

Amit Shah's War On Illegal Constructions Along Border, Villagers Welcome

Amit Shah has directed authorities to enforce a 'zero tolerance' policy towards illegal constructions within 15 km of the country's borders

Jammu.(Agency)

Villagers living along the International Border in Jammu are often described as the eyes and ears of security forces guarding India's frontiers. Union Home Minister Amit Shah's directive for stringent action against illegal constructions near the International Border has been welcomed by the border villages. Residents say the move will help curb drug smuggling and activities of anti-India elements."Shah's instructions will help check illegal activities by narco-smugglers and other anti-national elements," said Suchetgarh Sarpanch Swaran Singh.

Union Home Minister Amit Shah has directed authorities to enforce a 'zero tolerance' policy towards illegal

constructions within 15 km of the country's borders and demolish all illegal structures that have come up over the years.As part of the crackdown, District Magistrates have been tasked with monitoring banking transactions, tracking fake Aadhaar cards, and probing the funding of large businesses operating in border areas.Shah has also called for multi-agency surveillance, stressing seamless coordination between the BSF, local police, and central agencies to dismantle cross-border crime and infiltration networks.Border residents, who bear the brunt of Pakistan-sponsored terrorism, say proceeds from drug smuggling are fueling many of these constructions."Many people have built houses with money from drug smuggling. These houses should also be demolished,"

said Rattan Lal, a resident of Samba.Villagers believe several of these illegal structures are used as safe houses by overground workers and those linked to narco-smuggling networks.



Full Vande Mataram rendition not mandatory, only guidelines exist: Kerala CM

Thiruvananthapuram.(Agency)

Kerala Chief Minister V D Satheesan on Friday said that rendering the national song, Vande Mataram, in full was not mandatory as there was no law enacted by the Parliament in that regard.Satheesan was responding to reporters' queries regarding Kerala Governor Rajendra Vishwanath Arlekar expressing concern over Vande Mataram not being sung in full in the state Assembly when he was present for the UDF government's policy address.Arlekar was displeased that neither was the song sung in full, it was only played by a band.



Satheesan said that the Congress and its UDF alliance work within the framework of a political ideology and is governed according to the decisions of the party's central leadership. He said that the party's central leadership has a clear stand on the issue and that is applicable to the alliance also.The CM also said that singing the Vande Mataram in full was not mandatory as there was no law enacted in that regard by the Parliament. "There are only some guidelines issued by the Parliament," he said.

Social Media Drama Deepens: Abhay Chopra Slams 'Baseless Propaganda', Says Community Being Misled by Fiction and Rumors

Mahanagar Metro Desk / Pawan Makan

Nagda. The ongoing controversy within sections of the Jain community has taken an increasingly bitter turn, with public accusations, social media campaigns, and personal attacks dominating the discourse. Prominent Nagda-based social activist Abhay Chopra has launched a scathing attack on an individual identified as Jagat, accusing him of spreading unverified allegations, sensational narratives, and misleading content that is damaging social harmony.In a strongly worded statement, Chopra alleged that certain individuals have transformed social media into a platform for personal vendettas, attention-seeking, and character assassination rather than constructive public discussion."Fantasy Stories Presented as Facts"Taking direct aim at his critics, Chopra remarked that social media is being flooded with imaginary theories and speculative claims lacking evidence, logic, or legal standing."I am a law graduate, while some people behave like they are trapped in a world of detective novels. Every day a new story appears, a new allegation is made, and a new conspiracy is invented. Facts are missing, evidence is missing, but the drama continues," Chopra



said.Accusations of Creating Chaos and ConfusionChopra alleged that repeated circulation of unverified claims has created unnecessary confusion within the Jain community. According to him, individuals with limited understanding of legal procedures are presenting themselves as experts and attempting to influence public opinion through emotional narratives rather than factual information.He further claimed that certain people have assumed the role of self-appointed moral authorities, acting as if they possess the exclusive right to judge the credibility and character of others.Legal Matters Being Exploited for Publicity?Refer-

ring to ongoing legal disputes, Chopra warned community members against drawing conclusions based on social media interpretations. He argued that preliminary legal proceedings are being deliberately exaggerated and misrepresented to generate controversy and attract public attention.According to Chopra, attempts are being made to convert sensitive community matters into social media spectacles for personal publicity and relevance.Growing Concern Over MisinformationObservers within the community have expressed concern that the increasing volume of allegations, counter-allegations, and online campaigns is deepening

divisions and distracting attention from genuine social and religious issues.Chopra concluded by urging people to verify facts before accepting accusations and to remain cautious of self-styled "social media investigators" who make serious claims without presenting credible evidence.Mahanagar Metro ViewThe controversy reflects a larger challenge facing modern society: the rapid spread of allegations through social media before facts are established. When opinion is presented as evidence and speculation is treated as truth, communities risk becoming divided by misinformation rather than united by facts.

CBI chief briefs house panel on NEET-UG paper leak probe

CBI chief briefs Rajya Sabha committee on investigation progress as officials outline measures to ensure transparency and prevent malpractice in the June 21 re-test.

New Delhi.(Agency)

Amid the ongoing controversy over the NEET-UG paper leak, the Rajya Sabha Parliamentary Committee on Government Assurances met senior officials on Friday to review the investigation and preparations for the June 21 re-examination. CBI Director Praveen Sood briefed the panel on the progress of the probe, arrests made, and efforts to apprehend the remaining accused.

Higher Education Secretary Vineet Joshi, NTA Director General Abhishek Singh, and officials from the National Medical Commission also attended the meeting. Officials informed the committee about steps being taken to ensure transparency and prevent malpractice during the re-exam.

The panel directed authorities to ensure that the medical admissions seat matrix and counselling schedule remain unaffected. The seat matrix determines the distribution of undergraduate and super-specialty medical seats across the country and categorises them according to quotas and student classifications.



The committee had summoned the officials after earlier assurances given in Parliament regarding the NTA's examination conduct. Officials also discussed measures recommended by an expert committee formed to improve the fairness and security of examinations nationwide.

Suggestions discussed

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Siddaramaiah's dethroning will hit Rahul Gandhi. He must have known the risk

The Congress high command might have resolved the Karnataka deadlock by asking Siddaramaiah to step down, but the move could backfire for it in the 2028 Assembly polls. The unseating of the veteran OBC leader could also blunt Rahul Gandhi's

New Delhi.(Agency)

Has the Congress brass, in its bid to fight a dustbin fire, opened itself to leaping flames? That could indeed be the case. After years of posturing between outgoing Chief Minister Siddaramaiah and his likely successor DK Shivakumar, the Congress leadership finally brokered a transition formula in Karnataka on Tuesday. Siddaramaiah resigned on Thursday. But the unseating of the veteran OBC leader hasn't gone down well with a big section of supporters in Karnataka, and the messaging might come back to bite the Congress and its leader Rahul Gandhi. And Rahul Gandhi might have been well aware of the risks.

appear to have been resolved, the decision to make Siddaramaiah step aside has triggered discontent among sections of the Congress in Karnataka, with protesters burning posters of Rahul Gandhi. Though the protest was against the high command's decision, Rahul Gandhi became the face of the decision to remove Siddaramaiah, who is viewed as the party's strongest mass leader in the state.The move to ask Siddaramaiah to step aside in favour of DK Shivakumar goes against the image Rahul Gandhi has cultivated over the years, and the political planks he has tried to build. He has batted for a pan-India caste census, projecting himself



Siddaramaiah is an OBC leader who has built the AHINDA social coalition of backward communities, while DK Shivakumar or DKS is from the influential Vokkaliga community.

Karnataka was the only one headed by a leader from the backward community. This positioning was crucial for Rahul Gandhi as he has been trying to consolidate the support of Dalits, minorities, and backward-class voters, which is necessary for him at the national level against the BJP. He was using the Mandal against BJP's kamandal. With Siddaramaiah stepping down, there is no OBC, or minority, or Dalit face heading any government in any of the Congress-ruled states. The Assembly election in Karnataka is due by May 2028. It is one of the southern states where the BJP is a major force and has been

News box

Why repeated fires in condos? Gzb to hold review meet

GURGAON.(Agency)

After two major fires broke out in Indirapuram within a month, the district administration has sought reports from Ghaziabad Development Authority, discom and fire department. A meeting will be held on June 2 to review these reports, officials said on Friday.

The recent fire incidents in Ghaziabad's Indirapuram — Gaur Green Avenue and Gaur Biz Business Park — have raised serious concerns over fire safety and emergency preparedness in high-rise residential and commercial complexes. On April 29, a fire broke out in a flat in Tower D of Gaur Green Avenue and ripped through five floors, damaging at least 13 apartments. The residents were safely evacuated and no casualties were reported though property of significant value was destroyed. Another fire broke out in the meter room located in the basement of Gaur Biz Business Park and spread through electrical wiring and panelling on Wednesday. The blaze also impacted nearby structures, including parts of Gaur Green Avenue. No injuries were reported in this case as well. Officials told TOI that a committee headed by the GDA secretary had been constituted on April 30 to review safety measures, investigate the causes of the fire, assess whether adequate safeguards are in place to prevent such incidents and evaluate the district's preparedness to handle emergencies. "The report has been submitted this week and action will be taken by the district magistrate," an official said. DM Ravindra Kumar Mandar has sought a report from the discom to determine whether residential complexes in the city are operating within their sanctioned power load. Another report has been sought from GDA to verify whether the original map approved by the Authority is still being followed. In case any additional or illegal construction is found, it will be removed. The administration has also asked the fire department to submit a detailed report regarding fire NOCs issued to the residential societies and the overall preparedness of the premises to handle emergency situations. Officials have been asked to verify whether all fire safety systems and equipment are functional and properly maintained. The report will also assess whether the society is complying with the fire safety norms and if adequate measures are in place to prevent such incidents.

Truck rams bike, MBA student on way home after exam dies in Noida

Noida.(Agency)

Two women died and two men were injured in separate road accidents in Gautam Budh Nagar.

Police arrested a driver — in the first incident — after a college student died when a truck collided with the motorcycle she was riding on near LG roundabout in Greater Noida on Thursday. Police said the accident took place around 2am. Chandan Barnwal and Chandni Kumari Gupta were returning after appearing for an MBA second-semester examination. Chandni, a student of GL Bajaj Institute, was riding pillion. Chandni, daughter of late Raju Prasad Gupta, died on the spot due to severe injuries, while Chandan suffered injuries and was admitted to Kailash Hospital for treatment. Police said the motorcycle was hit by the truck bearing registration number HR55AT5670. Officials said the driver — Upendra Prasad Yadav, a resident of Nawada district in Bihar — has been taken into custody.

In another incident, which took place in the Sector 127 underpass area in Noida, a woman died after a car allegedly rammed a motorcycle from behind. The accident took place on May 19, but an FIR was registered on Thursday following a complaint by the injured biker. According to police, Vishal, a resident of Bheemathikri village in Amroha who currently lives in Sector 44, was travelling with his maternal aunt Reena on a motorcycle towards Sector 128 when the accident occurred. The complainant alleged that the car driver was driving rashly and at high speed.

Girl firm on statements, man from Rajasthan gets 20 years jail for sexual assault

Noida. Agency)

A special Pcoso court in Noida has sentenced a Rajasthan man to 20 years in prison and imposed a cumulative fine of Rs 70,000 for sexually assaulting a minor girl. The 10-year-old case was proved in court on the sole testimony of the survivor, who remained consistent in her statements. The survivor's father filed a complaint at the Jewar police station on July 27, 2016. He told the police that his daughter had left for her sewing class that evening but did not return. However, a neighbour had seen the 17-year-old girl with the man from Rajasthan, Dharendra, and his landlord's son. Police registered a case against them under IPC sections 363 (kidnapping) and 366 (kidnapping, abducting or inducing woman to compel her into marriage). They rescued the girl within a week and arrested the men. The police later filed a chargesheet against Dharendra under sections 363, 366 and 376D (gang rape) IPC with Section 5/6 Pcoso Act on Jan 16, 2017. However, since the landlord's son was a minor, his case was transferred to a juvenile justice board. The court framed charges against Dharendra on Sept 15, 2017.

The survivor said on July 25, 2016, her sewing classes were called off and she was on her way back home. While she was waiting for a bus, Dharendra and his landlord's son offered her a lift home in a white van. Instead of dropping her, they took her forcibly to Bharatpur, Rajasthan, threatening her with a knife and raped her. The prosecution presented seven witnesses. The defence argued that it did not present any independent witness and there was no medical report on record to prove sexual assault. Special public prosecutor JP Bhati countered that in cases of rape and aggravated penetrative sexual assault, corroboration of the fact by any other witness is rare because such offences are done in private and away from the viewing of others.

The court agreed that there are no reasons to disbelieve the girl's version. "Her statement proves rape and aggravated penetrative sexual assault but presumption also suggests that she would have been sexually assaulted by the accused," said additional sessions judge Abhishek Pandey. "So, Section 29 of Pcoso Act is relevant, which says that it shall be presumed that the charged person has committed the offences and the defence has failed to prove otherwise." He declared the accused guilty of kidnapping and gang rape of the minor.

Pipeline ready, 23 Gurgaon sectors likely to get water supply boost

GURGAON.(Agency)

GMDA has started trial runs of an 18-km pipeline, which runs from Chandu Budhera water treatment plant to the Sector 72 boosting station, laid to improve drinking water supply across new sectors along the Southern Peripheral Road. The authority is aiming to finish trials by the end of June. At present, new sectors depend on the Sector 51 boosting station, which is unable to meet peak demand, forcing several residential societies to rely on private water tankers.

Around 10 km of the pipeline has been tested, while the remaining stretch will be tested in phases. Once operational, the boosting station in Sector 72 is expected to ensure adequate water supply to sectors 58 to 80, many of which experience recurring shortages.

During trials, leakages were detected at two locations near Sector 88, resulting



in subsidence on a newly constructed service road. The damaged portions were repaired immediately, officials said.

The project, estimated to cost Rs 63 crore and spread over 4 acres, has faced repeated delays since its inception. The foundation for the 240 MLD station in

Sector 72 was laid in June 2019, with completion initially targeted within nine months. However, work slowed during the Covid-19 pandemic and was further impacted by annual construction bans across NCR.

While the construction of the station was completed in 2022, the second phase,

involving installation of machinery, began in Feb that year with a 12-month deadline.

Progress was again hit due to the unavailability of land for a 500-metre stretch required for laying inlet and outlet pipelines between Chandu Budhera and the boosting station.

To work around this, GMDA revised the alignment and laid around 650 metres of pipeline between Fazilpur Road and Sector 71.

The project also faced a fresh hurdle when NHAI halted pipeline work beneath the Dwarka Expressway after cavities were detected along the stretch, stalling work for nearly two months. The work was allowed to resume in Dec after clearance from the authority. A total of 985-metre pipeline was laid between Chandu Budhera WTP and the boosting station in Sector 72, which was only completed last month.

SIR in Haryana from June 5, BLOs will knock on door from June 15

Gurgaon.(Agency)

The Election Commission's special intensive revision (SIR) of electoral rolls is set to begin in Haryana from June 5, kicking off a tightly scheduled exercise that will decide who makes it to the voter list ahead of the next assembly polls. In the city, the field process will start on June 15, when booth level officers (BLOs) will begin door-to-door verification, update voter details and photographs, and collect signed enumeration forms.

The first phase, from June 5 to 14, will focus on training BLOs, electoral registration officers and booth level agents of political parties. After that, BLOs will fan out across the city for household verification. Gurgaon district has around 15.5 lakh registered voters. Officials said BLOs will visit every household up to three times. Voters, they said, must be ready with documents, watch the dates closely, and respond in time if any detail is missing or wrong. District election officer Uttam Singh said the three-visit rule will ensure genuine voters are not left out. "If a voter is not found at the address on all three occasions, the BLO will leave the form behind so it can be filled and submitted on time. Timeline is sacrosanct. If the voter is away during the survey, any adult family member can sign and submit the enumeration form," he added. The revision is significant because Haryana last carried out an SIR in 2002. The exercise, officials said, is aimed at ensuring that no eligible citizen is left out and no ineligible person is included. "A comprehensive campaign will be conducted under SIR 2026 so that the voter list is accurate and inclusive," Singh said. The paperwork required will depend on the voter's date of birth. Those born before July 1, 1987, must submit one valid personal document. Those born between July 1, 1987, and Dec 2, 2004, must provide one personal document and one document of either parent. Applicants born after Dec 2, 2004, must submit one personal document and one document each of both parents. The Election Commission has notified a list of 20 acceptable documents. Any one from the prescribed category will suffice.

Walls give way in storm, 2 boys taking shelter die

Gurgaon.(Agency)

A violent dust storm that ripped through south Haryana on Thursday evening left two boys dead in Nuh after walls they had turned to for cover gave way under fierce winds.

In Tapkan village, a group of four children ran towards a school boundary wall as the weather worsened, only for it to collapse on them. Hours later, in Chandeni village, another boy died when the wall of his house came down during the same storm.

The first tragedy unfolded near govt senior secondary school in Tapkan. A group of children had been playing in a field next to the campus when the storm gathered force. As the winds intensified, they moved towards the school's boundary wall for brief shelter. Within moments, a portion of the wall facing the playground collapsed, burying them under debris.

Villagers rushed in and pulled the children out. Mohammad Ayan (15) died before he

could be taken to hospital. Aashiq (13), Kamil (15), and Sufiyan (9), Aryan's brother, were injured and taken to Nalhar Medical College.

The school principal said the wall had shown no visible signs of weakness. "The boundary wall was fine and had been built under a panchayat plan before my tenure. The storm was extremely severe and the wind pressure unusually high. This was a natural disaster. Nearby infrastructure, including a water-supply transformer, also collapsed, and tree branches were broken," the principal said.

He added that children should remain indoors during such weather. "This is my personal opinion," he clarified.

In the second incident, Alshaf (9) died in Chandeni village after a wall of his house collapsed during the storm. Initial information suggested construction work was underway at the house when strong winds brought the structure down. He died

on the spot.

Police reached both sites and began inquiries to determine whether negligence or poor construction contributed to the collapses. No FIR had been registered till Friday. If a case is filed, it is likely to invoke charges such as causing death by negligence and causing hurt by an act endangering life or personal safety, officials said.

The storm also triggered a near-miss near Chillar village bus stop on Pataudi-Rewari highway. An iron reinforcement bar fell from an under-construction flyover onto a car parked below, punching through the vehicle and tearing into the front passenger seat. No one was sitting inside.

The NHAI official said preliminary findings suggested a temporary shelter put up by workers was dislodged by high winds, and a rod tied to it was blown onto the road.

Leaking walls, dirty toilets: Noida's community centres need a relook

Noida.(Agency)

Community centres in the city were built as sectoral amenities about three decades ago. In the late '80s and '90s, almost every other wedding, birthday party and other occasion was held at one of these centres. But now, they are fraying. Older facilities in sectors 11, 12, 19, 40, 44, 55 and 71 show signs of neglect: peeling plaster, seepage-stained walls, broken toilets and deferred maintenance. But even centres delivered within the past decade in sectors 51, 116 and 122 lack basic infrastructure, with some lacking kitchens or parking. Across the board, most community centres lack firefighting systems or rainwater harvesting measures. RWAs across the city have pointed out that more than two dozen community centres are in shambles and they have become unsafe for hosting large gatherings. "Several occasions, including weddings, birthday parties and engagements, are held in these community centres. During such functions, around 200 to 500 people gather. From the fire safety point of view,

these centres are not safe at all," said senior vice-president of the District Development RWA Sanjeev Kumar.

In Sector 11, one of Noida's earliest residential sectors, residents said the community centre has remained



incomplete despite repeated requests to Noida Authority. RWA president Anup Gupta said portions of the building still have tin sheds instead of RCC roofing. "Frequent thefts are reported in the sector, which is open from all sides and has no gates. The sector is situated at the border of Delhi, near Kondli," he said.

He also pointed to unusable toilets, seepage, lack of kitchen facilities and the absence of firefighting systems. "We

have made several petitions to the Authority, but there has been no redress. Tenders were issued for repairs and ceiling works nearly a decade ago, however, they were never acted upon," Gupta added. The sector is densely populated with about 20,000 inhabitants. Neighbouring Sector 12 presents a similar picture. Residents described the centre as poorly maintained, with peeling plaster, broken flooring, rusted gates and garbage littered across the premises. RWA president Tarsem Chandra said anti-social activities were frequently reported there. "No one uses the community centre in our sector. Its condition is not conducive to holding functions or weddings," he said. The venue is overgrown with bushes and infested with rats. "More and more people are forced to choose private banquet halls. We had written to the GB Nagar MP and MLA, but there has been no redress." Chandra claimed that the community centre has become an 'eyesore', with stray cattle wandering in the abandoned building.

Govt plans 5-hectare plantation drive, but where's the land, ask experts

Gurgaon.(Agency)

In a shift in its annual afforestation strategy, Haryana govt has asked all districts to identify contiguous land parcels of at least five hectares for plantation during the monsoon.

The move marks a departure from the earlier practice of carrying out plantations across multiple smaller, scattered sites. Officials said the new approach is aimed at creating larger green blocks that are easier to monitor, protect and maintain. Forest officials have been asked to identify suitable sites ahead of the plantation season.

The decision was taken in a meeting between ACS (environment) Sudhir Rajpal and the state forest department. "The decision was communicated and districts have been asked to follow the guidelines while preparing their plantation plans," said a senior forest department official. It was discussed in the meeting that since smaller parcels are difficult to monitor, forest department will only carry out plantation over 5ha, even as local bodies will take care of the small

patches.

The directive, however, has raised concerns among forestry experts, especially in Gurgaon and Faridabad,



where large vacant land parcels are scarce because of rapid urbanisation and the Aravali landscape.

"Land availability in Aravali districts is a major concern. In the Aravali hills and foothills, plantation has already happened over the years. What is needed now is protection and rejuvenation of existing forests. This move is not practical for these districts," said MD Sinha, former chief

conservator of forests, south Haryana. Officials familiar with the exercise said that while large land parcels may be available in some districts of north and west Haryana, identifying contiguous stretches of five hectares in highly urbanised districts could prove difficult.

"Plantation planning has to be based on land availability. If a panchayat has two acres, or a school, waterworks or roadside stretch can accommodate trees, plantation should happen there. In the past, afforestation on smaller available parcels collectively contributed significantly to green cover. Insisting on a minimum five-hectare patch may restrict plantation opportunities rather than expand them," said RP Balwan, also a former chief conservator of forests in south Haryana.

Beyond the logistics, experts also questioned whether fresh plantations should be the primary focus at all in ecologically sensitive parts of the Aravalis, where invasive species and forest degradation pose a more urgent

threat.

"Removal of lantana and subabul should be the focus, especially in Faridabad. These invasive species are spreading like slow poison and affecting native biodiversity. Restoring existing forests will yield better ecological outcomes than simply planting more saplings," said forest analyst Chetan Agarwal.

The concerns arrive against a backdrop of sustained pressure on Haryana's green cover.

The state already has one of the lowest forest covers in the country at around 3.5%, with much of it existing as narrow strip forests along roads, highways, canals, railway lines and field bunds. Data from the Union environment ministry shows that more than 1,150 hectares of forest land were diverted for over 1,280 projects in Haryana between April 2021 and Oct 2025. Forest cover declined by 14 sqkm between 2021 and 2023 alone.

Haryana's Forest Policy had set an ambitious target of raising tree cover to 20% by 2020 — a goal that remains unmet. Gurgaon, despite a tree cover of 12.9% of its geographical area, continues to rank among the country's most polluted cities.

BMC's tree committee clears proposal to fell, transplant 1992 trees for coastal road

The proposed second phase of the coastal road will connect Versova with Bhayander in the Mumbai Metropolitan Region (MMR) and has been divided into six different packages.

Mumbai. (Agency)

The Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation's (BMC) tree committee on Friday (May 29) cleared a proposal that would allow cutting and transplanting of 1,992 trees to make way for the Mumbai coastal project. The proposal doesn't include the additional 6,000 mangroves that will be cut for this project. The BMC secured permission to cut the mangroves from the Bombay High Court (HC) and the state forest department last year. Meanwhile, of the 1992 trees that will be chopped by the tree committee, 726 will be cut, while 1,266 will be transplanted at a land parcel in Powai. Of the 1992 trees affected, 815 are in

Malad, 323 are in Goregaon, 321 will be in Andheri West and Versova region.

Officials said that the proposal for cutting trees for the coastal road project is being tabled on in two phases, and on Friday, the first phase was cleared.

"The proposal is being tabled in a phased manner since we have to maintain the ratio of compensatory plantation as well. For instance, for cutting and transplanting these 1992 trees we will be planting 20,330 trees as compensation in Panvel at the Raigad district. So we sent the proposal to the tree committee only after we had acquired the land parcel for planting these many trees," an official privy to the project told the Indian

Express. Furthermore, the official also stated that the compensatory plantation will be carried out by the state government's forest development corporation (FDC) who will be responsible for taking care of the saplings and trees for a period of seven years.

"The proposal for cutting the trees in the next phase will be sent to the committee only after we find a land parcel," the official added.

The proposed second phase of the coastal road will connect Versova with Bhayander in the Mumbai Metropolitan Region (MMR) and has been divided into



six different packages. Package A will cover 4.5 km between Versova and Bangur Nagar (Goregaon), package B will cover 1.66 km between Bangur Nagar and Mindspace (Malad). The packages C and D will include twin

tunnels – 3.9 km long – connecting mindspace at Malad with Charkop in Kandivali. Package E will be 3.78 km, connecting Charkop with Gorai and the final package F will be 3.69 km will connect Gorai with Dahisar.

Pegged at Rs 25,000 crore, the phase 2 of Mumbai coastal road will be a 25 KM-long high speed corridor comprising underground tunnels, cable-stayed bridges and vehicular interchanges. The alignment of the road has been planned in such a way that it will traverse through mangrove patches, creeks and forest zones. As a result, a significant proportion of green cover is set to be affected.

Short news

Andhra Chambers president writes to SCoR seeking introduction of new trains

VIJAYAWADA. (Agency)

Andhra Pradesh Chambers of Commerce and Industry Federation (AP Chambers) president Potluri Bhaskara Rao submitted a representation to Sandip Mathur on assuming charge as the General Manager of the newly formed South Coast Railway (SCoR) Zone, stating that the commencement of SCoR operations from June 1, 2026 marks a historic milestone and fulfils the long-standing aspirations of AP people.

He noted that the railway zone was also an important commitment under the Andhra Pradesh Reorganisation Act. AP Chambers observed that despite Vijayawada and Visakhapatnam divisions being among the highest revenue-generating divisions in Indian Railways, Andhra Pradesh continues to remain inadequately served in railway connectivity, infrastructure development, and train allocations.

AP Chambers further stated that important divisions such as Guntur and Guntakal also require enhanced connectivity and infrastructure support to meet growing passenger and industrial demands. It urged the SCoR to introduce additional originating trains from Vijayawada to major destinations, including Delhi, Mumbai, Kolkata, Cochin, Ahmedabad, Pune and other important cities considering the increasing travel demand from AP.

Andhra likely to witness above-normal heatwave days, higher temp in June

VISAKHAPATNAM. (Agency)

Andhra Pradesh is likely to experience above-normal heatwave days and higher-than-normal maximum temperatures during June 2026, according to the seasonal forecasts issued by the India Meteorological Department (IMD).

The southwest monsoon season (June to September) is likely to remain below normal in the State along with others in the South Peninsular India, with rainfall projected at less than 94 per cent of the Long Period Average (LPA).

During the upcoming southwest monsoon season, several districts in Andhra Pradesh are expected to receive normal rainfall, including Srikakulam, Parvathipuram Manyam, Vizianagaram, Visakhapatnam, Anakapalle, Alluri Sitarama Raju, BR Ambedkar Konaseema, East Godavari, Krishna and Kakinada. Deficit rainfall is likely in Polavaram, Eluru and West Godavari districts, while Bapatla, Guntur, Palnadu and Prakasam may receive above-normal rainfall.

In Rayalaseema region, parts of Annamayya and Anantapur are likely to record normal rainfall, while the remaining districts may experience deficit rainfall.

Scientists at the Cyclone Warning Centre in Visakhapatnam noted that rainfall variation may fluctuate by around 4 per cent on either side. "Overall, nearly 60 per cent of the State is expected to receive normal rainfall, while around 40 per cent may witness deficit rainfall during the monsoon season," the experts stated. The IMD cautioned that prolonged heatwave conditions could significantly impact public health, water availability, power consumption and essential services.

Gujarat: Rajkot man arrested 120 km away near toll plaza hours after allegedly hammering wife to death

Ahmedabad. (Agency)

A man allegedly attacked his wife on the head with a hammer at their residence in Rajkot on Friday, leading to her death, police said. The crime is likely a fallout of marital strife over the accused suspecting his wife of having a purported extramarital affair, police said.

Police identified the victim as Shilpa.

The body was found at the residence and a hammer allegedly used in the crime was also recovered. The accused, Altaf alias Batuk Jafar Lalani, fled the city after the crime, Inspector C N Dave of Gandhigram-2 (University) police station in Rajkot city said.

However, hours later, on Friday evening, the Detection of Crime Branch (DCB) of Rajkot city police managed to apprehend



Lalani, 52, from near the Vanthali toll plaza in Junagadh district, which is over 126 km from Rajkot.

The FIR in the case, filed on the basis of a complaint by a niece of the deceased, alleged that Lalani returned home from his shop around 9:15 am on Friday and had an argument with his wife over her purported extramarital relationship. The niece

managed to calm them down.

The FIR stated that a while later, Lalani stepped out of the house and returned with a cloth bag. He then asked the niece to go about her business but she told him that since Shilpa wanted to go to her own parents' home in Porbandar, she would drop Shilpa at the bus stand and then go to work. Lalani then snatched the phones of both women and left the house.

He soon returned and called Shilpa.

When Shilpa and her niece went to the living room, Lalani allegedly took out a hammer from the cloth bag he had earlier brought.

The niece managed to run out of the house to call the police. However, she heard Shilpa raising an alarm and rushed back to the flat. There, she saw her aunt lying in a puddle of blood.

Bareilly BEO sparks row with fodder collection order to school teachers, later clarifies it's 'voluntary'

Lucknow. (Agency)

The Nawabganj Block Education Officer (BEO) in Uttar Pradesh's Bareilly district triggered a controversy after he issued an order to government primary school principals and teachers for fodder collection as part of an initiative for destitute cattle.

In a letter issued on May 22, two days after summer vacations started in schools, BEO Satyadev said it was mandatory for every school to contribute 46-kg fodder and warned of departmental action in case of non-compliance.

But when teachers reacted sharply to the move, a clarification letter dated May 25 stated the fodder donation drive was voluntary and that there would be "no pressure of any kind" on teachers or school staff. Basic Shiksha Adhikari



(BSA) Vineeta on Friday said Satyadev was relieved of the Nawabganj BEO's charge and had been attached with the district headquarters and asked officials to use a "restrained language" in their communications.

The teachers' associations said the issue was not about the initiative itself, but about them being assigned responsibilities beyond academic work. Desh Bandhu Gangwar, the head teacher of

a primary school in Bhuta block, questioned why teachers were being roped in for the exercise. "Schools are already functioning with limited staff. Teachers are engaged in census work and several other duties. Now they are being asked to arrange fodder collection as well," he said.

Gangwar also raised practical concerns regarding the arrangement and transportation of fodder. "One quintal means several sacks.

Who will buy it, transport it and deposit it?" he said. Schools had been told to make their own arrangements for transport and collection, he said. Referring to the May 22 letter, Gangwar said schools in the block had initially been instructed to deposit the fodder at the veterinary officer's office.

After Delhi Gymkhana row, Maharashtra moves to tighten government's grip on Mumbai's 16 clubs on public land

Physical inspections of all 16 clubs are done, office-bearers were summoned for one-on-one meetings Friday; and higher lease fees and transparent memberships are on the table.

Mumbai. (Agency)

A week after the Union Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs' Land and Development Office (L&DO) asked the century-old Delhi Gymkhana Club to vacate its leased premises on Safdarjung Road, the Maharashtra government has initiated moves to draft a policy aimed at making land parcels occupied by Mumbai's gymkhanas more accessible to the public.

Government sources told The Indian Express that the exercise is also intended to ensure greater government control over these land parcels.

The state's action comes close on the heels of the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation's (BMC) 2024 takeover of a large portion of the Mahalaxmi Racecourse



to create a public park. The move follows a government resolution (GR) issued in February this year. According to the resolution, the state revenue and forest department has proposed setting up a study group to review existing policies governing gymkhanas and clubs across Maharashtra. "In Mumbai as well as several

other districts in the state, government owned lands have been allotted to Gymkhanas on lease basis at a subsidised rate. To ensure that the functioning of the Gymkhanas become more inclusive in the future and to also ensure that these lands can also benefit the common public going forward, a study group is being appointed to review the existing policies of gymkhanas and clubs and to make necessary changes wherever required," the GR stated.

"In Mumbai as well as several other districts in the state, government owned lands have been allotted to Gymkhanas on lease basis at a subsidised rate. To ensure that the functioning of the Gymkhanas become more inclusive in the future and to also ensure that these lands can also benefit the

common public going forward, a study group is being appointed to review the existing policies of gymkhanas and clubs and to make necessary changes wherever required," the GR stated. The document added that the proposed policy amendments would also seek to make club memberships more transparent and re-evaluate the existing revenue model.

In space-starved Mumbai, where public open spaces remain scarce, gymkhanas and clubs occupy a significant share of the city's green cover.

According to a report by the Observer Research Foundation (ORF), gymkhanas and VIP clubs occupy 664 acres — nearly one-fifth of Mumbai's total 3,780 acres of open space. The report noted that Mumbai's have access to just 1.28 square metres of open space per capita.

Don't turn RBI into govt's cash cow

A falling rupee is usually treated as a macroeconomic problem. It raises the cost of imports, worsens inflationary pressures, unsettles investors and dents national pride. But India's recent experience has produced a curious paradox. The same rupee weakness that creates external stress has also produced a fiscal bonanza for the Union government. The Reserve Bank of India's defence of the rupee — by selling dollars from its reserves — has yielded large realised profits, which are then transferred to the Centre as surplus. The RBI is thus not merely managing the currency. It is increasingly becoming a fiscal stabiliser, almost a treasurer to the government. This deserves more scrutiny.

The RBI Central Board has now approved a record surplus transfer of Rs 2,86,588 crore to the Union government for FY2025-26. This is higher than the previous record of Rs 2,68,590 crore in FY2024-25, Rs 2,10,874 crore in FY2023-24 and Rs 87,416 crore in FY2022-23. The latest transfer is reportedly backed by robust RBI earnings, including gains from large dollar sales to support the rupee and higher income on foreign assets.

Nearly Rs 2.9 lakh crore is not a rounding-off item. It is close to 8% of the Centre's revenue receipts. It gives the government fiscal breathing space without raising taxes, cutting expenditure or borrowing more from the market. At a time of elevated crude prices, geopolitical uncertainty and pressure on the fiscal deficit, this is a very useful cushion. But that is exactly why it is worrying. A cushion can quietly become a habit.

The arithmetic is simple. The RBI accumulated dollars over many years when the rupee was much stronger. When it sells those dollars today at a weaker exchange rate, it books a rupee gain. This is not merely a paper gain from revaluing foreign exchange reserves. It is a realised gain from actual dollar sales. Under the economic capital framework, unrealised revaluation gains on gold or foreign exchange are not meant to be distributed. But realised income from forex operations can flow into the RBI's income and then into its surplus transfer to the government.

This means rupee weakness has produced a fiscal windfall. That is an uncomfortable sentence, but it captures the paradox. The same depreciation that hurts importers, raises the cost of oil, reduces India's dollar GDP and unsettles foreign investors also boosts RBI profits when dollars are sold. This matters for another reason. If India's nominal GDP grows by 10% in rupee terms, but the rupee depreciates by more than 10% against the dollar, then India's GDP in dollar terms barely grows. This is not merely statistical trivia. Global rankings, investor perceptions and geopolitical heft are measured in dollars. A country can grow fast domestically and yet appear stagnant internationally if currency depreciation wipes out the gain. Persistent rupee weakness can therefore become a strategic concern. But that does not mean the rupee must be defended at any cost. India is a current account deficit economy. It imports much more oil, gold, electronics and critical inputs than it exports. It also has a higher inflation rate than the US over the medium term. Some depreciation of the rupee is natural. It can even be desirable. A weaker currency acts as a shock absorber. It protects export competitiveness, discourages non-essential imports and prevents the economy from pretending that external imbalances do not exist.

The danger is not depreciation itself. The danger is disorderly depreciation. That is where the RBI rightly intervenes: to reduce volatility, prevent panic and anchor expectations. But defending a level is different from managing volatility. If the market believes that the RBI will always protect a particular exchange rate, then large importers and dollar borrowers may under-hedge their exposures. An artificially strong rupee subsidises imports, penalises exports and delays adjustment. The eventual correction then becomes more painful.

Rethinking urban mobility: The case for walkable cities

Building safe streets is necessary for ensuring equitable rights to all citizens

As the nation undertakes a long-awaited Census, can we utilise the decadal exercise for rethinking urban mobility? Census 2011 was the first to gather information on the mode of travel used by workers to reach their workplace. Despite limitations, that data provides the only nationally representative snapshot of commuting patterns in India. The findings are revealing. A majority of Indian workers (58.1% in rural areas and 48.9% in urban ones) commute either on foot or by bicycle, and more than 20% rely on public transport (buses/trains) for their daily commute. By contrast, the share of motorised two-wheelers in urban districts is around 20%, and the share of cars, jeeps or vans remains below 5%. Taken together, this suggests that nearly 70% of Indian workers walk, cycle or use public transport to reach their workplaces. While updated data from the forthcoming census will help refine this understanding, the available evidence offers a compelling insight that most Indians depend on forms of mobility which receive little policy priority and investment. The case for strengthening pedestrian infrastructure is closely tied to the issues of access and equity. According to available data, around 22.53 crore driving licences have been issued to citizens in India, of which only 6% are women. These numbers highlight a major barrier to private mobility. For most citizens, the option of driving a private vehicle doesn't exist. Apart from being a means of transportation, mobility determines access to employment, education, markets, healthcare and leisure. Expanding equitable mobility options therefore directly contributes to expanding economic and social opportunities. Pedestrian infrastructure is the essential "first and last mile" of public transport systems. Without safe and continuous footpaths, public transport becomes difficult to access. At the same time, walking itself is a legitimate and independent mode of transport. Millions walk to access workplaces, markets, schools and to reach transit stations to reach their daily destinations. Yet in many Indian cities, walking is unsafe, uncomfortable and undignified due to the absence of footpaths or the presence of broken ones, encroachments, poor lighting and lack of maintenance. The State has an important role in ensuring that those without access to private transport, whether due to economic constraints, gender barriers or other social factors, are provided safe, reliable and affordable mobility alternatives, of which walking is an important one.

Current scenario

Despite the centrality of walking in India's mobility landscape, investment in pedestrian infrastructure remains poorly documented and neglected. Analysing

public spending on pedestrian and cycling infrastructure reveals a striking gap. Apart from scattered references in reports of NITI Aayog, projects undertaken under the Smart Cities Mission and isolated initiatives by some urban local bodies, comprehensive national statistics on investment in pedestrian infrastructure are scarce.

Pedestrian infrastructure is largely governed by the Indian Roads Congress guidelines and various urban street design manuals, which are not legally binding. Although public works departments and municipalities maintain technical specifications for footpaths and pedestrian



amenities, the absence of clearly earmarked budgets or dedicated reporting suggests that pedestrian infrastructure isn't a policy priority.

This is in stark contrast with investments made in road infrastructure. While these investments are necessary for supporting commerce, logistics and long-distance mobility, there is a strong case for greater balance in spending, particularly in urban areas where walking remains a dominant mode of travel.

Learning from international practices

Several countries have embedded pedestrian infrastructure within their legal and planning frameworks. In many cities in the US and the UK, "Complete Streets" policies require roads to be designed for all users, including pedestrians. Developers are often required to construct sidewalks at their own cost before receiving occupancy approvals, with planning codes specifying minimum sidewalk widths and accessibility standards.

In the Netherlands, urban planning frameworks require continuous pedestrian networks in neighbourhood plans. In Japan, urban regulations mandate wide sidewalks near transit stations, safe walking routes to schools and pedestrian-only shopping streets. In

Drying Haryana: Groundwater degradation threatens soil health

The state's dependence on water-intensive paddy cultivation remains at the centre of the problem

HARYANA's groundwater crisis has entered a dangerous new phase. For years, the debate revolved around the rapidly falling water table caused by excessive extraction for the paddy-wheat cycle. Now, a study by Chaudhary Charan Singh Haryana Agricultural University has revealed an equally alarming reality: barely 32% of the state's groundwater remains suitable for high-quality irrigation. The problem is no longer just about the quantity of water available underground, but also about its deteriorating quality. Large parts of Haryana are now confronting salinity, sodicity and chemical imbalances that gradually reduce soil fertility and agricultural productivity. In some districts, over-extraction has drained aquifers; in others, canal seepage and poor drainage have produced waterlogging and salt accumulation. Together, these twin crises expose the ecological limits of Haryana's Green Revolution model. The state's dependence on water-intensive paddy cultivation remains at the centre



of the problem. Subsidised electricity, assured procurement and MSP incentives continue to encourage indiscriminate groundwater pumping. Farmers cannot be blamed entirely for responding rationally to the economic signals created by policy.

Yet the long-term consequences are becoming increasingly visible beneath the fields themselves.

Crop diversification must move from policy rhetoric to economic reality. Farmers require assured procurement and market support for less water-intensive crops such as maize, pulses and oilseeds. Techniques like direct-seeded rice, micro-irrigation and groundwater recharge need wider implementation, while canal systems require better drainage management. Most importantly, groundwater quality mapping must become central to district-level agricultural planning. Haryana's food security model cannot survive if its soil and aquifers continue to degrade simultaneously. The warning signs are visible. If corrective action continues to lag, the state risks transforming one of India's most productive agricultural regions into an increasingly water-stressed and chemically damaged landscape.

How Iran has unified Israel's regional rivals

—Anxieties about Iran's missile capabilities, proxy networks and nuclear ambitions have quietly accelerated new patterns of security cooperation across West Asia and the Caucasus

FOR decades, Israel imagined itself as a lonely fortress in a hostile West Asia. Today, however, a quieter reality is emerging: an undeclared regional coalition stretching from the Caucasus to the Gulf, united less by ideology than by a common anxiety about Iran. The alliance is not formal. There are no NATO-style communiqués or public military headquarters. Instead, it operates through intelligence channels, commercial partnerships, drone technology, cyber-security cooperation and discreet political understandings.

The recent confrontation between Israel and Iran revealed glimpses of this hidden architecture.

According to reports in the New York Times, later cited by the Guardian, Israeli officials privately expressed frustration at aspects of the later-stage American negotiations with Tehran and were said to be relying increasingly on "regional allies and their espionage networks surveilling Iran's leadership." The phrase attracted little attention. Yet it points towards one of the least examined geopolitical developments in modern West Asia: Israel's growing network of tacit regional partners. Even as Washington continues indirect contacts with Tehran, regional anxieties about Iran's missile capabilities, proxy networks and nuclear ambitions have quietly accelerated new patterns of security cooperation across West Asia and the Caucasus.

For years, many of these relationships existed in the shadows. In January 2010, alleged Mossad operatives moved through Dubai hotel corridors disguised as tourists and tennis players during the assassination of Hamas commander Mahmoud al-Mabhouh at the Al Bustan Rotana hotel in Dubai. Dubai police later released extensive CCTV footage showing surveillance teams changing wigs, monitoring elevators and tracking the target through hotel lobbies. The Dubai police chief,

Lt Gen Dhahi Khalfan Tamim, declared afterwards that he was "99% if not 100%" certain that Mossad had carried out the operation.

The assassination triggered diplomatic outrage at the time. European governments protested over the use of forged passports, while Gulf officials publicly condemned the killing. Yet 16 years later, the geopolitical landscape has changed dramatically.

The covert contacts and intelligence understandings that once operated through hotel rooms, commercial fronts and unofficial intermediaries have increasingly become formalised through the Abraham Accords and expanding regional security cooperation.

Today, Israeli businessmen travel openly to the United Arab Emirates. Cyber-security partnerships are publicly advertised. Defence officials attend the same conferences. Intelligence coordination against Iran is no longer merely whispered about in diplomatic circles. What was once deniable has, in part, become institutionalised. The most intriguing relationship may be with Azerbaijan. The small, oil-rich former Soviet republic shares a long border with Iran and maintains deep security ties with Israel. During a 2016 visit to Baku, Benjamin Netanyahu openly acknowledged the scale of the relationship, declaring: "The contracts signed between Israel and Azerbaijan amount to \$5 billion." The remark was widely reported at the time by Reuters and Israeli media. The Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) has since documented extensive Israeli arms sales to Azerbaijan, including drones and missile systems, which later proved decisive during the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.

Iranian officials have repeatedly voiced concern about Israeli influence on their northern frontier. In 2021, Iran's Supreme Leader, Ali Khamenei, issued an

unusually pointed warning against the presence of "foreigners" in the region bordering Iran — language widely interpreted as referring to Israel.

Tehran's anxieties are heightened by demographics. Millions of ethnic Azeris live inside north-western Iran,



creating fears among Iranian security officials that outside powers could exploit ethnic tensions and separatist sentiment. Further west lies another discreet Israeli partnership: the Kurds. Relations between Israel and Kurdish groups date back decades, particularly in northern Iraq. Israeli officials have periodically expressed support for Kurdish autonomy as a strategic counterweight to hostile regional states. In 2014, Netanyahu publicly stated: "The Kurds are a fighting people who have proven political commitment and

political moderation." The comment was interpreted internationally as a rare public acknowledgment of longstanding informal ties.

The Kurdish regions also offer geography valuable to intelligence services: mountainous borders, smuggling routes and difficult terrain extending into Iran.

Further south, the UAE has emerged as perhaps Israel's most sophisticated regional partner since the Abraham Accords normalised relations in 2020. The UAE's Ambassador to Washington at the time, Yousef Al Otaiba, described the accords as creating "a better path" for the region — diplomatic language that masked rapidly expanding security and technological cooperation. Trade between Israel and the UAE accelerated sharply after normalisation, especially in cyber-security, surveillance systems and artificial intelligence. Even Saudi Arabia, despite lacking formal diplomatic relations with Israel, has quietly moved closer through parallel fears of Iran's missile programme and regional proxy network. The result is a West Asia that would have been almost unimaginable a generation ago. Israel, once regionally isolated, increasingly operates within a loose but expanding ecosystem of states and non-state actors linked less by ideology than by a shared determination to contain Iran. The relationships remain deliberately ambiguous because public opinion across the Arab world still imposes limits on overt alignment with Israel. Yet ambiguity itself has become part of the strategy. In today's West Asia, alliances are often expressed not through treaties, but through cyber cooperation, intelligence exchanges, drone technology and quiet understandings conducted far from public view.



**settling in,
youngsters are
geared up for
exciting treks in and
around Aurangabad.**



Weekends are all about

Monsoon Treks

Gautala Autramghat Wildlife Sanctuary, Shuli Bhanjan hill, Brazen Glen group of caves and Gogababa hill are some of the hotspots for trekkers. City based trekking organizations say that monsoon treks over the weekend is quite popular and reveal that this year, enquiries have been pouring in due to early monsoon. Most organisers have decided to prepone their trekking dates. Kishor Gathadi, an experienced trekker says, "This year we are starting our trekking programmes earlier than usual. Generally we start from July as the monsoon is at its peak. But this time due to early rains we start from June 23. There are a lot of engineering students who will be part of the treks this year, since most of them have just finished their exams. We have 60 entries so far and the number is increasing on a daily basis." Ravi Choudhary of another organization adds, "More than 50 students have enrolled with us for so far. With early showers it's not a surprise that nature lovers want to get started with adventure

activities." For most students trekking is an exciting activity that gets them close to nature and also helps stay fit naturally. Mansi Mahadik, student of Babasaheb Ambedkar Marathwada University says, "I'm looking forward to having a lot of fun trekking this year as the rains have been good." Kshitija Bardapurkar a student from Marathwada Institute of Technology College adds, "I cherish the memory months later after a trek. It provides a respite from the drab routine of city life. Nature also inspires me to write poetry." But it isn't only limited to being a fun activity and also provides an opportunity to learn new things and spread environmental awareness for some. Ravi adds, "While conducting treks, we encourage the trekkers to clean the plastic littering the area and also plant seeds." Prakash Kulkarni, a student of Maulana Azad College who is all set to plant 500 neem seeds during his trek says, "Trekking is no doubt fun and a great form of exercise. But I also like to contribute to the environment in my own way. I have bought 500 neem seeds which I will sow along the stretch that I pass during my trek." Meanwhile Rahul Ingle, another student from Maulana Azad College who has been an avid trekker since past five years, has plans to teach rappelling to new trekkers. Expert trekker Utsav Helambkar doles out some advice to new student trekkers. "Students should follow all the instructions given by their trekking head so as to avoid any mishap. Sometimes, girls tend to wear incorrect footwear during trekking. Wearing the right footwear, carrying enough food and water and a first aid box is very important. Also trekkers should walk in groups to reduce the risk of losing their way," ashokumarmundetiya.S

The western Grand Canyon was largely carved out by about 70 million years ago when dinosaurs roamed the earth, an analysis of mineral grains lying at the bottom of these hulking shapes reveals.



Grand Canyon was carved out while dinosaurs roamed

large part by an ancestral waterway of the Colorado River that was flowing in the opposite direction millions of years ago, said Flowers. "An ancient Grand Canyon has important implications for understanding the evolution of landscapes, topography, hydrology and tectonics in the western U.S. and in mountain belts more generally," said Flowers.

The new research pushes back the conventionally accepted date for the formation of the Grand Canyon in Arizona by more than 60



million years, says Rebecca Flowers, assistant professor of geological sciences at the University of Colorado Boulder. The team used a dating method that exploits the radioactive decay of uranium and thorium atoms to helium atoms in a phosphate mineral known as apatite, said Flowers, who co-authored the study with Kenneth Farley, professor at the California Institute of Technology, the journal Science reports. The helium atoms were locked in the mineral grains as they cooled and moved closer to the surface during the carving of the Grand Canyon, she said, according to a Colorado statement. Temperature variations at shallow levels beneath the Earth's surface are influenced by topography, and the thermal history recorded

by the apatite grains allowed the team to infer how much time had passed since there was significant natural excavation of the Grand Canyon, Flowers said. "Our research implies that the Grand Canyon was directly carved to within a few hundred meters of its modern depth by about 70 million years ago," said Flowers. Flowers said the entire modern canyon may not have been carved all at the same time. Different canyon segments may have evolved separately before coalescing into what visitors see today. Over a mile deep in places, Arizona's steeply sided Grand Canyon is about 280 miles long and up to 18 miles wide in places. Visited by more than five million people annually, the iconic canyon was likely carved in



Savour a chilled coconut as you walk along the scalloped shoreline of Copacabana or take in the dazzling 360-degree views from Sugar Loaf Mountain—Rio de Janeiro is a true holiday paradise. Whether you're headed to this year's FIFA World Cup or have plans to spend quality time with the sun and sand, this guide will help you make the most of your Brazilian break.

A traveller's Guide to Rio de Janeiro

Copacabana Beach

A magnificent confluence of land and sea, the long, scalloped beach of Copacabana always has a flurry of activity stretching its length—footballers sing their team's anthem, cariocas (Rio's residents) and tourists line up for caipirinhas—a popular local cocktail—at kiosks, and beach vendors make their way through the mass of bronzed bodies. The rocky outcrop at its south end, called Arpoador, is popular with the city's surfing community and is one of the best spots in the city for watching the sunset. The beach is lined from one end to the other with tourist-class and luxury hotels, casinos, indoor and outdoor restaurants, bars and nightclubs. There are historic forts at both ends of the beach—Fort Copacabana, built in 1914 at the south end and Fort Duque de Caxias built in 1779 at the north end.

Ipanema Beach

Ipanema shares a border with Copacabana, but this world-class beach destination is more exclusive than its south Rio counterpart. Ipanema has a magnificent beach and leafy streets dotted with enticing outdoor cafes and lively bars—it was here that the famous song Garota de Ipanema (Girl from Ipanema) was penned. With mountains, turquoise waters, golden sand and tropical flora making for most of this beach's landscape, Ipanema is Rio's most visited beach. The beach promenade is home to many of the city's upscale shops and cafes and the nearby Rua Vincius de Moraes, Baixo Farne and Baixo Quiteria streets are lined with

expensive bars, clubs and restaurants.

Sugarloaf Mountain

Set at the mouth of the Guanabara Bay, Pao de Acucar or Sugarloaf Mountain is one of the world's most famous landmarks. A breathtaking cable car ride to the top of the mountain will stun you with panoramic views of one of the world's most beautiful landscapes. Standing 394 metres high, Pao de Acucar derives its colloquial name comes from the mountain's resemblance to a concentrated sugarloaf. To reach the summit, passengers take two cable cars—the first ascending to the shorter Morro da Urca (standing 220 metres high) and the second ascending to Pao de Acucar. The top of the mountain offers expansive views of the Guanabara Bay with the Botafogo beach to the North and Copacabana to the South. Be sure to check out the open-air cable car on display that was used for transportation in the 1930s.

Rio Carnival

A carnival is a celebration of fun, music and frivolity held worldwide, but the Rio Carnival is the biggest and the best known. More than 500,000 visitors flock to Rio for the carnival every year adding to around a million local revellers. It takes place over four days, culminating in the samba parade where three to five thousand people from samba schools all over Rio perform with floats, music themes and costumes and onlookers party in the streets. Samba schools spend all year preparing for it, and complete over the four days for the right to feature in the samba parade where the final winner is announced. The hedonistic attitude of this carnival comes from its

history as a final fling in the lead up to Lent, while the drum music played on many of the floats comes from African influences. Carnival-goers can also attend balls, street parties and samba school nights. Learn to samba, douse your costume in sequins and feathers and get ready to dance all night—just make sure you book your flights and accommodation early.

Santa Teresa

The hillside neighbourhood of Santa Teresa, where aging 19th-century-mansions and a bohemian spirit offer a very different take on the Cidade Maravilhosa (Spanish for 'Marvellous City'). Take in fine views from the Parque das Ruinas, stop for potent caipirinhas, or ride along the old-fashioned tram that still rattles along the cobblestone streets. The neighbourhood never loses sight of its community roots, and many of its spaces have been re-imagined into Art Deco buildings that serve as stomping grounds for artists, travellers and collaborators. Trolley tracks run through this intimate neighbourhood's cobblestoned-streets lined with ambrosial restaurants, adding to its folksy allure and ethereal magnetism.

Christ the Redeemer

Nothing like a giant, 130-foot tall statue of Jesus, arms gracefully outstretched to keep a city as known for its taste for vice as Rio in line. Christ the Redeemer (who watches over us with what I think is a slightly anxious expression in his rather elegantly draping robe) stands atop Corcovado, trust me, you won't miss him, in the Tijuca National Park. Outside he's soapstone but inside he's reinforced concrete, much safer for everyone (I do have dreams about him falling on the city, but that could be a sign his presence is working and suggesting I lay off the vice), especially since he's been standing there since 1931. Underneath his great plinth is a Catholic chapel.

In 2007, Christ was voted one of the Modern 7 Wonders after a hectic media campaign from local industry, but the best story about him is the number of people who schlepped up the hill to see him unveiled, about one and a half million, trust me, you can see him pretty well from many parts of Rio and less well up close. But there is a grand view looking down so maybe they were after a Christ's Eye View like so many tourists today. But you can climb the 220 stairs or get the elevator, if you want to get close enough to whisper in his ear. I was lucky enough to be in Rio when he got struck by lightning in February—naturally he survived intact—need I say more.



Perfect summer destinations in India

Planning a vacation in India is a challenging task with the country's incredible diversity throwing up a long list of names. From tropical islands and tea plantations to lush valleys overlooking the mighty Himalayas, there is no dearth of options when it comes to planning the perfect summer getaway in India.

Coorg (Kodagu), Karnataka

Spread out across the Western Ghats, the misty valley of Coorg offers the perfect getaway from the scorching summer heat. Fondly referred to as the 'Scotland of India' due to its verdant beauty and pleasant weather conditions, Coorg has a special place among all hill stations in India. A place where you can just sit around and watch the fog roll by.

Rishikesh, Uttarakhand

Styling itself as the 'Yoga Capital of the World', Rishikesh is a magnet for spiritual seekers. Surrounded by the fast-flowing Ganga and forested hills, the setting is definitely conducive for relaxing and meditation. Rishikesh is also a popular white-water rafting centre and backpacking hang-out.

Tawang, Arunachal Pradesh

A heady mix of religion, history and nature, Tawang is one of the least discovered towns in Arunachal Pradesh. Dotted with Buddhist monasteries and mystical gompas on one end

Perfect summer destinations in India

and a war memorial on another, the valley begins to work its magic on travellers the moment they start descending the hills.

Ooty, Tamil Nadu

Established as a retreat from the scorching heat of the summer by the British, Ooty is a visual delight filled with pretty cottages, fenced flower gardens, thatched-roof churches

and terraced botanical gardens. Venture a few kilometres out and find yourself surrounded by greener, quieter areas dotted with an abundance of pine trees.

Darjeeling, West Bengal

Surrounded by emerald-green tea plantations and set against a backdrop of jagged white Himalayan peaks, Darjeeling is nestled away in the northern regions of West Bengal. A journey on the 'Toy train,' which meanders up the hills to Darjeeling from New Jalpaiguri in the plains is a great way to explore and soak in the magnificent surroundings of this hill station.

Munnar, Kerala

Sprawling tea plantations, picture-perfect towns and

during the summer months. Backpackers come to hang around in the villages near the main town and adventure tourists come for trekking, paragliding, rafting and skiing. About 53 km away from Manali is the famous Rohtang Pass offering up breathtaking sights of glaciers, peaks and valleys.

Nainital, Uttarakhand

A welcome relief from the heat of Delhi, Nainital is a small town in Kumaon which encircles the picturesque Naini Lake. There's a busy town bazaar and a web of walking tracks around the forested hillsides, which have enticed travellers since pre-independence days to retreat to Nainital during the summer months.

Andaman and Nicobar Islands



winding lanes make Munnar a perfect destination for those looking for respite from the summer heat. Although the town itself is forever buzzing with activity, wander a few kilometres out and you'll be engulfed in a thousand shades of green.

Pahalgam, Kashmir

Known as the 'Valley of Shepherds,' Pahalgam is a low-rise town that stands at the confluence of Lidder River and Sheshnag Lake. The surrounding mountains contain many picturesque spots and over 20 lakes to which countless guides and horsemen and more than eager to take you to.

Manali, Himachal Pradesh

With mountain adventures beckoning from all directions, Manali is the perfect destination for those looking to unwind

The perfect summer getaway, Andaman and Nicobar Islands offer tourists a relaxed tropical ambience and an array of thrilling adventure activities. Tourists from all over the world visit this tropical paradise for its rich and diverse marine life which is best seen while snorkelling and scuba diving around its many pristine beaches.



Kumbh-fame Monalisa's husband charged under SC/ST Act, police inform court

New Delhi.(Agency)

Madhya Pradesh Police on Friday informed the Kerala High Court that a case under the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act had been added against Farmaan, the husband of viral Kumbh Mela sensation Monalisa Bhosle, and argued that the couple's anticipatory bail plea was therefore not maintainable. The couple moved the court seeking anticipatory bail in a case registered on a complaint filed by Bhosle's father, who alleged that his daughter had been abducted. Additional Solicitor General SV Raju informed the bench of Justice Kauser Edappagath that anticipatory bail under the CrPC would not be maintainable in view of the provisions of the SC/ST Act.

Monalisa, from Indore, shot to fame during the Prayagraj Kumbh Mela for her

captivating smile and striking eyes. She travelled to Kerala in March and reportedly sought police protection to live with her boyfriend Farmaan, following which the couple's marriage was held under official supervision. The marriage snowballed into a massive controversy after the National Commission for Scheduled Tribes alleged that the woman was allegedly around 16 years old at the time of the marriage and that forged documents may have been used to facilitate the wedding. Following these findings, Madhya Pradesh Police registered a case against Farmaan under the PcoSo Act. Allegations of 'love jihad' were also raised against Farmaan.

When the matter came before the High Court

earlier, interim protection from arrest had been granted to the husband. During the hearing on Friday, the ASG

The victim belongs to the Scheduled Tribe community. The first petitioner does not belong to the SC/ST community".

Section 3(2)(v) of the SC/ST Act provides that any person committing an offence punishable with imprisonment of 10 years or more against a member of a Scheduled Caste or Scheduled Tribe shall be liable for life imprisonment and fine. During the proceedings, the couple sought permission to amend their anticipatory bail plea. The Madhya Pradesh Police opposed the move, contending that the proposed amendments were aimed at curing deficiencies already pointed out by the prosecution during earlier hearings.

ASG Raju argued that the facts sought to be introduced through the amendment were

already within the petitioners' knowledge at the time of filing the original plea and therefore could not be treated as subsequent developments. He accused the couple of hiding important facts and trying to cover the gaps in their case after the state raised objections. Responding to the objection, Justice Kauser Edappagath observed, "Already there were sufficient pleadings, but the exact wording was not there."

Senior advocate Sasindran, appearing for the couple, defended the amendment plea and said the bail application had been filed in Kerala because the couple faced serious threats over their interfaith marriage. Referring to photographs allegedly showing marriage pictures being burnt and attacked by "fundamentalists", he argued that the couple feared travelling to Madhya Pradesh.

New teams for districts soon: Delhi BJP chief Harsh Malhotra

New Delhi.(Agency)

A day after taking charge as president of the Delhi unit of BJP, Harsh Malhotra on Friday said that gaps in the organisation at the district level will be filled on a priority basis. Malhotra, who is also the MoS for road transport and corporate affairs in the Modi government, said that the new team of Delhi BJP will be formed in the next couple of months.

"The teams in the districts will be formed in the next 15-20 days, while the reorganisation of the state unit and appointment of office bearers will be completed in the next two months," said Malhotra.

One of the first major responsibilities assigned to Malhotra will be overseeing the fortnight-long programmes in June to mark 12 years of the Modi-led government at the Centre. Soon after assuming charge on Thursday, he chaired a meeting with party MPs, MLAs, councillors and district presidents to review preparations for the events.

Talking about the preparations for MCD elections to be held in November next year, the Delhi BJP president said the party remains consistently active on the ground with public welfare at the core of its agenda and expressed confidence that it would achieve the desired results. He added that the Centre, the Delhi government and the BJP-led MCD have been delivering good governance in the national capital, which is why people continue to support them.

BJP is not a party that starts preparations for the elections at the last moment, Malhotra said regarding next year's Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD) polls. "Our teams are ready at the Mandal level; some necessary changes will be effected wherever needed. The important thing is that our government in Delhi has done many development works, as there is no lack of funds," he said.

India's first integrated weather intelligence facility launched at Delhi airport

New Delhi.(Agency)

In a major boost to aviation safety and meteorological capability in India, an advanced integrated aviation weather intelligence and nowcasting facility became operational at the Indira Gandhi International Airport (IGIA) on Friday. SKYCAST is a joint venture between the Ministry of Science and Technology and Delhi International Airport Limited (DIAL).

An official release from DIAL said, "SKYCAST is a next generation aviation meteorological platform that integrates advanced remote sensing technologies, atmospheric profiling systems and intelligent nowcasting tools to continuously track rapidly evolving weather conditions that may impact flight operations."

The system combines a Radar Wind Profiler, Microwave Profiling Radiometer, Sonic Detection and Ranging, and Automated Weather Stations to deliver high resolution wind and thermodynamic profiling of the atmosphere.

"With the commissioning of SKYCAST, Delhi airport becomes the only airport in India to deploy a comprehensive, real time atmospheric monitoring system specifically designed to support aviation and airport operations," DIAL said.

It enables continuous real time monitoring of critical atmospheric parameters, including temperature and humidity profiles, wind speed and direction, and near surface high resolution wind observations.

"SKYCAST is capable of assessing atmospheric conditions from the surface up to nearly 10 km altitude for thermodynamic profiling and several kilometres for wind observations. This significantly enhances the ability of meteorologists and aviation stakeholders to accurately track and respond to rapidly changing weather systems," it said. A key feature of the system is its automated nowcasting and hazard alerting capability. It detects and provides real time alerts for critical aviation hazards, including wind shear, fog, inversions, icing and turbulence.

No more indefinite delays: Supreme Court sets 3-month deadline for reserved verdicts

New Delhi.(Agency)

In a move to tackle delays in the judicial system, the Supreme Court has laid down a set of timelines and guidelines for pronouncing and uploading judgments after courts reserve their verdicts.

The top court said that if a judgment is not delivered within three months of being reserved, the Registrar General concerned must place the matter before the Chief Justice of the High Court. The Chief Justice may grant an additional two weeks for pronouncement of the verdict. If the judgment is still not delivered within that period, the case can be reassigned to another bench. The Supreme Court further directed that where only the operative portion of a judgment has been pronounced, the detailed reasons must be uploaded within 15 days. If this does not happen, affected parties may move an application before the court. If the reasons are not uploaded within 30 days, litigants may seek transfer

of the matter to another bench for fresh consideration. To improve transparency, the court ordered that the date on which a judgment is reserved must be displayed on the respective High Court's website. Registrars General of all High Courts have been directed to place the guidelines before their Chief Justices for implementation. The Supreme Court also emphasised that judgments in reserved matters should ordinarily be delivered within three months. Cases involving personal liberty, including bail matters, should be prioritised and decided

expeditiously.

In a major relief for undertrial prisoners, the court said orders in bail cases must be pronounced on the day after the order is reserved. Bail orders should be promptly communicated to jail authorities, and undertrials granted bail should be released on the same day or, at the latest, the following day. Trial courts have also been directed to report compliance to the High Courts.

The directions came while hearing petitions alleging extraordinary delays in the pronouncement of judgments by the Jharkhand High Court. Petitioners claimed that verdicts in their criminal appeals had remained reserved for two to three years after final arguments were concluded. Taking serious note of the issue, the Supreme Court had expanded the scope of the matter and sought status reports from all High Courts regarding cases where judgments had remained reserved for months or years.

India-US interim trade pact reaches final stage, will be signed soon: US Ambassador to India Sergio Gor

New Delhi.(Agency)

US Ambassador to India Sergio Gor on Friday expressed optimism that an interim trade agreement between India and the US will be signed soon. Delivering a talk on US-India Trust Initiative: Advancing partnership in research and training' at IIT-Delhi, Gor said the agreement between is in the final stages and will unlock prosperity for both.

"President Trump's goal is to facilitate bilateral trade in a way in which it creates unprecedented opportunities for American businesses and workers. Just last week, India had sent a team to Washington, DC, to finalise the last one per cent of that trade deal. Next week, we will welcome a US delegation here to continue those

talks. We fully expect the new trade deal to be signed within the next few weeks and months," he said.

Within just two decades, the bilateral trade between India and the US has

shot up from 20 billion to 220 billion in goods and services. "It is not just the volume, but it reflects deeper engagement and stronger economic integration," he said. Repeatedly dwelling on the solid partnership between the two nations, the

ambassador said, "Critical and emerging technologies are fundamentally reshaping the global balance of power. And I believe no partnership is better positioned to lead that charge than ours."

The Indo-US relationship must deliver tangible benefits for both nations. "For too long, those centres of power have been in places that have frankly remained outdated. One of the things the Trump administration has done is identifying the new centres of power. To me, to the president and the administration, the importance of India is now. It is not stuck in other places. It is not stuck in past societies. We realise the potential that India has and the growth that India has, not only economically.

Late response in Delhi's Hauz Khas fire: Locals

A fire official stated that two fire tenders were dispatched immediately after receiving the information, one from Geetanjali Fire Station and another from Bhikaji Cama Place Fire Station.

New Delhi.(Agency)

Dhanendra, a 1968-batch retired IAS officer and former executive director representing India at the World Bank, died on Wednesday night after a fire broke out at his residence in Hauz Khas area, a couple of days before his 80th birthday. His son, who had travelled from London for the birthday, also got injured in the incident.

The night guard in the area saw the fire and alerted locals. According to the neighbours, apart from fire tenders being late, the cars parked on both sides of the roads delayed movement. They reportedly used buckets of water and other available means to contain the flames.

"The fire brigade took around 20 to 25 minutes to arrive. They were saying that they could not locate the address properly and that the street was too narrow. However, I don't think that was the case because we heard the siren only once, and after that, they arrived at the spot," one of the neighbours said.

Another neighbour Priya said, "The whole ground floor was on fire. All the neighbours were there to support uncle. Aunty was brought out early, but Uncle, unfortunately, was still inside at that time. I think we all should have fire extinguishers in houses."

Residents of Hauz Khas Enclave said the incident exposed deeper concerns over emergency preparedness in Delhi's gated colonies, where roads are often blocked or narrowed due to security barricades and indiscriminate parking. "This could have been avoided if the fire department had not taken so much time to respond. I made the first call around 11.15 pm and then three more calls, but it took them around 50 minutes to come. By that time we were trying to douse the fire ourselves along with police personnel using water buckets," Abhishek Ranjan, Kumar's manager for the past 14 years, said.

According to him, the fire started after a suspected short circuit in the indoor unit of an AC and quickly spread through curtains and furniture on the ground floor. Domestic help Ramesh Kumar said that the AC caught fire. "First, we rescued Madam, who was in a wheelchair. Then, I, along with my owner's son, took out the retired bureaucrat and shifted him to the hospital.

Rain, cloud cover bring brief respite to Delhi, temperature drops by 9 degrees Celsius in 48 hours

New Delhi.(Agency)

Clouds shrouded the city, and traces of rain were reported in a few areas on Friday as Delhi recorded its lowest maximum in 21 days and witnessed a sharp fall in temperatures of up to 9.4 degrees Celsius in places over the past 48 hours.

As per the weather department, the city's maximum temperature settled at 36.8 degrees Celsius on Friday, the lowest since May 8, when it stood at 36.4 degrees Celsius. However, during the intervening 21 days, the mercury steadily climbed, crossing the 45-degree Celsius mark amid prolonged heatwave conditions. According to data from the India Meteorological Department (IMD), temperatures across the national capital dropped sharply over the past 48 hours.

Safdarjung recorded a decline of 7.5

degrees Celsius, with the maximum temperature falling from 44.3 degrees Celsius on May 27 to 36.8 degrees Celsius on Friday. Meanwhile, Ridge witnessed a drop of 8.8 degrees Celsius, from 45.6 degrees Celsius to 36.8 degrees Celsius. The sharpest decline was recorded at Ayanagar and Palam, where maximum temperatures fell by 9.4 degrees Celsius each.

On the other hand, Ayanagar cooled from 45.4 degrees Celsius to 36.0 degrees Celsius, while Palam dropped from 44.6 degrees Celsius to 35.2 degrees Celsius. Lodhi Road also saw a substantial fall of 8.9 degrees Celsius, with the maximum temperature decreasing from 44.6 degrees Celsius to 35.7 degrees Celsius.

The minimum temperature was recorded

at 25.3 degrees Celsius at Safdarjung, 1.3 degrees below normal. Rainfall during the 24-hour period ending 8.30 am was recorded at 4.0 mm at

Safdarjung, 4.3 mm at Palam and 3.8 mm at Ayanagar, while Lodhi Road recorded trace rainfall. No rainfall was recorded at Ridge during the period. Additionally, the IMD has forecast

thunderstorms accompanied by rain to persist till May 31. For Saturday, the weather office has predicted a minimum temperature of around 23 degrees Celsius and a maximum temperature of around 35 degrees Celsius. A yellow alert has also been issued for thunderstorms accompanied by rain.

Maresh Palawat of Skymet Weather attributed the weather activity to a western disturbance over the hills, an induced cyclonic circulation over Rajasthan and adjoining areas, along with humid winds from the Bay of Bengal that have increased moisture levels over the city. "The current spell of pre-monsoon rains is likely to be stronger than the pre-monsoon showers witnessed in Delhi earlier this month and in April, leading to widespread rainfall activity across the city," Palawat said.

CMYK

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Non-Food bank credit growth jumps to 15.8% in April 2026; Services, industry lead expansion: RBI

New Delhi..(Agency)

Non-food bank credit growth accelerated to 15.8 per cent year-on-year in the fortnight ended April 30, 2026, compared with 9.8 per cent in the corresponding fortnight of the previous year, according to data released by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) on Friday.

The data on sectoral deployment of bank credit for April 2026, collected from 41 select scheduled commercial banks (SCBs) accounting for about 95 per cent of total non-food credit by all SCBs, showed broad-based growth across key segments.

Credit to agriculture and allied activities registered a year-on-year growth of 13.7 per cent as on the fortnight ended April 30, 2026, against 9.2 per cent in the corresponding fortnight last year, the RBI said. Credit to industry recorded a y-o-y growth of 15.1 per cent, sharply higher than 7.0 per cent in the corresponding fortnight of the previous year. "While credit to 'Micro and Small' and 'Large' industries grew at an accelerated pace, 'Medium' industries exhibited steady growth on y-o-y basis," the central bank noted.

Among major industries, outstanding credit to 'infrastructure', 'basic metal and metal product', 'all engineering', 'petroleum, coal products and nuclear fuels', and 'chemical and chemical products' marked higher y-o-y growth. However, the RBI said 'construction', 'textiles' and 'rubber, plastic and their products' segments witnessed marginally subdued credit growth.

The services sector led the expansion, with credit growth at 18.6 per cent y-o-y as on April 30, 2026, compared with 10.1 per cent in the corresponding fortnight of the previous year. The growth was supported by robust performance in segments such as 'non-banking financial companies' (NBFCs), 'commercial real estate', 'trade' and 'professional services', the RBI said.

Infosys CEO Salil Parekh's FY26 pay rises 2.5 pc to Rs 82.6 crore

BENGALURU.(Agency)

Infosys Chief Executive Officer and Managing Director Salil Parekh received total remuneration of Rs 82.6 crore in the financial year 2025-26, marking an increase of about 2.5% from the previous year, according to the company's annual report.

The annual report showed that Parekh's remuneration included a salary of Rs 7.97 crore, retiral and other benefits of Rs 0.53 crore, variable pay of Rs 78.5 crore, stock incentives worth Rs 23.35 crore and perquisites linked to exercised stock units valued at Rs 50.75 crore. His total compensation stood at Rs 82.6 crore for the year. Infosys said Parekh receives remuneration only from Infosys and not from any subsidiary or group company.

The company also disclosed that Parekh exercised 2,72,400 Restricted Stock Units (RSUs) under the 2015 Plan and 64,690 RSUs under the 2019 Plan during FY26. During the year, the board approved several stock-based grants for Parekh. These included 2,30,621 performance-based RSUs linked to business targets, 13,273 performance-based RSUs tied to environmental, social and governance milestones, and 33,183 performance-based RSUs linked to the company's cumulative total shareholder return. He was also granted annual time-based and performance-based RSUs under the company's stock incentive plans.

The annual report noted that Infosys Chairman Nandan Nilekani continued to forgo remuneration for services rendered to the company. Independent directors received commission and sitting fees during the year. Infosys reported revenue of Rs 1.79 lakh crore and net profit of Rs 29,440 crore for FY26, while free cash flow stood at Rs 33,097 crore. The company ended the year with more than 3.28 lakh employees globally.

Nearly 20,000 MSME applications received under ECLGS

New Delhi.(Agency)

Under the government's Emergency Credit Line Guarantee Scheme (ECLGS), nearly 20,000 applications from micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs) have been received for disbursement of Rs 25,000 crore, a senior Finance Ministry official said. "We received around 20,000 applications, all from MSMEs, till this morning, and processed the required amount of Rs 25,000 crore. The scheme has been received very well," the official said, adding that no applications had been received from airlines so far. Under ECLGS 5.0, the government will provide 100% credit guarantee coverage for MSMEs and 90% coverage for non-MSMEs as well as the airline sector. Of the total Rs 25,000 crore allocated under ECLGS 5.0, Rs 5,000 crore has been specifically earmarked for airlines. The scheme provides structured financial relief with a maximum loan limit of Rs 1,000 crore per borrower, along with an additional Rs 500 crore subject to equivalent equity infusion by the borrower. The loans will have a tenure of up to seven years, including a two-year moratorium on repayment, thereby easing short-term liquidity pressures. The Cabinet approved the scheme to address financial stress faced by airlines due to the sharp increase in aviation turbine fuel (ATF) prices, compounded by airspace closures and reduced operations, particularly on international routes, which have led to lower aircraft utilisation and liquidity constraints. Finance Ministry officials also said that 23 policies had been issued under the Bharat Maritime Fund till May 28. "We expect the maritime insurance pool to become bigger and the premiums will further come down," the official added. The \$1.5 billion fund has been established to provide comprehensive maritime coverage for Indian-flagged, India-bound and India-originating vessels.

CNG prices hiked by Rs 2 per kg in Mumbai, Thane, Navi Mumbai

This is the second hike in less than a month, following an earlier revision on May 14. The cumulative Rs 4 rise is expected to impact daily commuters, taxi operators and commercial vehicle users who rely heavily on CNG.

New Delhi..(Agency)

State-run gas distributor Mahanagar Gas Limited (MGL) has increased the price of Compressed Natural Gas (CNG) by Rs 2 per kilogram across the Mumbai Metropolitan Region (MMR), effective immediately. With the latest revision, CNG will now cost 86 per kilogram in

Mumbai, Thane, Navi Mumbai and adjoining areas. This is the second hike in less than a month, following a similar Rs 2 per kilogram increase announced on May 14. The cumulative Rs 4 rise is expected to impact daily commuters, taxi operators and commercial vehicle users who rely heavily on CNG. The YMGL has not yet detailed the reasons behind the latest price revision.

This comes just days after prices in Delhi were increased again by Rs 2 per kg, taking the retail price to Rs 83.09 per kg on May 26. The revision marked the fourth increase within 11 days and the third hike in just nine days, with cumulative CNG prices in the national capital rising by Rs 7 per kg since May 15. The series of revisions began with a Rs 2 per kg increase on May 15, followed by hikes of Rs 1 per kg each

on two separate occasions in the succeeding week. Despite the rise in CNG prices, rates of piped natural gas

disruptions in the Strait of Hormuz, a critical route for global oil shipments, amid heightened tensions involving the US and Iran. The repeated increases are expected to raise operating costs for commuters, transporters and businesses, with analysts warning that higher transportation and logistics expenses could eventually translate into increased prices of essential goods and food items.

Government officials, however, maintain that the price adjustments are necessary to offset rising import costs and ensure uninterrupted fuel supplies during a period of geopolitical uncertainty.

As India imports nearly 85 per cent of its crude oil requirements, domestic fuel prices remain highly vulnerable to fluctuations in international energy markets.



(PNG) for households and domestic LPG cylinders remain unchanged. The fuel price revisions come amid sustained pressure from rising global crude oil prices. Industry experts attribute the surge to growing concerns over potential

Gold dips 1.36 pc this week over stable dollar, Fed rate hike expectation

New Delhi.(Agency)

Gold prices dipped 1.36 per cent during the week as a stable dollar and stronger-than-expected US inflation data reinforced expectations that the US Federal Reserve may raise interest rates later this year. On Friday, MCX gold June futures dipped 0.59 per cent while MCX silver May futures lost 0.94 per cent. Currently, gold futures stand at Rs 1,56,000, while silver futures at Rs 2,67,000 per kg. The price of 10 grams of 24-carat gold was at Rs 1,56,463 on Friday down from Rs 1,58,622 seen on Monday market opening, according to data published by the India Bullion and Jewellers Association (IBJA). The dollar index rose about 0.10 per cent, while US personal consumption expenditures (PCE) rose 3.8 per cent (year-on-year) in April, the fastest pace since May 2023, bolstering expectations of US Fed rate hikes this year. "Gold and silver continue to attract

selective safe-haven and value-oriented buying near key technical levels, although upside momentum remains closely linked to expectations surrounding US monetary policy, bond yields and the trajectory of the US



dollar," an analyst said.

Higher energy prices fuel inflationary pressure increasing the likelihood of Fed tightening, denting gold's appeal as investors gravitate toward yield-

bearing assets.

The recent US Fed's meeting minutes showed that more officials are now open to the possibility that they may need to hike rates.

COMEX Gold is currently trading in the USD 4,570-USD 4,600 range, with weekly price action continuing to reflect a consolidation phase and a cautious undertone, he added. Technically, immediate resistance is placed in the USD 4,600-USD 4,650 region and the USD 4,400-USD 4,350 range continues to serve as a critical support area, market participants said.

For MCX Gold, immediate resistance is placed in the Rs 1,60,000 to Rs 1,62,000 range and the Rs 1,54,000-Rs 1,52,000 region continues to act as a critical support base.

AI-based financial advice a tricky slope, say experts

BENGALURU.(Agency)

The injection and integration of artificial intelligence (AI) into digital spheres of interaction between institutions and the individual have been rapid and steep, allowing little time for law and policy to catch up. Bengaluru-based experts note finance as a sector that is increasingly moving towards AI-based automation, and with the absence of legal frameworks of accountability, consumers are left to their own devices as it were, making them prone to mishaps involving personal and confidential information.

While the loopholes of accountability that are inherent in an interaction between an individual and an AI platform involving private information are obvious, placing the onus on the individual to enact discretion, the situation gets further complicated when an agency offering financial advice uses AI in its operations. "Consumers do not need to fear every AI-driven financial platform, but they should approach them with informed scepticism. AI can assist with financial information, yet decisions involving

savings, debt, insurance, retirement, or investments still require transparency, human accountability, and



independent judgment," said Prof. Madhu Veeraraghavan, pro vice-chancellor for Management, Law, Humanities, and Social Sciences at the Manipal Academy of Higher Education (MAHE). If this was not all, a further complication is introduced by the fact that owing to the aforementioned lack of any ethical standard of procedure or similar framework, it is not uncommon for such platforms to run their customers' queries through layers of AI, without expressly asking for consent. "If

customers are not clear on how much algorithmic systems impact their decisions due to the lack of transparency, they could watch out for some signs: highly standardised replies with minimal context, minimal human interaction, instant automated responses, etcetera," said Remya Tressa Jacob, an assistant professor in the Accounting, Economics and Finance Area department at T A Pai Management Institute (TAPMI).

The lack of a policy or governance with regards to AI also points out to the fact that it is by virtue elusive to such frameworks, which should be a cause for significant concern. Prof. Tuhin S Banerjee, associate dean of the School for Continuing Education and Professional Studies, RV University, explained, "The inherent lack of explainability in deep learning makes it difficult for financial institutions or regulators to understand the reason for the decision thus complicating compliance. Data misuse and unauthorised profiling may happen in trying to use AI for hyper-personalisation."

Illness, insurance and the cost of timing

What happens when a chronic illness arrives before health insurance? One Multiple Sclerosis patient's journey highlights the challenges of getting coverage for pre-existing diseases in India.

New Delhi.(Agency)

In 2019, upon my Multiple Sclerosis diagnosis, I was admitted to the hospital for five days. At discharge, I received a bill of Rs 2 lakh, an amount more than double my monthly income at the time. My corporate insurance covered 90 per cent of it and I paid the rest. I left feeling fortunate, even reassured.

It took me a year to understand how fragile that reassurance was. As mobility challenges set in, I had to step away from my career. With that, I lost the corporate insurance I had relied on.

Not taking personal health insurance was one of my biggest mistakes. One I cannot undo because health insurance is typically meant to be purchased before illness. Once a condition is diagnosed, it is classified as pre-existing and is often

excluded for life or is heavily restricted. Even relatively manageable conditions are treated with caution. For instance, thyroid disorders often come with waiting periods of up to three years before any claims can be made, despite continuous premium payments. If that is the case for common conditions, the exclusion of complex, lifelong illnesses like MS is inevitable. I have been covered under a family health insurance plan since 2004, with premiums paid consistently for over 20 years.

However, a request to increase the sum insured after my diagnosis, in order to accommodate my condition was denied on the grounds that it was considered a pre-existing condition, leaving no room to adjust coverage when needed the most. THE HIGH COST OF LIVING WITH MS

The disease-modifying therapy I rely on for MS- Ocrevus (ocrelizumab) costs approximately Rs 2.81 lakh per infusion, excluding hospital and related expenses. In total, each cycle comes close to Rs 3.5 lakh. Administered every six months, this brings the annual cost to nearly Rs 7 lakh. This amount is about twice the annual income of a middle-class individual in urban India.

This reveals who health insurance really serves. In principle, insurance exists to protect against uncertainty. In practice, it often benefits those who secured coverage before illness struck. For those who did not anticipate a chronic condition early enough, meaningful coverage remains out



of reach. **ASYSTEM THAT REWARDS TIMING, NOT NEED**

I often find myself asking a simple question: why didn't I know enough about health insurance to take it in time? The answer, I have come to realise, is not just personal—it is cultural. Health insurance is rarely part of everyday conversation. It is not something we discuss openly with friends or within families, nor is it meaningfully

taught in schools. I do not remember being told, at any stage, about its importance. Like many others, I learnt about it only after I needed it. Even now, most people I know continue to rely entirely on corporate insurance, assuming it will be enough. Few expect that illness could also mean losing their financial security and perhaps, no one should have to live with that fear. What has been harder to process is the shift in response after my diagnosis. Before, no one spoke about insurance. After my diagnosis, it became a question of personal responsibility. Why didn't you plan better? I was asked. The same advice that was never offered earlier was now delivered with certainty.

WHY MANY INDIANS LEARN ABOUT INSURANCE TOO LATE

I accept that I did not plan better. But the larger question remains: why is this something we are expected to learn only in hindsight? If awareness is truly everywhere, as we are often told, why does it so often arrive only after the damage is done?

The truth is we do not talk about health insurance until it is too late. Preparedness is treated as individual responsibility but the knowledge required to prepare is never meaningfully shared.

Short news

3 months to mend habits, then fine for violations: Bengal cracks down on littering

Kolkata.(Agency)

In a significant move against littering, the West Bengal government is set to impose strict fines from September 1 for throwing plastic waste or garbage on roads. Agnimitra Paul, Minister for Urban Development and Municipal Affairs, has said that a pilot project will be launched on Saturday in 10 municipalities to improve the waste management and cleanliness system, and spread awareness.

“We are focusing on ensuring that civic services are not disrupted in municipalities where councillors have resigned and where administrators are absent. If people take photos upon seeing garbage anywhere and send them, the staff concerned will also be required to take action on it. The project will be inaugurated on May 30.”

The Minister said that cleanliness must be maintained by involving the police, administration, and the general public. Paul added, “When our people go abroad, to malls... they behave like civilised individuals. But upon stepping on to the streets here, they throw away coconut shells, plastic and chip packets. This will not be allowed. Keeping our cities clean is a shared responsibility for all of us. We will give it three months... People must improve their habits during this period. After that, from September 1, fines will be levied in accordance with the existing rules.” Under the plan, dustbins will be installed at a distance of every 100 meters. Even after this, if anyone throws garbage on the road or in a public place, a fine will be imposed from September 1.

GCC-run schools to get 180 temporary physical education teachers for 2026-27

CHENNAI.(Agency)

The Greater Chennai Corporation (GCC) is set to appoint 180 temporary physical education teachers (PETs) through school management committees (SMCs) in corporation-run schools across the city for the 2026-27 academic year.

The civic body's education department has issued a circular to headmasters directing them to initiate the recruitment process. The appointments will be made for a period of 10 months, from June 2026 to March 2027. The initiative is part of the budget announcement made by GCC Mayor R Priya for the financial year 2026-27. In her budget speech, she announced an allocation of Rs 3.65 crore for the second phase of appointing temporary PETs in GCC schools to improve students' physical fitness, strengthen physical education, promote discipline and encourage participation in sports and extracurricular activities. Under the first phase of the initiative, 141 temporary PETs were appointed in corporation schools during the 2025-26 academic year.

According to the circular, 101 vacancies will be filled in corporation primary schools by candidates possessing a Certificate in Physical Education (CPEd) or Bachelor of Physical Education (BPEd), who will receive a monthly honorarium of Rs 18,000. For middle schools, 29 temporary PETs with BPEd or Master of Physical Education (MPEd) qualifications will be appointed with a monthly honorarium.

Emergency pumping at Singur to begin from June 1

HYDERABAD.(Agency)

The Hyderabad Metropolitan Water Supply and Sewerage Board (HMWSSB) will partially begin emergency pumping operations at the Singur reservoir from June 1 to ensure an uninterrupted drinking water supply to Hyderabad and meet the requirements of the Core Urban Region (CURE).

Singur is one of Hyderabad's key drinking water sources after the twin reservoirs, Osmansagar and Himayatsagar. The reservoir supplies water to various parts of the city, industries and several areas in the erstwhile Medak district. The move comes after nearly eight tmcft of water was released from the reservoir in March to facilitate repair works. Despite concerns over water availability during the peak summer season, officials managed supply through regulated distribution schedules.

HMWSSB managing director K Ashok Reddy reviewed the emergency pumping arrangements at the reservoir and inspected the ongoing pump set alignment works being carried out under Patancheru transmission division-2.

Officials informed him that the present water level in the Singur reservoir stands at 516.080 feet, with available storage of 5.477 TMC. At a water level of 516.00 feet, nearly 5.340 TMC of water would remain available. They also stated that preparations are underway to begin partial emergency pumping operations from June 1. Ashok directed officials to complete pump set alignment works, power supply arrangements and related mechanical and electrical installations within.

TN panel tells CBSE, private schools to display class-wise fee at entrances

CHENNAI.(Agency)

In a sweeping directive to ensure transparency in collection of school fees, the Tamil Nadu State Information Commission has ordered district education authorities to ensure public display of fee structure by all private, CBSE, and aided schools across the state.

Bringing to end the three-and-a-half-year battle of a Coimbatore resident to obtain information on school fees under the Right to Information (RTI) Act, information commissioner VPR llamparithi directed schools to display class-wise fee structures at their entrances, on their websites, and furnish them along with the admission application forms.

Coming down heavily on officials for the prolonged delay in furnishing the information, the commission also directed the School Education Department to pay Rs

25,000 as compensation to the applicant, M Liaquath Ali of Coimbatore, and sought explanations from the officials who repeatedly transferred the RTI application



instead of providing the requested details.

The commission has directed Director of Private Schools S Suganya to submit a compliance report by June 15.

The order was passed recently on the second appeal filed by Liaquath Ali, who had sought information in October 2022 on the fee structure prescribed for private matriculation higher secondary schools under government guidelines.

According to the commission's order, the RTI application was transferred between the office of the Chief Educational Officer, the District Educational Officer (Private Schools) and school principals in Coimbatore, resulting in a delay of more than two-and-a-half years. The panel noted that even after receiving its notice, officials had failed to furnish complete information to the applicant.

Notice issued to PIOs of TN education officers

The petitioner said lack of clarity on school fee norms caused financial hardship and mental distress to his family during the Covid-19 period.

IMD predicts below-normal monsoon, extended heatwave in Telangana

HYDERABAD.(Agency)

Telangana may be headed for a difficult and uncertain monsoon season this year, with the India Meteorological Department (IMD) forecasting below-normal rainfall across the South Peninsular region even as parts of the state continue to reel under prolonged heatwave conditions under El Nino effect. More worrying for the state is the IMD's June forecast, which indicates that isolated pockets of the state are likely to continue experiencing more heatwave days than normal, even after the official onset of the southwest monsoon season.

The IMD, New Delhi, on Friday released its second-stage long-range forecast for the 2026 Southwest Monsoon, projecting seasonal rainfall at 90 per cent of the Long Period Average (LPA), placing the country



in the “below-normal” rainfall category.

The revised forecast is slightly lower than the earlier prediction of 92 per cent $\pm$ 4 per cent, signalling a modest downward revision in the expected intensity of this year's monsoon. For Telangana, the outlook appears mixed and increasingly complex. “While some parts of the state, especially central Telangana, including Hyderabad and surrounding districts, are expected to

receive excess rainfall of nearly 30% above normal, several northernmost and southernmost districts may witness rainfall deficits ranging between 25 and 30%,” an official with IMD, Hyderabad, GNRS Srinivas Rao, told. Meteorologists say this uneven spatial distribution could create serious challenges for agriculture, water management, and reservoir planning across the state. Unlike previous years, when the southwest monsoon typically became active across Telangana during the first week of June, this year's onset is expected to be sluggish and delayed.

Normally, the monsoon reaches Kerala in the first week of June and advances into Telangana within five to 10 days. However, since the monsoon has not yet reached Kerala, meteorologists now believe that its arrival over Telangana could be delayed until around June 15.

Orissa HC quashes disciplinary proceedings against judicial officer

CUTTACK.(Agency)

The Orissa High Court has quashed disciplinary proceedings and punishment imposed on senior judicial officer Lalit Kumar Dash, holding that the findings against him were based on “no evidence and unsupported presumptions”.

A division bench comprising Justices Manash Ranjan Pathak and Sibho Sankar Mishra, set aside the inquiry report and the order dated February 23, 2023, that had imposed the penalty of withholding two increments with cumulative effect on Dash.

Quashing both the inquiry report and punishment order, the bench directed high court authorities to restore all consequential service benefits to Dash before his retirement on July 31, 2026. He is presently serving as Additional-cum-Special Judge (Vigilance), Balasore.

Dash, an officer of the Odisha Superior Judicial Service, had joined service in



1997 and was appointed registrar (judicial) of the Orissa High Court on January 13, 2020. After his transfer, disciplinary proceedings were initiated against him over alleged disappearance of documents from an administrative file and alleged irregular recommendations in matters relating to promotions of court staff.

According to the case records, Dash was asked to explain the alleged missing of documents from two pages in an administrative file. His explanation was found unsatisfactory, following which a departmental proceeding was initiated in 2021. The inquiry officer later held him guilty, and the

disciplinary authority imposed the punishment in 2023.

However, the bench found serious flaws in the disciplinary findings. “The findings on charges relating to administrative indiscipline, misconduct and failure to maintain integrity on account of alleged missing documents are vitiated by non-consideration of material evidence, reliance on presumptions and shifting of burden of proof. Hence, it's a case of no evidence,” the bench observed. The court also rejected allegations relating to Dash's recommendation for invoking Rule 38(10) of the High Court of Orissa Staff Rules in matters concerning promotions of secretaries and personal assistants. “The petitioner did not conceal the source of the directions. On the contrary, he openly incorporated in the official note that the actions were being taken under the directions of the Acting Chief Justice. Such conduct militates against any inference of covert or dishonest intent,” the judgment stated.

Massive storm, 88 kmph wind hit Kolkata: 7 dead, widespread damage reported

Kolkata.(Agency)

Heavy rain lashed Kolkata and other parts of West Bengal on Friday, leaving seven people dead and causing widespread damage. Flight operations were also hit, with several diverted or delayed.

The weather office said a squall passed over Alipore in Kolkata district from the north-westerly direction with a maximum speed reaching 88 kmph at 2.45 pm. A squall also passed over Dum Dum in North 24 Parganas district with a maximum speed of 74 kmph at 2.29 pm. The squalls were accompanied by heavy thunderstorms.

Chief Minister Suvendu Adhikari announced compensation of Rs 4 lakh each for the families of those who died. He said at a press briefing, “Between this storm and various other factors, such as electrocution, railway incidents, house collapses, and lightning, a total of seven people have lost their lives. We all know that no monetary compensation can ever replace a lost life. However, on behalf of the government, we are announcing a compensation of Rs 4 lakh each for these seven families. District magistrates, along with local MLAs, have been instructed to ensure this compensation reaches the families as swiftly as possible.”

The Home Secretary, the Disaster Management Secretary and all other government departments are actively monitoring the situation, and the police and district magistrates have been instructed to complete postmortems and other necessary formalities.

Around Town: Finally, Indu Ice Cream has a scoop-shop! Here's what to expect

Mumbai.(Agency)

It's 10.30 pm and there's a long queue at Indu Ice Cream. People of all ages, standing in line for a scoop of something familiar or something they've never tried. Hours earlier, Saloni Kukreja had told us she'd be at the shop until it closes at 12.30. We didn't fully understand the need then. Now we do. She and five others barely have a second to look up — scooping, offering tasters, patiently explaining to a pre-teen why toppings are pre-decided per flavour and can't be switched, before turning to pipe salted caramel onto a filter coffee ice cream for the next person in line.



A few weeks ago, when 30-year-old Kukreja announced on Instagram that Indu would finally have a physical outlet, the response was largely: Finally.

She always knew she wanted to work in food. Home science was the only subject

she excelled at in school, but a degree in it was a no from her parents. She did a BMS at HR College instead, and started doing content creation on Instagram and writing a food blog ‘Food of Mumbai’ on the side. This was 2014. She was 17. By second year of college, brand collaborations were bringing in money. By graduation, a string of internships had made one thing clear: corporate life wasn't it.

She pursued content full time and enrolled at Northwest Culinary Academy in Vancouver in 2019. There she worked on a farm, in cafes, in hot kitchens, and crossed hot kitchens off the list. Pastry held her — the pre-planning, the intricacy,

the way everything is accounted for before you begin. Ice cream specifically felt like a blank canvas. The last bakery she worked at had started as a mill, sourcing grain directly from Canadian farmers, milling on-site, no commercial wheat, no instant yeast. It planted something. She came back to Bombay wanting to do the same with Indian ingredients — indigenous grains, local fruits, flavour profiles that patisserie here hadn't touched. She assessed the market and concluded it wasn't ready. Ice cream was. In the summer of 2023, she ran a four-month pilot out of her Khar home — six flavours, a retailer licence, small-batch production at a friend's facility, packaged.

NEWS BOX

IPL 2026: Kumar Sangakkara drops Sam Curran injury truth bomb after RR bow out



CHENNAI. (Agency)

Rajasthan Royals head coach Kumar Sangakkara has questioned Sam Curran's absence from IPL 2026 after the England all-rounder returned to action for Surrey in the Vitality Blast, despite the franchise being informed that he had suffered a season-ending injury. Speaking after Rajasthan Royals' exit in Qualifier 2, Sangakkara said it was disappointing to see Curran return to action in England after the franchise had been informed that the all-rounder would miss the entire season due to injury. We were told that Sam Curran had a season-ending injury, but I think I saw him play two or three games for Surrey. That was disappointing because we would have loved to have had him here with us," Sangakkara told reporters. Curran was signed by Rajasthan Royals for Rs 2.40 crore but withdrew before the start of the season because of a groin injury. The franchise subsequently brought in Sri Lanka all-rounder Dasun Shanaka as his replacement. Sangakkara said the Royals had accepted the situation when they were informed of the injury and praised the squad for the way it responded despite losing a player of Curran's calibre. "Having brought in Dasun Shanaka as a replacement after being informed early, I think the team and everyone involved should be extremely proud of what they've achieved," he said. The former Sri Lanka captain also backed the BCCI's stance on player withdrawals and injuries, saying clear rules were necessary to protect the interests of franchises. "A proper, tight policy around that is always a requirement, and the BCCI has a strict policy on it. Injuries are part of the game, and if it's a serious, season-ending injury, of course we understand," Sangakkara said. Curran's withdrawal came after a groin problem that had troubled him during England's T20 World Cup campaign. Speaking after pulling out of the IPL, the 27-year-old had said scans revealed enough damage to require an extended period of rehabilitation. "It's an injury that I've kind of been battling with a little bit. It has gradually got fractionally worse. I went for a couple of scans, and it showed reasonable damage, so I had to make the tough decision.

Arsene Wenger built the dream, can Arteta complete it with Champions League glory?



NEW DELHI. (Agency)

There is a unique pressure that comes with chasing ghosts. For years, every Arsenal manager lived under the towering shadow of Arsene Wenger, the man who shaped the club's modern identity.

Now, as Arsenal prepares for the Champions League final against Paris Saint-Germain, the comparison has shifted dramatically. Mikel Arteta has already ended Arsenal's 22-year wait for a Premier League title. One more victory could deliver an unprecedented European double and spark an uncomfortable question: if Arteta wins the Champions League, does he surpass Wenger's legacy? The Perfect Run vs The Unpredictable Challenger

Arsenal has stormed through Europe, reaching the final without losing a single game, including all eight group-stage games. A possible European 'Invincible' season is on card. On the other hand, PSG's path has been far messier, with Luis Enrique's side enduring inconsistency in the league stage before battling their way into another final.

That contrast has led some fans to argue that it would be a bottle job if Arsenal fails to lift the trophy. Former India international Robin Singh, however, disagrees entirely.

"I don't think it's going to be a bottle job," Robin said in an exclusive interview. "The physical and emotional toll of winning the Premier League — the best league — from being called 'nearly there' for so many years has now found fruition. The pressure is off their back because they've won the league."

Robin believes that from here on whatever Arteta achieves will be considered an achievement. "For him now, it's about continuing that form, and I think more than a bottle job, it'll be: 'We haven't done it for 20 years. This is about making history.'"

Writing History, Not Replacing It
Football debates often reduce legacy to a simple hierarchy. But Wenger's influence extends far beyond silverware. A long-term

Delayed entry, weight change: Vinesh Phogat clears last-minute hurdles for Asian Games trials

Vinesh Phogat was finally cleared to compete in the Asian Games 53kg trials on Saturday after days of legal and administrative confusion involving the Wrestling Federation of India.

New Delhi. (Agency)

Even after the Supreme Court cleared her participation, Vinesh Phogat faced last-minute hurdles ahead of the Asian Games selection trials on Saturday, May 30. However, the wrestler was eventually allowed to compete in the 53kg category after days of uncertainty and legal wrangling involving the Wrestling Federation of India (WFI). The federation had approached the Supreme Court challenging a Delhi High Court order that directed it to permit Phogat's participation in the trials. Phogat had to fight hard to secure her place in the selection trials after the WFI attempted to block her participation. The federation had moved the Supreme Court challenging a Delhi High Court order that directed it to allow Phogat to

compete in the trials. However, she eventually had the final word after winning the legal battle.

The uncertainty continued at the venue as Vinesh arrived at the Indira Gandhi Stadium at 6:30 am but was made to wait until around 8:20 am for her weigh-in. Notably, the three-time Olympian had initially planned her comeback in the 57kg category at the Senior Open Ranking Tournament in Gonda before being barred from competing by the WFI. Phogat had turned up at the event in Uttar Pradesh only to return without competing.

WHAT'S THE OFFICIAL WORD?

The Wrestling Federation of India (WFI), meanwhile, issued an official statement saying the weigh-in for all categories, including the women's 53kg division, was conducted as per schedule at the Indira Gandhi Stadium, with Vinesh Phogat among those who completed the required formalities and were cleared to compete in the selection trials. However, the statement did not address the confusion surrounding her weight category. "The weigh-in for all weight categories, including the Women's 53kg category, was conducted at the Indira Gandhi Stadium, New Delhi, as per the

approved schedule for the Asian Games selection trials," the WFI said in a statement. "All eligible wrestlers, including Ms. Vinesh Phogat, reported for the weigh-in and completed the requisite formalities." "Accordingly, all eligible



wrestlers who fulfilled the prescribed requirements have been cleared to participate in the selection trials, which are scheduled to commence shortly," WFI added.

HOW WFI'S ATTEMPT TO STOP VINESH PHOGAT WAS REJECTED

Phogat was first allowed to compete by the Delhi High Court after she challenged a suspension imposed by the Wrestling

Federation of India (WFI) over alleged procedural and disciplinary violations, including a missed dope test last year. The WFI later approached the Supreme Court to challenge the High Court order, but the top court declined to stay her participation. The Delhi High Court also directed the Sports Ministry to appoint observers for the trials, while criticising the WFI's attempt to block Phogat from competing.

WHO ARE THE OBSERVERS OF VINESH PHOGAT'S TRIAL?

When Vinesh Phogat competes in the high-profile women's wrestling Asian Games

trials, former footballer Aditi Chauhan and Olympic gold-medallist hockey captain M M Somaiya will serve as observers from the Indian Olympic Association (IOA) and the Sports Ministry. Chauhan, a pioneering former goalkeeper who played professionally in the UK with West Ham United, is currently the Programme Officer for the IOA's Athlete Commission (Safeguarding & National Olympic Academy), a role she took up earlier this year. She represented India 57 times before retiring from international football.

Vaibhav Sooryavanshi more than ready: Sangakkara backs RR starboy for India call-up



New Delhi. (Agency)

Rajasthan Royals head coach Kumar Sangakkara believes Vaibhav Sooryavanshi is more than ready for an India debut. The teenage sensation enjoyed a dream IPL 2026 campaign, finishing as the Orange Cap holder with 776 runs from 16 matches at an average of 48.50 and a staggering strike rate of 237.30, including one century and five fifties. Amid his remarkable season, Sooryavanshi also earned a call-up to the India A squad for next month's tour of Sri Lanka. On Friday, the 15-year-old smashed 96 off 47 balls, but his valiant effort went in vain as the Royals failed to reach the final, losing to Gujarat Titans in Qualifier 2. Backing Sooryavanshi to soon earn his senior India cap, Sangakkara praised the youngster's maturity and composure, saying he has shown a strong sense of responsibility and impressive game awareness throughout the tournament. You never really know if anyone is ready until they play. But with everything he has shown against some of the best bowlers in the world, I think he's more than ready to take on any challenge that you throw at him. I'm sure he'll get that call-up very, very soon," Sangakkara said in the post-match press conference. "He has batted with a lot of maturity and shouldered the responsibility of that opening partnership really well for us this season."

'NEVER A GOOD SIGHT'

Sooryavanshi also faced a major challenge against the Titans when he was struck on the helmet by a sharp bouncer from Kagiso Rabada. However, the Royals opener showed remarkable courage, quickly regaining his composure after undergoing a mandatory medical assessment before continuing his innings. And yes, any batter getting hit is scary. I've seen a lot of people get hit, and it's never a good sight. But I'm glad he's OK," Sangakkara added. Sooryavanshi may have fallen just four runs short of a century in Qualifier 2, but the 15-year-old still had plenty to celebrate. During his 96-run knock, he became the fastest batter to reach 1,000 IPL runs in terms of balls faced, surpassing Andre Russell's previous record.

Play of the Day: Gill, Sudharsan and a reminder that cricket's basics never go out of fashion

New Delhi. (Agency)

The IPL has spent years redefining what batting can look like. Every season brings with it a fresh innovation. Batters shuffle across their stumps to lap 145kph fast bowlers over fine leg. Yorkers disappear behind the wicketkeeper. Reverse scoops and ramps, once considered novelty shots, have become part of the everyday vocabulary of T20 cricket. The format rewards audacity, celebrates invention and often convinces players that there is always a newer, smarter and more adventurous way to score runs. That is what made Gujarat Titans' chase against Rajasthan Royals in Qualifier 2 so fascinating. In a match featuring one of the most gifted teenage talents the game has seen in years and a target in excess of 200, the defining performance came not from innovation but from execution. It came from two batters who continue to trust cricket's oldest principles and execute them better than most. Shubman Gill and Sai

Sudharsan did not chase 215 with a barrage of unconventional strokes. They did not attempt to overwhelm Rajasthan through recklessness. Instead, they produced a



batting display built on timing, placement, footwork and shot selection, reminding everyone that the basics remain just as effective in 2026 as they were decades ago.

By the end of the night, Gujarat had secured a commanding seven-wicket victory, booked a place in their third IPL final in five seasons and completed the highest successful chase in the franchise's history. Gill had produced

a sublime 104 off 53 balls, Sudharsan had contributed a fluent 58 off 32, and together they had added 167 runs in just 77 deliveries in a partnership that effectively ended the contest before Rajasthan realised it was slipping away. The chase, however, began long before Gill and Sudharsan walked out to bat.

Earlier in the evening, Rajasthan Royals had been propelled by another remarkable innings from Vaibhav Sooryavanshi. The 15-year-old prodigy once again played with a freedom and confidence that belied his age, smashing a brilliantly paced 96 off 47 deliveries. His innings was packed with astonishing strokes and fearless intent, helping Rajasthan post 214 for 6 after electing to bat first on a used New Chanderigarh surface. At various points during Sooryavanshi's innings, it appeared as though Rajasthan were heading towards a total that would place enormous pressure on Gujarat. Yet inside the Titans camp, there was little sign of panic.

UEFA Champions League: Arsenal face PSG with European glory and history on the line

Arsenal meet holders PSG in the Champions League final in Budapest after dominant but contrasting runs. A first European crown for Arsenal or a rare successful defence for PSG would make this a defining final.

NEW DELHI. (Agency)

As European club football reaches its crescendo at Budapest's Puskas Arna, Arsenal and PSG stand one match away from immortality. Fresh from ending a 22-year wait for the Premier League title, Mikel Arteta's Arsenal are chasing the one trophy that has long eluded the club — the

UEFA Champions League. Standing in their way are defending champions PSG, led by Luis Enrique, who are aiming to



become the first team since Real Madrid to successfully retain the title. Arsenal have been dominant in Europe this season, arriving in Budapest unbeaten and boasting one of the competition's best defensive records. PSG, meanwhile, once again conquered French football by winning a fifth straight Ligue 1 title and continue to impress with Enrique's possession-based, high-intensity style.

THE ROAD TO THE FINAL

Arsenal's run to their first Champions League final in 20 years has been built on consistency and defensive solidity. The Gunners topped the league phase after winning all eight matches while they followed that by defeating Bayer Leverkusen 3-1 on aggregate in the Round of 16, edging Sporting CP 1-0 in the quarter-finals, and overcoming Atletico Madrid 2-1 across two legs in the semi-finals.

PSG's journey has been far more dramatic.

After finishing 11th in the league phase and entering the play-offs, they navigated a series of difficult knockout ties.

The French champions beat Monaco 5-4 on aggregate before dismantling Chelsea 8-2 in the Round of 16. Liverpool were swept aside 4-0 in the quarter-finals, while PSG survived a thrilling 6-5 aggregate semi-final victory over Bayern Munich to book their place in Budapest. e conceding only four goals.

The flying Sikh: How Gurindervir Singh took back the title of fastest Indian alive from Animesh Kujur

Gurindervir Singh and Animesh Kujur are two of the fastest men in India. The battle between the two is rapidly taking sprinting to new heights in the country.

Las Vegas. (Agency)

Punjab's Gurindervir Singh rose to national prominence in May 2026, when he ran the fastest 100m sprint ever recorded by an Indian man. Racing alongside Animesh Kujur, Gurindervir posted a time of 10.09, bettering Animesh's previously held national record by a considerable margin. What was perhaps more fascinating was the fact that the national record was traded three times in the space of 24 hours. First, Guri broke Animesh's 10.18, set last year, by 0.01 seconds in the heats. Animesh rose up to the

occasion soon enough and bettered both Guri and his own timing by registering 10.15. In the final showdown between the two, Guri raced ahead and posted a staggering time of 10.09, becoming the first-ever Indian to dip under 10.10, something that seemed like a distant dream even a few years ago. But that is not the story that we are telling today. Today's story is about how Guri, once nearly defeated by illness, found himself back to be the best again.

After winning the 2026 Fed Cup, Gurindervir chucked his spikes hard at the ground, only to pick them up and kiss them moments later. The raw emotions came from a man who had nearly lost his career in 2022.

THE UNMAKING OF INDIA'S FASTEST MAN

Training in National Institute of Sports Patiala, Gurindervir fell sick, which left his stomach lining thinned. Unable to absorb nutrients properly, Gurindervir lost that year to sickness and spent a large part of 2023 recovering from it. His previous best of 10.27

had come back in 2021, when he was still only 21 years old. But after the illness,



Gurindervir struggled to get anywhere close to that level again. Even after making an explosive comeback in 2024, winning both the Federation Cup and the Inter-State

Championships, he was still not running as fast as he once had. The struggle was not just physical. Training at an elite level without seeing the same response from your body can weigh heavily on an athlete. When Gurindervir joined the Reliance Foundation, after the Fed Cup 2024, the intensity of the programme initially left him overwhelmed.

Speaking to ESPN last year, Gurindervir admitted that he went into the National Games with negative thoughts in his head, unsure if he was adapting properly to the level of training around him. After a hard couple of years, Gurindervir got back to his potential again. He became India's fastest man in March 2025, posting a timing of 10.20 in the Indian Grand Prix in Bengaluru. That rush of becoming India's fastest man alive, Guri perhaps did not handle very well.

"I think his mind wasn't conditioned for what happened after that national record, it just went a bit crazy, and he just wasn't ready for it. But he's learnt a lot from that," Guri's coach James Hillier told India Today in an interview.



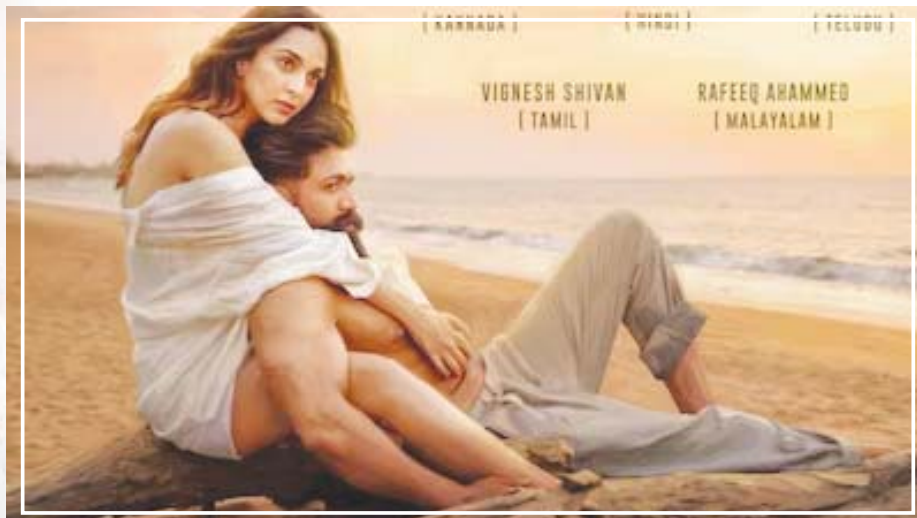
Kiara Advani

Was Asked Not To Say 'Hi, Hello' On Toxic Set, Was Told 'I Don't Want Pleasantries'

Kiara Advani will soon be seen in *Toxic: A Fairy Tale For Grown-Ups*. In a recent interview, the actress opened up about working on the project and revealed how the director Geetu Mohandas had asked her not to say 'hi, hello' to anybody on sets. This was because the filmmaker wanted the Bollywood star to be in her character's zone during the shoot.

"Geetu is like, okay, tomorrow when you come on set, I want you to be... and I'm a person when I walk on set I'm always like, 'Hi, what's up, good morning', I'm that person. And she's like, 'I don't want pleasantries, I want you to come in that zone, no hi hello, not your team, nobody, just be in a zone today'," Kiara told *Bombay Times*.

The Bollywood actress also admitted that working on the film was 'challenging' because she also had to shoot in the Kannada language. "Working in Kannada, I think I would say *Toxic* has been challenging because it's for the first time that we shot in both English and Kannada. We would do the same scene. So this shot was an English shot first till we got the take right.



Then we do the Kannada take, because you're, at least for someone like me, Kannada not being my language, mugging up my dialogues literally the night before," she said.

For the unversed, *Toxic* was shot in English and Kannada but will be released in several other languages, including Hindi. However, Kiara also explained that working in the Kannada film industry was not very different from how she is used to working on Hindi films. "I think eventually there may be slight cultural differences, but I feel eventually at the core we're all Indians, so there's a similarity, there's a familiarity.

Even the style of working sometimes, the bigger the stars and backup, which is great over there. But apart from that, I feel I've had a fairly similar experience with working in Hindi and in Telugu language," she shared.

Backed by KVN Productions and Monster Mind Creations, *Toxic: A Fairy Tale for Grown-Ups* also stars Yash, Nayanthara, Huma Qureshi, Rukmini Vasanth and Tara Sutaria in pivotal roles. *Toxic* was supposed to hit theatres on June 4, 2026. However, it has once again been postponed. The film's new release date has not been announced as of now.

Samay Raina Shares Glimpse From India's Got Latent Sets, Says 'Uski Bhi Shooting Chal Rahi Hai'



Comedian Samay Raina has sparked fresh speculation about the return of his controversial show *India's Got Latent*. Nearly a year after the show found itself at the centre of a major controversy over alleged vulgar remarks made during one of its episodes, Samay hinted that the series may be back in production by sharing a behind-the-scenes glimpse from its shoot.

The update came on Thursday, when Samay first took to Instagram Stories to announce the return of his COB chess tournament for longtime fans.

Samay Raina Hints At India's Got Latent Return

Sharing an update about his chess tournament, Samay wrote, "Organising my favourite chess tournament for old times' sake! I still love you chat." He also revealed the list of players, which included Anirban Dasgupta, Vaibhav Sethia, Joel Dsouza, Tracy Alison, Prakhhar Gupta, Vivek Desai and Balraj Ghai. In another Instagram Story, Samay cheekily addressed his *Latent* fanbase by sharing a clip from his stand-up special *Samay Raina: Still Alive*. Along with the clip, he wrote, "Latent fans in my dms." The video featured his comic line, "Yeh chess khel raha hai yaha pe?"

However, it was his next Story that grabbed the most attention. Samay shared a behind-the-scenes picture from what appeared to be the shoot of *India's Got Latent*. While he blurred the faces of the guests to keep their identities under wraps, he captioned the image, "Uski bhi shooting chal rahi hai dostoo."

The picture showed Samay holding a microphone, while comedian Balraj Ghai was seen standing behind him. The post has now led many fans to believe that *India's Got Latent* is officially back in production.

Pooja Bhatt Recalls 'Spark' With Aamir Khan During Dil Hai Ke Manta Nahin: 'It Never Bloomed'



Aamir Khan's reputation as a "perfectionist" on film sets began taking shape quite early in his career, and according to Pooja Bhatt, *Dil Hai Ke Manta Nahin* was one of the films where that side of him was already visible. The 1991 romantic drama, directed by Mahesh Bhatt, starred Aamir and Pooja in lead roles and went on to become one of the most loved films of its time. In a recent interview, Pooja revisited the film's shoot, her equation with Aamir and the "spark" they shared on camera.

Pooja Bhatt Recalls Working With Aamir Khan In Dil Hai Ke Manta Nahin

Speaking to Vickey Lalwani, Pooja said Aamir was deeply involved in the filmmaking process even back then. She recalled how he would rehearse extensively and question everything that did not feel right for the character.

She said, "He is somebody who rehearses. He is somebody who is... Well, some people would say intrusive, some people would say extremely interested in every aspect of the film. So he would question, 'Why are you wearing heels that are so big?' That's not the character." But I learnt a lot from him. His precision, for example, as an actor, he is a precise actor."

Pooja also revealed an interesting trivia about Aamir's famous cap from the film. According to her, the cap was Aamir's own addition to the character and had originally belonged to his nephew, Imran Khan. She said, "He was wrong about a lot of other things but he was right about one thing which was that cap. That cap was his addition to the film. He took it from his nephew, Imran, I think, and he brought it, and we said, 'Oh my god, you can't wear this, it's a child's cap.' He said, 'That's exactly where I got it from. I got it from my nephew.' And we were like, 'You can't wear this' and we were making fun of this, and that cap became a rage, it was sold on every street corner."

Pooja Bhatt Says She And Aamir Were Like Tom And Jerry

Looking back at their off-screen friendship, Pooja said she and Aamir would constantly tease each other during the shoot. She shared, "He is not all-knowing and correct always, and we used to pull each other's leg a lot.

Malaika Arora

On How She Protects Her Joy Amid Public Scrutiny: 'Internet Is Loud, But Not Always Wise'

Malaika Arora has been under constant scrutiny since the start of her career. Apart from her professional choices, she also frequently makes headlines for her personal life, especially her romantic relationships.

Recently, Malaika shared that she has learnt how to protect her inner joy. She also reflected on the things that spark joy for her. "I protect it (her inner joy) by remembering that the internet is loud, but it is not always wise. There's a difference. Over the years, I've realised that if you keep handing your peace over to public opinion, you'll never feel settled within yourself," Malaika Arora told *Hindustan Times*.

"I've learned to create boundaries. I don't consume everything that's said about me. I don't internalise every opinion. I lean on real life, my work, my loved ones, my routines, the things that actually nourish me.

That's what keeps me grounded," she added. Malaika said, "And honestly, with age comes perspective.

You stop reacting to every passing noise. You understand that criticism often says more about the person throwing it than the person receiving it. My joy today comes from being anchored in who I am... It's personal, it's protected, and it's not up for public debate."

"I think the thing I'm most joyful about today is my ease with myself. Earlier, like many women, I think I spent a lot of time wondering if I was being too much, too outspoken, too visible, too ambitious, too glamorous, too independent," she shared. "With time, you realise that the very things people want to shrink in you are often your strengths. Today, I genuinely enjoy being who I am without apologising for it. At this stage of my life, joy comes from not constantly editing yourself to make other people comfortable. I've earned that comfort in my own skin," she concluded.



NEWS BOX

IMF, World Bank, Others Warn Middle East War Is Straining Energy Supplies

World.(Agency)

The heads of the International Energy Agency, International Monetary Fund, World Bank and World Trade Organization warned on Friday that the war in the Middle East was straining global energy supplies and hitting vulnerable economies hardest.

The US-Israel war on Iran has disrupted trade, rattled financial markets and raised concerns over global energy supplies, particularly through the Strait of Hormuz, a key route for oil and gas shipments.

The global institutions said that the world economy remained resilient, but the conflict was disproportionately affecting poorer countries through higher fuel and fertilizer prices, increased uncertainty, and risks to jobs.

The heads of the groups met on Thursday to discuss how they should respond to the economic impact of the war, they said in a joint statement. US President Donald Trump has said he would decide Friday over a potential deal with Iran to extend their ceasefire that would need to include opening the waterway and dismantling Tehran's capacity to make a nuclear weapon. "If shipping flows do not return to normal, continued rapid depletion of global oil inventories ahead of peak summer oil demand in the Northern Hemisphere would present increasing risks for fuel security, market conditions, and broader economic resilience," the institutions said.

Indian student killed in Canada: 22-year-old attacked with knife; India's consulate expresses sorrow

World.(Agency)

Vidhi Megha, a 22-year-old Indian international student from Borsad in Gujarat's Anand district, was killed on May 15 in St. Catharines, located in Canada's Niagara region. She was reportedly attacked with a knife in a suspected homicide incident. Meanwhile, the Consulate General of India in Toronto has expressed sorrow and stated that the Indian authorities are constantly in touch with the bereaved family and are providing all support and assistance, including transportation of the mortal remains to India.

According to her father, Vidhi Megha had gone to Canada to study business management and had completed her three-year course. She later enrolled in a Personal Support Worker (PSW) Honours course. The Consulate is deeply saddened to learn about the death of an Indian international student, Vidhi Megha in St Catherine, Niagara. We convey our deepest condolences to the bereaved family and solidarity on this tragic loss," the Consulate General of India in Toronto said in a post on X. "The Consulate is in touch with the family members in India and Canada and also the funeral home and is providing all support and assistance to the family, including for transportation of the mortal remains to India," it added. Earlier, the father of the Indian student had urged the government to repatriate her mortal remains to India for her final rites.

"My daughter is 22 years old; the incident happened in St Catharines in Canada's Niagara region. She was attacked with a knife," her father, Kalpeshbhai Medha, said on Thursday.

"Your dead husband....": Candace Owens slams Erika Kirk over Charlie Kirk's private letters, calls fundraising effort "shameless"

World.(Agency)d

A social media dispute started this week after conservative commentator Candace Owens publicly attacked Erika Kirk for sharing personal notes and letters written by her late husband, Charlie Kirk. The conversation exploded across X, eliciting strong reactions from fans and critics alike as questions swirled about grief and privacy and public fundraising. The controversy began when Erika Kirk posted emotional reflections about Charlie Kirk, as well as photos of notes he'd handwritten to her during their marriage. While many followers viewed the posts as an intimate tribute to their relationship, Owens claimed the move crossed a line, particularly because the content was linked to fundraising efforts. Candace Owens calls out Erika Kirk on Charlie Kirk letters Owens has no qualms about criticizing. In a widely circulated post, she wrote: "Sharing private letters from your dead husband for the express purpose of fundraising is as tasteless as it is classless and I am without patience for those pretending otherwise. There is nothing beautiful about this. It is shameless emotional-manipulation for money, made worse by the fact that these e-mails are not even authored by her." The comments immediately triggered discussion on the net. Some users agreed with Owens, saying private correspondence should remain private, especially after the death of a loved one. Others pushed back, saying grieving families should be free to honor and remember loved ones however they see fit. This debate reflects a larger tension that often occurs when public figures share deeply personal moments with vast audiences. One person sees a touching tribute, another sees an inappropriate use of private memories. Erika Kirk's tribute to Charlie Kirk resonates with supporters. Supporters of Erika Kirk argue the posts offer a glimpse into the human side of a public figure. They believe the letters help preserve Charlie Kirk's legacy while offering comfort to people who are dealing with loss and grief in their own lives.

Blue Origin investigates rocket explosion as public is warned about possible wreckage washing ashore

US Vice President JD Vance told reporters that Trump was not yet ready to approve it, even though negotiations had "made a lot of progress."

CAPE CANAVERAL.(Agency)

Jeff Bezos' Blue Origin is assessing damage to its launch pad after a rocket exploded during a test firing, creating a giant orange fireball seen and felt for miles around. The company fueled the hulking New Glenn rocket Thursday night, hoping to briefly ignite the engines ahead of a satellite launch next week. But the 321-foot (98-meter), rocket blew up, taking part of the pad with it.

Aerial views on Friday revealed heaps of crumpled structures on the ground, with just one tower and the water tank still standing. Emergency officials warned the public to avoid any wreckage that might wash ashore and to instead call 911. There were no reported deaths or injuries.

It's a major setback for Blue Origin, coming just one month after the entire New Glenn

fleet was grounded because of an upper-stage engine issue that dumped a satellite in the wrong orbit. Named after John Glenn, the first American in orbit, New Glenn is the rocket that Blue Origin plans to use to launch landers to the moon under NASA's Artemis program that aims to build a sprawling base near the moon's south pole. The goal is to land the first Artemis moonwalkers as early as 2028. Earlier this week, the space agency awarded a new contract to Blue Origin worth hundreds of millions of dollars. None of the assigned 48 Amazon Leo satellites were on board the newest rocket when the blast occurred. Another batch of Amazon Leo satellites — competing with SpaceX's Starlinks to provide internet service to remote locales — lifted off from another pad at Cape



Canaveral Space Force Station on Friday night, courtesy of United Launch Alliance's Atlas V rocket.

It was the second launch of the day. SpaceX launched more Starlinks to orbit Friday morning, within 12 hours of the explosion. CEO Elon Musk has two Florida pads in action, one on the Space Force side where the latest Falcon 9 lifted off and the other at NASA's Kennedy Space Center. Blue Origin has just one Florida pad: Launch Complex 36 dating back to the early 1960s. NASA's Mariner and Pioneer interplanetary probes rocketed away from there, as well as the moon-bound Rangers and Surveyors. The Washington state-based Blue Origin spent more than \$1 billion rebuilding the launch complex — taking it from double pads to a single — after leasing it from the Air Force in 2015.

US Democrats say Bondi refuses to answer Trump-related questions in Epstein probe

CAPE CANAVERAL.(Agency)

Former US Attorney General Pam Bondi refused to answer questions from Congress on whether President Donald Trump was aware of the late sex offender Jeffrey Epstein's activities that led to his criminal indictments or whether he directed her to redact Justice Department files that were made public, Democratic lawmakers said on Friday. In a closed-door interview before the House of Representatives Oversight Committee on Friday, Bondi also said Todd Blanche, who now serves as acting attorney general, had been responsible for the documents' release. "I did not lead every aspect of this effort or conduct that document review myself. I delegated oversight over this process to Deputy Attorney General Todd Blanche," Bondi said in a prepared statement obtained by Reuters. Bondi later said that she backed Blanche in

her testimony. "I praised Acting AG Blanche's management of this Herculean task. I said his ethics are beyond reproach and that he is an incredible Attorney General," she wrote on X. Representative Robert Garcia of California, the top Democrat on the committee, told reporters Bondi refused to answer questions pertaining to Trump, saying a Justice Department lawyer sitting next to her "stepped in and told the former attorney general that she was not going to answer those questions." Under her tenure, the Justice Department said it would not release information that exposed victims or compromised ongoing investigations. Bondi faced sharp criticism from Democrats and some Republicans during her tenure for her handling of the release of millions of documents related to Epstein.

Democrats and some Republicans accused Bondi of trying to shield

Trump from scrutiny. Trump opposed the release of the information until shortly before Congress overwhelmingly passed a law ordering its release. Democratic Representative Melanie Stansbury of New Mexico said Bondi told the committee that the Justice Department has released 3 million out of 6 million Epstein-related documents. "This is a cover-up," she said. In her opening statement to the panel, Bondi acknowledged "redaction errors" but did not detail those mistakes. She also defended the Trump administration's handling of the Epstein case and the release of the documents. "To the best of my knowledge, the department produced everything required," she said in her statement, which was obtained by Reuters. The interview with Bondi concluded without her speaking to reporters gathered outside the committee room.

No state can impose hegemony: US Defence Chief draws red line on China

World.(Agency)

US Defence Secretary Pete Hegseth on Saturday urged Asian allies to ramp up military spending to counter China's growing power and prevent its dominance in the region, warning of "rightful alarm" over its rapid military buildup.

Hegseth, speaking at the Shangri-La Dialogue in Singapore, Asia's premier forum for defence leaders, militaries and diplomats, said stronger, more self-reliant allies are key. There is rightful alarm regarding China's historic military buildup and the expansion of its military activities in the region and beyond, "he said, to deterrence. "A Pacific dominated by any hegemon would unravel the regional balance of power," Hegseth said. "No state, including China, can impose hegemony and hold the security of our nation and our allies in question." The U.S. expects its Asian allies and partners to increase defence



spending to 3.5% of GDP as it pledged a \$1.5 trillion investment in its military, the Pentagon chief said. Hegseth stressed allies want stability, not escalation. "What they want, and what the United States delivers, is strength that is disciplined, resolve that is steady, and leadership that is confident enough to speak and walk softly while carrying a big stick."

Hegseth added ties with Beijing are "better than they have been in many years," citing "We are meeting more frequently with our Chinese counterparts by maintaining open lines of military to military communication."

NO FREELOADING

Since returning to office, U.S. President Donald Trump has demanded that allies boost defence spending and has pointedly said European and NATO partners should reduce reliance on Washington. "The era of the United States subsidizing the defence of wealthy nations is over," Hegseth said.

US Green Card: Most Immigrants Will Not Have To Leave America, Says DHS

LONGVIEW.(Agency)

Most immigrants seeking permanent residency in the United States will not be required to leave the country while waiting for their green cards, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) has clarified, according to The New York Times. The clarification follows confusion over a recent announcement by US Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS), which appeared to suggest that applicants would generally have to return to their home countries and wait abroad unless they qualified for "extraordinary" exceptions. However, DHS said on Friday that there had been no broad change in policy. According to The New York Times, immigration officers have long had the discretion to decide on a case-by-case basis whether an applicant should complete the green card process from outside the United

States. A DHS spokesperson said the latest guidance was simply a reminder of that existing authority and not a new requirement for all applicants. The department stressed that most people



seeking permanent residency would still be allowed to remain in the country while their cases are processed.

Officials indicated that certain factors, such as visa overstays or other immigration concerns, could influence individual decisions. However, DHS

has not provided detailed guidance on exactly who might be affected. The clarification represents a notable shift from the impression created by last week's announcement, which sparked concern among immigrant communities and immigration advocates. Even some officials within the department were reportedly uncertain about the scope of the guidance when it was first publicised.

According to The New York Times, a senior White House official described the move as a routine administrative matter rather than a significant shift in immigration strategy.

Despite the latest explanation, questions remain because the government has yet to clearly define the circumstances under which applicants may be required to leave the United States during the green card process.

Trump says Iran deal possible only if all conditions met amid conflicting claims over negotiations

White House official says US President will not sign agreement unless "red lines" are satisfied, while Tehran insists no final deal has been reached and disputes key US claims.

WASHINGTON.(Agency)

US President Donald Trump will only make a peace deal with Iran if it meets all of his conditions, a White House official told AFP on Friday, as questions swirled about the state of negotiations to end the war. The White House had indicated Trump was close to a decision on a potential deal, even as Tehran insisted there was still "no final agreement" on ending the Middle East conflict. An Iranian state media report also rebutted several key elements of Trump's

characterization of the deal, with sources calling his remarks a "mixture of truth and lies." US sources had told AFP the deal was waiting on Trump's sign-off following weeks of halting negotiations over a conflict that has engulfed the Middle East and shaken the global economy.

Trump attended a two-hour meeting in the White House Situation Room on Friday but did not reach a decision.

"President Trump will only make a deal that is good for America and satisfies his red lines," a White House official told AFP afterward. "Iran can never possess a nuclear weapon," the official added. Trump had announced the meeting in a lengthy social media post, reiterating long-held demands that Iran agree never to develop nuclear weapons and reopen the vital Strait of Hormuz shipping lane.

Iranian foreign ministry spokesman Esmail Baqaei pushed back, telling state media that the Islamic republic "said goodbye to the language of 'must' 47 years ago." Exchanges of messages were continuing, he added, but "no final agreement has been reached yet."

In a phone call with the Emir of Qatar, Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian said Iran was ready to achieve a "dignified framework" to end the war, according to state news agency IRNA. In his post,



Trump said Tehran would remove mines from the Strait of Hormuz and end its blockade of the waterway with "no tolls," while the US would lift its parallel blockade of Iranian ports.

The two countries would also coordinate on removing and destroying Iran's enriched uranium, he said, adding that "no money will be exchanged, until further notice."

Iran's Fars news agency, however, cited sources as saying Tehran was demanding "the immediate release of \$12 billion in frozen Iranian assets" before moving to the next phase of negotiations.

On the toll-free reopening of Hormuz, the sources said "no such clause appears in the text of the agreement," while Trump's comment on destroying Iran's nuclear material "is fundamentally baseless."

Baqaei also told state TV there were currently "no negotiations" taking place on Iran's nuclear program, as Iran's top diplomat suggested the US was holding up a deal with its approach to the talks. Telling the truth? Ali, a resident of the city of

Tonekabon north of Tehran, said that whatever the deal was, there would likely be more strife to come.

"Both sides are speaking in a way that keeps their supporters satisfied. It's not clear who is telling the truth," the 49-year-old said.

Hopes of an agreement had risen on Thursday after US officials voiced optimism about the diplomatic progress.