

Amid Middle East War, PM Modi Tells Ministers To Explore Alternative Energy Sources

The PM also called upon his ministers to implement reforms with vigour, underlining that Viksit Bharat 2047 was not merely a promise but a commitment.

New Delhi.(Agency)

At Prime Minister Narendra Modi's four-hour-long meeting with his Council of Ministers on Thursday evening, energy crisis triggered by the Middle East war loomed large. The Prime Minister urged his ministers to urgently explore alternative energy sources. The US-Israel war on Iran and the continued blockade of the Strait of Hormuz has disrupted India's fuel supplies from the Gulf. In this context the Prime Minister has called for looking at energy alternatives beyond the conventional ones. The Prime Minister also pushed for biogas as a substitute for LPG cooking gas. The Prime Minister also called upon his ministers to implement reforms with vigour, underlining that Viksit Bharat 2047 was not merely a promise but a commitment. The meeting of the Council of Ministers took place as the Prime Minister returned from his five-



nation tour, the first stop of which was United Arab Emirates (UAE). India and UAE signed a key agreement on the petroleum reserve where UAE's Abu Dhabi National Oil Company (ADNOC) will boost India's petroleum reserves. Apart from this, there was also an agreement on LPG supply.

The Middle East crisis has finally hit the Indian consumers directly with petrol and diesel prices being raised by around Rs 3 a litre to cover up for the losses of the Oil Marketing companies. The Prime Minister Modi has been emphasising on cutting down on fuel use, appealing citizens to switch to electric vehicle and public transport as much as possible. He has also appealed to the citizens to cut down on spendings on gold and foreign travels to preserve India's foreign exchange reserves. Nine departments made presentations before the Prime Minister and the Council of Ministers. These included Agriculture, Forestry, Labour, Road Transport, Corporate Affairs, External Affairs, Commerce and Power, sources told.

Khaki Shamed, Bootleggers Unstoppable: SP Sir, When Will the Hammer of Law Strike the Black Empire of Death Flourishing Under Your Nose?

Mahanagar Metro Desk / Pawan Mankan

Ankleshwar. While the Gujarat government continues to project claims of strong law and order, shocking allegations emerging from Bharuch district paint a disturbing picture of deep-rooted corruption within the police system. Ankleshwar, known as one of Asia's largest industrial estates, is now allegedly becoming infamous not for industry, but for illegal liquor, gambling rackets, and toxic chemical-based bootlegging operations operating openly under alleged police protection. A notorious bootlegger identified as Ramesh Vasava is accused of running a massive illegal liquor network right under the nose of the Ankleshwar GIDC Police Station. Sources allege that local police officials, instead of enforcing the law, have turned into silent spectators — of this deadly business. Toxic Chemical Liquor Destroying Workers' Families According to local allegations, dangerous and acidic industrial chemicals discharged from factories are allegedly being used to manufacture illicit country liquor in labor colonies and slum areas near the railway station in Ankleshwar GIDC. Poor workers and unemployed youth are reportedly consuming this "slow



poison," risking their lives daily. Residents fear that authorities are waiting for another major hooch tragedy before taking action. Questions are now being raised over whether the police machinery has completely failed in protecting public safety. Dattu Allegedly Running the "Collection System" Sources claim that the real operational manager behind the illegal empire is a man known locally as Dattu, described as the key "vahiwardar" or collection agent for the network. Police insiders allegedly claim that monthly protection money is distributed from local bootlegging operations to officials connected with the Ankleshwar GIDC Police Station and even elements within the Bharuch Local Crime Branch (LCB). These allegations have triggered serious public concern regarding the integrity of law enforcement in the district. Serious Allegations

Against Bharuch LCB Apart from liquor operations, illegal gambling dens are also reportedly flourishing across the district. One of the most alarming allegations is that whenever citizens allegedly provide confidential information to the Bharuch LCB regarding illegal activities, the information reportedly reaches the accused within minutes. Informants are then allegedly threatened or attacked by criminal elements. If true, such allegations point toward a dangerous collapse of public trust in the policing system. Gambling and Illegal Activities Expanding Into "A Division" Areas The situation is reportedly no longer limited to GIDC areas. In Ankleshwar's A Division jurisdiction, illegal gambling activities are allegedly operating openly near Sargam Shopping Centre in New Nagari. Two women identified locally as Bharti and Jyoti are alleged to be operating gam-

bling hubs involving card gambling, matka, and other illegal betting games. Residents allege that despite repeated complaints, no meaningful crackdown has taken place. Allegations of Monthly Protection Payments Sources further allege that illegal operators are paying lakhs of rupees every month as protection money to certain officials. Public discussions within the district now revolve around whether influential protection from higher levels is preventing strict action against illegal liquor and gambling mafias. These allegations, if investigated fairly, could expose a major corruption network damaging the image of Gujarat's policing and governance system. Tough Questions Raised Before Bharuch Police Administration Question 1: When will Bharuch district police take strict action against officials allegedly accused of shielding illegal liquor and gambling networks? Question 2: When will accused bootleggers and alleged gambling operators be arrested and booked under stringent legal provisions? Question 3: Will Bharuch SP launch an immediate special operation against these alleged illegal dens, or wait for intervention from state vigilance authorities?

Ask caste, then fire: Bihar CM's swipe at Tejashwi Yadav over police encounters

Patna.(Agency)

Politics over police encounters in Bihar intensified after Chief Minister Samrat Choudhary hit back at Leader of Opposition Tejashwi Yadav over allegations related to recent police action against criminals in the state. The controversy erupted after Tejashwi Yadav alleged that "caste-based encounters" were being carried out in Bihar and claimed that criminals were being targeted after their caste identities were determined.

Responding to the allegations, Samrat Choudhary took a sarcastic swipe at the RJD leader and questioned the logic behind the remarks.



"Some people are now saying that if a police encounter happens, the police should first ask about the caste of the criminal. I would tell the police personnel -- fine, ask their caste first and then fire," the Chief Minister said. Continuing his attack, Choudhary, who holds the Home department portfolio, said such statements lacked "common sense" and asserted that maintaining good governance in Bihar remained the government's top priority. "The NDA government has given the police a free hand. Maintaining 'sushasan' in the state is the commitment of the government. There will be no compromise on good governance. The rule of law is prevailing in the state. If anyone dares to challenge the police, they have been asked to respond within 48 hours," he said while speaking at a function at police headquarters in Patna.

Karnataka to proceed with CET counselling without waiting for NEET results

AICC General Secretary Randeep Singh Surjewala attacked the BJP-led NDA government, accusing it of "collapsing" the education system,

BENGALURU.(Agency)

Higher Education Minister MC Sudhakar said that the state would proceed with Common Entrance Test (CET) counselling for engineering and other professional courses without waiting for NEET results.

Speaking during the protest staged by Youth Congress members at Freedom Park in Bengaluru on Thursday, where thousands of students and Congress workers gathered over alleged irregularities in the NEET-UG examination, the minister announced that the state will go ahead with allotment of seats for engineering and other courses, delinking this process with NEET, adding that CET results are likely to be declared next week. He reiterated the Congress government's demand to revert to the pre-NEET system.

AICC General Secretary Randeep Singh Surjewala attacked the BJP-led NDA government, accusing it of "collapsing" the education system, citing instances of various paper leaks while pointing out its "systemic failure" in conducting national-level examinations.

"For the last 12 years, the Modi government has handed over India's education system to an education mafia and paper leak mafia," he said. He alleged that multiple recruitment and entrance examinations, including NEET and other competitive tests, had been compromised during the tenure of Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

'Paper Leak Pe Charcha'

Referring to past controversies, Surjewala cited the Vyapam case and alleged paper leaks in recruitment exams, calling them part of a continuing "pattern of failure" in the country's examination system. He said the country now needed a "Paper Leak Pe Charcha" instead of the Prime Minister's "Pariksha Pe Charcha". He alleged that the current system increasingly favoured coaching centre networks and "education mafias", while making it a disadvantage for students from rural areas and smaller towns.



'Incredibly intrigued': Tharoor backs satire outlet as Cockroach Janta Party gains millions of followers

Congress MP Shashi Tharoor has voiced support for the viral satirical outfit Cockroach Janta Party, saying the growing popularity of the group reflects rising frustration among young people. He also criticised the withholding of the party's X account and said democracies need space for

New Delhi.(Agency)

Congress MP Shashi Tharoor has voiced support for the viral satirical outfit Cockroach Janta Party, saying the growing popularity of the group reflects rising frustration among young people. He also criticised the withholding of the party's X account and said democracies need space for dissent, satire and humour.

In a post on X, Tharoor said he was "incredibly intrigued" by the sudden rise of the Cockroach Janta Party, also known as CJP, which has rapidly gained millions of followers on social media within days of its launch.



#CockroachJantaParty, which has already reached more than 15 million followers on Instagram in just five days. I understand the frustrations of the youth and see why they are resonating with it. This is precisely why the account being withheld

there should be an outlet for the youth to express their feelings, and so, let CJP's account function instead of shutting it down! Democracies need outlets for dissent, humour, satire and even frustration," Tharoor wrote.

Tharoor says Opposition should seize the opportunity

Speaking to The Indian Express earlier, Tharoor said the popularity of the Cockroach Janta Party showed growing dissatisfaction among sections of the public and presented an opportunity for the Opposition. Repeating the same message in his X post, he wrote that the movement represented "an opportunity

"I am uncertain about the future of this movement, but I hope the youngsters behind it find a way to bring this energy into mainstream politics or perhaps express it through their vote to be a voice of change and, in doing so, become impossible to ignore. This is an opportunity that the Opposition must seize," he said.

What is the Cockroach Janta Party?

The Cockroach Janta Party was launched by 30-year-old political communication strategist Abhijeet Dipke after backlash erupted online over remarks reportedly made by Chief Justice Surya Kant comparing some unemployed youth to

News box

Noida dowry death case: Deepika Nagar’s mother-in-law among 2 arrested; autopsy reveals multiple grievous injuries

NOIDA.(Agency)

The mother-in-law of Deepika Nagar, an alleged victim of dowry harassment who died at her in-laws’ house in Greater Noida’s Jalpura village on May 17, was among two persons arrested on Wednesday. So far, police have arrested her husband Ritik and father-in-law Manoj.

While her in-laws claimed the 24-year-old fell from the third-floor terrace following an argument, Deepika’s family alleged she was murdered following months of harassment over dowry since their marriage in Dec 2024. Police, however, have not yet filed murder charges.

The FIR, lodged at Ecotech-3 police station under BNS sections 85 (husband or relative of husband of a woman subjecting her to cruelty) and 80(2) (dowry death) and Dowry Prohibition Act, 1961, sections 3 and 4, names seven persons. On Wednesday, Deepika’s mother-in-law Poonam and uncle-in-law Vinod were arrested in the case. Three other accused remain absconding.

The autopsy found multiple grievous external and internal injuries, including a ruptured spleen, brain haematoma, and internal bleeding across several sites.The autopsy also documented a large swelling of approximately 12 cm x 9 cm on the right side of her face, bleeding from the left ear, a massive contusion measuring roughly 38 cm x 14 cm on her right thigh, injuries.

City’s first dog shelter to come up at Kadarpur

Gurgaon.(Agency)

The city’s first dog shelter is set to come up in Kadarpur village, where the MCG has identified 3 acres of land for the project. The facility will be designed to accommodate up to 5,000 stray dogs and is expected to strengthen the city’s stray dog management infrastructure alongside 4 new animal birth control (ABC) centres recently established by the civic body.

Officials said the shelter will aid the MCG in complying with recent Supreme Court directions calling for the removal and relocation of stray dogs from public institutions and spaces, including hospitals, schools, colleges and playgrounds.

“We have identified 3 acres of land to establish the city’s first dog shelter. We have already sought the preliminary administrative approvals, and the engineering wing is preparing the design and will subsequently float a tender,” Dr Ashish Singla, MCG chief medical officer, said.

He added that the civic body has also achieved 100% sterilisation and vaccination in several parts of the city, including sectors 31, 44, 45, 46, 5, Kanhai etc.

“A consultant will soon be hired to design the project proposal and make an estimate of the project. The shelter is likely to be set up within 18 months. However, we will get more clarity once the consultant makes the proposal,” said MCG executive engineer Sandeep Sihag.

According to municipal corporation officials, ABC centres have been established and made operational in Begampur Khatola, Baliawas, Sector 99 and Basai. The corporation claims that from January of this year till now, anti-rabies vaccination and sterilisation of nearly 2,500 dogs have been successfully completed.

Gurgaon has not done a dog census and works with a ballpark estimate of 50,000 community dogs.

It was in October last year that the MCG signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with the CSR arm of a private firm to launch a comprehensive animal welfare programme in the city with an initial investment of Rs 10 crore. Under the MoU, the foundation undertakes the sterilisation and vaccination of stray dogs, and operates the existing ABC centres in Begampur Khatola and Basai. This MoU has been made for 15 years and can be extended for an additional 15 years.

Three four-wheelers gutted in workshop fire

Noida.(Agency)

The autopsy report of 24-year-old Deepika Nagar, whose family has accused her in-laws of killing her after months of dowry harassment, has found multiple grievous external and internal injuries. The examination found severe contusions on her face, thigh, forearm, chest, abdomen and arms, along with bone-deep wounds on the knee and injuries near the waist.

Deepika, according to her in-laws, jumped from the third floor of their house in Greater Noida’s Jalpura village. Her family, however, alleged she was tortured and thrown from the terrace to make her death appear as a suicide. Following a complaint, her husband Ritik Nagaar Gupta said the investigation team was working with doctors to establish the cause of death.

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BJP Yuva Morcha Gets Dynamic Young Leadership — Shivraj Singh Palada Appointed State Vice President

Mahanagar Metro Desk

Jaipur: The appointment of Shivraj Singh Palada, son of senior BJP leader and dedicated social servant Bhanwar Singh Palada, as the State Vice President of Bharatiya Janata Yuva Morcha (BJYM) has become a matter of pride and celebration not only for the Palada family but also for the entire region and BJP workers. His appointment is being seen as a strong step toward empowering youth leadership and bringing fresh energy into the party organization. Following this important responsibility entrusted to him by the BJP leadership, congratulatory messages have been pouring in from political leaders, social organizations, supporters, and party workers across Rajasthan. BJP workers believe that his appointment will strengthen the participation of youth in organizational activities and help spread the party’s ideology to every section of society.

Strong Connect With Youth

Shivraj Singh Palada has been actively involved in social, political, and organizational activities for a long time. His strong connection with the youth, humble nature, dedication toward the organization, and continuous interaction with party workers have made him a popular young face among BJP supporters. He has consistently participated in social welfare initiatives, public service programs, and youth-related campaigns. Due to his active involvement at the grassroots level, he enjoys immense support and trust among young party workers. Political observers believe that Shivraj Singh Palada possesses strong leadership qualities, organizational skills, and the ability to unite and motivate young people. His appointment is expected to further strengthen BJYM at the grassroots level.

Inspired by the Legacy of Service and Ded-

ication

Senior BJP leader Bhanwar Singh Palada has always been recognized for his inspiring political and social journey. Over the years, he has played a significant role in strengthening the organization, promoting social welfare, and serving the public with dedication. He is widely respected as a hardworking and committed leader who has consistently stood with the people in times of need. The influence of his experience, struggle, and spirit of service is clearly visible in the personality and work style of Shivraj Singh Palada. Party workers believe that Shivraj Singh Palada has carried forward the values and ideals of his father while dedicating himself to the welfare of youth and society. This is one of the key reasons why the party leadership trusted him with such an important state-level responsibility.

Congratulations Pour In From Across the State

After being appointed as State Vice President, Shivraj Singh Palada has been receiving continuous congratulations and best wishes from BJP workers, social organizations, youth supporters, and well-wishers. Social media platforms are also flooded with congratulatory messages praising his appointment. Several BJP leaders and workers have described this appointment as a symbol of respect for youth power and the party’s growing emphasis on young leadership. Supporters believe that under his leadership, Bharatiya Janata Yuva Morcha will gain new direction, strength, and momentum.

A Strong Voice for Youth

Political analysts believe that the BJP has consistently focused on promoting young leadership, and the appointment of Shivraj Singh Palada reflects that vision. In the coming years, he is expected to play a major role



in connecting youth with nation-building activities, organizational work, and social service initiatives. His appointment is being viewed as a positive and inspiring development in Rajasthan politics. BJP workers are confident that he will contribute significantly toward strengthening the organization, raising youth-related issues effectively, and taking the party’s policies to the grassroots level.

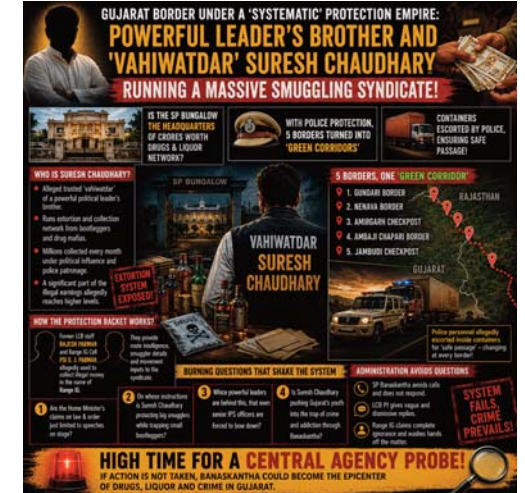
Atmosphere of Celebration in the Region

Following the announcement of his appointment, an atmosphere of joy and celebration has spread across Beawar and nearby regions. BJP workers and supporters celebrated by distributing sweets and expressing happiness over the decision. Young workers say that this appointment will inspire dedicated grassroots youth leaders to work harder for the organization and society. Many believe that this new responsibility given to Shivraj Singh Palada will bring fresh political awareness, enthusiasm, and organizational strength among the youth in Rajasthan.

Gujarat Border Turns Into a ‘Systematic Protection Empire’: Explosive Allegations Against Political Nexus and Alleged Collection Agent Suresh Chaudhary

Mahanagar Metro

Banaskantha. A sensational and deeply disturbing set of allegations emerging from Gujarat’s Banaskantha district has raised serious questions over law enforcement, political influence, and the alleged protection of organized smuggling networks along the Rajasthan-Gujarat border.Despite Gujarat’s long-standing prohibition policy and repeated claims of strict governance, sources allege that illegal liquor, narcotics, and contraband containers are entering the state openly through multiple interstate border points under the protection of a powerful political nexus.At the center of the controversy is a man identified as Suresh Chaudhary, allegedly known locally as a “vahiwatdar” — a collection manager and operational handler — who is accused of running a massive protection and extortion network connected to bootleggers and drug traffickers across North Gujarat.Allegations of Political ProtectionAccording to local sources, the alleged network is operating under the influence of the brother of a highly influential political leader from the region. Sources claim that this political backing has made the alleged syndicate virtually untouchable, creating fear among lower-level officials and enforcement agencies.Residents and insiders allege that anyone attempting to challenge the network faces pressure, intimidation, or administrative obstruction.Questions Raised Over Alleged Operations Linked to SP BungalowExplosive



allegations further claim that the illegal collection system connected to liquor and drug smuggling is allegedly being coordinated with the support of individuals closely associated with the district police establishment.Sources claim that Suresh Chaudhary is widely known in the district as an alleged “special handler” connected to influential police circles. Discussions within local circles have intensified over claims that portions of illegal protection money collected from bootleggers and traffickers allegedly reach higher levels of the system.While no official confirmation has been made, these allegations have triggered widespread public concern regarding institutional integrity.Former LCB Personnel and Alleged Protection MechanismSources also allege that former Local Crime Branch-linked personnel and certain officers familiar with border opera-

tions are being used to monitor routes, track container movement, and coordinate illegal protection arrangements.According to allegations, detailed intelligence regarding which bootlegger is moving which consignment through which route allegedly reaches the syndicate in advance, allowing seamless transport operations. The report claims that five major interstate border routes in Banaskantha have effectively become “green corridors” for illegal liquor and narcotics transportation:Gundari BorderNenava BorderAmirgarh CheckpostAmbaji Chapari BorderJambudi CheckpostSources allege that smugglers are informed in advance regarding safe crossing timings and enforcement movement.One of the most serious allegations claims that containers transporting illegal consignments allegedly receive “safe passage” support, with protection arrangements coordinated across jurisdictional boundaries.If proven true, such claims could indicate a highly organized criminal protection system operating across sensitive border regions.Public Trust in Enforcement Under Serious QuestionCitizens and local observers now question whether anti-smuggling operations are genuinely targeting major syndicates or merely focusing on small operators while larger networks continue functioning uninterrupted.Critics allege that enforcement actions often appear symbolic, while large-scale operators remain untouched due to political and administrative influence..

The 'burden' of proof: As chargesheets surge in volume and data, accused seek access to computers

From accused in the now-concluded Malegaon 2008 blast case to those booked in the Elgaar Parishad case of 2017-18, several accused have been given permission to use computers, with curbs.

Mumbai. (Agency)

In 2006, some of the accused in the Mumbai serial train blasts case had to approach the court for permission to keep their over 10,000-page chargesheet in their barracks; the overcrowded Arthur Road Jail barrack barely had space for its prisoners. Twenty years later, the jail still remains crowded, chargesheets have only got longer, and the struggle for space has gone digital. Undertrials across jails are seeking access to computers or laptops to read the electronic evidence against them. From accused in the now-concluded Malegaon 2008 blast case to those booked in the Elgaar Parishad case of 2017-18, several accused have been given permission to use computers, with curbs.

While jail authorities oppose such pleas, citing lack of adequate staff to monitor usage and apprehensions of misuse, courts have been receptive on the grounds that the accused need to access e-data against them. In the terror scare case involving the Ambani residence Antilia, for example, the NIA submitted in court that it had collected 1,000 terabytes of e-data — equivalent to roughly 10 billion pages of text — including about 39,000 clips of CCTV footage, apart from emails and call data dumps. One of the accused, the dismissed cop, Sachin Waze, sought access to a laptop to go through the same. In jail since 2021, he told the court that he was ready to pay for electricity and Internet charges.

Jail authorities opposed the plea arguing that if Waze was given access, others too would make similar demands, which would be “dangerous”. Granting Waze’s request, the court said in a May 2024 order: “Admittedly, the data of e-evidence is huge. To go through it, the help of a device like a computer or laptop is necessary.” As regards Internet access, the court said the prison need not provide the same. Consequently, Waze was allowed to use a laptop between 11 am and 4 pm daily, under the supervision of jail authorities.

Elgaar Parishad accused Surendra Gadling and Arun Ferreira, who are themselves lawyers, moved court for the use of computers in Talaja Jail, citing the



evidence submitted by the NIA against them on a hard disk. While jail authorities opposed the pleas saying there was no provision for this in the prison manual, the court permitted them to use a computer for an hour twice a week, along with necessary software. Similarly, in 2011, Lieutenant Colonel Prasad Purohit,

acquitted in the Malegaon 2008 blast case, was given permission to use a laptop in jail. In 2008, an orthopaedic surgeon called Dr L Prakash, who was serving time in Puzhal Central Jail in Chennai for alleged cyber porn, invoked habeas corpus while seeking access to a laptop in jail for him and all others who applied for it. Prakash said that while the prison had about a dozen devices in its computer lab for training, he wanted a personal computer. The Madras HC looked into precedents on inmate rights and considered if the use of computers was a fundamental right falling under Article 19. It held Prakash could not be given a personal laptop but directed the jail to allow him access to a computer.

Short news

UP woman found murdered in Surat flat

Ahmedabad. (Agency)

In what police suspected to be a case of murder, a 20-year-old woman from Uttar Pradesh’s Ambedkar Nagar was found dead at her rented accommodation in Palsana near here, police said, adding a team had left for the UP district to look for the man who lived with her. Mehviz Khatun Afzal Ali died due to strangulation, police said, citing the postmortem report.

Her body was found by police in the house located in Mahaveer Apartments in Palsana’s Bagumura on Sunday afternoon. Mehviz hailed from Ambedkar Nagar’s Shivpal village.

Citing neighbors, the police said Mehviz and Shiv Singh Ranjeet Singh (25) had been living together for three months. Shiv Singh, also from UP, worked at a textile factory at Parab village in Kamrej taluka.

Palasana S-I N N Gamit registered an offence of murder at the Palsana police station.

Palsana police inspector Bhagwanbhai Zilariya said, “The two stayed together in a flat in Palsana. Shiv Singh is the primary suspect, and his whereabouts are unknown. We have sent a team to Ambedkar Nagar to catch him.”

“Mehviz and Shiv Singh first eloped three years ago. Then her father lodged a complaint with Ambedkarnagar police against Shiv Singh, who was later arrested under charges of POCSO and rape, and was later released. Shiv Singh contacted Mehviz again after she turned legal age, and the two eloped again a year ago.”

Severe heatwave grips Andhra as mercury touches 48.1 degree celsius

VIJAYAWADA. (Agency)

The Andhra Pradesh State Disaster Management Authority (APSDMA) has issued a fresh advisory warning of record-breaking heatwave conditions across the State, urging citizens to remain vigilant.

APSDMA MD Prakhar Jain said the heatwave is expected to continue until Monday, with maximum caution advised between 11 am and 4 pm. On Thursday, Piduguralla in Palnadu district recorded 48.1°C, the highest so far this season. Officials reported that 18 districts crossed 45°C, while 200 mandals across 20 districts registered above 44°C.

The impact was noted in Palnadu (26 mandals), Prakasam (23), Krishna (22), Eluru (21), Bapatla (20), NTR (15), Guntur (14), and Markapuram (11).

Forecasts indicate that on Friday (May 22), 15 mandals may face severe heatwave conditions, while 219 mandals are likely to experience hot winds.

Similar conditions are expected on Saturday (May 23), with temperatures ranging between 45–47°C in coastal and central districts, 43–45°C in parts of Kakinada and Nellore, and 40–43°C in northern and Rayalaseema districts.

The APSDMA has advised elderly persons, pregnant women, and patients with heart disease, diabetes or hypertension to avoid exposure.

Protective measures like hats and sunglasses are recommended when stepping outdoors.

‘People are addicted to tea’: Milk price hike leaves vendors, customers worried

Ahmedabad. (Agency)

The first blow came with the LPG shortage amid the West Asia crisis and now a milk price hike. When Amul raised the price of milk last week followed by other milk marketing companies, the tea vendors were a worried lot. A cup of ‘cutting chai’ — about 100 millilitres of the steaming brew sold on every street corner in Ahmedabad city — costs anywhere between Rs 10 to Rs 30. While the Gujarat Cooperative Milk Marketing Federation, which owns Amul, raised all milk prices by Rs 2 per litre, the price of the T special milk, meant for tea, saw a Rs 3 hike for a one-litre pouch. Mohanbhai, who runs a makeshift tea stall on a sidewalk in Ramdevnagar, a largely residential area, for almost 15 years, said he cannot

increase the price of his tea, with the price hike effected by popular milk brands. This, he believes, would drive the customers away. The business has already been slow,



he reasoned. “I use about 15 litres of milk in a month, and that monthly cost has gone up by 35-40 rupees. I sell a cup for 10 rupees, so I can’t afford it,” he said. “I can’t

use any alternatives either, whether it’s watering down the tea or reducing the size of the glasses; my customers will know if anything has been changed,” he added.

In Nehrunagar, an area lined with shops, offices and educational institutions, the Iyer Tea Stall is crowded throughout the day. It has its own set of loyal customers as well as a decent footfall of passers-by.

Kanchi Mehta, a student, said, “My friends and I come here often, and we see all sorts of people frequenting the stall. They have increased their prices recently, not just for the tea but the muska bun as well.” The tea is now costlier by 5 rupees. The owner, Vishwa Lakshmanan, said it was not only the milk that caused them to hike their prices but also the gas (LPG).

AP govt frees over 1.6 lakh acres from prohibited list, moves to resolve long-pending land disputes

VIJAYAWADA. (Agency)

The coalition government in Andhra Pradesh has moved decisively to resolve long-pending land disputes by lifting restrictions on thousands of acres listed under Section 22-A prohibited lands.

Officials confirmed that over 1.6 lakh acres have already been freed, granting farmers permanent ownership rights, while another 1.9 lakh acres of ‘chukkala’ (dotted) lands are set to be released shortly. Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu has directed the Revenue Department to prioritise protecting land rights, noting that nearly 90 % of public grievances received during his visits relate to land issues.

Revenue Minister Anagani Satyaprasad has overseen reforms, including the repeal of the Land Titling Act and NALA provisions, introduction of the Land



Grabbing Prohibition Act, and amendments to the ROR Act.

The government has also initiated Resurvey 2.0, involving farmers directly to ensure dispute-free records, and introduced blockchain-based digital security for land documents. Farmers can now digitally lock their records,

preventing unauthorised mutations or registrations. The government has removed restrictions on five categories of lands - pattas, ex-servicemen’s lands, freedom fighters’ lands, political sufferers’ lands, and pre-1954 assigned lands - as well as those wrongly listed due to survey number overlaps.

The process has been simplified: submission of any one of nine valid documents is sufficient for deletion from the prohibited list. Additionally, 1.3 lakh acres of village service inam lands and 33,000 acres of conditional pattas have been regularised, allowing farmers to register or sell their holdings freely. Assigned house sites given since the NTR era are being freed from restrictions. Urban land ceiling properties and regularised houses have also been given full rights in two years.

10,226 documents missing in BMC fake birth certificate scam, vigilance probe finds

Earlier this month, the Mumbai Police constituted a Special Investigation Team (SIT) to probe the alleged racket. Alongside the police investigation, the BMC vigilance department has also begun scrutinising records linked to the certificates.

Mumbai. (Agency)

A fresh inquiry by the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation’s (BMC) vigilance department has found that supporting documents linked to 10,226 allegedly fake birth certificates issued to illegal foreign nationals are missing, deepening concerns over irregularities in the civic administration.

The development comes weeks after an internal probe revealed that 87,347 fake birth certificates had been issued between 2024 and 2026. Civic officials said the missing records include government-approved identity documents required for the issuance of birth certificates.

Earlier this month, the Mumbai Police constituted a Special Investigation Team (SIT) to probe the alleged racket. Alongside the police investigation, the

BMC vigilance department has also begun scrutinising records linked to the certificates.

“As part of the scrutiny, we are tracing the supporting documents of each of the 87,000 fake birth certificates that were issued by BMC to various beneficiaries. During the process, it has been found out that supporting documents of 10,000 such certificates couldn’t be found and for the past three weeks the documents have remained untraceable,” an official told The Indian Express on Thursday.

Bharatiya Janata Party MP Kirit Somaiya, who has repeatedly flagged the issue with the civic administration, said the BMC had shared the data with him.

Speaking to , Somaiya said the certificates



issued without supporting documents were largely traced to the L ward (Kurla), E ward (Byculla), M East ward (Govandi) and K North ward (Jogeshwari) offices.

“All these certificates were issued from the SAP based software system, which the BMC was using illegally despite the Civil Registration System (CRS) being in

function. The fact that 10,000 certificates were issued without any valid document clearly shows that a section of the administration was hand in glove with this issue. The investigation is currently ongoing and in the days to come the numbers are only going to increase,” Somaiya said.

According to civic records, of the 87,347 allegedly forged certificates issued through the SAP system, 30,507 were generated in 2024, 49,705 in 2025 and 7,135 in 2026. In contrast, only 33,700 certificates were issued through the officially approved CRS system during the same period. A senior civic official, however, said the BMC had continued operating both systems simultaneously because the CRS platform was facing technical glitches at the time.

Can't keep failing our students

The cancellation of NEET-Undergraduate 2026 has pushed nearly 23 lakh students across India into uncertainty, anxiety and emotional distress. These candidates undertook months and years of disciplined preparation, believing that the Union government would at least ensure a fair and secure examination process. Instead, in one stroke, the system has pushed them into confusion and instability. What should have been a transparent and merit-based gateway to medical education has instead become a symbol of institutional failure, administrative negligence and the dangerous collapse of public trust in our exam systems. NEET is not simply a competitive exam. It represents aspiration, social mobility, economic hope and years of personal sacrifice. Parents invest heavily, exhausting savings, taking loans and stretching their finances to the limit to support their children's dreams of entering the medical profession. The collapse of exam integrity, therefore, becomes not merely an academic disruption, but a major social and economic crisis.

The most serious consequence of repeated exam controversies is the erosion of public confidence in our institutional systems. High-stake national exams derive their legitimacy from trust. The moment students begin to believe that merit can be compromised through organised malpractice, impersonation, paper leaks or corrupt networks, the credibility of the entire system weakens.

The NEET-UG 2024 controversy had already shaken public confidence after allegations of paper leaks, suspicious score inflation, grace marks and procedural irregularities triggered nationwide protests. Eventually, a re-exam had to be conducted for 1,563 candidates who were awarded grace marks due to alleged loss of exam time. Yet, the lessons were evidently ignored. Instead of structural reform, the country witnessed routine assurances and temporary damage control. The recent cancellation demonstrates that the crisis is not accidental, but systemic. Since the introduction of NEET, allegations of irregularities, impersonation, organised cheating and paper leaks have repeatedly surfaced across multiple states. Nor is the problem confined to NEET alone. In 2024, UGC's National Eligibility Test was cancelled within a day over suspected leaks, while the joint Council of Scientific and Industrial Research-UGC NET and NEET-Postgraduate were postponed amid allegations of security breaches and procedural failures. These incidents collectively indicate the existence of a deep-rooted nexus involving coaching mafias, organised cheating syndicates, corrupt intermediaries and institutional negligence.

The psychological consequences are enormous. Students preparing for exams like NEET endure extraordinary academic pressure for one or two years, often sacrificing social life, recreation, emotional well-being and extracurricular growth. When the integrity of the exam collapses, the resulting uncertainty creates anxiety, helplessness, frustration, humiliation and loss of confidence. The National Testing Agency (NTA), entrusted with conducting some of the country's most critical exams, has repeatedly failed

Made in Italy + Make in India = Excellence

The Indo-Pacific and the Mediterranean are increasingly interconnected spaces

THE relationship between India and Italy has now reached a decisive stage. In recent years, our ties have expanded with unprecedented momentum, evolving from a cordial friendship into a special strategic partnership grounded in the values of freedom and democracy, and a common vision for the future. At a time when the international system is undergoing a profound change, the partnership between Italy and India is guided by regular exchanges at high political and institutional levels and is gaining a new and higher dimension that combines our economic dynamism, societal creativity and millennia-old civilisational wisdom.

Our cooperation mirrors our shared awareness that prosperity and security in the 21st century will be shaped by the ability of nations to innovate, manage energy transitions and strengthen strategic sovereignty.

To this end, we have committed to deepening and diversifying our bilateral relationship with a view to pursuing new objectives and pooling our complementary strengths. We aim to forge a powerful synergy between Italian design, manufacturing excellence and world-class supercomputers — reflecting Italy's position as an industrial powerhouse — and India's rapid economic growth, engineering talent, scale and innovation and entrepreneurial ecosystems with over 100 unicorns and 200,000 startups. This is not a simple integration, but a co-creation of value where our respective industrial strengths amplify one another. The Free Trade Agreement between the European Union and India paves the way for increased trade and investment in both directions. We want to reach and exceed the Euro 20 billion target for trade between Italy and India by 2029, with a focus on defence and aerospace, clean technologies, machinery, automotive components, chemicals, pharmaceuticals, textiles, agri-food, tourism and more. 'Made in Italy' has been synonymous with excellence, and today, it finds a natural synergy with the high-quality goals of the 'Make in India' initiative. The growing interest of Italian businesses in production in India and the increasing presence of Indian industries in Italy, numbering over 1,000 from both sides now, is a positive sign that will strengthen the integration of our supply chains. Technological innovation lies at the very heart of our partnership. The coming decades will be shaped by a technological revolution of unmeasurable scope, marked by advances in sectors such as artificial intelligence, quantum computing, advanced manufacturing, critical minerals and digital infrastructure. India's dynamic innovation ecosystem, coupled with the highly skilled professional talent pool and Italy's advanced industrial capabilities make our cooperation in the above sectors both natural and

strategic. The growing partnership between our universities and research centres will support this. India's digital public infrastructure is already finding resonance with a large number of countries, particularly in the Global South. Artificial Intelligence, in particular, is impacting our societies and the global economy. Italy and India have long been collaborating to ensure that AI development is responsible and human-centred. From this perspective, India and Italy also see AI as a powerful instrument for inclusive development, especially for the Global South, where digital public infrastructure and



accessible, multilingual technologies can bridge divides rather than deepen them. Building on India's vision of MANAV — putting humans at the centre of technology — and Italy's leadership in promoting a human-centric 'algor-ethics' rooted in its humanist tradition, our partnership seeks to ensure that AI acts as a catalyst for social empowerment. Our approach combines India's digital scale with Italy's ethical and industrial expertise, ensuring tech serves human dignity. By sharing best practices in secure digital cooperation, capacity-building and resilient cyber infrastructure, we aim to create an open, trustworthy and equitable digital space in which every nation can shape and benefit from AI. This perspective forms the core of Italy's G7 Presidency and outcomes of the AI Impact Summit 2026, held in New Delhi. Conceiving AI as a tool created by humans for humans means firmly asserting that technology cannot replace individuals or undermine their fundamental rights, nor be used to manipulate public debate or alter democratic processes.

Our cooperation also covers the space sector. India's advancements in space exploration and satellite technology, together with Italy's aerospace engineering excellence, offer significant opportunities for joint initiatives and next-generation technology

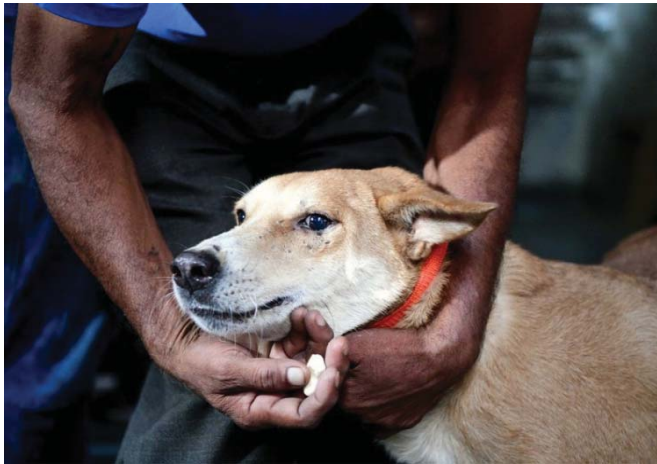
development. Security and stability remain essential to ensuring nations' prosperity. Italy and India intend to further strengthen their cooperation in defence, security and strategic technologies. Our collaboration will help ensure the security of critical maritime routes, strengthen resilience in the face of threats, such as terrorism, international criminal networks, drug trafficking, cybercrime and human trafficking. Energy is another key pillar of our partnership. The global transition towards diversified energy sources requires innovation, investment and cooperation. India and Italy are collaborating on areas ranging from renewable energy and hydrogen technologies to smart grids and resilient infrastructure to become a hub for green hydrogen exports offers immense potential, it complements Italy's advanced technology in renewable infrastructure and its strategic role as an energy gateway for Europe. Our collaboration with other countries through key India-led initiatives — the International Solar Alliance, Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure and Global Biofuels Alliance — is also important in this context. Physical, digital and human connectivity is the thread that weaves us together. Both India and Italy are located at the very heart of two crucial hubs of the global economy — the Indo-Pacific and the Mediterranean. These regions cannot be viewed as separate spheres, but instead, as increasingly interconnected spaces.

We are witnessing the emergence of what might be termed the Indo-Mediterranean, an important corridor for trade, technology, energy, data and ideas tying the Indian Ocean to Europe. It is precisely within this interconnected space that our bond naturally evolves into a special strategic partnership — one that bridges two continents and shapes new global dynamics. The India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor represents a vision aimed at better connecting our regions through transport and infrastructure, digital networks, energy systems and supply chains. India and Italy are also committed to working together with other partners to make this vision a reality. We can address our shared challenges by drawing upon our partnership and the enduring cultural ties between us. Within the Indian culture, the concept of 'dharma' evokes the sense of responsibility that must guide our actions, whilst the principle of 'vasudhaiva kutumbakam' (the world is one family) resonates powerfully in this interconnected digital age. Such values find a natural echo in Italy's humanist tradition, rooted in the Renaissance, which highlights the dignity of each individual and the power of culture to unite peoples and societies. Our shared vision, therefore, aims to lay the foundation for a strong and forward-looking India-Italy partnership, with our people at the centre.

Dog menace : SC balances public safety with animal welfare

India recorded over 30 lakh dog-bite cases in 2023, followed by more than 37 lakh cases in 2024

THE Supreme Court's refusal to dilute its directions on removing stray dogs from public institutions is a necessary intervention in a worsening public safety crisis. For years, civic authorities across India have failed to address the alarming rise in dog-bite incidents, forcing courts to step into what is essentially an administrative vacuum. As per the National Centre for Disease Control, India recorded over 30 lakh dog-bite cases in 2023, followed by more than 37 lakh cases in 2024 — averaging over 10,000 incidents every day. Several states and cities are witnessing an unprecedented surge. Kerala recently reported more than 3.6 lakh dog-bite cases within a year, while Noida identified dozens of dog-bite hotspots after tens of thousands of complaints in just a few months. Behind these statistics are children attacked near schools, elderly citizens unable to walk safely and residents living in fear of aggressive stray packs. At the



same time, the crisis reflects a deeper failure in how society and institutions treat animals. A couple of days

ago, a shocking incident emerged from Chandigarh, where a puppy was reportedly thrown into a tandoor by an unidentified person. Such acts expose the disturbing cruelty that often exists beneath public debate. Equally troubling is the condition of many dog pounds and shelters. Reports from Chandigarh have highlighted deplorable conditions, including instances of dogs allegedly eating their own young due to neglect.

The SC has rightly held that humane treatment of animals cannot mean ignoring human safety, but neither can public safety become a justification for neglecting animal welfare. The SC's emphasis on lawful relocation must now be matched by investments in shelters, sterilisation centres, vaccination drives and veterinary facilities. The challenge is to build a humane, accountable and effective stray management system that protects both citizens and canines.

Xi has the measure of Trump

Clearly, the Chinese see the scales tilting increasingly in their favour

IF the summit between US President Donald Trump and his Chinese counterpart Xi Jinping in Beijing last week was expected to bring the world closer to peace in West Asia, that was a bar set too high already. The two sides certainly "exchanged views on major international and regional issues, such as the Middle East situation, the Ukraine crisis and the Korean Peninsula", but the record shows that they have diametrically opposite views on what the outcome of each conflict ought to be.

On the Korean Peninsula, the Chinese are strenuously opposed to the presence of American troops in South Korea, but despite their misgivings about North Korea's nuclear programme, are not about to press Pyongyang too hard on the issue if it keeps the Americans on tenterhooks. Plus, the regime is a bulwark against American troops on China's borders.

On the Ukraine crisis, China has committed to a 'no limits' partnership with the Russians. While Beijing perhaps expected a quick Russian victory, the stalemate also suits it just fine with Russia on the ropes and dependent on China's financial system, military supplies and diplomatic support, and trans-Atlantic unity fraying under US pressure on the Europeans to increase their defence budgets. The US-Israel attack on Iran has perhaps affected the Chinese the most over the short term at least with rising energy prices. China has the largest strategic oil reserves of any country on the planet and can be expected to bear the pain longer than most countries — even so, prolonged economic distress in the Global South has consequences for China that has

tried in recent years to diversify its export markets away from the US. There is also, perhaps, not a little pressure on China as a purported leader of the Global South to contribute its mite to the resolution of the conflict.

Advertisement But if there is one constant about Chinese



foreign policy, it is that whatever the diplomatic rhetoric, Beijing has always acted only in its own interest. Its markets in the Global South are not so large or important right now as to cause it to veer from a larger interest — seeing the US dragged into another morass of its own making and distracted from focusing its full attention on

China. At a recent conference in Berlin that this author attended, at least one Chinese participant suggested that the Iran conflict was a good thing for China in the short term because it had diverted US military resources from the Indo-Pacific to the Arabian Gulf. With a limited number of US aircraft carriers in East Asian waters — there is just one currently according to the US Navy — the implication was that China fancied its chances in a Taiwan scenario. While this might have simply been kite-flying, the larger logic of the US being too involved in other theatres to focus on China still holds.

It is no surprise then that the Chinese have done their bit to bolster Iran's capabilities. There is no mention of any Chinese commitment whatsoever to helping the US end the Iran conflict, even though the readout from the White House stated, "Both countries agreed that Iran can never have a nuclear weapon." But China does not necessarily disagree with this proposition nor the need to keep the Strait of Hormuz open for the free flow of energy — it is just that it does not feel the need to actively work to these ends if the US finds these objectives more important. Higher prices for domestic consumers have more political consequences for Trump than they do for Xi.

Indeed, this Chinese view extends to the larger economic relationship and outcomes of the Trump visit. Several economic agreements have been concluded, but the Chinese official media reportage is interesting. It quotes Trump as saying to Xi "that the world's top companies all wanted to come to China" and that he "actively encouraged them to expand their cooperation with China". The message that the Chinese

will take from this is that the Americans need the Chinese market more than the other way round, even if for Chinese manufacturers, too, it is the American market that matters more than anything in the Global South. As the Chinese see it though, "In the blink of an eye, US-China relations have evolved into what the United States views as a relationship between nearly equal nations." But in language redolent of hierarchy and imperialism, the Chinese Foreign Ministry also stated that "President Trump asked each of the [American] business leaders who were travelling with him to present themselves to President Xi." Clearly, the Chinese see the scales tilting increasingly in their favour.

It is this confidence that allowed China to push the US more strongly than it has ever done on the issue of Taiwan. Calling it "the most important issue in China-US relations", Xi threatened "clashes and even conflicts" if the issue was not "handled properly". But there is only one way that this can be done, which is for the Americans to unequivocally support the Chinese position on Taiwan. Despite China's multifold of internal problems, including the hit its manufacturing sector has taken from the US-Iran conflict and rising fuel prices, the language coming out of Beijing suggested a greater degree of confidence that it ever did before.

While Trump was a wild card in his first term that the Chinese took time to figure out how to deal with, they did figure him out as they ignored much of the deals cut with him during that time.

This time round, with Trump clearly under external and domestic pressure from the continuing conflict with Iran, Xi appeared to have the measure of his guest and was willing also to engage in more direct language alongside the diplomatic pomp and ceremony.



Don't let rains ruin your Vacation

That moment is finally here. You've checked the weather forecast, carefully planned your travel stops and even packed three different pairs of swimwear. You get up in the morning, ready for another day at the beach, and it's raining. All your travel plans seem ridiculous as threatening black clouds cover the sky. Take heart, all is not lost. Here are a few tips to salvage your rain-ruined vacation.

Accept the rains

A rainy day might be a far cry from the sandy, sun-kissed vacation you were hoping for, but wet weather can be truly beautiful. Local waterfalls will be at their best, and a few things can be as exhilarating as a muddy, barefoot hike through the jungle. Find a great vantage point where you can sit back, coffee in hand, and just watch the rain come thundering down. The stormier the weather, the more spectacular it is.

Storm out impurities

A trip to the spa might be one of the only things on do list that doesn't require a rain-check. A lot of countries have traditional cures and treatments that are not only soothing but also a lot cheaper than what you'll find back home. Sign up for a day-long retreat at your favourite spa and chase away your rainy day blues with a facial and a mineral scrub. If possible, book a massage in a covered outdoor cabana. You'll reach new levels of Zen during a hot stone massage while listening to the pitter-patter of rain around you. Consider unique experiences like Iceland's geothermal spas, where it's nice and toasty even if the weather is awful.

Credit: ThinkStock Photos
Chase the sun

a daytime stroll away from the rains.

A day of museum-hopping

A rainy day is actually a message from the universe, urging you to tick off all your indoor activities. A soggy and drenched message, but a message nonetheless. Head to the museums that have made your list for an afternoon of learning. In countries like Italy, many of the best art is found in churches rather than museums. These give you a fascinating insight into the local religion and culture.

Credit: ThinkStock Photos

Do as the locals do. For the locals, life almost always goes on even when things get wet. Take this opportunity to ditch the tourist traps and find out where the city's residents hang out during rainy days.

This would set you up for lots of fun and insightful interactions in pubs and local restaurants. Even if you only have a tenuous grasp of the local language, you'll be surprised how friendly and accommodating people can be. You might just end up discovering an under-the-radar concert or a hole-in-the-wall eatery that no tourist's ever heard of.

Go to the beach anyway!

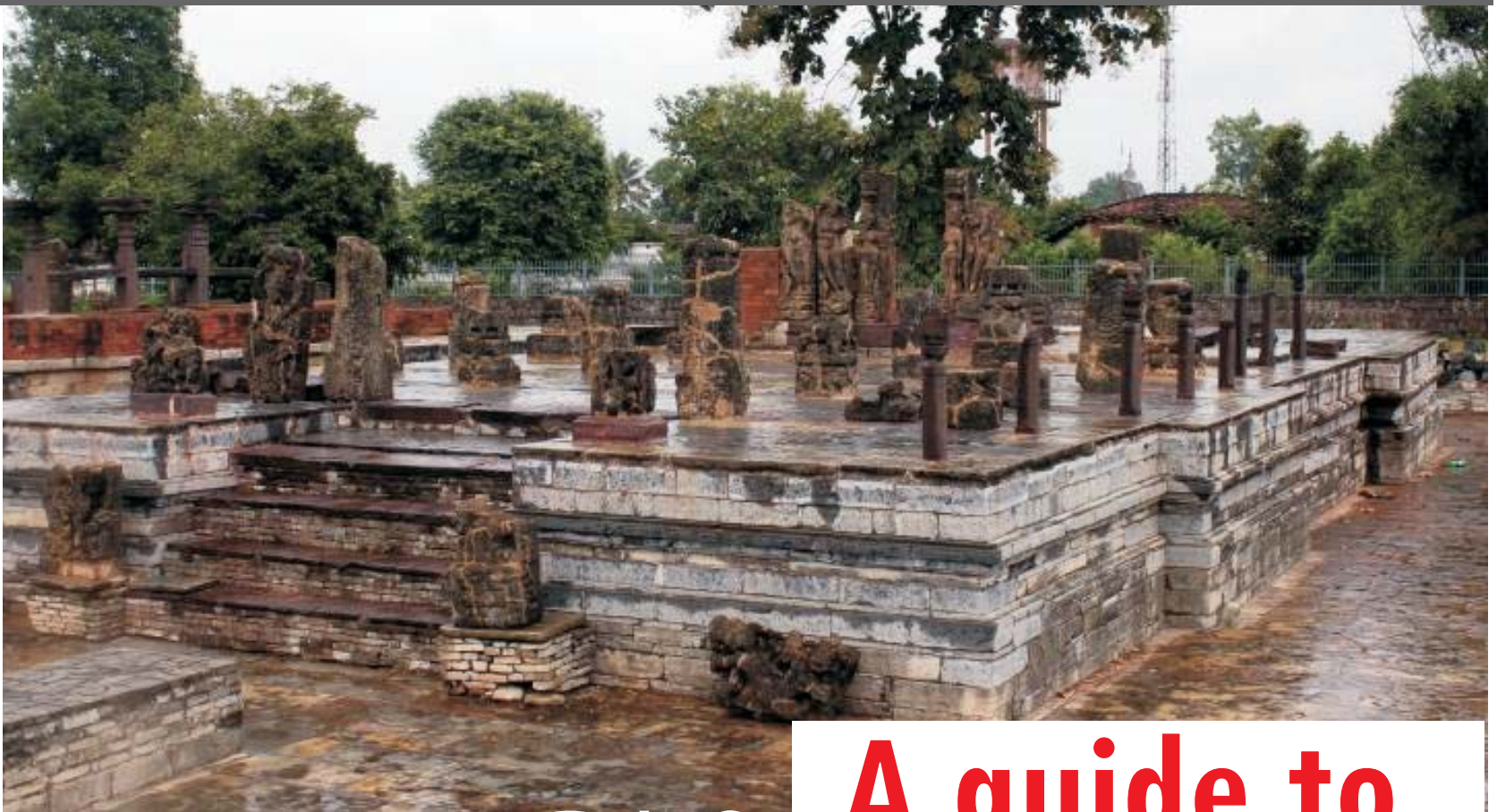
Throw caution—and raincoats—to the wind and head to the beach you were planning to go to, regardless of the rain. As long as the water is a manageable temperature and the conditions okay to swim, being on the beach in the rain is actually quite fun. Splash along with the raindrops and take a walk on wet sand—there is no reason a little bit of rain should put a damper on your beach fun.

Though it is still an offbeat destination, there are several tourist places in Chhattisgarh. The well-developed capital Raipur has some of the most advanced infrastructure, as well as the most hospitable and polite people you can meet anywhere in the country. Chhattisgarh stands apart in its practices, social rituals and its diverse tribal culture and lifestyle. Sirpur, only 84 km from Raipur, is a hidden town from the past. This fascinating town has a deep archaeological significance as well as a connection to Buddhism. Residing quietly by the Mahanadi River, Sirpur has archaeological ruins from the fifth to the eighth centuries. There is evidence of the Chinese traveller, Hiuen Tsang exploring this town, and more recently in 2013, it was graciously visited by His Holiness the Dalai Lama.

Surang Tila and other ruins

The enormous temple of Surang Tila was unearthed in 2005-06. The temple premises covers a vast area and the main temple stands tall, elevated by a flight of 37 steep limestone steps. It is believed to have been hit by a devastating earthquake around the 12th century AD, and the steps still bear the visual repercussions of this calamity.

The temple was built by Mahasivagupta Balarjun in seventh century AD and has been constructed in the panchayatan style of temple architecture, with the main temple in the centre and four temples in the corner. The main temple has five sanctums, four of which had four different types of Shiva lingas for worship, respectively coloured white, red, yellow and black. The remaining sanctum contains a Ganesh idol. The 32-pillared mandapa holds these five sanctums. The complex area has three tantric temples in a platform, dedicated to Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva. The entry gate was believed to be located near the river flowing adjacent to the temple. This was a practice that was started in the temples of Sirpur, and thereafter, spread to other parts of



the country.

Laxman Temple

Dating back to 625-650 AD, the Laxman Temple in Sirpur is one of the most famous structures in the city. It is believed to be one of the best examples of brick temples in India and is dedicated to Lord Vishnu. The intricate carvings on the exterior of the temple make it special. These designs include Lord Vishnu, Krishna Leela symbols, Vaishnava Dwarpal, and pictures bearing resemblance to the famous erotic work as in the Khajuraho Temple. The mandapa which originally bore stone pillars is now in ruins.

Budh Vihar

The Budh Vihar was unearthed in 2003 and houses a statue of Buddha, with Padmapani on either side. It is believed to have been constructed during the time of

Somanvansi king, Teevardeo and continued to stay in use until the rule of his grandson Mahashivgupta Balarjun in 7th to 8th century AD. Perhaps the most interesting aspect of this ruin is the entry gate to the temple. The beautiful carvings here depict plenty of scenes from Buddha's life, including love, matrimony, friendship and other ties. This emphasis confirms the influence of Buddhism in Sirpur. The northern and southern arms of this space were used as dwelling chambers.

Ancient marketplace

The ancient marketplace is an impressive set of ruins that are spread over an area of 250 sq m along the river Mahanadi. This place was believed to be the centre of all commercial and trading life of the era. The excavations have revealed that some shops have connecting underground channels, which may imply that the shop owners had more than one shop. There

are places which suggest that goods were kept covered in these depressions to guard against natural weathering. The main artefacts unearthed from here indicate that this market was used mainly by coppersmiths, goldsmiths, ironsmiths and potters.

Street food

Street food is busy but organised in Chhattisgarh. Even though the samosas are believed to be mouth-wateringly delicious here, the bhajiyas or the pakoras definitely deserve more of the attention. With the traditional cup of chai, the breakfast here usually comprises kachoris, mirchi bhajis, dal ka wada and onion bhajiyas. To satisfy your sweet tooth, pick a warm jalebi and you will not regret it. Sirpur is essentially dominated by a straight road with major sights located on either side. The city's main street food hub is on the junction of the road that turns towards Budh Vihar and Laxman Temple.

A guide to Sirpur

Tips for doing Petra right



If you're on a tight time frame, you can visit Petra in just one day. However, most travellers whom we met were spending at least two days there, so if you can squeeze in an extra day for sightseeing, do so.

When you buy passes, you get discounts for

take you to and from the entrance and the Treasury. There are some places you can't visit like the Monastery unless you can ride comfortably on a donkey for about 20 minutes. You can negotiate the

prices a bit but they are mostly set. There are places to stop, take breaks, have tea and buy water en route. You can even buy souvenirs here.

Timings

Wake up early! The early bird catches the worm here, and by that I mean, great photo opportunities with fewer people crowding around awesome shots. You will need about 7 hours to walk around comfortably and go all the way to the Monastery and back.

How much walking is it really?

Well, to see it all, as mentioned, would take about 7 hours comfortably. You can do it in 5, which we did, if you walk very fast and take a donkey ride up to the Monastery. You can also come to Petra and just walk to the Treasury (30 minutes) and then return to your hotel. There are many ways to see the sites and it's up to you to decide what you want to see. The Monastery, Petra's largest monument, is more impressive than the Treasury and I think if you've come all this way you should go ahead and see it.

What to wear?

You do have to cover up here, although many tourists were not and some even had on denim shorts. I recommend breezy trousers or leggings and a thin T-shirt. As long as your legs and shoulders are covered, you are okay. Bring a hat, sunscreen and sunglasses. Wear comfortable walking shoes, but hiking shoes are not necessary.

You probably know what Petra looks like from famous photographs. Most of the tourists also know that it is one of the New7Wonders of the World, but they usually don't know the full details of what visiting involves and hence, it's always good to read up on these things ahead of time so that you can really enjoy the site rather than worry about things you were unprepared for. Petra is a true 'once in a lifetime' place to visit, so read up to learn what you need to know ahead of time!

Getting there

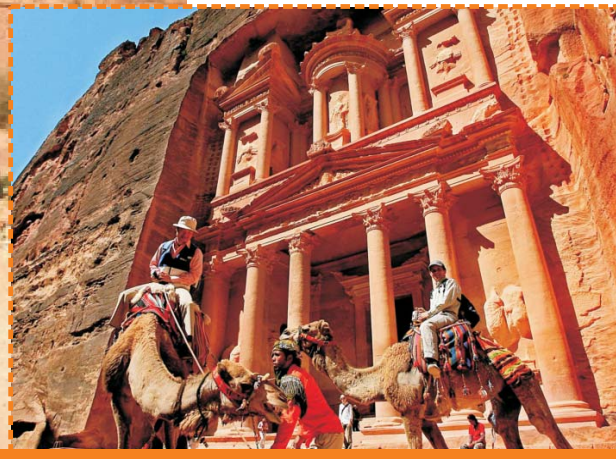
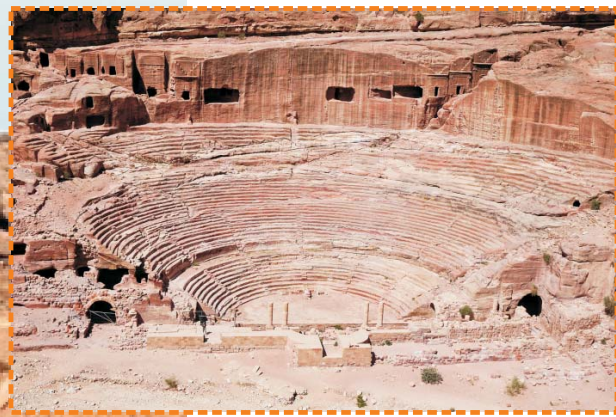
It takes two and half hours to get to Petra from

Amman Queen Alia International Airport, without traffic on the main highway. Keep in mind that it's often better to take the King's Highway which is a slow, hilly, winding, scenic highway, even if it means at least an hour longer journey! There are many places to stop for photos and this area is often called the 'Grand Canyon of Jordan'.

Where to stay?

There are many guest houses in Petra but the most famous hotel is Movenpick which is right outside the entrance gate and is reasonably priced for a 5 star hotel. There is also a pool. Do keep in mind that the taxes on food here are higher, so consider exploring Petra town for dinner.

Tickets and tours



By the end of the Middle Ages, St Andrews boasted of Scotland's first university and was the country's undisputed ecclesiastical and intellectual capital. The medieval street plan remains virtually intact. The oldest surviving buildings are sandstone. The "Auld Grey Toon" is one of cloister garths, courtyards, "yettis" (gates of latticed wrought iron bars), "wynds" (narrow lanes), "pends" (streets leading to courtyards), Renaissance arcades, masonic porches, villas, staired turrets, balustrade parapets, slate or clay pantile, Flemish crow-stepped or corbie roofs, moulded windows, porticos, old archdeacon's mansions and walled gardens.

St Salvator's Chapel

Locals and students are all familiar with Agnes, Annie, Elizabeth, Margaret, Katherine and George. These are the church bells of the university chapel on North Street. The six bells are contained in the tower and are hung for full circle ringing. The oldest is Elizabeth, recast in 1940. Agnes is named after the sister of one of the university's chairs of Greek, George after a student, Margaret after a Scottish medieval queen and Annie after the university's first female student, Agnes Forbes Blackadder (MA, 1895).

A rare example of Late Gothic architecture, the chapel was founded in 1450. The adjacent 1933 halls of residence were once described as "a rambling Gothic dormitory". The oldest hall is St Regulus (1868). The modern halls are in the "brutalist" style of architecture.

St Salvator's College

Established in 1450 by Bishop Kennedy, this is now a university residential hall. The tower, to which the present spire was added in 1550, contains the original bells—Katharine and Kate Kennedy. The butts date from the 1860s. The entrance archway originally formed part of the old cloister court. In the vestry is a 1461 college mace. In 1747, St Salvator's College became the seat of the United College. St Salvator's Quad contains lecture and exam halls, and was for many years the scene of the annual Raisin Weekend mass shaving foam fight every October. This

Top attractions in St Andrews

commemorates the tradition of giving raisins to academic parents or mentors who look after freshers, first year students or "beasants" (fledglings). Now, their services are rewarded usually by alcohol! Outside the Quad are the letters PH in the cobble marking the site where the Protestant martyr Patrick Hamilton was burned at the stake in 1528, and it is considered bad luck to walk on the letters. Students who walk across these letters will fail their degree but can remove the 'curse' by bathing in the sea at dawn on 1st May

St Andrews Castle

Once one of the most important strongholds of the kingdom, the castle was founded around 1200, reconstructed in the 14th century and repaired in the 16th century. The structure forms an irregular pentagon enclosing a courtyard with towers or blockhouses which are now long gone, along with the original square Fore Tower. What remains is the work of Archbishop Hamilton, following the siege of 1546-7. Still standing is the Kitchen tower and Sea Tower with its bottle dungeon.

St Rules Tower

The place to sightsee, St Rules Tower in St Andrews Cathedral has the best view in town. Its name derives from the town's

claim to be the final resting place of the apostle Andrew and the patron saint of Scotland, whose bones were brought under divine guidance from Patras, Greece by St Regulus (St Rule) to Kilrymont. St Andrews was also called Kilrule.

The Priory of Canons Regular of the Order of St Augustine was founded in 1127. The community were for a while associated with the Church of St Regulus or St Rule, of which the 33 m Romanesque tower and choir (1080) still stands to the east of the later Cathedral. It is the oldest surviving building in St Andrews. It was the first place of worship for arriving St Augustine canons. The establishment of the present town began around 1140 by Bishop Robert. The burgh of St Andrews was first represented at the great council at Scone Palace in 1357 and granted a royal charter by King James VI, who used the area around the nearby Falkland Palace for hunting.

St Andrews Cathedral

This Cathedral was founded in 1160 by Bishop Arnold and consecrated in the presence of King Bruce in 1318. Construction started at the east end, where the detail is Romanesque but later work is Gothic. The nave consisted of 12 bays, a

crossing with a central tower, north and south transepts, a choir and shrine. At 109 m (357') it was by far the longest and largest cathedral in Scotland.

The vaulted calefactory and refectory undercroft were restored at the end of the 19th century. Parts of the Great Hall remain, as well as the re-built gateway of the New Inns or royal guest house on Pends Road. The whole area is a half-a-mile in length with 13 towers and three gateways. The Cathedral was abandoned during the Reformation (1559). The lead on the roofs was used for ammunition in the Wars of Religion. The central tower collapsed and the ruins were used as a quarry. Many buildings around town are made from the Cathedral stone.

Used as a place of worship since the 8th century, the cathedral became the headquarters of the medieval Scottish church and dominated religion until the Protestant Reformation in 1560. It was the seat of Scotland's leading bishops, and from 1472 of the archbishops. In 1559, John Knox preached a passionate sermon in the parish church and, as a result, the church was cleansed. In 1561, it was abandoned and left to fall into ruin.

The Cathedral graveyard contains the

graves of Scottish diplomat and prelate Andrew Forman, Scottish Presbyterian and museum curator James Bell Pettigrew and famous golfing pioneers, Old Tom Morris and his son, Young Tom who won the British Open Championship four times and died at the age of 24.

There is also the grave of golfer Allan Robertson to whom Old Tom was an apprentice. He is considered to be the first professional golfer club and ball maker. Robertson was never beaten and was first to break 80 over the Old Course, the year before he died in 1859. He exported his clubs and balls worldwide. An authentic Robertson "feathery" ball is a collector's item today. Along with Morris, he also designed Carnoustie in 1842. His epitaph reads: "Allan Robertson—who died 1st Sept. 1859 aged 44 years old. He was greatly esteemed for his personal worth and for many years was esteemed as the champion golfer of Scotland."

The British Open is due to his death. The members of Prestwick Golf Club on the west coast of Scotland held the competition in 1860, to decide who would succeed him as the "Champion Golfer". The Open, continuing annually ever since except for the war years, is the longest-running golf championship, and the oldest of the four "Majors"—the US Open, US Masters and USPGA Championship.

Queen Mary's House

On South Street, which is like all the streets a processional avenue to the St Andrews Cathedral, there is the three-storey frontage of the house and its later extension, "Priorsgate". The most striking design element is the western wing's stair tower and corner oriel of brownstone. The house was begun in 1523 by merchant Hew Scrymgeour and became known as Queen Mary's House when she stayed there in 1564 on one of her many visits. The building was renovated in 1927 for use as a library by St Leonards School.



Bandra slums demolition was decades overdue. But has Railways got the timing wrong?

Western Railway demolished hundreds of houses and shops in Bandra's Garib Nagar after a court-backed clearance drive. A section of people backed the drive as long-overdue for safety and growing infrastructure needs. Others have criticised the timing as the displaced families will have no roof over their head during the monsoon.

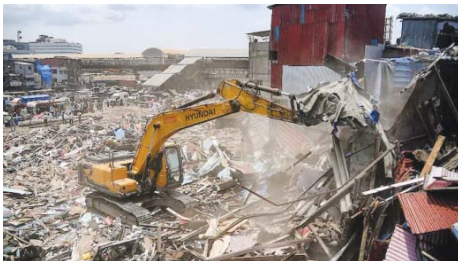
New Delhi.(Agency)

"I have never liked the sight of slums right outside Bandra station. Nobody does. The area was filthy, crime was rampant, and it was common to see drug addicts on the foot overbridges despite the presence of the Government Railway Police (GRP). But watching school-going girls in their uniforms sitting on the road, barely metres away from the homes they grew up in, holding on to just a bag of belongings they could save, is a heartbreaking sight," said Devesh Kamble, a software engineer who commutes daily from Bandra East to Kalanagar. As he shared this experience with India Today Digital, bulldozers reduced homes to rubble in Mumbai's Garib Nagar slum outside Bandra station's eastern side. The ongoing demolition drive

by Western Railway in Bandra East has cleared over 400 unauthorised structures, including homes and shops, on railway land hugging the tracks. The Bombay High Court backed the action to reclaim about 5,200-5,300 square metres for railway expansion, including new lines, better connectivity between Bandra Terminus and suburban stations, and support for projects like improved access to the Bandra Kurla Complex (BKC). The land, long encroached upon, holds an estimated value of around Rs 600 crores. Though the anti-encroachment drive and cleanup were long overdue, the reality has two sides to it.

SLUM DWELLERS LEFT WITHOUT A ROOF JUST AHEAD OF MONSOONS

Garib Nagar, one of Mumbai's older and



denser slum pockets, featured multi-storey structures. Many of them were two or three storeys high, built directly beside railway tracks. Residents and commuters have long described these areas as among the filthiest and dingiest in the city, with poor sanitation, waste dumping, safety hazards, and high crime. For decades, they blocked

infrastructure upgrades and posed risks to train operations.

Yet these slums housed thousands who form the backbone of Mumbai's workforce — daily wagers, service staff, and essential workers keeping the city running. Many had lived here for 40 years or more.

"This slum, inhabited nearly two hundred years ago, now lies abandoned. Residents, along with their wives and children, sat in an open field, carrying household items, watching their homes collapse," social activist and journalist Siraj Noorani said in a post on X. Families pleaded with officials amid the rubble to not demolish the house, or at least let them take their household items out, only for the bulldozers to silence their pleadings. One viral video showed an elderly woman distressed over the rubble,

saying she could not even retrieve a religious scripture from her house.

Officials arrived at the site in Garib Nagar on Tuesday (May 19) with heavy earthmovers and bulldozers, police, and RPF personnel, giving little time for residents to salvage belongings.

Over 60% of the demolitions happened in a matter of just 48 hours. With thousands displaced right ahead of monsoon, the footage of belongings piled on roads is going viral now. The timing of Western Railway carrying out the eviction has sparked criticism. The southwest monsoon is expected to hit the Kerala coast around May 26 — nearly a week early — and reach Mumbai by early June. With rains just weeks away, displaced families are left without any shelter.

Higher rates, low availability: Protest disrupts commuter mobility in capital

New Delhi.(Agency)

Auto-rickshaw and commercial vehicle unions across Delhi-NCR kicked off their three-day strike on Thursday, citing rising fuel prices, increasing operational costs, and unsustainable commission structures imposed by ride-hailing platforms such as Uber, Ola, and Rapido. The travel across several parts of the capital was apparently disrupted, leaving office-goers and college students struggling to secure rides, particularly during peak hours. Many commuters reported longer wait times, reduced availability of autos and cabs booked via app-based aggregators, and inconsistent fares. "A ride from Chanakyapuri to Satya Niketan cost me Rs 100 today. Usually, even during peak hours, I pay around Rs 70," said Aayushi, a college student in Delhi University's South Campus area. Shivin Bhargava faced a steeper increase. "I paid Rs 160 for an auto to travel from South Campus to Saket, whereas the same route usually costs me about Rs 80," he said.

For others, the issue wasn't just the pricing but availability. "Ever since the protest was announced, getting an auto has become extremely difficult, even for very short distances," said Harsh Malhotra from Faridabad. "The fares are still high despite the shortage, and most drivers are refusing shorter routes altogether." Saba Taherypour from Gurgaon also reported facing similar issues with ride availability and fluctuating prices during the day. Even the Uber and Ola cabs, which were available with much waiting, showed extra prices. From ITO to Mayur Vihar, which generally costs Rs 150-180, the charges on Thursday went up to as high as Rs 200-245.

Transport unions argued that the strike has become necessary due to mounting fuel costs and declining earnings for drivers working through app-based services.

DDA gives 15-day relief to Yamuna Bazaar residents

New Delhi.(Agency)

Two weeks after the Delhi Disaster Management Authority (DDMA) issued an eviction notice to residents of 310 dwellings of Delhi's Yamuna Bazar, the Delhi Development Authority (DDA) has also issued another public notice directing all "unauthorised occupants/encroachers" living along Yamuna Bazaar to vacate the area within 15 days. They also warned that failure to comply could lead to demolition and removal action without further notice.

On Tuesday, the High Court dismissed a plea challenging the eviction notices issued to the families in the Yamuna Bazar area. The DDA notice was issued three days before the HC order, which is on May 15.

Earlier, the DDMA notice which was issued on May 7 gave 15 days of time to the residents, which will be over on May 22. However, with the latest notice from the DDA, the residents have time till May 30.

The notice has been addressed to occupants residing between Ghat No. 2 and Ghat No. 32 near Yamuna Bazaar and concerns land identified as part of the Yamuna floodplain and O-Zone area.

According to the notice, authorities have reported that certain persons are in unauthorised possession of government land falling within the Yamuna floodplain in Revenue Estate Bela. The land has been described as government land under DDA jurisdiction.

Meanwhile, on the ground there is not much panic visible as residents continue to live their lives normally without any signs of packing bags and belongings.

Seven days to submit objections

The notice said that occupants seeking to challenge the action have been given seven days to submit objections or representations before the office. The notice also mentioned that the floodplain area is an ecologically sensitive zone and should remain free of encroachment in accordance with planning provisions and directions issued by courts.

Three children flee home in Gujarat after father takes away mobile phone

New Delhi.(Agency)

According to the complaint, the father had travelled to his native village late last month and had accidentally left his phone at home. During his absence, the children allegedly spent long hours playing games on the device. When he returned, the children's mother expressed concern that the siblings had become excessively dependent on mobile gaming. In an attempt to curb the habit, the father reportedly removed the SIM card from the phone three days before the incident and locked the device inside a cupboard. Police said the restriction angered the children, who then allegedly decided to leave home. The siblings,

who belong to a labourer's family engaged in Surat's textile industry, are also suspected of taking around Rs 15,000 in cash before fleeing.



After discovering the children missing, the family immediately approached the police and filed a complaint. "The complainant informed us that the children spent

most of their time playing mobile games and engaging in similar activities. Upset over this, the father had scolded and counselled them.

The children appear to have taken the matter seriously and left home with some belongings and cash," Police Inspector SD Rathod said.

He added that five police teams had been formed to trace the siblings, with assistance from senior officers and other police units. "Based on CCTV footage and preliminary investigation, we suspect the children may have boarded a train to Mumbai. We have received some positive leads, and teams are actively working at all possible locations," Rathod said.

Fire scare on Air India flight triggers full emergency at Delhi airport

New Delhi.(Agency)

A Delhi-bound Air India flight from Bengaluru triggered a full emergency response at the capital's Indira Gandhi International (IGI) Airport on Thursday night after the pilot reported a suspected smoke-related incident while landing, sources said. The incident involved flight AI2802 operating from Bengaluru to Delhi with 171 passengers onboard. Sources from Air India confirmed to India Today that during the landing procedure, the pilot announced that the engine had caught fire, prompting authorities to declare an emergency at Delhi airport as a precautionary measure.



Despite the scare, the aircraft landed safely, and no injuries were reported. The authorities said that the operations duty manager observed no

pilot also suggested pulling the aircraft off the runway.

In a statement, Air India said it is aware of the incident involving flight AI2802 on May 21, 2026, adding that the aircraft landed safely and there was no harm to passengers or crew.

"We are currently gathering additional information and are working closely with the relevant authorities. Further updates will be shared as more details become available," the airline said.

A full emergency at an airport is usually declared when there is a potential threat to aircraft safety, allowing emergency services including fire and rescue teams to be positioned in advance.

fire after the flight landed. The incident occurred on runway 29R around 10.18 pm, which was temporarily suspended for inspection following the aircraft's arrival. The

Why ED is chasing Kolkata cop as criminal links to TMC's 'golden boy' emerge

After the BJP's election win, the ED has launched an aggressive crackdown on criminal syndicates that the party claims are in cahoots with the TMC. At the heart of the probe lies a startling nexus between a senior Kolkata cop and a notorious criminal believed to be close to TMC.

New Delhi.(Agency)

On Friday, even before dawn had fully broken, the Enforcement Directorate (ED) embarked on, perhaps, its most sweeping operations in Bengal in recent years. In fact, after the BJP's election win, central agencies have launched an aggressive crackdown on criminal syndicates and extortion gangs that the party claims were in cahoots with the TMC. At the heart of the probe lies a startling nexus - a senior Kolkata Police officer who was previously in charge of the area where Mamata Banerjee resides and notorious strongman Sona Pappu, often described as the TMC's 'golden boy'.

The ED believes Kolkata DCP Shantanu Sinha Biswas and Pappu, alias Biswajit Poddar, were central figures in an alleged racket involving land grabbing, extortion, illegal construction, and hawala dealings. Biswas and Pappu, who was on the run for over three months, were arrested by the ED last week, triggering a major stir in Bengal. It has led to speculation that the probe could lead to more high-profile names and explosive revelations.

ED CRACKDOWN ON SYNDICATES

On Friday, ED teams fanned out across nine locations in Kolkata and Murshidabad linked to Biswas and Pappu. One ED team landed at the former DCP's luxurious ancestral home in Murshidabad's Kandi town. However, the gates were locked. Drama ensued as the ED officers broke open the gates and barged in. Stunned locals watched in silence as the raid unfolded.

The image was a far cry from when ED officers were allegedly attacked by TMC goons during a raid at the residence of former TMC leader and strongman Sheikh Shahjahan in Sandeshkhali. On Friday, the ED officers spoke to locals outside the premises before breaking in. Biswas's sister, Gauri Sinha Biswas, who is the vice-chairperson of Kandi Municipality, was not present at the residence.

Bhojshala temple dispute reaches SC as Muslim side challenges High Court order

New Delhi.(Agency)

The decades-old dispute over the Bhojshala-Kamal Maula Mosque complex in Madhya Pradesh's Dhar has now reached the Supreme Court, with the Muslim side challenging a recent High Court verdict that recognised the site as a temple dedicated to Goddess Vagdevi Saraswati and barred Friday namaz at the premises. The petition has been filed by Qazi Moinuddin, the mosque's caretaker and one of the intervenors in the case, against the May 15 judgment delivered by the Indore bench of the Madhya Pradesh High Court.

The Intazamiya Committee Kamal Maula Masjid and the All India Muslim Personal Law Board were also among the parties contesting the matter before the High Court. Challenging the verdict before the Supreme Court, the Muslim

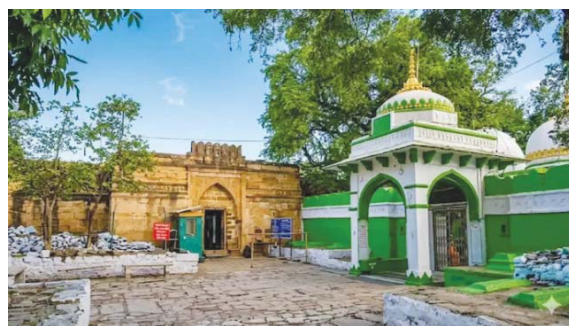
side has argued that the High Court ruling runs contrary to archaeological evidence and violates the spirit of the Places of Worship Act, 1991. Anticipating a challenge to the verdict, Hindu parties had already filed a caveat petition in the Supreme Court seeking that no ex parte order be passed without hearing them.

HIGH COURT ORDER

In its landmark ruling, the High Court held that the religious character of the disputed complex was that of Bhojshala, a temple associated with Goddess Saraswati and linked to Parmar ruler Raja Bhoj, who is credited with turning Dhar into a centre of Sanskrit learning.

A division bench of Justice Vijay Kumar Shukla and Justice Alok Awasthi

observed that historical records, archaeological material and literary evidence supported the Hindu claim



over the site. The High Court said the available materials established the existence of a temple dedicated to Goddess Vagdevi Saraswati at Dhar and noted continuity of Hindu worship at the

site overtime.

The High Court also quashed the Archaeological Survey of India's 2003 arrangement that allowed Hindus to perform puja on Tuesdays and Muslims to offer namaz on Fridays at the protected monument. With the order being struck down, the weekly Friday prayers by the Muslim community at the complex stand discontinued.

"The historical literature of the place establishes it as a centre of Sanskrit learning associated with Raja Bhoj. It indicates the existence of a temple dedicated to Goddess Vagdevi Saraswati at Dhar. Therefore, the religious character of the area is held to be Bhojshala with temple of Goddess Vagdevi Saraswati," the court said in its ruling.

Sensex, Nifty open higher as crude stays near \$105; banks, financials lead gains

New Delhi..(Agency)

Benchmark stock market indices opened higher on Friday as investors tracked crude oil prices and developments in the ongoing US-Iran talks, while banking and financial stocks led gains in early trade. The BSE Sensex was up 336.46 points at 75,519.82 around 9:26 am, while the NSE Nifty50 gained 86.30 points to trade at 23,741.00. Markets opened with positive momentum after global crude oil prices remained below the \$105-per-barrel mark despite continuing tensions in West Asia. As of around 9:25 am, Brent crude was trading at \$104.25 per barrel, up 1.63%, WTI crude stood at \$97.44 per barrel, up 1.13%.

OIL, IRAN TALKS REMAIN IN FOCUS

Investors are closely watching developments in the US-Iran peace discussions, which continue to influence global oil prices and market sentiment.

The two sides remained divided on issues related to Iran's uranium stockpile and control over the Strait of Hormuz, although US Secretary of State Marco Rubio said there had been "some good signs" in the negotiations. The Iran conflict has remained one of the biggest triggers for global markets over the past few months, especially for oil-importing countries like India.

BANKING SHARES LEAD MARKET GAINS

Most major sectors traded in the green during early trade. Nifty Financial Services rose 0.76%, while Nifty Private Bank gained 0.93% and PSU Bank index climbed 0.47%. IndiGo shares also rose more than 0.8%, while UltraTech Cement, Asian Paints and Axis Bank traded higher. However, IT stocks remained under pressure, with Tech Mahindra, Infosys and TCS slipping in early trade.

LIC stock in focus: Q4 profit surges 23%, board announces Rs 10 dividend

Kolkata .(Agency)

LIC Q4 results which were announced after market hours on May 21 beat market expectations on most core performance parameters. LIC announced a 23% surge in its Q4FY26 net profit figure, which jumped to Rs 23,467 (on a year-on-year basis) against Rs 19,039 crore in Q4FY25. The company's board of directors spiced up the robust results with a dividend of Rs 10 per share for shareholders. It is expected that LIC shares will see significant movement today, May 22. LIC's assets under management (AUM) increased 5.1% year-on-year to touch Rs 57.3 lakh crore. The value of new business (VNB) also saw a significant jump and in the Jan-March quarter, it surged 41.63% to reach Rs 14,179 crore, which signalled improved profitability in generating new business.

Improvement in solvency ratio

LIC's solvency ratio increased to 2.35% during the Q4 period compared to 2.11% in the same period last year. It stood at 2.19% in the Q3FY26 period. The solvency ratio of an insurer reflects its financial strength. However, the company's 13-month persistency ratio declined to 67.77% compared to 68.62% last year and 69.36% in Q3FY26 period.

Preparations for IndAS implementation

LIC said that the company is preparing to implement Indian Accounting Standards (IndAS) as per regulatory guidance and is confident of implementing it within the stipulated time frame.

"Financial Year 2025-26 has been a satisfying year for us, with strong overall growth across every business vertical leading to record performance metrics. We have achieved a Non Par share on APE basis in our individual business of more than 35% and our VNB margin is more than 21% for the year. Our strategy of channel diversification has been successful with our Banca and Alternate Channels (BAC) having recorded a growth rate of more than 45% with premium from BAC exceeding Rs. 5,000 Crores in FY26," said R Doraiswamy, CEO and MD of LIC.

Capital Group builds \$2 billion bet in Adani Group in pivot from Reliance

New Delhi.(Agency)

The Capital Group, one of the world's largest investment management firms, has been increasing its exposure to Adani Group companies while steadily paring holdings in Reliance Industries Ltd., marking a shift in foreign investor preference between India's biggest conglomerates.

The Los Angeles-based money manager has acquired stakes worth more than \$2 billion across three Adani Group companies in recent weeks, according to people familiar with the matter. On May 5, Capital Group bought nearly a 2 per cent stake in Adani Ports and Special Economic Zone Ltd. for \$74.86 billion (\$776 million) through open-market transactions, according to BSE block-deal data.

The investor, which oversees more than \$3.3 trillion in assets globally, has also accumulated between 1.5 per cent and 2 per cent stakes in Adani Power Ltd. and Adani Green Energy Ltd. through market purchases, the people said, asking not to be identified because the information is private.

In a market that's fallen out of favor with some investors because of its lack of companies tied to the global artificial intelligence buildup, Adani companies are increasingly viewed as rare leveraged plays on India's infrastructure development, energy transition and manufacturing push. That shift is also emblematic of a broader transition toward bets on the next phase of India's economic expansion. Adani Power, Adani Green and Adani Ports shares surged 94 per cent, 35 per cent and 25 per cent, respectively, in one year. A Capital Group spokeswoman said she's unable to comment on individual stocks or shareholdings. A representative for Adani Group didn't respond to a request for comment.

Rupee at 100 against US dollar? Why experts say India shouldn't panic

As crude oil prices stay elevated and the rupee weakens further, a growing number of experts now argue India's real risk is not crossing 100 against the dollar, but rising inflation and slowing growth.

New Delhi..(Agency)

The rupee has been on a roller-coaster ride in recent months, sliding sharply against the US dollar as the global oil shock deepens and tensions in West Asia continue to disrupt energy markets.

With crude oil prices remanding above \$100 per barrel amid the ongoing West Asia conflict, many economists now believe the rupee touching 100 against the dollar may no longer be unthinkable. And interestingly, a growing number of experts also argue that the real risk for India may not be the rupee touching 100 itself, but what happens to inflation, jobs and economic stability alongside it. Former IMF Deputy

Managing Director and Harvard University professor Gita Gopinath recently captured this shift in thinking when she argued that policymakers should focus less on the symbolic exchange-rate level and more on the broader economy. "The relevant number is not the actual value of the exchange rate," Gopinath said in a recent interview. "What matters is jobs, inflation and output," she said.

That view is increasingly finding support among economists and market experts as India navigates a worsening global energy crisis.

A WEAKER RUPEE IS NOT ALWAYS BAD

For years, rupee weakness was often viewed almost entirely as a sign of economic stress. But economists say currency depreciation during a major external shock is not automatically a bad thing. In fact, a weaker rupee can sometimes help economies adjust.

When the rupee falls, imports become more expensive. That naturally reduces

demand for foreign goods, lowers pressure on India's foreign exchange reserves and can improve export competitiveness by making Indian



products cheaper globally.

"Rupee depreciation is partly a problem and partly a solution to the problem," said Dr. VK Vijayakumar, Chief Investment Strategist at Geojit Investments Limited.

"Rupee depreciation boosts exports and at the same reduces foreign exchange

expenditure. Expensive dollar can curtail forex expenditure more than austerity appeals. That way it is a solution to the problem," he added. This logic becomes especially important during oil shocks.

India imports the majority of its crude oil requirements. With tensions around the Strait of Hormuz disrupting global energy flows, elevated oil prices are already increasing pressure on India's import bill and dollar demand. In such situations, economists argue that allowing the currency to weaken gradually can help absorb part of the shock instead of forcing the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) to aggressively burn through forex reserves defending a symbolic exchange-rate level.

'100 IS JUST A NUMBER'

The growing argument against aggressively defending the rupee has also found support from former NITI Aayog Vice Chairman and Chairman of the 16th Finance Commission Arvind Panagariya.

Why is Indian rupee slipping nonstop? Here are three triggers behind the fall and risks ahead

New Delhi.(Agency)

India's economy continues to grow at a healthy pace, but the rupee has been under depreciation for years. The currency has now moved close to the 97-per-dollar mark, and it has fallen by nearly 7.5 percent in the first months of 2026. This leads to a question about why a fast-growing economy is witnessing a weaker currency. Currency strength usually moves in line with economic performance. In simple terms, stronger growth tends to support a stronger currency. But in India's case, the pattern has not followed that rule in recent years. Since 2018, the rupee has shown a gradual weakening trend almost every year, even though growth numbers have held up relatively strong. Back in 2013, when Narendra Modi was projected as the prime ministerial candidate by the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), the falling rupee was a major political talking point. At that time, the exchange rate had crossed the 60-per-dollar level and it was debated in public forums. If the

currency crosses the psychologically important 100 mark, economists say it could create added pressure for policymakers, especially the government and the Reserve Bank of



India (RBI). Import costs, oil prices and daily impact

A weaker rupee directly increases India's import bill. Since the country depends on imports for crude oil, cooking gas, fertilisers and electronics, a fall in the currency makes these essential goods more expensive in rupee terms. This eventually feeds into inflation and raises costs for households. At the same time, there is another side to the story.

Families dependent on remittances benefit when the rupee weakens because they receive more rupees for every dollar sent from abroad. India is among the largest recipients of remittances across the world. In the financial year ending March 2025, overseas Indians sent more than \$135 billion back home. However, this inflow could face disruption due to geopolitical tensions, especially military confrontations in the Middle East that affect Indian workers in Gulf countries. Rising concerns over the currency. The present weakness of the rupee is also driven by international and domestic factors. Oil prices have risen after attacks on Iran by the United States and Israel. It increased India's trade deficit. Since the country imports around 90 percent of its crude oil requirement, higher international prices directly increase dollar demand. Foreign investors have also been pulling money out of Indian markets. Reports suggest that around \$23 billion have been withdrawn from Indian equities this year.

Pharma stocks regain health amid geopolitical tension: Gain up to 31% in a month

New Delhi..(Agency)

Pharma stocks have scripted rare success in the stock market in the past one month despite the dangerous and wide ramifications of the US-Iran tensions and global uncertainties arising thereof. Pharma stocks have performed remarkably and attracted investor attention since many stocks have recorded a strong rally even when the broader was in turmoil. In the past one month, the Nifty Pharma index has risen by about 11% while in the same period the benchmark Nifty 50 index has gone down by about 2.98%.

Gland Pharma records the biggest gains

In the rally of the past month, Gland Pharma has emerged as the top performer. Its shares have surged more than 31% in the past month. Laurus Labs and Biocon also recorded gains of 19.44% and 19.54%. Stocks such as Ajanta Pharma, Cipla, Mankind Pharma, Granules India, Sun Pharmaceutical Industries, and Zydus

Lifesciences have seen gains ranging from 10% to 15%. Some quarterly earnings have beaten market estimates. Q4 results to dollar revenues



Analysts have attributed a few reasons to this surge in some pharmaceutical sector stocks. One, Q4FY26 results have been better than expected. Two, the weakening rupee has actually benefitted some export-oriented pharma companies, whose dollar revenues are raising their bottom lines and revenues. Three, the pharma sector is considered a defensive defensive

sector, which means that demand for medicines and healthcare services remains strong during economic crises or wartime situations. Therefore, many investors are flocking to pharma stocks in a volatile market. Another point to note is that some Indian pharma companies are benefiting from a robust pipeline of specialty drugs and upcoming biologics patents in the US markets, providing long-term growth visibility in highly regulated markets. "Pharma is one sector that has been performing well for quite some time. Over the past one month, we have witnessed strong buying interest in the sector. Most of these companies have reported reasonably well quarterly numbers. Export is one part which is completely benefiting. Depreciating rupee against the dollar is an advantageous position for pharma as well as for industries involved in export-oriented business.

Not Saudi, not US: India's newest major oil supplier may surprise you

Venezuela became India's third-largest crude supplier in May, overtaking Saudi Arabia and the United States. The shift shows how lower prices and regional supply disruptions are reshaping India's crude sourcing.

New Delhi.(Agency)

Venezuela has emerged as India's third-largest crude oil supplier in May, overtaking traditional heavyweights Saudi Arabia and the United States, as Indian refiners increased purchases of cheaper Venezuelan crude amid ongoing disruptions in global oil markets. According to data from energy cargo tracker Kpler, Venezuela supplied around 417,000 barrels per day (bpd) of crude oil to India so far this month, sharply higher than 283,000 bpd in April. The South American country had supplied

no crude to India during the previous nine months. The jump comes at a time when India is reshuffling its crude oil sourcing strategy due to the ongoing West Asia conflict, disruptions around the Strait of Hormuz and changing global supply dynamics. Only Russia and the United Arab Emirates supplied more crude oil to India than Venezuela in May.

WHY INDIA IS BUYING MORE OIL FROM VENEZUELA

The main reason behind the surge is price.

Venezuelan crude is currently cheaper than many other global oil grades, making it attractive for Indian refiners dealing with elevated crude prices and geopolitical uncertainty. "Indian buyers have historically shown strong interest in Venezuelan barrels due to their attractive economics and compatibility with complex refining systems," Nikhil Dubey, Lead Analyst-Refining at Kpler, said, as quoted by The Economic Times (ET). Indian refiners, especially Reliance

Industries, are among the biggest buyers because Venezuela's heavy and high-sulphur crude suits complex refinery systems such as Reliance's Jamnagar



refinery in Gujarat. Most Indian refiners can process Venezuelan crude only in limited quantities, but Reliance's advanced refining infrastructure makes it one of the biggest beneficiaries.

INDIA'S OIL IMPORTS RISE, BUT STILL BELOW PRE-WAR LEVELS

India's overall crude oil imports rose 8% month-on-month to around 4.9 million barrels per day in May, according to Kpler data. However, imports still remain below

the 5.2 million barrels per day recorded in February, before the Iran war disrupted energy shipments from West Asia.

The near closure of the Strait of Hormuz had severely impacted oil shipments from key Middle East suppliers earlier this year.

Although some Iraqi crude cargoes resumed this month, volumes remain sharply lower. India received only around 51,000 bpd from Iraq so far in May, compared to nearly 969,000 bpd in February. IRAN SUPPLIES HALTED AGAIN

India had briefly resumed crude imports from Iran in April after the US eased sanctions restrictions earlier this year.

That marked the first Iranian oil imports into India in nearly seven years.

However, those shipments have once again stopped. No Iranian cargoes have arrived in India this month following the US naval blockade around Iranian ports amid the ongoing conflict. The disruption forced Indian refiners to look for alternative sources, benefiting suppliers such as Venezuela and the UAE.

Short news

Telangana Government Doctors' Association raises concern over delay in transfer process

HYDERABAD.(Agency)

The Telangana Government Doctors' Association (TGGDA) on Thursday expressed serious concern over the delay in the ongoing transfer process in the Medical & Health department. They also opposed the attempts to introduce separate guidelines contrary to GO Ms No 38. Addressing the media at the DME office in Koti, the association pointed out that the transfer process should be conducted strictly in accordance with the existing government order without any



alterations, selective implementation, or deviation from the notified guidelines. They strongly objected to proposed changes in the definitions of focal and non-focal areas, stating that such modifications could create dissatisfaction, suspicion, and a sense of discrimination among doctors across the state.

TGGDA founder Dr B Ramesh stressed that many doctors who have been waiting for transfers for several years were already facing disappointment and uncertainty. He also urged senior officials of the Health department not to delay the process further by introducing new interpretations and additional conditions beyond the existing guidelines.

Punjabi University B Tech student found dead in hostel room; probe on: police

Patiala. (Agency)

A B Tech student of Punjabi University has been found dead inside one of the hostel rooms, police said.

Police have identified as Varunpreet Singh (24) and was from Tarn Taran's Kang village. Although, Varunpreet was staying in a rented accommodation outside the university campus, he had come to room 340 of Baba Banda Singh Bahadur hostel of the university on Wednesday, they said. The students were studying in different hostel rooms in various study groups for the ongoing university examinations, officials said. However, Varunpreet was reportedly alone in one of the rooms.

One of the students found Varunpreet lying unconscious when he accidentally entered the room. Following this, he was immediately shifted to the university dispensary in an ambulance, but the doctors declared him brought dead.

The family members of the deceased had not arrived till the time of filing this report and therefore the postmortem examination could not be conducted on Thursday.

SSP Patiala Varun Sharma told The Indian Express, "Postmortem will be conducted Friday morning only afterwards we will get to know the cause of death."

Search expands to Dubai in Kochi modelling scam

KOCHI.(Agency)

The investigation into the human trafficking and sex racket that allegedly operated under the guise of the modelling industry has expanded internationally, with police now searching for two key suspects believed to be hiding in Dubai. The absconding accused, identified as Shamla and Rahmath, are suspected to have links with an international human trafficking and sex trafficking network.

According to the remand report submitted before the Judicial First Class Magistrate Court on Thursday, Sindhu, 56, the main accused who was arrested from Mumbai, allegedly maintained links with an international trafficking and prostitution racket.

Police said Shamla and Rahmath coordinated the racket's operations in Dubai under Sindhu's direction. Investigators have also found indications that Sindhu had connections with criminal gangs. So far, three persons have been arrested in the case – Sindhu, Manjima and Aleena Abraham.

Investigators said the racket of luring young women to Dubai and allegedly handing them over to sex trafficking networks had been operating since 2022. The revelation reportedly emerged from Sindhu's confession statement.

The probe team further discovered financial transactions allegedly made by Sindhu to Aurangzeb, a friend of fourth accused Aleena and a person facing multiple criminal cases. Two mobile phones were recovered from Sindhu, and the investigators are analysing.

Parking dispute turns fatal: Mohali youth jumps into Bhakra canal, family alleges harassment

Mohali.(Agency)

A 21-year-old youth allegedly died by suicide after jumping into the Bhakra canal following a dispute over parking in Mohali's Phase 4 area. The deceased, identified as Pawan, was undergoing police recruitment training and was staying in a PG accommodation at House No. 636 in Phase 4. Divers later recovered the body from the canal. The body has been kept in the mortuary for postmortem examination.

The deceased's father, Prem Kumar, a resident of Nihal Khara village in Abohar, alleged that his son took the extreme step after being "harassed" by a municipal corporation election candidate of a political party, his son and the police. He claimed that before the incident, Pawan had sent video and audio recordings to one of his friends.

According to information, the dispute began over parking a vehicle outside the residence of an MC election candidate in Phase 4.



Allegedly, the candidate, contesting from Ward No. 8, and his son asked Pawan, who lived in another locality, to remove the vehicle parked there, leading to a heated argument.

The family alleged that Pawan and his friend, Madhav Shah, were later assaulted and taken to the police station after police were called to the spot. Prem Kumar said he was in Ganganagar to purchase medicines when he received a phone call from his son. "My son

told me that he was badly beaten by the MC candidate and his son at the spot and was humiliated at the police station as well," he alleged.

According to the father, Pawan told him over the phone: "Papa, first I was beaten at the spot, then taken to the police station and humiliated badly. Now I am going to die." Pawan's friend, Madhav Shah, a national-level baseball player, also alleged that both of them were assaulted and later harassed at the police station. He further claimed that they were falsely accused of consuming and selling drugs.

The incident triggered tension in the area, with the family demanding strict action against the accused. Police said an investigation is underway. DSP City-1 Gurcharan Singh said no suicide note had been recovered so far. "Statements of the family members are being recorded and all aspects are being examined. Further action will be taken based on the findings of the investigation," he said.

Manipur: 3 yrs after peace deal, insurgent group found selling weapons

Guwahati. (Agency)

Security forces in Manipur recovered 67 weapons, including ones looted from state armouries, from the United National Liberation Front (Pambei), a valley-based insurgent group that the Centre had signed a peace agreement with in 2023. According to police, cadres of the group were engaged in selling these weapons.

Over the course of two days, which included a cordon and search operation at an unauthorised UNLF(P) camp at Lamdeng in Imphal West, joint security forces comprising Manipur Police, Assam Rifles and the CRPF recovered these weapons, said a statement from the Manipur Police. A breakup of these weapons included 27 AK-series weapons, 11 M-series rifles, four 9-mm pistols, and one RPG-7.

According to a senior police officer, this weapons haul includes weapons that had been looted from state armouries during the course of the ongoing conflict in the state.



Around 6,000 weapons had been looted from state armouries during the conflict that began in May 2023.

According to police, they launched a special

operation in Lamshang on Wednesday based on "credible information regarding the selling of looted arms and ammunition", during which they apprehended two active cadres of the UNLF(P) with one INSAS LMG and three magazines, as well as fourteen live rounds. "While the arrest was going on, associates of the cadres opened fire at the security forces, resulting in a brief exchange of fire," said a police statement, adding that two more cadres who had fired at the security forces were apprehended as well.

"On preliminary interrogation of the arrested cadres, they disclosed that they had come to sell the seized weapons on the instruction of self-styled Lance Corporal Naorem Bijoy, alias Macha, of UNLF(P). They further admitted to earlier sale of looted arms and ammunition," said police.

Bhubaneswar sweats through season's first heatwave day

BHUBANESWAR.(Agency)

Normal life was thrown out of gear as Bhubaneswar recorded its first official heatwave day of the season on Thursday, with maximum day temperature touching 42.2 degree Celsius. As the state capital saw mercury soar past the normal by 4.5 degree C, people complained of uneasiness and heat stress as high levels of humidity made life miserable. During the peak hours, road wore a deserted look as denizens chose to stay indoors.

"Today's conditions were almost unprecedented as I had not witnessed such a combination of heat and humidity," said Prasanta Sahu, an online delivery agent of the city. While the sweltering conditions affected the people, for stray animals such as dogs and cattle, it was equally unbearable.

The intense heat surged in the state capital by about 5.4 deg C in the last 24

hours. Bhubaneswar had recorded 36.8 deg C on Wednesday. People expected respite as overcast conditions developed later in the day but only to be left disappointed. Neighbouring



Cuttack too sweated under intense heat and recorded 40.2 deg C on the day but citizens were in for a much-needed respite as nor'wester rains lashed the city in the evening. Keonjhar, which recorded 41.3 deg C on the day, too experienced thunderstorm activity. Besides, parts of Khurda district also

witnessed rains and strong winds.

Before a nor'wester hit some parts of Odisha on Thursday afternoon, large parts of the state reeled under a gruelling heatwave. At least 24 places reported above 40 degree C temperature on the day.

While Jharsuguda experienced heatwave conditions for the second consecutive day and sizzled at 45.5 degree C, six other places recorded more than 44 degree C on the day. Sambalpur and Balangir recorded 44.6 degree C each, Hirakud and Titilagarh 44.5 degree C each, Sonepur 44.3 degree C and Boudh 44.2 degree C. However, there is no immediate relief in sight as the India Meteorological Department (IMD) forecast heatwave over the next four days. Heatwave to severe heatwave may prevail in Jharsuguda, Sambalpur, Balangir and Nayagarh districts on Friday, said the regional met office.

Chennai to continue recording 41-42 degree celsius for next two days

CHENNAI.(Agency)

Heat wave-like conditions intensified across several parts of the state on Thursday, with Chennai and northern districts recording temperatures soaring above 40°C. The Regional Meteorological Centre (RMC) has forecast isolated heavy rainfall and thunderstorms in parts of the state in the coming days.

According to RMC, Chennai Airport recorded the highest maximum temperature in the state at 41.6°C on Thursday, while Nungambakkam registered 40.4°C. Vellore emerged as the hottest station with 42.5°C, followed by Tiruttani at 42.1°C. Karur Paramathi and Madurai city also touched the 40°C mark.

Meteorologists said maximum temperatures rose by 2-4°C at isolated places in Tamil Nadu during the last 24 hours, with several stations recording temperatures above normal levels. Heat wave conditions are likely to continue in isolated pockets of coastal Tamil Nadu, Pondicherry and Karaikal on till Friday.

RMC has forecast no significant change in temperatures in interior Tamil Nadu for the next five days. However, coastal districts are likely to witness a further rise of 3-4°C above normal levels and increasing discomfort due to high humidity. For Chennai, the weather office has forecast maximum temperatures of 41-42°C over the next two days with partly cloudy skies. Warm nights with minimum temperatures around 30-31°C are also expected, adding to the heat stress in the city. Officials warned that the combination of high day temperatures and humidity could cause severe discomfort in coastal areas from May 23 onwards.

Headless body in Lucknow: 16-year-old girl 'killed' by family over relationship

Lucknow.(Agency)

The mystery behind the headless torso and limbs found stuffed in a bag on a train at a Lucknow railway station has been solved — the victim was a 16-year-old girl, allegedly murdered by her family after she refused to end her relationship with a man.

The Government Railway Police has arrested her 48-year-old father along with two relatives for allegedly killing her in an "honour" crime.

The shocking discovery was made on May 16, on the Chhapra-Gomti Nagar Express that travels from Bihar to Lucknow via Gorakhpur. Once passengers had deboarded the train, the railway staff started a routine check of the



compartments and found a trunk and a bag near a washroom in one of the sleeper coaches.

Those arrested include the girl's father, Viggan, an e-rickshaw driver; his elder sister Noorjahan (55), and her husband

Mojibullah (53), Superintendent of Police (Railways) Rohit Mishra said. Police claimed the accused killed the girl with a gadasa — a sharp-edged agricultural weapon — at their home in Kushinagar district, dismembered the body and stuffed the parts in a bag and a steel trunk.

Police said they went to the railway station, boarded the train arriving from Chhapra, and dumped the trunk and bag near the washroom inside a sleeper coach.

Police said the accused, during questioning, admitted that they thought abandoning the body parts on a train would make it difficult for police to identify the victim or solve the case. "We are still searching for

the victim's head. The accused had claimed they threw it into a pond; we conducted a search there, but could not recover it," Mishra said.

CCTV provided key clue

Mishra said during investigation, they examined CCTV footage from railway stations where the train had halted. "At Kushinagar station, we spotted people placing a trunk and a bag inside the train. A team was sent to the area to trace those seen in the footage. With the help of local residents, police later identified the victim's father," said Mishra. The officer said the father was detained for questioning and subsequently admitted to the crime. "We will seek police remand of the accused for further questioning

NEWS BOX

Drums and tears: Cristiano Ronaldo celebrates Saudi league title, X post goes viral

CHENNAI. (Agency)

They said he went to the desert to retire. They said the hunger would fade, buried under the weight of a 200-million-euro contract and the twilight of a legendary career. But on a sweltering Thursday night at Al-Awwal Park, as the final whistle blew to confirm Al-Nassr as the Saudi Pro League champions, Cristiano Ronaldo proved once again that his obsession with winning defies both time and critics. At 41 years old, a man who has conquered Manchester, Madrid, and Turin stood on a football pitch in Riyadh and wept like a teenager winning his very first medal.

Cristiano Ronaldo lifts the 2025/26 #RoshnSaudiLeague trophy pic.twitter.com/gjFKcDJ4vd— Roshn Saudi League (@SPL_EN) May 21, 2026

The stakes could not have been higher on the final night of the season. Al-Nassr held a razor-thin advantage, knowing anything less



than a victory could hand the crown to their relentless arch-rivals, Al-Hilal. The atmosphere inside the stadium was electric, a sea of yellow and blue roaring for a domestic title that had eluded the club since 2019. Early goals from Sadio Mané and Kingsley Coman put Al-Nassr in control, but a tense penalty from Damac brought the score to 2-1, stretching the nerves of everyone in the arena to a breaking point. Then came the 62nd minute, the moment the script belonged to Ronaldo. Standing over a free-kick twenty-five yards out, he took his trademark deep breath, his eyes locked onto the top corner. With a devastating blend of power and dip, he struck the ball. It bypassed a desperate wall and a forest of legs, rocketing into the far corner of the net. The stadium exploded. It was vintage, peak Ronaldo, delivered precisely when his team needed a saviour. Nine minutes from time, he put the final exclamation point on the season, smashing home a sharp cut-back from the edge of the six-yard box to make it 4-1.

Shubman Gill is IPL 2026's best captain: Ex-India star after GT crush CSK



NEW DELHI. (Agency)

Former India cricketer Mohammed Kaif believes Shubman Gill has emerged as the best captain of IPL 2026 after Gujarat Titans sealed a crushing win over Chennai Super Kings to strengthen their top-two finish hopes ahead of the playoffs. Kaif praised Gill's leadership style, tactical clarity and the way he has managed Gujarat's bowling attack throughout the season.

Gill once again led from the front with the bat on Thursday, smashing 64 off 37 balls as Gujarat Titans piled up a massive 229 against Chennai Super Kings in Ahmedabad. The GT skipper now has 616 runs from 13 matches this season and continues to combine captaincy with elite batting consistency. Gujarat eventually crushed CSK by 89 runs to bounce back strongly after their defeat to Kolkata Knight Riders. Sai Sudharsan's 84, Gill's fluent knock and Jos Buttler's explosive 57 powered GT to a huge first-innings total before the bowlers dismantled Chennai for just 140 in 13.4 overs. The defeat officially ended CSK's IPL 2026 campaign as they finished with 12 points from 14 matches. It also marked the third straight season where Chennai failed to qualify for the playoffs.

After the match, Kaif took to X and strongly backed Gill amid the constant debate around his leadership credentials in T20 cricket. For me Shubman Gill is this IPL's best captain. The sign of a great captain is how he uses his bowlers. His bowlers have taken 108 wickets in 14 games," Kaif posted. Bowlers to stick to Test match line and length. Gill plays correct cricket - has great batting technique and knows how to use his bowlers." Gill's captaincy has remained under heavy scrutiny despite Gujarat's strong campaign, especially after he was removed as India's T20I vice-captain and overlooked for India's 500-run IPL seasons as captain.

Ilish finally beats Chingri again as East Bengal end 22 years of Bangal pain

After 22 years of inherited heartbreak, corporate chaos, and near-misses,

East Bengal's dramatic ISL title

triumph has revived a sleeping giant.

The moshal burns bright again;

Kolkata's red-and-gold half has finally reclaimed its soul.

LONDON. (Agency)

When a child is born in a Bengali household, one of the earliest loyalty tests that he or she needs to take is not political, not cultural, not even cinematic. It is football. Whether they will grow up eating Ilish in red-and-gold or Chingri in green-and-maroon, whether their heart will belong to East Bengal or Mohun Bagan. A grandfather still emotionally talks about PK Banerjee, a father remembers Bhaichung Bhutia carrying East Bengal on his shoulders, and now a son debates Cleiton Silva versus Dimitrios Petratos on Instagram

Reels and X threads. But for the last 22 years, that emotion has often hurt far more for East Bengal supporters.

The rivalry itself never lost its intensity, but slowly the balance of success drifted heavily towards the green-and-maroon side of the city. Mohun Bagan kept collecting league titles, ISL finals and continental nights while East Bengal fans were left surviving mostly on memories, nostalgia and endless reminders of "kobe abar champion hobe?" That is why on May 21, 2026, when the final whistle blew at Kishore Bharati Krirangan after East Bengal's dramatic 2-1 win over Inter Kashi, years of pain disappeared in seconds.

Fans flooded onto the pitch almost immediately. Oscar Bruzon and Youssef Ezzejari were lifted onto supporters' shoulders and tossed into the Kolkata night as moshals lit up again. Social media instantly became a flood of red-and-gold emotion. One East Bengal supporter uploaded a video looking at the sky saying, "Baba, amra abar champion holam" — "Father, we are champions again." His father

had passed away years ago without seeing East Bengal win another national league title after the 2003-04 National Football League



triumph under Subhash Bhowmick. Another elderly supporter, probably in his seventies, stood outside the stadium crying uncontrollably while saying, "Jibon-e shob dekhlam, kintu eta aar dekhbo bhabini" — "I have seen everything in life, but I never thought I would see this again." That is what these 22 years really were. An entire generation growing older while carrying football heartbreak almost like inherited

trauma. Kids who last saw East Bengal as champions in 2004 are now full-grown adults. Some finished school, college, jobs, marriages and even became parents before finally watching East Bengal lift another major national league title again. Indian football itself moved through entire eras during this wait, from the Bhaichung Bhutia-Mike Okoro days under the chest-thumping intensity of Subhash Bhowmick to an ISL generation raised on transfer rumours, meme pages and yearly derby meltdowns online.

Indian football itself completely changed during that period. The National Football League disappeared and the I-League arrived. Then came the chaos and glamour of the ISL era. Yet somehow, East Bengal's pain survived every single era.

Trevor Morgan's side gave supporters genuine hope during those early 2010s years with magical AFC Cup nights and aggressive football that made fans dream again. Then came the near misses in 2010-11 and 2013-14 before the particularly painful 2014-15 collapse when Mohun Bagan edged them to the title.

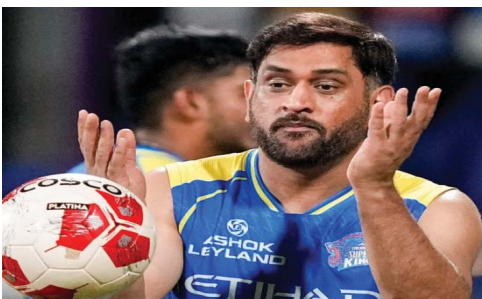
Season ends, enigma endures: CSK deliver final word on MS Dhoni's IPL future

New Delhi. (Agency)

The great theatre of Indian cricket rolled on at the Narendra Modi Stadium, but as the dust settled on Chennai Super Kings' crushing 89-run defeat to Gujarat Titans, the post-match conversation inevitably pivoted away from the scorecard. CSK were officially knocked out of the IPL 2026 playoffs race, and with their campaign brought to a grinding halt, the single most enduring question in modern sport resurfaced: What happens next to MS Dhoni? For months, the franchise had operated under a veil of intense secrecy. Dhoni did not play a single fixture this season, nor did he travel with the team for most of their away games, remaining a looming, legendary shadow over the transition era. Minutes after a dejected skipper Ruturaj Gaikwad told reporters that the world would "know next year," it was bowling coach Eric Simons who stepped into the press room to provide the most candid, insightful update yet on the enigma of No. 7. When asked point-blank about whether this was the definitive end of the road for Dhoni, Simons couldn't help but chuckle at the predictability of the

inquiry. Are you seriously asking me that question?" Simons smiled.

"Honestly, he has hit the ball so well. He had a leg injury which made it very difficult for him to run. So that's why he couldn't play. But, in terms of hitting the ball in the nets, he



is hitting it as well as I have ever seen him hit it." Simons' words shed crucial light on Dhoni's mindset: the desire to compete was fully intact, and he was actively priming himself to take the field, but his body simply refused to cooperate. To make matters worse, a fresh thumb injury put an end to any late-season cameos. Dhoni didn't even

travel to Ahmedabad for this final fixture, having already flown back to Ranchi to nurse the blow. Even earlier, during CSK's emotional lap of honour to tribute the fans at Chepauk, eagle-eyed observers noticed his thumb heavily taped.

IT WILL BE DHONI'S CALL

Yet, Simons made it clear that while physical setbacks currently dictate terms, the final decision remains entirely in the hands of the mastermind himself. "But, I keep saying this. MS will know and he will only make the decision about when he is ready," Simons explained. "If he knows it is not right, he won't play. But, if he feels it's right, he will. He will make a decision in the best interest of the team and not for himself as an individual." That selfless approach has defined Dhoni's entire career. Even in a purely dugout-bound, net-bound avatar, his value to a transitioning Chennai side remains immeasurable. "It would be great to have him playing," Simons admitted. "It has been great having him around the unit and have the opportunity to tap into all the knowledge and calmness."

After roasting GT fielding, Shubman Gill leads by example with stunning CSK display

Kolkata. (Agency)

After being highly critical of Gujarat Titans' fielding and even roasting them after their performance against KKR, Shubman Gill needed to walk the talk and set an example. He had to show his players how it was done on the field, and he did exactly that during the match against Chennai Super Kings. There were two pieces of fielding magic from Gill on the field. The first one took place in the seventh over, when he produced a stunning throw to run out Kartik Sharma, who looked like he was going to be a menace for the home team in Ahmedabad.

They can do no wrong tonight Bullseye from Captain Shubman Gill Then Gill produced a catch of the season contender with a diving effort to send the marauding Shivam Dube back to the pavilion. The match ultimately ended with GT winning by 89 runs. Gill was thrilled to see his side be more vigilant on the field and wanted the trend to continue in the playoffs.

WE ARE OUT OF WORDS!

Shubman Gill with Catch of the Season contender "Catching was much better. Hopefully we continue to do so," said Gill



at the post-match presentation.

GILL SILENCE GESTURE EXPLAINED

It was a night when the cheers were mostly for CSK than the home side. Following his catch of Dube, Gill decided to shush a section of the fans in an emotional moment

for the GT skipper. When asked about the celebration, Gill said in a game like this, the emotion was always bound to be high. "When you are playing such a high emotion game, that kind of thing can happen," said Gill.

Gill was one of the heroes with the bat for GT, scoring 64 off 37 balls as the home side posted 229 runs in the first innings. The Gujarat captain was happy with his performances so far with the bat, as he has scored 616 runs from 13 matches.

So it wasn't a surprise that he had an angry reaction when he got out, something he explained as looking at what he could have done different in the end. "Very happy with how am I am batting. When you get out, you always think of what you could have done differently, but overall, I am happy with the way I am going," said Gill.

RCB vs SRH preview: Top 2 out of grasp, SRH hope to dent RCB's confidence in Hyderabad

➡RCB vs SRH Preview: Defending champions RCB and SRH will play their final league-stage game in the IPL 2026. RCB are firmly placed at No.1 and SRH are unlikely to make it to the top 2 places due to their NRR deficit. So what's there to play for?

Hyderabad. (Agency)

Royal Challengers Bengaluru and Sunrisers Hyderabad started IPL 2026 with different pressures hanging over them, but both now find themselves exactly where they hoped to be before a ball was bowled. In the playoffs, carrying momentum, belief and the feeling that this could still become their

season. When RCB walked into the tournament as defending champions, scrutiny was inevitable. Winning a title changes everything around a franchise. Every performance is judged differently, every flaw dissected more closely. The challenge was no longer about becoming champions. It was about proving last season was not a fleeting high. For SRH, the pressure came from another direction. Over the last few years, Hyderabad had built one of the most explosive squads in the league, yet they often struggled to sustain rhythm when it mattered most. There were flashes of dominance mixed with stretches of frustration. This season carried the sense that the team finally needed to turn promise into authority. On Friday at the Rajiv Gandhi International Stadium, the two sides meet in their final league-stage fixture. What once promised to be a thrilling finish in the race for the top two has now become largely a formality, because SRH are highly unlikely



to break into those spots due to the massive net run rate gap. The situation changed after Gujarat Titans obliterated Chennai Super Kings by 89 runs a day earlier at the Narendra Modi Stadium in Ahmedabad. So, what is left to play for?

RCB HAVE FIRM GRIP ON TOP 2

RCB currently sit at the top of the table with 18 points and the best net run rate in the competition. Another victory would secure a first-place finish and hand them two chances to reach the final, an advantage every team

desperately wants at this stage of the tournament. The strongest feature of Bengaluru's campaign has been the composure with which they have handled pressure. There have been very few off days, no extended slump and hardly any visible panic during difficult moments. Rajat Patidar has captained with calm assurance, creating an environment where experienced names and younger players have thrived together. At the centre of it all has been Virat Kohli. There is something almost expected now about Kohli producing another big IPL season, but familiarity should not take away from the level he continues to maintain. His 542 runs have once again given RCB strong foundations, whether in steep run chases or on slower surfaces where patience mattered as much as aggression. Devdutt Padikkal has looked far more settled this season and has complemented Kohli beautifully at the top. Patidar has brought stability.



Tejasswi Prakash

Defends Karan Kundrra, Addresses Cheating Allegations: 'I Do Not Care...'

Tejasswi Prakash has defended Karan Kundrra. In the recent episode of Desi Bling, the actress was asked about her beau's past relationship, presumably with Anusha Dandekar. Karan and Anusha dated for over three years before parting ways in 2020, following which the former was accused of cheating on the VJ-actress. Tejasswi addressed the same on Desi Bling and said, "We all have our pasts. Somebody's past is out there in public. If he has cheated or not, which again, we don't know, because he has told me. He thought, 'I don't care if the world knows, you need to know the real thing'," as quoted by.

What Happened Between Karan And Anusha? Karan and Anusha dated for three years before they announced their breakup in 2020. They had even co-hosted the reality show MTV Love School.

In September 2021, Anusha held an 'Ask Me Anything' session on Instagram when a user asked her: "Please, I want to know the direct reason for your

break-up if you can tell it." To this, the actress replied: "We deserve more honesty, love and happiness...and it starts with self-love. So, I chose me. That's it."

Later, Karan also shared his side of the story while speaking to ETimes, "I have remained silent out of respect for the relationship and I would like to keep it that way. At this point, I am also thinking about two families. I, too, can turn around and say a lot of things, but that's not me. What she shared was her perspective."

After breakup with Anusha, Karan fell in love with Tejasswi Prakash. Their love story is not a secret. They first met while participating in the reality show Bigg Boss. During their time on the show, their chemistry quickly became one of the most talked-about aspects of the season. After the show ended, the couple confirmed that their bond continued outside the house. They began appearing together at public events, vacations and social media posts. Over time, their pairing earned a loyal fanbase, often referred to as "TejRan". Karan and Tejasswi have now been together for nearly five years. Recently, Karan also proposed to Tejasswi on Desi Bling.



Kusha Kapila Says 'Actors Are Right' To Question Influencers Getting Films 'Because Of Followers'



Kusha Kapila's shift from influencing to acting reflects a larger change in the Indian entertainment industry, where digital creators are increasingly crossing over into mainstream cinema and OTT storytelling. As certain studios continue prioritising internet-savvy audiences, influencers with built-in fan bases have become attractive casting choices.

However, Bollywood actors have often called out this practice, saying that casting a role based on followers is a disservice to the craft. Kusha Kapila reflected on this in a chat with Hindustan Times and said, "I feel actors are right to feel that if the hiring is only happening because of followers. They are right to feel that because they have studied for it. They are the ones who should be leading and fronting projects. 100%"

However, Kusha says that this argument cannot be applied to creators who are working hard to hone their skills. She said, "If a creator is taking the time out, putting in the effort, going back to school, learning, workshoping, things get different... For that matter, look at somebody like Bhuvan Bam..." content, and there is proof of concept. If you are taking out the time, and if one is really putting in the work (things are different... Take the time. It's not like you have to prove yourself in just five. An actor can come from anywhere," added Kusha. Asked if she is recognised more as an actor or a social media influencer, Kusha Kapila said, "So, many people definitely recognise me through my projects."

"I started my career with Netflix with Ghost Stories... I am on a very nicely paced journey. I feel like whenever a bigger opportunity presents itself, I want to be ready for it. I don't want to be like I'm less. I want to be like 'I am ready. I feel after Maamla Legal Hai season 2, I would be ready, and would be like 'bring it on'." Kusha shared. She continued, "It is important to pace yourself for a big opportunity rather than get it at a time where you won't be able to do justice to it. I am liking the pace of how things are going. I'm loving it. Bahut maza aa raha hai (I have a lot of fun)."

'Zor Se Sorry Bolo': Paparazzi Apologise To Salman Khan After Hospital Row, Actor Forgives Them



After Bollywood superstar Salman Khan's public display of anger both online and in real life, the paparazzi tendered an apology to the superstar at an event in the city on Wednesday. As the actor walked into the success party of 'Raja Shivaji', he was swarmed by the paparazzi, who immediately apologised for their intrusive behaviour on Tuesday. The paparazzi were heard saying, "sorry" relentlessly as the actor walked in and greeted his friends from the industry. Hearing the commotion, the actor leaned forward, and gestured the paparazzi asking what happened. As he heard their apology, Salman told them it's alright in gesture.

Earlier, the actor had called out the paparazzi after being extremely miffed for creating a ruckus during his hospital visit and invasion of privacy. While the actor expressed his angst, netizens seemed confused by the captions put up by the superstar.

Salman took to his social media account in the wee hours of Wednesday morning and expressed his utter disappointment in the behaviour of paparazzi. He wrote, "If I see any press at a hospital enjoying my pain. The press that I have stood for interacted with, took care to make sure that they also earn their bread and butter. But if they wanna make money from my losses, keep quiet, don't enjoy. bhai bhai bhai matrabhumi picture ki maaa ki aankh, pic imp hai ya life (sic)".

"Aise main sau jala doonga. Bhai k ek bhai k dukh par agli baar try kar lena mere sath. Buss try kar lena Jab bhi tumhara koi hospital mai hoga kya mai aisa react karoonga?", he added.

In his final post, Salman warned, "Saath saal ka ho gaya hoon lekin ladna nahiiin bhoola yeh yaad rakh lena, jail mein dalo ge haaa haaa".

The posts quickly grabbed attention online, with fans and celebrities flooding the comments section with support. A certain section of netizens seemed confused by the captions, and worried for the actor.



Kiara Advani

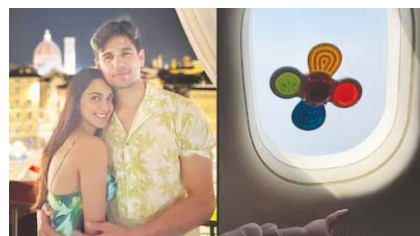
Shares In-Flight Glimpse Of Daughter Saraayah Ahead Of Vacation With Sidharth Malhotra

Kiara Advani and Sidharth Malhotra were recently spotted at Mumbai airport as they headed out for a family vacation. The celebrity couple caught the attention of fans and paparazzi with their stylish yet relaxed airport appearance. However, what truly melted hearts was Kiara's adorable glimpse of their daughter, Saraayah. Ahead of boarding the flight, Kiara shared a sweet candid moment from inside the aircraft. Taking to her Instagram stories, Kiara Advani shared a photo which shows daughter Saraayah's hand and a toy on flight's window. The actress has not written much as the caption. She has only added heart emojis. Recently, Kiara was trolled for her remark during a podcast. Kiara said that she wouldn't want her daughter to feel like she can only date one person and has to marry that same person. The actress said that she wants Saraayah to have a full life, and Kiara would support her even if her daughter didn't want to get married.

Recently, Kiara Advani said on Raj Shamani's podcast. "I would want her to see a very full life. I don't want her to feel like she has to only date one person or she has to... Like, there's no restriction of if you want to get married, get married and if you don't want to get married, don't get married..." Kiara said that everyone she dated, she thought she was going to marry them.

She said, "Life doesn't turn out like that. Thank god it didn't turn out like that because I'm very happy with who god chose as my eventual life partner (Sidharth Malhotra). But all those relations that you have in your life growing up,

they all teach you something.



NEWS BOX

Oil market risks 'red zone' by summer, IEA chief warns

LONDON. (Agency)

The world oil market risks entering a "red zone" by the upcoming summer season should there be no progress on ending the West Asia war, the head of the International Energy Agency warned Thursday.

"We may be entering the red zone (on supplies) in July or August if we don't see that there are some improvements in the (war) situation," Fatih Birol said at the Chatham House think tank in London.

Iran has effectively halted tanker traffic through the Strait of Hormuz in retaliation for US and Israeli strikes launched in late February, choking off oil and gas traffic and sending prices soaring.

While a surplus of oil in the market before the war has helped absorb the energy shock, "stocks are eroding", Birol said. He warned that it will take "a lot of time" for production and refining capacity to return to pre-war levels. Birol previously said that commercial oil stocks are falling "very fast", even with the release of strategic reserves by governments worldwide.

The IEA has coordinated the release of 426 million barrels from emergency stocks by its 32 member countries, and said this month that around 164 million barrels have already been drawn. A ceasefire on April 8 halted the war, but negotiation efforts have so far failed to yield a lasting peace agreement, weighing on the world economy.

Farmers Turn to Human Urine After Fertiliser Crunch From Iran War

world. (Agency)

After the Iran war disrupted supplies of conventional nitrogen fertilizers, the English farmer began scouring the Yorkshire countryside for substitutes to keep his crops growing. That led Mills to the poultry shed of a relative's friend, whose chicken manure is suddenly so sought after that he now has a long list of buyers. "Everyone is doing the same, looking for alternatives," said Mills, who harvests wheat, barley and oats on a farm dotted with sheep.

Farmers worldwide are under pressure. About a third of traded urea, a widely used nitrogen fertilizer, comes from the Gulf region. With the Strait of Hormuz effectively shut, prices have jumped to multi-year highs. That's forcing growers to improvise ahead of the fall planting season or risk lower yields, profit losses and disruptions to global food supply.

Some are turning to age-old solutions like manure. Others are experimenting with newer technologies. These range from waste-based inputs, including materials like ground almond shells, to microbial products designed to boost plant growth and reduce reliance on chemical fertilizers.

"The war situation is, sadly, a good thing for us," said Francois Gerard of French startup Toopi Organics, which converts human urine collected from schools and festivals into a bacteria feed that helps plants grow. Since late February, sales have jumped about a quarter, he said, with prices holding steady thanks to abundant supply. With no end in sight to rival US and Iranian blockades in Hormuz, fertilizer disruptions are expected to persist. A prolonged conflict could mean weaker harvests and higher grocery prices. The United Nations has warned that an additional 45 million people may face acute food insecurity. Because farmers plan months ahead, the effects risk rippling into yields as far out as 2027, according to the UN's Food and Agriculture Organization. The World Bank expects fertilizer prices to rise by nearly a third this year, pushing affordability to its worst level since 2022, when Russia invaded Ukraine.

A 'Band Of Brothers' Is Running Iran With Mojtaba Khamenei: Report

Tehran. (Agency)

When Ali Khamenei, Iran's supreme leader for 37 years, was assassinated in an Israeli strike on February 28, it created a vacuum at the top and changed the power corridors of Tehran. His son, Mojtaba Khamenei, was appointed his successor, but reports have suggested that the 56-year-old cleric does not wield the same level of influence as his father did. Instead, a small, elite band of men in senior positions, most of whom are current or former senior Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) commanders, are guiding decision-making in Iran, according to a New York Times (NYT) report.

"Senior Iranian officials maintain that all key matters are run by the 56-year-old heir. Decision making, however, extends beyond one man," the report said, adding that a "hardened band of brothers" whose "seminal experience was the brutal, eight-year war between Iran and Iraq that began in 1980."

ALSO READ: Iran Executes Two Men Over Armed Rebellion Charges, Links To 'Separatists'

'The Band Of Brotherhood' Founded in 1979 to protect the Islamic revolution and its leader, the Guards promoted some of these commanders to the rank of general while they were still in their late 20s or early 30s. The West's support for Iraq in the war convinced Tehran that Iran had to forge its own way, no matter the cost. After the war with Iraq was over, these commanders went on to control intelligence or security services. Experts point out that their shared backgrounds, careers and ideological outlook are the reasons why neither the war nor the collapse of the government and assassinations of around 50 top political and military leaders could paralyse Tehran. How these leaders operate and share power remains largely opaque. Some have been out of the limelight long before the war started, and now remain hidden out of fear of being targeted. But now, they have joined forces and become "a brotherhood running the country," Saeid Golkar, a Guards expert who is a political science professor at the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga, told NYT.

Ebola case confirmed in rebel-held Congo's South Kivu area

DR CONGO. (Agency)

An Ebola outbreak in the Democratic Republic of Congo has spread to eastern South Kivu province in an area under the control of the Rwanda-backed M23 militia, the group's spokesman said Thursday, heightening fears of the deadly disease's growing reach. Efforts to get a grip on the latest outbreak of the highly contagious haemorrhagic fever, which the World Health Organization has declared an international emergency, have been hampered by the DRC's long-running conflicts, including between the Congolese army and the M23. Having seized swathes of land in the mineral-rich east with Rwanda's help, the M23 has installed a parallel administration in areas under its control. But the armed group has never had to manage the response to a serious epidemic of a disease like Ebola, which has killed more than 15,000 people in Africa in the past half-century. The virus is expected to have claimed 160 lives out of nearly 671 probable cases, according to figures

published by the National Institute for Public Health (INSP) on Thursday. There are 64 confirmed Ebola cases and six confirmed deaths, INSP said. Tests "confirm a new positive case" in Kabare territory in South Kivu, M23 spokesman Lawrence Kanyuka said in a statement. Parts of South Kivu, including the provincial capital Bukavu, fell to the M23 in February 2025 after fierce clashes. The case involved a "person coming from Kisangani", a major city in the eastern Tshopo province, where no Ebola infections from the current outbreak have so far been recorded. Congolese authorities, in a statement on Thursday, reported two cases identified in South Kivu province -- one suspected case and one confirmed. Riot at hospital The outbreak's epicentre is in northeastern Ituri province, with many cases in hard-to-access areas plagued by the Congolese east's litany of armed groups and where measures to respond to the crisis have been slow to get off the ground. "We have no sanitary facilities at all, not even a handwashing

station, for 16,000 displaced people," said Desire Grodya, an official at a site for displaced people in Kigonze, on the outskirts of Bunia, Ituri's provincial capital.



"We're really crammed in here; it's total overcrowding... If the outbreak starts on the site, it will be catastrophic," he warned.

On Thursday, a brief riot erupted at the hospital in Rwampara, one of the outbreak's focal points located about 12 kilometres (seven miles) from Bunia.

Young people who "wanted to retrieve the body" of a deceased patient "entered the hospital and burned down the two isolation tents", a hospital official told AFP.

healthcare worker was also injured by stone-throwing before law enforcement intervened, the official said. The isolation tents had only just been put up at the hospital. Cases have also been recorded in North Kivu province and neighbouring Uganda, where one person has died. Split by front lines

Both North and South Kivu are split in two by the front lines dividing the Congolese army from the M23 armed group and its Rwandan allies. No vaccine or clinical treatment exists for the Bundibugyo strain of the Ebola virus responsible for the current epidemic. "Every passage who arrives here, whether at the airport entry point or elsewhere, is subject to a temperature check," said Aime Prosper, head of border hygiene at Bunia airport, in a statement. Tons of equipment have been delivered at the airport by the WHO and NGOs since Monday. In the city "we're not allowed to carry two people on the same motorcycle", Paulin Kibondo, a motorcycle taxi driver, said.

US pins hopes on mediator Pakistan in push to end Iran war

TEHRAN. (Agency)

TUS Secretary of State Marco Rubio voiced hope of progress on ending the war with Iran, as he looked to Pakistani mediators to help advance efforts to strike an agreement.

Previous comments by President Donald Trump had suggested weeks of stop-start negotiations to strike a permanent end to the war were teetering on the "borderline" between a deal and renewed attacks. "I believe the Pakistanis will be travelling to Tehran today. So hopefully that'll advance this further," Rubio told reporters on Thursday. A ceasefire on April 8 halted the war launched weeks earlier by the United States and Israel, but negotiation efforts, including historic face-to-face talks hosted in Islamabad have so far failed to yield a lasting agreement. Pakistan's interior minister Mohsin Naqvi, who is widely considered close to Pakistan's powerful army chief Asim Munir, visited Iran for the second time in a week on Wednesday. Iranian media,

including the ISNA news agency, had reported based on unnamed sources that Munir could himself visit Tehran as early as Thursday, but there was no



comment from Pakistan authorities about any travel plan for the army chief. Beijing did however, announce that Pakistan Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif will travel on Saturday to China, which has also been involved in mediation efforts to end the war. Borderline Though open warfare and strikes across the Gulf have reduced, the impasse continues to

weigh on the world economy. In April, Pakistan hosted the only direct negotiations, which Munir helped mediate, between US and Iranian officials to take place since February 28, when the war began. But the talks ultimately failed, with Tehran accusing Washington of making "excessive demands". Since then, the two sides have exchanged multiple proposals, with the threat of renewed conflict looming all along. "It's right on the borderline, believe me," Trump told reporters Wednesday. "If we don't get the right answers, it goes very quickly. We're all ready to go." He said a deal could come "very quickly" or "in a few days", but warned Tehran would have to provide "100 percent good answers". Rubio also criticised NATO allies for their refusal to help in the war against Iran. "He's not asking them to commit troops. He's not asking them to send their fighter jets in. But they refuse to do anything," he said. "We were very upset about that."

Thursday that determining the death toll in Trujillo was complicated partly because relatives of the victims have removed bodies of their loved ones. Investigators have been sent to the scene, he said. The National Police and armed forces will respond to both of the areas where attacks took place, and teams including forensic specialists and prosecutors will be formed to investigate, the Security Ministry said. Honduras has struggled with high rates of crime linked to gangs and the transnational drug trade, although its homicide rate has decreased significantly in recent years since a 2011 peak of 83 murders per 100,000 residents, according to the World Bank. International human rights organisations have criticised Honduras for its militarised approach to fighting crime, which they say has led to human rights abuses including torture.

Gunmen open fire in two separate attacks in Honduras, killing at least 25 people

TEGUCIGALPA. (Agency)

Gunmen opened fire in two separate attacks Thursday on the Honduran coast, killing at least 25 people, including six police officers, authorities said. The first incident took place at a plantation in the municipality of Trujillo in northern Honduras, where at least 19 workers were shot and killed, according to Public Prosecutor's Office spokesperson Yuri Mora. The resource-rich region has been the site of a decades-long agrarian conflict. The Inter-American Commission on Human Rights has previously issued precautionary measures to some activists in the region who have been threatened, surveilled and intimidated for their work defending the environment and land rights. The 2024 killing of environmental leader Juan López highlighted the dangers of defending

natural resources in this highly militarised area of Honduras. The Central American nation regularly ranks as one of the most dangerous for environmentalists, with five killed in 2024 and 18 the year before, according to nongovernmental organisation Global Witness. Three people were recently arrested for masterminding López's killing, providing a rare glimpse of justice in a country with high rates of impunity. In the second attack, assailants opened fire on police in the municipality of Omoa in the Cortes department near the Guatemalan border, killing six officers, including a senior officer, police said. The officers were assigned to an anti-gang mission and were attacked while traveling to Omoa from the capital, Tegucigalpa, police said. National Police spokesperson Edgardo Barahona said earlier

Thursday that determining the death toll in Trujillo was complicated partly because relatives of the victims have removed bodies of their loved ones. Investigators have been sent to the scene, he said. The National Police and armed forces will respond to both of the areas where attacks took place, and teams including forensic specialists and prosecutors will be formed to investigate, the Security Ministry said. Honduras has struggled with high rates of crime linked to gangs and the transnational drug trade, although its homicide rate has decreased significantly in recent years since a 2011 peak of 83 murders per 100,000 residents, according to the World Bank. International human rights organisations have criticised Honduras for its militarised approach to fighting crime, which they say has led to human rights abuses including torture.

Iran warns Trump against military action, says US will be forced to 'retreat and surrender'

WASHINGTON. (Agency)

Republicans struggled Thursday to find the votes to dismiss legislation that would compel President Donald Trump to withdraw from the war with Iran, delaying planned votes on the matter into June.

The House had scheduled a vote on a war powers resolution, brought by Democrats, that would rein in Trump's military campaign. But as it became clear that Republicans would not have the numbers to defeat the bill, GOP leaders declined to hold a vote on it. It was the latest sign of the slipping support in Congress for a war that Trump launched more than two months ago without congressional approval. "We had the votes without question and they knew it, and as a result they're playing a political game," said Democratic Rep. Gregory Meeks, who sponsored the bill. Republicans in the Senate are also working to ensure they have the votes to dismiss another war powers resolution that advanced to a final vote earlier this week, when four GOP senators supported the resolution and three others were absent from the vote. The actions by congressional leaders showed Republicans are struggling to maintain political backing for Trump's handling of the war. Rank-and-file Republicans are increasingly willing to defy the president over the conflict. House Republican Leader Steve Scalise told reporters that the vote was delayed to give lawmakers who were absent a chance to vote. House Speaker Mike Johnson did not answer questions from reporters as he exited the House chamber. Frustration with Iran grows on Capitol Hill

On Capitol Hill, patience with the war has worn thin as the stalemate in the Strait of Hormuz disrupts global shipping and elevates gas prices in the US. Another House war powers resolution nearly passed last week, falling on a tie vote as three Republicans voted in favor.

Meeks, the top Democrat on the House Foreign Affairs Committee, said he had the votes "locked in" this time around. "People are beginning to finally listen to the American people who don't support the war in Iran, and I think there's a growing number of Republicans who see how devastating the war has been for our country," said Democratic Rep. Adam Smith of Washington state. The lone Democrat who voted against the war powers resolution last week, Rep. Jared Golden of Maine, has said he will vote in favor of the legislation next time. In a joint statement, House Democratic leader Hakeem Jeffries and other caucus leaders said Republicans were "cowardly" to pull the vote. "Even as we prepare to recognize our nation's fallen heroes on Memorial Day, House Republicans refuse to show up and be accountable to the brave service members that have been recklessly put in harm's way," they added.

Trump says he is sending 5,000 more troops to Poland, stirring confusion about US presence in Europe

The Trump administration had earlier said it was reducing levels in Europe by about 5,000 troops, and US officials confirmed about 4,000 service members were no longer deploying to Poland.

WASHINGTON. (Agency)

President Donald Trump on Thursday said the US will send an additional 5,000 troops to Poland, stirring confusion following weeks of changing statements from Trump and his administration about reducing — not increasing — the American military footprint in Europe. The Trump administration has said it was reducing levels in Europe by about 5,000 troops, and US officials confirmed about 4,000 service members were no longer deploying to Poland. Trump's social media

announcement raises more uncertainty for European allies that have been blindsided by the changes as the administration has complained about NATO members not shouldering enough of the burden of their own defense and failing to do more to support the Iran war. "Based on the successful Election of the now President of Poland, Karol Nawrocki, who I was proud to endorse, and our relationship with him, I am pleased to announce that the United States will be sending an additional 5,000 Troops to Poland," Trump said on Truth Social. Trump and the Pentagon have said in recent weeks that they were drawing down at least 5,000 troops in Germany after Chancellor Friedrich Merz said the US was being "humiliated" by the Iranian leadership and criticized what he called a lack of strategy in the war.

Trump then told reporters at the beginning of the month that the US would be "cutting a lot further than 5,000." As of last week, some 4,000 troops from the Army's 2nd Armored Brigade Combat Team, 1st Cavalry Division were no longer en route to Poland. The Associated Press reported

that the canceled deployment was part of an effort to comply with Trump's order to



reduce the number of troops in Europe. A deployment to Germany of personnel trained to fire long-range missiles also was halted. Democratic and Republican lawmakers alike criticised the reductions as sending the wrong signal both to allies and Russian President Vladimir Putin during the 4-year-old war in Ukraine. Republican Rep. Don Bacon of Nebraska said during a congressional hearing that he spoke with Polish officials and they were "blindsided." He called the decision "reprehensible" and said it was "an embarrassment to our country what we

just did to Poland." Chief Pentagon spokesman Sean Parnell said Tuesday that it was "a temporary delay" of the deployment of US forces to Poland, which he called a "model US ally." He said it was a result of the US reducing the number of brigade combat teams assigned to Europe from four to three and indicated the Pentagon still needed to decide which troops to station where. It was not clear whether that meant the brigade would resume its deployment to Poland, if additional troops on top of that rotational deployment could be added, or whether there would still be a drawdown of US troops in Europe but from a different country. The Pentagon referred requests for comment to the White House, which did not immediately respond to messages seeking clarity. Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth and Defense Undersecretary Elbridge Colby both spoke with their Polish counterparts this week. Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk had said Wednesday that he was happy to hear "Washington's declaration that Poland will be treated as it deserves."