar power plant and a planned township. The first phase of the project is due for completion by 2028. The Rs 75,000 crore project is located just 40 nautical miles from one of the world's most critical maritime

arteries, carrying 50 per cent of global container traffic and roughly 80 per cent of global seaborne oil trade. It transforms India from being a mere observer



in the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN), into a key participant in the influential economic grouping. This is only one of the reasons that makes the GNI one of the most significant geo-strategic projects ever attempted by India. **THE MALACCA DILEMMA** The 921-square kilometre Great Nicobar Island is India's southernmost territory. It is a third the size of

the state of Goa, and is located near the Six Degree Channel — the primary trade route exiting from the narrow funnel of the Malacca Strait. Nearly 80 per cent of China's energy supplies pass through this critical maritime chokepoint, leading then-Chinese President Hu Jintao to coin the term "Malacca Dilemma" in 2003. In this Chinese dilemma lies an Indian opportunity. India maintains seven small military bases on the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, including an airstrip, INS Baaz in Campbell Bay on the Great Nicobar Island. A tri-services theatre command established here in 2001 integrates land, air and naval assets. An Indian submarine based in the Andaman Islands would take just five days to arrive at the chokepoints of the Indonesian islands, roughly half the time it would take from Visakhapatnam. Yet, even after 25 years, India has not based major warships, fighter aircraft, submarines or long-range Anti-Submarine Warfare (ASW) aircraft on these islands. Common reasons include a lack of fuel storage facilities, docking and repair facilities for warships and submarines. It is a chicken and egg conundrum.

Govt revises petrol export tax, cuts diesel, ATF duties

New Delhi,.(Agency)

The government has revised export taxes on petroleum products, imposing a special additional excise duty (SAED) of Rs 3 per litre on petrol exports while reducing the duty on diesel to Rs 16.5 per litre, effective from Saturday.

The notification by the Ministry of Finance stated that the entry of Rs 3 per litre shall be substituted for petrol exports, while diesel has been revised to Rs 16.5 per litre. It further said the road and infrastructure cess has been reduced to zero on petrol and diesel exports. The fresh SAED levy on petrol exports marks the first such duty since the outbreak of the West Asia conflict.

While export duties on diesel and ATF have been reduced from higher levels after a series of revisions in recent months. Earlier, export duty on diesel was revised multiple times. It was first set at Rs 21.50 per litre on March 26, then raised to Rs 55.5 per litre on April 11. Later, it was cut to Rs 23 per litre on April 30, and has now been further reduced to Rs 16.5 per litre. Similarly, aviation turbine fuel (ATF) followed a similar pattern. The duty was first Rs 29.5 per litre, then increased to Rs 42 per litre. It was later reduced to Rs 33 per litre and has now been brought down to Rs 16 per litre. The windfall tax framework was introduced to ensure adequate domestic fuel availability and curb exports amid volatile global oil markets triggered by the West Asia crisis. Geopolitical tensions remain elevated after the United States and Iran failed to reach a peace agreement, with US President Donald Trump rejecting Iran's proposal, saying: "I don't like it — TOTALLY UNACCEPTABLE."

NPS annuity exit rules eased for retirees facing financial emergency: Know the details

Kolkata .(Agency)

One of the reasons why NPS, or National Pension System, is yet to enlist the desired number of subscribers is often cited to be the rigidity inherent in the structure. PFRDA, or the Pension Fund Regulatory and Development Authority, which regulates the system, has eased one of the rigid rules of annuity. The PFRDA's new rules will make it easier for retirees could find themselves stuck with older annuity contracts. On May 14, PFRDA issued a circular which stipulated that annuity service providers can now permit surrender of annuity policies in select cases. These are specifically instances where the annuitant, or a family member of the annuitant, is critically ill and needs funds quickly on an emergency basis. There is a second category too — NPS subscribers for whom the annuity policy was issued before October 24, 2024 and already carried an explicit surrender clause. While the earlier system almost debarred exiting an annuity, the new PFRDA rule can be viewed as a significant easing of the rigidity.

The significance for NPS subscribers

Under the NPS rules, subscribers are required to retain at least 40% of their retirement corpus to buy annuity. This other portion — 100% minus whatever is retained for annuity — is used for providing monthly pension after retirement. These rules governing the annuity portions are extremely rigid and illiquid. The NPS subscribers could not exit annuities earlier. Needless to say, it was of inconvenience to many NPS subscribers who just couldn't take out the money irrespective of how severe the emergency was.

What changed after the 2024 circular

PFRDA had earlier tightened annuity rules. In October 2024 a circular barred annuity service providers from allowing surrender or cancellation of annuities. The only exception was a free-look period available immediately after policy issuance. The argument at that time for PFRDA was that this rigid rule was required for "long-term old-age income security for subscribers".

India-Brics trade booms to \$416 billion, but deficit keeps rising

NEW YORK.(Agency)

India's trade with Brics countries gathered pace over the past five years, making the bloc a significant part of the country's imports. However, this growing trade also reflects a bigger problem: India is relying more on imports from the bloc, pushing its trade deficit higher.

A report by Rubix Data Sciences said India's bilateral trade with the other 10 Brics countries touched \$416 billion in CY2025, growing at nearly 10% every year between CY2021 and CY2025. But while trade has increased, India's goods trade deficit with the bloc has nearly doubled in the same period, rising from \$117 billion to \$224 billion.

A big reason for this is the sharp jump in imports. India's imports from Brics nations stood at \$320 billion in CY2025, growing at a 12% CAGR over five years. This also pushed Brics' share in India's total imports from 36% in CY2021 to 43% in CY2025. Within Brics, Russia became one of India's fastest-growing import partners, with imports rising at a 61% CAGR, mainly because of crude oil purchases. The UAE and Brazil also remained major trade partners, each recording 12% CAGR growth. Exports, however, have not kept pace.

India's exports to Brics countries reached \$96 billion in CY2025, growing at just 3% CAGR over the same period. Brics accounted for around 22% of India's total exports. Among the bloc, exports to the UAE grew the fastest at 11%, followed by Russia at 8% and Egypt at 5%. This gap between imports and exports has widened India's trade imbalance with several Brics members.

Govt levies windfall gains tax on petrol exports; slashes levy on diesel, jet fuel

The impact of the US-Iran war was finally felt on the retail prices of petrol and diesel when the oil marketing companies were allowed to raise prices of these two fuels by more than Rs 3 per litre. The latest measure is the imposition of the windfall tax.

New Delhi,.(Agency)

The government has imposed windfall gains tax of Rs 3 per litre on the export of petrol. On the other hand, it reduced the levy on diesel to Rs 16.5 per litre and jet fuel or ATF (aviation turbine fuel) to Rs 16 per litre. The new charges will be effective from Saturday, May 16. As the

nomenclature indicates, windfall tax is defined as a temporary tax levied by governments on industries which witness unexpected surges in profitability. These are typically caused by geopolitical crises and/or supply chain bottlenecks. The idea is to earn from the taxes of super-profits or windfall gains during times of higher global prices. This is a tool for governments to regulate the trade deficit. The decision was announced less than 24 hours after the decision to raise retail prices of petrol and diesel.

Special additional excise duty

The windfall tax has come as a Special Additional Excise Duty. It is adjusted every fortnight by the government based on fluctuations in international crude oil prices. The special additional excise duty on petrol at Rs 3 per litre comes for the first time since the hostilities began on February 28 in West Asia when US forces attacked Teheran. The objective of the windfall tax is to rein in exporters from taking undue advantage of the price

differences, as globally crude oil prices have surged from about \$70 a barrel to more than \$110 a barrel.



Export duty on diesel and jet fuel

The duty on export of diesel was Rs 23 per litre, which has now been reduced to Rs 16.5 per litre. The duty on export of jet fuel was Rs 33 per litre but has been reduced to Rs 16 per litre. As the war progressed and prices of crude oil jumped in the global markets, the Centre imposed an export duty on diesel at Rs 21.50 a litre, and on ATF at Rs 29.5 a litre on

March 26. When it was reviewed on April 11, the export duty on diesel was raised to Rs 55.5 per litre and that on jet fuel to Rs 42 per litre. The duties were slashed to Rs 23 per litre on diesel and Rs 33 per litre on jet fuel when the government reviewed the rates on April 30.

Retail prices raised, more can follow

The impact of the US-Iran war was finally felt on the retail prices of petrol and diesel when the oil marketing companies were allowed to raise prices of these two fuels by more than Rs 3 per litre. The price rise happened after a gap of four years. The latest measure in the petroleum domain is the imposition of the windfall tax. In April, the government cut excise duty on petrol and diesel by Rs 10 a litre to provide relief to the oil marketing companies which were getting sandwiched between galloping crude oil prices and an unaltered retail fuel price line.

Ministry of Finance hikes Special Additional Excise Duty on petroleum exports

New Delhi.(Agency)

The Ministry of Finance has notified a hike in Special Additional Excise Duty (SAED) on exports of petroleum products, imposing Rs 3 per litre on petrol, Rs 16.5 per litre on diesel, and Rs 16 per litre on Aviation Turbine Fuel (ATF). The move, announced through official gazette notifications on May 15, aims to adjust export levies while setting the Road and Infrastructure Cess (RIC) to nil on these products. "The notification shall come into force with effect from May 16, 2026," read the statement. Domestic excise duties on petrol and diesel meant for local consumption will remain unchanged, ensuring no immediate



impact on retail fuel prices within the country. The differential taxation strategy is expected to boost government revenue from petroleum exports without affecting price stability for Indian consumers. This marks the latest fortnightly revision in export duties, a mechanism introduced after levies were first imposed on March 27, 2026, amid global supply uncertainties stemming from West Asia tensions. The government has periodically calibrated these duties—previously reduced for diesel and ATF effective May 1, to balance domestic availability, discourage excessive exports when international prices are attractive, and prevent windfall gains for exporters at the expense of local supply. Experts note that the adjustment, particularly the introduction of a modest duty on petrol exports (which was previously nil), could moderately impact margins of export-oriented refiners such as Reliance Industries, while public sector oil marketing companies with a stronger domestic focus may see limited effects. The policy continues to prioritise fuel security for Indian consumers by making exports relatively less lucrative.

Officials have maintained that such flexible tools like SAED allow the Centre to respond swiftly to volatile global crude markets

Sensex, Nifty slide over 2% amid crude surge, geopolitical tensions

New Delhi.(Agency)

Domestic equity markets witnessed another week of sharp correction, with benchmark indices declining over 2 per cent each amid rising crude oil prices and ongoing geopolitical tensions in West Asia. Nifty declined by 2.2 per cent or 532 points during the week to close at 23,643.5 against the previous Friday's closing, while Sensex dropped 2.7 per cent or over 2,000 points to end at 75,238. Meanwhile, broader markets remained under heavier pressure, with the mid-cap index falling over 2 per cent and the small-cap index losing nearly 4 per cent. Sectorally, realty stocks were worst performers, with BSE Realty plunging almost 8 per cent. Meanwhile, IT stocks also remained under pressure, with the BSE IT index falling 5.7 per cent, followed by auto, capital goods and consumer durable shares. In addition, banking and PSU stocks also witnessed selling pressure, with the BSE Bankex and BSE PSU indices declining 3 per cent each. However, few defensive sectors

outperformed, with BSE Metal gaining 1.5 per cent, while healthcare stocks rose 1.4 per cent.

Also Read: India-UAE Ink LPG, Strategic oil reserve deals amid US-Iran war fears



Company was the top loser, falling 7.6 per cent, followed by Reliance Industries, Tech Mahindra and Mahindra & Mahindra. According to market experts, investor sentiment remained cautious amid the lack of meaningful de-escalation in West Asia tensions and their impact on crude oil

prices, inflation and the rupee.

They said elevated crude prices, rising global bond yields and sustained strength in the US dollar continued to pressure emerging markets, leading to intermittent foreign fund outflows and currency weakness. Analysts further noted that higher wholesale inflation, fuel price pass-through and elevated bond yields have increased concerns over macroeconomic stability and future monetary policy actions.

In addition, global cues also remained negative as tensions in West Asia continued without any breakthrough.

Moreover, concerns over disruptions in the Strait of Hormuz kept Brent crude oil prices elevated in the USD 105-110 per barrel range. Despite the correction, domestic institutional investors continued to provide support to the market, aided by strong retail participation. Additionally, SIP inflows in April stood at Rs 31,115 crore, helping absorb sustained FII selling.

SEBI relaxes borrowing norms for InvITs above 49% leverage limit

New Delhi,.(Agency)

Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) on Friday relaxed borrowing norms for Infrastructure Investment Trusts (InvITs) with leverage exceeding 49 per cent of asset value, a move aimed at expanding financing flexibility for infrastructure projects and improving funding access across the sector. In a circular, the market regulator said InvITs will now be allowed to raise fresh borrowings above the 49 per cent leverage threshold for capital expenditure intended to enhance asset performance or expand project capacity. The regulator has also permitted InvITs to use additional debt for major maintenance expenses related to road infrastructure projects. According to the circular, such expenses will include non-routine maintenance obligations mandated

under concession agreements. "Major maintenance expense shall mean expenditure incurred on maintenance of road project which is not routine maintenance and is in accordance with



the obligations and requirements specified in the concession agreement," SEBI said.

The relaxation is expected to particularly benefit road-focused InvITs that require significant funding for large-scale repairs and periodic maintenance

work. SEBI has also allowed refinancing of existing debt by InvITs, special purpose vehicles and holding companies under specified conditions. The market regulator clarified that refinancing would be restricted only to the principal amount of the original borrowing, while accumulated interest, penalties, fees or other charges cannot be refinanced.

"Only the principal portion of debt is refinanced, that is, any accumulated interest or any charges or fees by whatever name called shall not be refinanced," the regulator said. The revised framework follows amendments introduced to Regulation 20(3)(b)(ii) of the SEBI InvIT Regulations on April 17, 2026, which broadened the permitted use of borrowings beyond the leverage ceiling.

PFRDA's new NPS rules: Retirees can now withdraw up to 80% corpus after retirement

The Pension Fund Regulatory and Development Authority issued a circular on May 15, 2026, formally launching the Retirement Income Scheme alongside several new post-retirement drawdown mechanisms.

New Delhi.(Agency)

India's pension regulator has overhauled the way National Pension System subscribers can access their retirement savings, introducing a set of new options designed to give retirees meaningful control over how and when they draw down their corpus. The Pension Fund Regulatory and Development Authority issued a circular on May 15, 2026, formally launching the Retirement Income Scheme alongside several new post-retirement drawdown mechanisms. The core objective is straightforward: move away from a one-

size-fits-all payout model and allow subscribers to structure withdrawals around their actual financial needs in retirement. The most significant structural shift involves the annuity requirement for private-sector and non-government subscribers.

Previously, retirees were required to deploy 40 percent of their accumulated corpus into an annuity product that pays a fixed income for life, leaving 60 percent available for lump sum withdrawal. That ratio has now been inverted. Under the revised framework, the mandatory annuity floor drops to 20 percent, freeing up to 80 percent of the corpus for lump sum or phased withdrawal. The regulator has been explicit that the new drawdown options sit alongside the annuity requirement rather than replacing it — subscribers must still purchase an annuity with the minimum mandated portion. For subscribers whose total corpus does not exceed Rs 8 lakh, the annuity requirement is waived entirely,

allowing full withdrawal. Those with a corpus between Rs 8 lakh and Rs 12 lakh can withdraw up to Rs 6 lakh as a lump sum, with the remainder channelled into annuity or structured withdrawal products.



New Withdrawal Instruments

Two new withdrawal tools have been introduced to support phased drawdown. The Systematic Lump Sum Withdrawal allows retirees to pull money out in instalments over a defined period rather

than taking the entire available amount at once. The Systematic Unit Redemption operates on a similar principle, enabling periodic redemption of NPS units to generate a regular income stream. Together, these instruments give retirees the kind of cash flow management tools that were previously unavailable within the NPS architecture.

Longer Investment Window

PFRDA has also extended the age limit up to which subscribers can remain invested in NPS from 75 to 85 years. For retirees who do not immediately need their full corpus, this extension provides a longer runway for retirement savings to continue compounding within the system. A new investment option called RIS Steady has been introduced under the Retirement Income Scheme. It operates on a glide path model, automatically reducing equity exposure as the subscriber ages, thereby managing market risk progressively through the retirement years.

Short news

Protest erupts after police stop namaz on road in Kolkata locality

Kolkata.(Agency)

Tension prevailed in Kolkata's Rajabazar area on Friday when a group tried to offer namaz on the road despite a recent ban by the new Suvendu Adhikari-led government on such activities at public places.

The situation spiralled out of control when police personnel arrived to vacate the road and there was resistance. The protesters argued that this was a tradition, whereas the administration insisted that keeping public thoroughfares clear was mandatory for maintaining law and order.

The road was later cleared and traffic movement resumed. Officials said the situation in the locality is currently under control. The administration deployed a large number of police and Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) personnel in the area. Police officers said individuals attempting to disturb law and order were being identified and legal action would be taken against them.

However, police are yet to give an official statement on the incident. During the previous Mamata Banerjee government, namaz and other religious activities on the streets were allowed, but the new government has taken a tough stance against the inconvenience they caused to the public. According to BJP sources, the CM had given clear instructions in the Cabinet meeting that namaz should be offered only inside mosques and no such activity will be tolerated on the road.

Set up libraries, reading rooms in each block: Bhubaneswar MP Aparajita to BDOs

Bhubaneswar.(Agency)

Bhubaneswar MP Aparajita Sarangi on Friday directed all block development officers (BDOs) to establish libraries and reading rooms in blocks and ensure their regular functioning. Stating that libraries should support youth preparing for competitive examinations, she also instructed officials to develop at least five model water bodies in every block under the Amrit Sarovar scheme through combined MP and MLA funds. The ponds are to include seating arrangements, lighting and plantation facilities.

Reviewing 101 central government schemes across 37 departments at the District Development Coordination and Monitoring Committee (DISHA) meeting of Khurda, Sarangi stressed coordinated functioning between public representatives and the administration for effective implementation of welfare schemes with transparency and public service.

During the review, officials informed that under the Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana, 27 projects worth Rs 71 crore were proposed for tender during 2025-26. The MP also reviewed bypass works at Tapang and Nirakarpur on the Howrah-Chennai railway line and directed authorities to minimise land acquisition. She also directed officials to expedite all pending works including the Rs 8,306-crore Rameswar-Tangi road project.

Fire breaks out at IT firm godown in Chennai, doused after hours

CHENNAI.(Agency)

A massive fire broke out at a godown at the Tech Mahindra campus in Sholinganallur on Friday evening. No casualty was reported.

Sources said thick black smoke began billowing from the godown shortly after the fire broke out, followed by intense flames within seconds. Employees inside the campus were immediately evacuated after emergency alarm went off. Initial firefighting efforts used extinguishers available on the premises.

The Fire and Rescue Services personnel rushed to the spot from Tambaram, Thiruvanniyur, Thoraiakkam, Medavakkam and Guindy fire stations. Private firefighting vehicles from nearby companies were also deployed to assist in the operation.

The police said the godown housed discarded electrical items, including old air-conditioners and damaged electric vehicles, all of which were gutted in the blaze. Thick smoke from the warehouse spread across the locality, posing a major challenge for firefighters.

More than 50 firefighters engaged in operations for several hours to bring the blaze under control. Private water tankers were also brought to the spot to support the operation. The warehouse is located inside the Tamil Nadu Electronics Corporation (ELCOT) Special Economic Zone on Chennai's Old Mahabalipuram Road.

Chandigarh Police uses water cannons, tear gas to disperse farmers marching towards Punjab Lok Bhavan

Chandigarh.(Agency)

The Chandigarh Police on Friday used water cannons and fired tear gas shells near Burail Jail to stop a large number of protesting farmers marching towards Punjab Lok Bhavan after a massive gathering held at Nature Park in Mohali's Phase 8 under the banner of the Samyukt Kisan Morcha Punjab.

Police said the protesting farmers tried to break barricades and march towards the Lok Bhavan "without authorities' permission". However, tension prevailed in the area as police attempted to prevent the farmers from entering Chandigarh.

Police said the administration had earlier granted permission for only 32 representatives from farmers' unions to meet and submit a memorandum of their demands to the Punjab Governor and Chandigarh Administrator Gulab Chand Kataria. However, the administration did not permit the march involving a large number of farmers. Police said the Governor waited for

the representatives to meet as per the earlier schedule. Still, at the Chandigarh-Mohali borders, farmers were adamant about marching in large numbers to the Bhavan, with some even scuffling with the police.



Chandigarh's Senior Superintendent of Police Kanwardeep Kaur told reporters, "Farmers lacked permission for the march. We held a meeting with farmers' outfits recently, but they did not inform us about the march. Their programme was only to submit a memorandum to the Governor. The Governor also gave time to 32 representatives and

waited for them."

The SSP said police stopped the farmers when they marched and crossed barricades. "We only used minor force to stop them," she said. Police said they briefly detained some farmers who were later released. They claimed that four to five jawans sustained injuries in the police-farmers scuffle. A brief scuffle also broke out between protesters and security personnel during the confrontation. Eyewitnesses claimed that some tear gas shells landed inside a nearby housing society, triggering panic among residents. Several farmers reportedly sustained minor injuries during the police action, while many turbans were dislodged amid the chaos. Despite the crackdown, protesting farmers continued raising slogans against the Central Government and the Chandigarh administration. Earlier in the day, hundreds of farmers from across Punjab gathered at Nature Park to protest against issues related to Punjab's river waters, Punjab University Chandigarh, the Bhakra Beas.

In Dang village, Rs 25,000 fine if found drunk: Panchayat resolution to help residents kick alcohol habit

Ahmedabad.(Agency)

Gujarat's only total tribal-district, Dang, saw an entire village support a resolution to ban consumption and sale of any kind of liquor that also imposes heavy penalties, going as far as "ostracization" of involved families.

The gram panchayat of Garudiya village with a population of nearly 1,500 passed a resolution on Thursday banning the "sale of IMFL (Indian Made Foreign Liquor) or country-brewed liquor," which is already banned under the state's strict prohibition law. Garudiya is a village of Subir taluka and shares its border with Nandurbar district in Maharashtra, a wet state.

On Thursday, sarpanch K M Kamri convened a gram panchayat meeting and proposed banning the sale and consumption of liquor in the village. The proposal was approved by all panchayat members. A copy of the resolution was submitted to the Subir police



station. After the resolution passed, the village sarpanch convened a meeting of villagers and announced the details in it. The sarpanch has formed a five-member 'Dekh Rekha' (supervision) committee to monitor liquor-related activities in the village.

The resolution states: "The 'Dekh Rekha' committee, formed by the Gram Panchayat and headed by the village sarpanch, will ensure that no person in the village manufactures, sells, or consumes country-made liquor or IMFL. If anyone is found in a

drunken condition, a penalty of Rs 25,000 will be recovered from them and they will also be subject to a police case. No one from the village will support the accused in obtaining bail during the police procedure. If anybody from the village or outside gives a tip-off to the Dekh Rekha committee about the sale or consumption of IMFL/country-made liquor, they will be rewarded with Rs 10,000 recovered from the accused, and the remaining Rs 15,000 (from the penalty) will be deposited in the Gram Panchayat fund. The village's primary occupation is agriculture, but alcohol consumption is common among the people. The resolution also states, "If anybody enters the village in an inebriated state and is caught by the villagers or the committee, he/she will also have to pay a penalty of Rs 10,000. Apart from this, if anyone violates the resolution even after being caught once, their family will be barred from social contact and other religious functions in the village."

After fake birth certificate scandal, BMC turns to AI to secure civic records

he initiative, titled Vision AI Vault, comes amid heightened scrutiny of the BMC's birth registration system after the civic administration revealed that 87,347 fake birth certificates were issued between 2024 and 2026.

Mumbai.(Agency)

Weeks after an internal probe exposed over 87,000 fake birth certificates issued by the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC), the civic body has rolled out an Artificial Intelligence-backed system to digitally preserve and retrieve key citizen records, beginning with E ward in Byculla.

The initiative, titled Vision AI Vault, comes amid heightened scrutiny of the BMC's birth registration system after the civic administration revealed that 87,347 fake birth certificates were issued between 2024 and 2026. Of these, 5,505 certificates were traced to E ward

alone.

Civic officials said the pilot project was launched following directions from Mumbai Municipal



Commissioner Ashwini Bhide to integrate AI-based mapping across the civic database.

The new system aims to digitise decades-old records — including

birth, death and marriage certificates — many of which have deteriorated due to Mumbai's humid weather and ageing storage conditions. Officials said records that earlier took nearly a month to retrieve could now be accessed within minutes.

Unlike conventional scanning systems, the AI-powered platform can reportedly read handwritten English, Marathi and Hindi documents, restore faded text and correct distortions caused by damaged paper and ink smudges, including in pre-Independence era records. Officials said users will be able to retrieve documents by entering a name, following which digitally signed certificates.

Ernakulam records 99.61% pass rate in SSLC exams; girls lead in A+ scores

Thiruvananthapuram.(Agency)

Eight months after its inauguration, the Rs 10-crore modern abattoir at Kunnukuzhy is finally set to commence full-scale operations, with the city corporation conducting the first trial run of the facility on Thursday.

The modernised slaughterhouse, expected to become fully operational next week, has the capacity to slaughter and process 50 to 75 animals in a single shift.

Mayor V V Rajesh said the formal launch of operations would be held next week. He said that the civic body will put an end to all illegal slaughtering happening in the capital.

"We will launch a large-scale crackdown on illegal slaughtering across the capital. Our aim is to eliminate unauthorised slaughtering in the city. The abattoir will play a key role in curbing environmental pollution. At present, slaughter waste is being dumped into water bodies and public spaces, contributing to the stray dog menace," the mayor said.

He said the inauguration had to be rescheduled because of the swearing-in ceremony of the new chief minister on Monday. The abattoir is expected not only to ensure the availability of hygienic and safe meat to consumers but also to generate revenue for the corporation.

Corporation veterinary surgeon Dr Sreerag Jayan said processing around 100 animals a day could generate the civic body nearly Rs 2 lakh in monthly revenue.

Malerkotla low intensity blast under probe; 'due to potash dumped at garbage site': police

Ludhiana.(Agency)

A low-intensity blast occurred Friday evening near a garbage dumping site in Punjab's Malerkotla, leaving a buffalo severely injured and triggering a police investigation. The animal reportedly lost one of its legs in the explosion. The incident took place close to the residence of former Punjab DGP Mohammad Mustafa and his wife, former Cabinet Minister Razia Sultana. Officials said forensic teams from Bathinda have been called to examine the site and ascertain the exact cause of the blast.

Mohammed Hamza, a dairy farmer whose buffalo was injured in the explosion, said the incident occurred when the animal approached a pile of garbage near the dumping point. "My buffalo went near the

garbage and stepped over a polythene bag... The impact was so strong that the animal was thrown several feet into the air. I was standing nearby and was also knocked down."

He also said when he regained his senses, he found the buffalo critically injured, with one leg blown off and severe injuries to its stomach. "For some time, I could not hear anything. Soon, local residents gathered at the spot and offered me water."

Hamza said the injured buffalo was a milch animal and its condition had severely affected his livelihood. Senior Superintendent of Police (SSP) Malerkotla Gurmeet Singh said preliminary investigations indicate that the blast may have been caused by potash

material allegedly dumped at the site.

"Initial investigation suggests that the incident appears to have occurred due to



potash dumped in the garbage disposal area. The buffalo got injured after entering the site," the SSP told the media.

He also said police had learnt that some

families living nearby were engaged in work involving potash, which is commonly associated with firecracker manufacturing. "One local resident informed us that a similar blast-like sound had been heard from the same disposal area in May last year, after which garbage at the site had caught fire. The sequence of events appears similar, though all angles are being investigated."

The incident comes days after low-intensity blast incidents were reported in Jalandhar and Amritsar on May 5, which sparked a political controversy in Punjab. Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann had then alleged that the incidents reflected the BJP's "style of preparation" ahead of elections.

NEWS BOX

Brand Beckham soars: David Beckham becomes UK's first billionaire sportsman

New Delhi. (Agency)

David Beckham, the boy from Leytonstone who once conquered world football with a swing of his right boot, has achieved what no British athlete before him ever could: the ten-figure club. According to the latest iteration of the Sunday Times Rich List, David and Victoria Beckham have officially crossed the threshold into billionaire status, with their collective net worth skyrocketing to a staggering £1.185 billion. The valuation marks a seismic leap from their estimated £500 million fortune last year, making Beckham the UK's first-ever billionaire sportsman. While the "Brand Beckham" machine has been a lucrative global enterprise for three decades, this recent financial surge is rooted firmly in a masterstroke of American sporting real estate and a slice of Argentinian magic.

THE MESSI FACTOR

The crown jewel of Beckham's empire is Inter Miami CF. When Beckham signed for the LA



Galaxy in 2007, his contract included a revolutionary clause allowing him to buy an MLS expansion franchise for just \$25 million. Today, that franchise is valued well north of £1 billion. The catalyst for that exponential valuation jump was the historic signing of Lionel Messi, which sent global merchandise sales, ticket prices, and Apple TV broadcast subscriptions into orbit. Combined with massive real estate developments surrounding the club's upcoming Miami Freedom Park stadium, Beckham's gamble on American soccer has paid off in historic fashion. Yet, it is not a solo victory. The milestone represents a twin-engine financial triumph for Britain's ultimate power couple. Victoria Beckham's luxury fashion and beauty house, which faced well-documented financial headwinds for years, has engineered a dramatic U-turn. The label recently reported revenues breaching the £100 million mark, pivoting into serious profitability and silencing high-fashion skeptics. As diversification as they are deep.

8 sixes in 16 balls: Lack of clarity gets the better of CSK against Lucknow



NEW DELHI. (Agency)

In two separate instances during the match against Lucknow Super Giants, Chennai Super Kings conceded four sixes in four balls. In a defence of 187 runs at the Ekana Stadium in Lucknow, that proved fatal for the Ruturaj Gaikwad-led side, who were chasing a top-four spot in the Indian Premier League's 2026 season. After a slow start to the season, Chennai had finally begun to put together some consistent results. Four wins from their last five games meant that CSK still had an outside chance of qualifying for the playoffs. However, it all came crashing down on Friday when Chennai were blown away by a magnificent 90-run innings from Mitchell Marsh, who looked in imperious touch on May 15. Playing on a deck that had good bounce and carry for the seamers, Marsh slammed seven sixes and nine boundaries before getting run out in the 12th over of the game. But by the time Marsh departed, the damage had already been done. In today's IPL Play of the Day, we look at how a stretch of 16 balls ruined CSK's night at the Ekana Stadium on May 15.

On Friday, Chennai Super Kings' fast bowlers had one clear task: find the length that helped LSG pacers make life miserable for Chennai's top order in the first innings. It seemed to be the hard-length area where Lucknow's pacers operated, extracting enough skid and bounce to hurry multiple batters into mistakes. Young Kartik Sharma and Shivam Dube had played valuable knocks to get CSK to a fighting total of 187. The bowlers simply needed to target the same areas and test the LSG batters early in the innings. But that plan quickly fell apart as Mitchell Marsh took a liking to the CSK pacers and dismantled them on Friday. Marsh's incredible assault began in the fifth over of the match when he took Anshul Kamboj apart with four consecutive sixes.

They funded their own dreams. Now Netherlands women are ready to play a World Cup

➔ The Netherlands are all set to make their Women's T20 World Cup debut next month in England and Wales. In an exclusive conversation with IndiaToday.in, Dutch skipper Babette de Leede reflected on the team's remarkable journey, from once struggling for recognition and resources to now stepping onto cricket's biggest stage.

New Delhi. (Agency)

2014 remains one of the most unforgettable years in Dutch cricket history. Under Peter Borren, the Netherlands men's team scripted a miracle at the T20 World Cup, storming into the Super 10 after chasing 190 against Ireland in just 13.5 overs in Sylhet. More than a decade later, Stephan Myburgh's breathtaking 23-ball 63 still lives vividly in memory, not just as one of their best, but as one of the most astonishing run-chases the tournament has ever witnessed. In that very

World Cup, the Dutch pulled off another remarkable victory, bowling England out for just 88 runs in a stunning display.

But while the men were making headlines and inspiring a generation, in the same year, the Dutch women's team was simply trying to survive. They did not even have T20I status then and, instead of earning from the game, many players often dipped into their own pockets just to continue playing the sport they love. There was no full-time head coach either, a painful reminder of how little support surrounded women's cricket in the country at the time. It was amid that uncertainty that a 15-year-old Babette de Leede made her debut for the Netherlands in 2014, carrying little more than hope and a dream. 12 years later, that young girl now stands at the heart of a historic moment, preparing to lead the Netherlands into their maiden Women's T20 World Cup under full-time coach Neil McRae. What once felt distant and fragile has finally turned into something beautifully real for Dutch women's cricket. I made my debut earlier in

2014, but we didn't have T20I status back then. We've come a long, long way since. Back then, we had to pay for our own tours and trips, and our coach wasn't full-time. Gradually, things improved. Around 2019 or 2020, we got our first full-time head coach,



who worked a lot with us and helped us get better," Babette told IndiaToday in an exclusive interview.

"We also started receiving match fees or at least petrol money, so it didn't cost us to play cricket or attend training. Now we're at a stage where we earn match fees on tour, and

some of the girls are on part-time contracts as well," Babette said.

THE HAPPY MOMENT OF SHIVERS

Cricket has always flowed through the veins of the De Leede family. Babette's uncle, Tim de Leede, etched his name into Dutch cricket folklore during the World Cup 2003 when he produced a Player of the Match performance against India and even dismissed the great Sachin Tendulkar as his very first international wicket. Her cousin, Bas de Leede, has already carried the family legacy onto the ODI and T20 World Cup stages. Now, another chapter is ready to be written. Babette is preparing to represent the Netherlands at one of cricket's grandest events in England and Wales, adding her own story to a family that has long served Dutch cricket with pride. Earlier this year in Nepal, the Netherlands women scripted a remarkable run at the Qualifiers, winning five consecutive matches to book their place at the global event alongside Bangladesh.

Anshul Kamboj was terrified: Ex-IND captain points out when CSK star lost plot vs LSG



Dharamsala. (Agency)

Anshul Kamboj had a day to forget at the Ekana Stadium against the Lucknow Super Giants. The CSK pacer came in as a bowler who was competing with Bhuvneshwar Kumar for the purple cap, but looked very ordinary in his efforts against LSG, conceding 63 runs off just 16 balls.

LSG vs CSK, IPL 2026: Highlights | Scorecard

This included two separate instances where the pacer was hit for four consecutive sixes, first by Mitchell Marsh and then by Nicholas Pooran. Speaking on his YouTube channel, former India captain and selector, Kris Srikanth pointed out the exact moment where Kamboj lost the plot. Srikanth slammed the planning of Kamboj for trying to bowl a short delivery against Marsh. He then said by the third ball of the over, the CSK pacer looked spooked and fear had crept into his mind and kept making the same mistake again and again.

"What did he bowl first ball? A short-of-a-length delivery. Against Australians, if you bowl short, they'll punish you badly. Marsh smashed that first ball over covers for six. Remember that shot? After that, Kamboj kept bowling short, trying to get bounce, and Marsh pulled him over square leg for another six."

"From the third ball onwards, if you watch the slow-motion replay carefully, you can notice it in Kamboj's run-up itself. He got scared after those first two sixes. The fear crept in immediately, and from there he kept bowling shorter and shorter," said Srikanth.

WHAT CSK NEEDED TO DO

Srikanth agreed with the fact that Kamboj shouldn't have bowled at that time and CSK should have persisted with Mukul Choudhary and Spencer Johnson, who looked impressive early on in the match. The former India selector said that CSK should continued bowling good and Test match lengths and continued with the left-arm pace duo. "Look at Spencer Johnson — even he only got hit in the final over.

Pakistan's Fatima Sana scores fastest Women's T20I fifty, smashes Richa Ghosh's record

New Delhi. (Agency)

Fatima Sana etched her name into the record books after smashing the fastest half-century in Women's T20I history during Pakistan's third T20I against Zimbabwe in Karachi. The Pakistan skipper raced to fifty in only 15 deliveries, surpassing the previous benchmark of 18 balls jointly held by Sophie Devine, Phoebe Litchfield and Richa Ghosh. The Indian wicketkeeper scored her fifty off 18 balls during the clash against the West Indies on December 2024. Her breathtaking knock also equalled the fastest fifty recorded in all women's T20 cricket, matching feats achieved by Marie Kelly for Warwickshire in 2022 and Laura Harris for Otago in the 2025 Super Smash. Before Sana's blitz, Pakistan's quickest T20I fifty belonged to Nida Dar, who had reached the landmark in 20 balls against South Africa in 2019.

Batting first in the series finale, Pakistan were already well-placed at 152/4 when

Sana walked in during the 17th over. She wasted little time settling in, collecting a boundary off her opening delivery from Michelle Mavunga before launching a fierce assault on the Zimbabwe bowlers. Kudzai Chigora bore the brunt first as Sana hammered four consecutive boundaries in



one over. The real carnage arrived in the 19th over against Nomvelo Sibanda. Sana unleashed a sequence of 4, 4, 6, 6 and 4, plundering 24 runs from the over and moving to 48 from just 14 balls. At the

opposite end, Saira Jabeen also played a fluent hand. Sana brought up the record-breaking milestone with a couple off the bowling of Zimunu in the final over before finishing unbeaten on a stunning 62 from only 19 deliveries, an innings decorated with 10 fours and two sixes. Jabeen remained not out on 50 from 32 balls as Pakistan piled up 223/4, their second-highest total in Women's T20Is.

Zimbabwe never threatened in reply and were dismissed for 90. Pakistan's bowling unit dominated, with Sadia Iqbal and Nushra Sandhu sharing five wickets, while Sana also chipped in with 1/28.

Sana has enjoyed a sensational run in T20Is this year. She is currently Pakistan's leading run-scorer in the format in 2026, amassing 229 runs in five innings at a strike rate above 206. Earlier this year, she also produced her career-best T20I score — a blistering 90 off 41 balls against South Africa.

MS Dhoni set for CSK return vs SunRisers in Chennai? Ex-teammate drops big hint

LOS ANGELES. (Agency)

The lingering mystery surrounding MS Dhoni's complete absence from the ongoing Indian Premier League season has taken a compelling turn, with veteran Indian spinner Ravichandran Ashwin hinting that the legendary wicketkeeper-batter could finally make his heavily anticipated return in Chennai Super Kings' must-win encounter against SunRisers Hyderabad on Monday. Dhoni, who has not played a single match in Chennai's 12 fixtures so far this season due to a calf injury sustained during pre-season training, left fans crestfallen yet again on Friday night. Despite travel arrangements being made for him to join the squad in Lucknow, the 44-year-old ultimately stayed back in Chennai as CSK fell to a damaging seven-wicket defeat against Lucknow Super Giants. However, speaking on his YouTube channel, Ashwin offered a reassuring assessment of Dhoni's physical state, suggesting that a return to the playing XI at Chepauk on Monday is firmly on the horizon. "Even now, if we talk about a

quality pace hitter, I think it's him," Ashwin said, underscoring Dhoni's enduring value to a middle order that has occasionally lacked late-innings impetus.



"Let's see. I have a feeling that against SunRisers Hyderabad, there is a good chance of him playing. Let's wait and see how it goes." Whether the former captain can provide the fairytale finish to an

otherwise frustrating season remains to be seen, but according to Ashwin, the medical green light is imminent. "As far as I have heard, he has been ready to take the field for the last two-three games," Ashwin said.

ASHWIN DEFENDS CHENNAI AMID INJURY WOES

Addressing the inevitable scrutiny that accompanies the prolonged rehabilitation of a high-profile athlete, Ashwin came to the defence of the Chennai team management. He dismissed the notion that skipper Ruturaj Gaikwad or head coach Stephen Fleming could have managed the situation differently, pointing instead to the complex realities of modern sports science.

"I think the more you cut down on training, the chances of getting injured increases. Some, in a bid to avoid injuries, they look at hopping from match to match—that's wrong. But this is another department; it's physiotherapy and sports science. I don't think the coach and the captain can be blamed. They can't do anything," Ashwin explained.

Ain't trending no more: Akash Singh's note celebration vs CSK leaves Steyn fed up

➔ Akash Singh flashed a handwritten note after striking against CSK in Lucknow. But Dale Steyn wasn't too pleased with the celebration, claiming that flashing the note was never a trend in the first place.

Dharamsala. (Agency)

Is the note celebration in IPL becoming outdated? Dale Steyn certainly thinks so, and he made his feelings felt right after Akash Singh pulled out a piece of paper with a message during the LSG vs CSK game at the Ekana Stadium on May 15. LSG vs CSK, IPL 2026: Highlights | Scorecard

Akash played his first match of the season and rocked the CSK top order by picking the



wickets of Ruturaj Gaikwad, Sanju Samson and Urvil Patel. Right after the wicket of Ruturaj, he pulled off the note that read, "This trend started last year when Abhishek Sharma delivered a message for the SRH



fans and it has continued this season with Raghu Sharma first doing it and then Urvil Patel showing a message dedicated to his dad. But by the time Akash pulled it off, Steyn said it was time to put the papers away. The

South African legend, in a tweet, said that the note celebration isn't trending anymore and it never was in fashion.

"Time to put the papers away. It ain't trending no more. Actually, to be honest, never really was," said Steyn on X.

WHY DID AKASH PULL OFF NOTE CELEBRATION?

During the match, Justin Langer was quizzed about the celebration from Akash by the commentators and he said that he wasn't aware of it and it was something they will need to look into.

But, Akash then revealed it after the end of the first innings, saying that there was no reason behind and the chit was there to act as motivation for him. "It just gives me motivation. There is no reason behind it. Whatever motivates me during the game, I'll keep backing it," said Akash. It will be interesting to see if the players will now heed to Steyn's advice and look for a new celebration during matches.



Mouni Roy

Divorce: Actor Turns Off Comments Section After Fans Troll Disha Patani On Instagram

Actress Mouni Roy has turned off her comments section after announcing her divorce from Suraj Nambiar. On Thursday, the couple confirmed their divorce in a joint post in which they confirmed they are parting ways and requested privacy. The actress soon turned off her comments section and hid the existing comments. Currently, no comments are visible on the joint post. While social media users, who couldn't comment on the recent post, swarmed to Mouni Roy's older posts. They dragged Disha into the marriage controversy surrounding Mouni and Suraj, and accused her of being the home-wrecker. One user wrote, "Karwa Di mouny our suraj ke bich ladai (You instigated the fight between Mouni and Suraj)". Another user wrote, "Divorce ke baad new husband Disha (After divorce, the new husband will be Disha)". The couple wrote in their post, "We note with dismay the unnecessary and intrusive attention into our personal lives by certain quarters of the media. We would like to state that we have decided to part ways and are taking the necessary time to address matters privately and amicably. Attempts have been made to sensationalise our private lives by the circulation of fictitious narratives and blatant falsehoods, which do not reflect the reality of our relationship". They further mentioned, "After thoughtful reflection on evolving personal priorities, we have mutually chosen to move forward on separate paths with respect and understanding. At this point, we are focused on navigating this phase thoughtfully and privately. We will endeavour to cherish our friendship in times to come. We sincerely appreciate your understanding, respect for our privacy, and the continued support extended to us during this time". For the uninitiated, Mouni Roy's personal life has been under the scanner for the past few days. The speculation began after many noticed that Mouni and her husband, Suraj Nambiar, appeared to have unfollowed each other on Instagram, sparking concerns about a possible separation. Mouni and Suraj first crossed paths at a New Year's celebration in Dubai in 2018. Introduced through mutual friends, the two quickly formed a close connection. In the early stages of their relationship, distance proved to be a challenge, with Suraj living in Dubai and Mouni based in Mumbai. Despite being in a long-distance relationship, they made constant efforts to spend time together, frequently travelling to meet one another. The couple tied the knot in 2022 in a Malayali wedding ceremony followed by a Bengali one in Goa.



Abhishek Bachchan's Villain Avatar From Shah Rukh Khan's King LEAKED



Shah Rukh Khan and Deepika Padukone's actioner King is among the most-awaited films of 2026. Helmed by Siddharth Anand, the film also stars Abhishek Bachchan, Suhana Khan, Raghav Juyal, Saurabh Shukla and Rani Mukerji in pivotal roles. The film recently grabbed attention after videos of SRK and Deepika from the sets of King were leaked online. Now, amid the growing curiosity surrounding the project, fresh glimpses from the shoot have surfaced, this time featuring Abhishek Bachchan, who is reportedly set to play the antagonist. The team was busy shooting for the next schedule in South Africa recently. However, it is not confirmed if the visuals of Abhishek Bachchan are from Cape Town or somewhere else. In the leaked pictures, he is seen standing atop a vehicle while holding a shotgun. Set against a rugged mountainous backdrop, the actor sports a dark outfit layered with a long grey overcoat, adding to the intense and gritty vibe of the scene. Reportedly, King Khan, along with the team, had recently flown to South Africa to film a song sequence along with crucial climax portions of the movie. Following an extensive two-week schedule overseas, the team returned to Mumbai to continue shooting the next phase of the big-budget action entertainer. Meanwhile, SRK and Deepika's leaked visuals from the sets earlier left their fans in awe. The moment was made extra special as Ranveer Singh and baby Dua were also seen watching them shoot the romantic song. However, director Siddharth Anand urged everyone not to leak assets online. A statement read, "Request to all the fans. Please do not post or circulate any leaked multimedia from the sets of King. The team is working round the clock to ensure the best cinematic experience for everyone. Let us wait for the surprise on the big screen and for the assets to be revealed as the team of King originally intends to. Thank you for your love, support and cooperation."

Saif Ali Khan On Taking 'Blessings' From His Kartavya Poster: 'All The Best To The Movie'



There is a certain breezy self-awareness to Saif Ali Khan that the internet has quietly adored for years. Among younger fans, the actor has earned a reputation for being effortlessly Gen Z coded, someone who appears unbothered, witty, slightly chaotic in the best way, and refreshingly unserious about the heavy machinery of stardom. Last week, Saif gave the internet yet another moment to obsess over. At the trailer launch of Kartavya on May 7, the actor unintentionally became part of one of the week's most shared viral clips. As he entered the venue, Saif was seen breaking into a small dance before seemingly "taking blessings" from his own poster. The clip immediately reminded fans of Kareena Kapoor Khan's iconic "Main Apni Favourite Hoon" energy, sparking memes and amused reactions across social media. **Saif Ali Khan Explains Viral 'Blessing' Moment** Saif has now reacted to the viral moment in a Netflix video and explained what was actually going on. According to him, the gesture was not as dramatic as the internet made it look, but came from a place of wishing the film and his character well. He said, "See, the thing is, you walk on, there's this huge poster of Kartavya and this cop, who, you can see that I'm saying all the best to the movie, all the best to me playing that. The film, in many ways, what he's fighting for is his home and his family. When I read the script, I mean, he's got many amazing qualities and he's probably far more amazing than I am." The explanation only added to the charm of the moment, with fans once again pointing out how casually funny Saif can be without seeming to try. **Saif Ali Khan Explains Viral 'Blessing' Moment** Saif has now reacted to the viral moment in a Netflix video and explained what was actually going on. According to him, the gesture was not as dramatic as the internet made it look, but came from a place of wishing the film and his character well. He said, "See, the thing is, you walk on, there's this huge poster of Kartavya and this cop, who, you can see that I'm saying all the best to the movie, all the best to me playing that. The film, in many ways, what he's fighting for is his home and his family. When I read the script, I mean, he's got many amazing qualities and he's probably far more amazing than I am."

Sara Ali Khan

Reveals If Social Media Trolls Affect Her Mental Health Amid Ongoing Feud With Orry

Actress Sara Ali Khan opened up about dealing with trolls, online criticism, and the love she receives from the netizens on social media. Talking exclusively to IANS, Sara was asked if these social media comments end up having an impact on her mental health. The 'Atrangi Re' actress admitted that she does get affected, as at the end of the day, as an actor, the primary focus is the audience. However, she pointed out that as time passes, one also learns to work for themselves. She told IANS, "I'll be lying if I say I don't get affected. I do get affected because ultimately, I, you know, do what I do for my audiences, and if I disappoint them, I don't feel good. But I think somewhere in this journey of having been here now for a while, you actually start also working for yourself. And I think I learned that late in my career." Sara further explained, "I think for very long the initial focus was, and it'll always be, I said 'Janata Janata' and I meant that. The focus will always be the audience. But if

you truly start enjoying your work, you enjoy the process, and you tell yourself, not in a lie but in a genuine way, that I have done my best. That absolves you of any sort of mental guilt and self-flagellation for no reason. Then you feel like, I did my best, I did as much as I could, and now it's up to God. That gets easier if you put in your



best, and then that's it." Work-wise, Sara will be seen playing a crucial role in the upcoming romantic comedy "Pati Patni Aur Woh Do", with Ayushmann Khurrana, Rakul Preet Singh, and Wamiqa Gabbi in crucial roles, along with others. Directed by Mudassar Aziz, "Pati Patni Aur Woh Do" will be reaching the cinema halls on May 15.

NEWS BOX

"Thought He Could Hide": Trump Says Top ISIS Leader Abu-Bilal Killed

WASHINGTON. (Agency)

US President Donald Trump said Friday that American and Nigerian forces had killed a senior Islamic State group leader. "Tonight, at my direction, brave American forces and the Armed Forces of Nigeria flawlessly executed a meticulously planned and very complex mission to eliminate the most active terrorist in the world from the battlefield," Trump said on Truth Social. "Abu-Bilal al-Minuki, second in command of ISIS globally, thought he could hide in Africa, but little did he know we had sources who kept us informed on what he was doing," he added. Al-Minuki had been placed under US sanctions in 2023 for ties to the Islamic State group. "He will no longer terrorize the people of Africa, or help plan operations to target Americans," Trump said. "With his removal, ISIS's global operation is greatly diminished."

Boeing Confirms China Is Buying 200 Planes

world.(Agency)

Aerospace giant Boeing on Friday confirmed that China had committed to purchasing 200 aircraft, as previously announced by US President Donald Trump during his visit to Beijing. "We had a very successful trip to China and accomplished our major goal of reopening the China market to orders for Boeing aircraft," the company, whose CEO Kelly Ortberg was part of the US delegation to China, said in a statement. "This included an initial commitment for 200 aircraft and we expect further commitments will follow after this initial tranche," Boeing said, thanking the Trump administration "for making this milestone happen." "We now look forward to continually addressing China's aircraft demand," it said. China's last order from Boeing dates back to 2017, when Trump went to Beijing at the start of his first White House term. At that time, it ordered 300 single-aisle and wide-body planes -- a mega-deal valued at \$37 billion.

On Thursday, Trump had referred to the new Boeing commitment, telling Fox News host Sean Hannity in an interview: "I think it was a commitment."

"That's a lot of jobs," the president added.

Speaking to reporters aboard Air Force One as he flew home from China, Trump said the deal included "a promise of 750 planes, which will be by far the largest order ever, if they do a good job with the 200." US media have reported for several months that Beijing was poised to make a major order from Boeing that would include 500 single-aisle 737 MAXs and about 100 larger 787 Dreamliners and 777s.

Lil Tjay sparks backlash after exposing private messages linked to Kai Cenat's ex-girlfriend



World.(Agency)

The latest online drama involving Lil Tjay and Kai Cenat has once again blurred the line between entertainment and personal privacy. What began as subtle tension between two internet personalities quickly exploded after Lil Tjay briefly posted screenshots of private messages connected to Cenat's former girlfriend, Gigi Alayah.

Although the posts disappeared within hours, the internet had already captured everything. Screenshots spread rapidly across X and Instagram, sparking fierce arguments among fans over whether the rapper crossed a line or simply added another chapter to an already public feud.

Lil Tjay sparks backlash after sharing Kai Cenat-related messages

The controversy began after Lil Tjay uploaded screenshots of direct messages allegedly involving Gigi Alayah. Some of the conversations reportedly dated back several years, while one message from May 12 read, "Don't just open my shit crazy."

The deleted uploads instantly triggered heavy criticism online. Many fans accused the rapper of unnecessarily dragging private conversations into public view, especially since Kai Cenat had recently stepped away from livestreaming following news of his breakup. Social media reactions became sharply divided. Some users called the move immature and attention-seeking, while others defended Lil Tjay's right to share interactions tied to ongoing public tension. The situation intensified because the rapper and Cenat have exchanged indirect shots before. Even though neither side publicly escalated the issue immediately afterward, online communities quickly turned the incident into another major celebrity internet debate. At the same time, observers pointed out that Lil Tjay has remained surrounded by controversy throughout recent months. Alongside releasing new music and making talk-show appearances, the rapper has also been linked to public disputes involving other artists, including Real Boston Richey. Kai Cenat remains silent as Lil Tjay controversy fuels speculation. While Lil Tjay briefly controlled the online conversation, Kai Cenat chose not to respond publicly.

Israel, Lebanon say extending ceasefire despite new strikes

WASHINGTON. (Agency)

Israel and Lebanon agreed to extend a ceasefire and hold expanded talks on a political settlement, the United States announced Friday, even as Israel carried out new strikes that it insists are not subject to the truce. Israel has been pounding Lebanon and invaded its south in response to fire from Hezbollah, the Iranian-backed Shia movement that is not part of the ceasefire diplomacy. Envoys from Israel and Lebanon's government, which has struggled to restrain Hezbollah, met for two days in Washington and said they would extend the ceasefire that was set to expire Sunday. The cessation of hostilities "will be extended by 45 days to enable further progress," State Department spokesman Tommy Pigott said.

He said that the State Department would hold negotiations aimed at reaching a permanent political agreement on June 2 and 3 and that the Pentagon would bring together delegations from the countries' militaries on May 29. Lebanon's delegation said in a

statement that the ceasefire extension and opening of military talks would offer "critical breathing room for our citizens" with a goal of "lasting stability." In an implicit rebuke to Hezbollah, Lebanese Prime Minister Nawaf Salam told an NGO dinner in Beirut that his country has had "enough of these reckless adventures serving foreign projects or interests."

The latest brought "a war we did not choose but was forced upon us, which led to Israel occupying 68 towns and villages," he said.

The United States steadfastly backs Israel, with which it launched attacks on Iran on February 28, but has also gently voiced unease about Israeli troops' encroachments into southern Lebanon. Israel's ambassador to Washington, Yechiel Leiter, who led his country's delegation, said after the talks that the priority was ensuring Israel's security. "There will be ups and downs, but the potential for success is great," Leiter wrote on X. Iran's clerical state, Hezbollah's

patron, has demanded a lasting ceasefire in Lebanon before any peace agreement with US President Donald Trump, who has been frustrated by Tehran's refusal to an accord on his terms.

Truce met with violence



Hundreds of people have died in Israeli strikes despite the truce announced on April 17. Moments after the ceasefire renewal was announced, an Israeli strike hit a center of the Hezbollah-linked Islamic Health Committee in the southern town of Hanuf, authorities said. Six people died,

including three paramedics, according to the Lebanese health ministry. Israel also carried out strikes in the southern city of Tyre after issuing evacuation orders, and Hezbollah said it targeted Israeli barracks in the northern city of Kiryat Shmona with drones. Lebanon's health ministry said strikes in the Tyre district also wounded at least 37 people, including six hospital personnel, nine women and four children.

Hafez Ramadan, a resident near the building targeted by the airstrike, said it had housed people who had fled their towns due to the war and was adjacent to a hotel where more displaced were staying. "There are only women, children and the elderly here," he said.

"Because of this strike, people have been displaced again." The Israeli military said another of its soldiers was killed in southern Lebanon, bringing the number of Israeli soldiers killed in clashes with Hezbollah since early March to 19. A civilian contractor was also killed.

Four killed, one injured in two bridge collapse incidents in Pakistan's Sindh

MELBOURNE. (Agency)

Four people were killed and one was injured in two separate bridge collapse incidents in Pakistan's Sindh province on Friday, according to ARY News.

In one of the incidents, a section of the under-construction Ghotki-Kandhkot Bridge collapsed after a heavy portion of the structure gave way and fell, ARY News reported, citing local sources. The incident triggered concern among residents, who questioned the quality of construction material used in the project and raised allegations of possible corruption.

Meanwhile, in another incident, four labourers were killed while one was left injured in Sindh's Karampur when a section of the dilapidated old bridge over Naseer canal collapsed, as per ARY News. As per locals, the construction work on the new bridge was underway when the old bridge collapsed and delay in rescue operations was also reported after emergency teams failed to reach the incident spot for several hours after

the incident. The rescue teams confirmed recovery of four bodies from rubble of the bridge; meanwhile, the other labourer was admitted to the hospital for treatment. Apart from the bridge collapse incident, Karachi is



also grappling with a worsening infrastructure crisis, with severely damaged roads across the city exposing what residents describe as years of official neglect and administrative failure. The arrival of

sacrificial animals has already begun in several areas, but the city's crumbling road network is struggling to cope even before Eid-related activity reaches its peak, as reported by The Express Tribune.

According to The Express Tribune, instead of smooth roads supporting the transportation of livestock and easing public movement during the festive season, Karachi's streets are riddled with potholes, broken asphalt and incomplete excavation sites.

Citizens fear the situation will spiral further once temporary cattle markets expand, animal movement increases, and post-slaughter waste starts accumulating on already damaged roads. Residents across multiple districts say the city's infrastructure has worsened to an alarming level. Major roads and inner streets in North Karachi, North Nazimabad, Nazimabad, Liaquatabad, Gulberg and the Federal B Area have become nearly impassable due to long-neglected maintenance and repeated digging by utility agencies.

ISIS second in command Abu-Bilal al-Minuki killed by US forces in Nigeria, says Trump

BEIJING. (Agency)

US President Donald Trump announced on Friday (local time) that American forces, along with the Nigerian armed forces, had eliminated Abu-Bilal al-Minuki, the second-in-command of ISIS globally, in Nigeria. In his Truth Social post, Trump wrote, "Tonight, at my direction, brave American forces and the Armed Forces of Nigeria flawlessly executed a meticulously planned and very complex mission to eliminate the most active terrorist in the world from the battlefield. Abu-Bilal al-Minuki, second in command of ISIS globally, thought he could hide in Africa, but little did he know we had sources who kept us informed on what he was doing." Trump welcomed the killing of Al-Minuki, stating that he

would "no longer terrorize the people of Africa, or help plan operations to target Americans."

Trump further added, "He will no longer



terrorize the people of Africa, or help plan operations to target Americans. With his removal, ISIS's global operation is greatly diminished. Thank you to the Government of Nigeria for

your partnership on this operation. GOD BLESS AMERICA!" Who was ISIS No. 2 Abu-Bilal al-Minuki?

Abu-Bilal al-Minuki was an alleged senior ISIS operative who reportedly served as the terror group's global second-in-command. He was also said to be known by the name Abu Bakr ibn Muhammad ibn Ali al-Mainuki. According to a report by the Counter Extremism Project, Al-Mainuki primarily operated in Africa's Sahel region, which stretches across 12 countries. The Sahel is a semi-arid transitional belt extending nearly 5,900 kilometres from the Atlantic Ocean to the Red Sea, separating the Sahara Desert in the north from the Sudanian savannas in the south.

Trump-Xi talks dominated by Taiwan, Iran; China pitches 'strategic stability' framework

BEIJING. (Agency)

For three days in China, President Donald Trump was unusually quiet, not speaking to reporters much and even mostly staying off social media. Then he got on his plane home and unloaded. Trump's trip was unexpectedly dominated by discussions about Taiwan and the notion that Washington and Beijing could adopt a new framework for managing their complicated relationship. Chinese President Xi Jinping kicked off the whirlwind visit with a warning: If Washington mishandles its relations with the self-governing island of Taiwan, the U.S. and China could end up clashing or even in open conflict.

Trump did not respond publicly, refraining from mentioning Taiwan while in Beijing. But he suggested aboard Air Force One on his way home that Xi's staunch opposition might make him rethink a planned U.S. arms sale to Taipei. Among the other topics of discussion were trade and the U.S. and Israel's war in Iran, which had been expected to take up most of the attention.

Trump spent the trip overtly flattering China's leader, despite Xi not reciprocating. And the president did not push back publicly on China's characterization that he and Xi had agreed to a "constructive" new vision for dealing with their relationship issues. Trump held his tongue on Taiwan — until he was headed home. Before the trip, Trump demonstrated greater ambivalence toward Taiwan in his second term, raising questions about whether he might be open to dialing back support for the island democracy that Beijing views as its breakaway province. Secretary of State Marco Rubio insisted there was no change in the U.S. approach to Taiwan. But there was always a risk that Trump — not known for diplomatic nuance — might make an off-the-cuff

remark that could have mammoth ramifications for Taiwan. In the end, Trump said nothing publicly about Taiwan, even as his Chinese counterpart suggested the island was the most important aspect of



U.S.-China relations. But then, pressed by reporters after leaving China, Trump said he had not yet made a decision on whether to carry through with a major arms package

sale he previously approved for Taiwan after hearing Xi's objections.

Trump's Republican administration in December authorized an \$11 billion weapons package for Taipei, but it has yet to move forward. Lawmakers also approved a \$14 billion arms sale to Taiwan in January, but the sale cannot advance until Trump formally sends it to Congress.

"President Xi and I talked a lot about Taiwan," Trump told reporters on the presidential plane. He said China's leader "does not want to see a fight for independence because that would be a very strong confrontation."

"I heard him out," Trump said. But "I didn't make a comment." Trump appeared to struggle to recall the name of Taiwanese President Lai Ching-te and noted of Washington's policy toward the island, "The last thing we need right now is a war that's 9,500 miles away."