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DK Shivakumar Writes To PM In New Mekedatu Push, Tamil Nadu Opposes

The proposed Mekedatu reservoir aims to supply drinking water to Bengaluru, but Tamil Nadu is opposing it over Cauvery water sharing

New Delhi .(Agency)
Karnataka Chief Minister DK Shivakumar has sought Prime Minister Narendra Modi's intervention in getting the contentious Mekedatu project cleared. The chief minister, in a letter to PM Modi, has urged him to expedite the clearance for the project that has pitted Karnataka against Tamil Nadu. DK Shivakumar, who met Prime Minister Modi in Delhi on Thursday after becoming the Chief Minister, has been pushing for the project clearance. In his letter, the Chief Minister has mentioned the rejection of Tamil Nadu's

review petition filed in the Supreme court on the project, urging the Center that the ball is now in its court. He has further mentioned in the letter that only Cauvery Water Management Authority (CWMA) and Central Water Commission (CWC) have the authority to take a decision on the Mekedatu Project. The proposed reservoir, located in the Ramanagara district (now Bengaluru South), aims to supply drinking water to Bengaluru and generate 400 MW of power, with Karnataka assuring that Tamil Nadu's allocated share of Cauvery water will not be compromised. The Tamil Nadu government, however, continues to



strongly oppose the project, citing concerns over water sharing, while Shivakumar maintains Karnataka will proceed with its preparations to submit a revised Detailed

Project Report. He has also sought intervention of Finance Minister Nirmala Sitaraman in getting the final statutory forest clearance that remains pending before the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC). In a letter to the Prime Minister last month, Tamil Nadu Chief Minister Vijay had opposed the project. Vijay had also questioned why the Ministry of Jal Shakti and the Central Water Commission were entertaining Karnataka's proposal despite objections raised by Tamil Nadu. Apart from the Mekedatu project, DK Shivakumar, during his meeting with the

PM on Thursday also pushed for a number of infra projects in Karnataka. He submitted a memorandum seeking urgent clearance and funding for several key state projects, including the Mekedatu reservoir, Upper Bhadra and Kalasa-Banduri Nala water projects, Bengaluru Metro expansion, Bengaluru Suburban Rail, Satellite Town Ring Road, and pending National Highway works. Shivakumar requested the release of Rs 5,300 crore for the Upper Bhadra project, Rs 2,860 crore in pending Finance Commission grants and a special infrastructure package of Rs 26,000 crore for Bengaluru.

CLAIMS WITHOUT PROOF

Mahanagar Metro Exclusive Alleged Defamation Plot Against Sagar Community Comes Under Fire

Scrutiny intensifies after key allegations are found to be based on assumptions, sparking debate over accountability and responsible conduct.

Mahanagar Metro Desk / Pawan Makan
Ahmedabad. Over the past several months, a deeply troubling pattern has emerged that many observers believe is aimed at disturbing social harmony and tarnishing the reputation of the Sagar community. According to allegations and information gathered during an independent inquiry, a network of individuals has been accused of creating and circulating manipulated images, fabricated content, and misleading digital material. The alleged modus operandi appears sophisticated. Fake videos and morphed photographs are reportedly prepared using modern technology and then used as tools to pressure individuals through threats of online publication. Critics of the network claim that when attempts at extracting money or other benefits fail, the disputed content is circulated on social media platforms in an effort to damage reputations and create public controversy. Mahanagar Metro News repeatedly challenged those making allegations against Jain monk Acharya Sagar Chandra Sagar Ji to produce verifiable evidence instead of relying on anonymous digital identities and social media campaigns. Seeking clarity, journalists from Mahanagar Metro News directly contacted Jagat Parekh through a telephonic interview. During the conversation, he was questioned about the serious allegations reportedly filed in court against

EXPOSING THE CONSPIRACY
Alleged Blackmail Network's Claims Against Sagar Community Collapse Under Scrutiny, Serious Allegations Found to Rest on Assumptions Rather Than Evidence

An alleged smear campaign targeting a Jain monk under the shadow of the Raj Kundra controversy comes under intense questioning. Alleged mastermind fails to provide any concrete evidence when confronted by Mahanagar Metro News.

THE ALLEGED MODUS OPERANDI

1. Fake videos and morphed images created using technology
2. Threats to upload on social media platforms
3. Extortion and blackmail for illegal gains
4. When demands fail, content is made viral to defame

KEY ACCUSED IN THE ALLEGED RACKET

- JAGAT PAREKH** (Ahmedabad): Multiple fraud and criminal cases allegedly registered. Credibility under serious question.
- HARDIK HUDIYA** (Mumbai): Allegedly operating and assisting in managing the network from behind the scenes.

ON-PHONE INTERVIEW: THE TRUTH EMERGES

- When asked about the serious allegations filed in court against Acharya Sagar Chandra Sagar Ji, Jagat Parekh was asked for evidence.
- He admitted on record: "We have no solid evidence. We just feel it might be true."
- When asked the reason, he stated that because the Raj Kundra case was in the news, he assumed "similar activities might be happening here too."

CAN A REPUTATION BE DESTROYED ON MERE ASSUMPTIONS?

- Courts work on EVIDENCE, not on guesses, prejudice or paranoia.
- Baseless allegations not only harm individuals but also mislead the public and waste judicial time.

TARGETING A MONK. HURTING A COMMUNITY.
Such baseless and malicious acts are not just attacks on an individual but wounds on the faith, dignity and harmony of an entire community.

OUR PLEDGE

- We challenge the accused: Present evidence in public, not behind the sheets of the courts.
- We will not bow down to any pressure or threats.
- We will continue to expose every face behind this alleged fake factory.
- We stand with truth, justice and the dignity of the Sagar community.

STOP DEFAMATION. RESPECT FAITH. RESPECT TRUTH.

Acharya Sagar Chandra Sagar Ji, including claims that explicit videos were allegedly being produced and sold abroad. According to the conversation, he allegedly acknowledged that no concrete evidence was available and stated that he believed such activities "might be happening." When pressed further about the basis of that belief, he report-

edly referred to the widely publicized Raj Kundra controversy involving allegations related to adult content distribution through mobile applications. Parekh allegedly suggested that because such a case had existed elsewhere, he suspected that similar activities could also be occurring in this instance. When asked to present evidence supporting such grave accusa-

tions, Parekh reportedly failed to provide any documentary proof, digital records, witness testimony, or other verifiable material. Legal experts point out that courts operate on evidence, documentation, witness testimony, and verifiable facts—not on personal assumptions, suspicions, or speculative comparisons. Observers argue that drawing parallels with an unrelated controversy and using that comparison as the basis for accusations against a religious figure raises significant concerns about due process and responsible conduct. Critics contend that such actions, if unsupported by evidence, may not only harm the reputation of the individual concerned but could also mislead the public and burden the judicial system with unsubstantiated claims. Mahanagar Metro News maintains that its position remains unchanged: any person making serious allegations should be prepared to substantiate them with credible evidence. The publication reiterates its call for transparency and accountability, urging all parties involved to rely on facts rather than speculation. It further states that it will continue examining the matter through lawful journalistic methods and will report developments as they emerge. As the controversy unfolds, one question remains central: can allegations of such magnitude stand without evidence, or will the judicial process ultimately separate fact from assumption?

Jaishankar defends India's Russia oil policy, says Europe's weapons have been used against India

New Delhi.(Agency)
External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar on Thursday strongly defended India's energy decisions amid criticism over New Delhi's purchase of Russian crude oil, while highlighting what he described as contradictions in Europe's position on India's security concerns. Speaking at the Kultaranta Talks in Finland during a session on 'Emerging Powers and the New Geopolitical Competition', Jaishankar responded to a journalist who suggested India had been "too sympathetic to Russia" and "too willing to buy oil from Russia". Explaining India's position, Jaishankar underscored that energy decisions were guided by affordability and supply realities.

"I'll make two observations. I buy oil based on cost and availability. So at that point of time, much of the oil available in the market was Russian because Europeans were essentially buying oil from the Middle East, which was our traditional supplier. So circumstances pushed us in a certain direction," Jaishankar stated. The minister also pushed back against criticism from Europe, pointing to India's long-standing security concerns over arms supplied to the region. "No European country has been attacked with Indian weapons. I wish I could say that for Europe weapons vis-a-vis India," he remarked. Asked to elaborate, Jaishankar sharpened argued that European arms exports had affected India's security interests for decades.



"Europe sells weapons, which are used to attack India. Not just now but for many years. We Indians have never done anything to endanger Europe. I think that's a reasonable point," Jaishankar emphasised.

Defending India's sovereign decision-making, Jaishankar also recalled the geopolitical and economic context following the outbreak of the Russia-Ukraine war in 2022. According to the minister, the United States had recognised India's role in stabilising global energy markets during a period of intense disruption triggered by sanctions on Moscow. "At that time, the US directly asked India to buy Russian oil to stabilise the oil market. We buy oil based on cost and availability," Jaishankar maintained during his address in Finland. Jaishankar further questioned the inconsistencies in Western sanctions and cautioned against applying selective moral standards to complex issues of trade, energy security and geopolitics.

Jaishankar responded to a journalist who suggested India had been "too sympathetic to Russia" and "too willing to buy oil from Russia".



News box

Woman hangs herself in flat, family alleges murder by husband and in-laws

Ghaziabad.(Agency)

A 27-year-old woman was found dead inside a rented flat in Faridabad's Sector 45 on Wednesday night, with her family alleging that she was murdered by her husband and in-laws. Police have registered an FIR on the complaint of the deceased's father, Ajit Singh. The woman, Seema, was a native of Ullawas village in Gurgaon. According to police, Seema's husband, Praveen, informed authorities that she had hanged herself inside a locked room. Police received information about the incident around 11 pm and reached the couple's rented accommodation in Sarvome Homes society.

"The couple got married two years ago. The husband's family is originally from Ribar village in Palwal and was residing in Sector 21C. The woman's family said that she was being harassed by her husband and in-laws since the marriage," an officer said. The complainant also alleged that the accused had been demanding Rs 50 lakh from Seema and her family. According to police, Praveen told investigators that the couple had argued over an issue before Seema went into her room. When she did not respond for a long time, he looked through a window and found her hanging from a ceiling fan. Following the incident, members of Seema's family reached the society and accused her husband and in-laws of murdering her. Additional police personnel and a crime branch team were deployed after tensions escalated at the spot.

"The matter will be investigated thoroughly. An FIR has been registered at Surajkund police station under Sections 80 (dowry death) and 3(5) (common intention) of the BNS against the husband, his mother, father and uncle. Further action will be taken based on the investigation," an officer said.

Haryana makes AI-powered app mandatory for govt school teachers

Ghaziabad.(Agency)

The Haryana school education department has made it mandatory for all teachers to download and actively use an AI application called Guru Mitra for lesson planning and classroom management. A directive issued by the directorate of school education on June 8 was circulated among all district education officers (DEOs), district elementary education officers (DEEOs) and heads of govt schools. Officials described Guru Mitra as a virtual teaching assistant capable of helping educators prepare customised lesson plans, generate classroom content, create quizzes and assignments, access learning resources, and streamline assessment-related tasks. The platform was developed to reduce paperwork, improve productivity and allow teachers to spend more time engaging with students rather than administrative work.

Education department officials said the app could significantly change how classrooms function. Instead of spending hours preparing study material, teachers can use AI-generated suggestions tailored to subjects and grade levels. The platform also offers support in classroom management and professional development, making it a one-stop digital companion for educators. The move comes amid a growing national conversation around the integration of artificial intelligence in education. While private schools and ed-tech companies have increasingly embraced AI tools, Haryana is among the first states to push for large-scale adoption of such technology across the govt school system. Officials argue that the initiative will not only enhance teaching quality but also help bridge gaps in access to educational resources, particularly in rural and semi-urban schools.

However, the decision is also likely to spark debate among teachers regarding digital readiness, training and the practical challenges of adapting to AI-driven systems. Recognising this, the department has directed school heads to provide guidance and support to staff to ensure smooth adoption of the platform.

Argument over Rs 1.6L spirals out of control, one shot in leg



Noida.(Agency)

A man was shot in the leg after a group of armed men allegedly barged into an office in Sector 10 and opened fire during a confrontation over a financial dispute of Rs 1.6 lakh on Wednesday around 10.30 pm.

The victim, Sikandar, filed a complaint alleging his friend Ashish had a monetary dispute with Arjun Sahu, an LLB student. Earlier, around 8.30 pm, Arjun allegedly threatened Ashish over the matter at his office.

Later, while Sikandar and others were present at Ashish's office in Sector 10, a group of men arrived and demanded that Ashish be brought outside. When those present tried to calm the situation and suggested resolving the matter through discussion, the visitors allegedly started abusing them. During the altercation, one of the accused allegedly pulled out a firearm and opened fire, with a bullet hitting Sikandar in the leg. The attackers then fled from the spot, leaving two vehicles behind. The victim was taken to a nearby hospital, where he underwent treatment. Based on his complaint, a case was registered at Sector 10 police station under Sections 191(2) (rioting), 191(3) (rioting while armed with a deadly weapon or any object likely to cause death), 115(2) (voluntarily causing hurt), 109 (attempt to murder), and 351(2) (criminal intimidation) of BNS and under relevant sections of the Arms Act. Vikas, 35, a resident of Samalkha in Panipat, who allegedly fired the shot, and Arjun Sahu, 20, a resident of Bhingarh Kheri in Gurgaon, were arrested.

3 days left to register pools, but compliance list stumps many in Ghaziabad

Noida.(Agency)

With the district administration directing all swimming pool operators to complete their registration within three days, the difficulty in fulfilling all the conditions in the compliance checklist may cause several housing societies to keep their pools closed. Authorities had introduced a sweeping set of compliance conditions for obtaining a no-objection certificates (NOCs) earlier this year. This includes disclosure of ownership structure, submitting qualification certificates of instructors, appointment of male and female lifeguards with documented credentials, as well as infrastructural changes like anti-skid tiles on pool decks, a boundary wall of at least eight feet around the pool and certification



from fire safety, electrical safety, and public works and irrigation departments. Separate functional changing rooms for men and women, a proper filtration plant to ensure that used water is

recycled and a proper channel for water outflow have also been made compulsory. According to an official, the move is aimed at maintaining safety and quality standards and is mandatory under the govt's "Pay and Play" and "Come and Play" schemes. Those found not complying with the norms will face action, he added. While authorities do not have an exact number of registered and unregistered pools in Ghaziabad, district sports officer Ram Milan said 160 pools have already got their registrations after completing the checklist. "We have also received 12 new applications for registrations on Wednesday. The count of the total number of pools in the district will begin on Friday," he told TOI. Representatives of several residential

societies have called the conditions "extremely difficult" and said they were having trouble completing them. An Indirapuram-based apartment owners' association (AOA), requesting anonymity, said that most of the residential societies were developed 20 years ago by different builders. "If we have to comply with the guidelines — like building an eight-foot wall around the pool — we have to change the entire structure," he said. The representative pointed out it was not only the infrastructural norms but also the detailed personal ones that were preventing them from applying for the registration. "The guidelines also ask us to ensure a prior health check up for those using it. It is impossible to enforce that as an AOA," he said. A representative from the association of another Indirapuram housing society said their swimming pool was handed over to a third party to get it ready for registration-related formalities.

MEHSANA TURNING INTO A 'MINI GOA'?

Serious Allegations of Illegal Liquor, Gambling and Protection Rackets Rock District

Mahanagar Metro Desk

Mehsana: Despite Gujarat's prohibition laws and repeated claims of strict law enforcement, Mehsana district is facing growing allegations of becoming a hub for illegal gambling and liquor-related activities. Local residents and whistleblowers claim that illicit operations have expanded across several areas of the district, prompting some critics to label Mehsana as a "Mini Goa" of underground activities. According to allegations highlighted by Pakko Gujarat News, concerns have been raised regarding the existence of an alleged protection network that reportedly allows illegal businesses to operate with minimal interference. The allegations have not been independently verified by authorities, and no official findings have yet been made public. Sources cited in the report claim that certain individuals allegedly function as unofficial "administra-

tors" who influence the operation of illegal activities across the district. Among the names frequently mentioned are Tarun Dabhi and an individual identified as Imran, who is reportedly lodged in Kadi Sub-Jail. The report alleges that despite being incarcerated, Imran continues to exert influence over illegal networks operating in the district. These claims remain unverified and no official confirmation has been issued by law-enforcement agencies. Several locations across Mehsana district have been named in complaints and local discussions regarding alleged gambling and liquor operations. In the Rajpur area under Nandasan police jurisdiction, allegations suggest that large-scale gambling activities are organized in open grounds behind local establishments, reportedly attracting participants from different parts of Gujarat. Similar allegations have emerged from vil-



lages under Bavlu, Gozaria, Bhayasar, and Linch jurisdictions, where individuals are accused of operating gambling centers or engaging in illicit liquor distribution. At the time of publication, the accused individuals had not publicly responded to these allegations. The report further alleges that bootlegging networks operating in Mehsana maintain connections with suppliers from neighboring Rajasthan. Claims have been made regarding the transportation of liquor through containers and luxury vehicles into Gujarat. No official law-enforcement agency has publicly confirmed these allegations, and indepen-

dent verification remains pending. Particularly alarming are allegations concerning the manufacture and distribution of illicit country liquor allegedly mixed with hazardous chemicals. Public safety advocates warn that if such claims prove true, the consequences could be severe, potentially leading to poisoning incidents similar to past liquor tragedies witnessed in different parts of the country. According to Pakko Gujarat News, complaints regarding these alleged activities were reportedly submitted to local police officials, district authorities, and the State Monitoring Cell (SMC) in Gandhinagar. The publi-

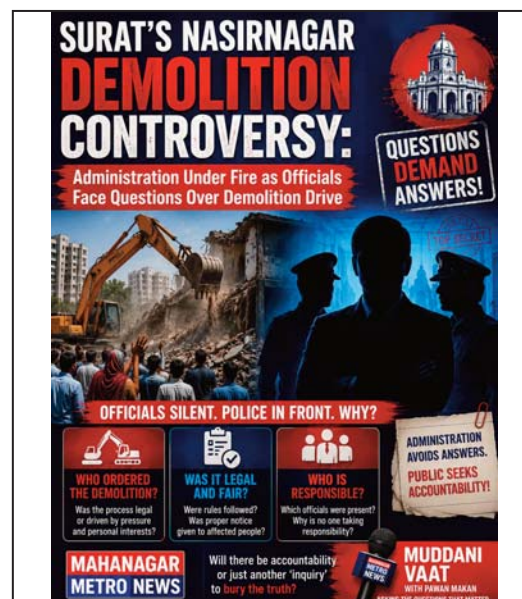
cation claims that detailed information and supporting material were also shared with concerned authorities. Critics argue that despite these representations, no major enforcement action has yet become publicly visible. The controversy has fueled public debate over accountability, transparency, and the effectiveness of enforcement mechanisms in tackling organized illegal activities. Citizens and activists are now demanding a comprehensive and impartial investigation into the allegations. They argue that only a transparent inquiry can establish the facts, determine whether any wrongdoing has occurred, and restore public confidence in the system. As pressure mounts, attention is turning toward the Home Department and senior law-enforcement authorities, who may face increasing calls to examine the allegations and clarify the official position.

ADMINISTRATION UNDER FIRE: Nasirnagar Demolition Sparks Accountability Storm in Surat

Mahanagar Metro Desk

Surat: The Nasirnagar demolition controversy in Surat has evolved far beyond a routine demolition exercise. What initially appeared to be an administrative action has now sparked wider public debate regarding transparency, accountability, governance, and the exercise of official authority. As affected families continue to seek answers regarding the demolition of their homes and livelihoods, attention is increasingly turning toward the officials responsible for planning, authorizing, and executing the operation.

During a recent episode of Mahanagar Metro News' flagship discussion program, "Muddani Vaat," senior journalist Pawan Makan raised a series of direct questions concerning the demolition process and the role of administrative authorities. Among the key questions raised were: Who authorized the demolition? Was the entire process carried out in accordance with legal procedures and statutory requirements? Which officials approved the operation? Were all affected parties given proper notice and an opportunity to present their case? Which officers were present at the site during the demolition? Was the operation conducted with adequate oversight and accountability? These questions have become central to the ongoing public debate surrounding the controversy. Critics allege that attempts by journalists to obtain detailed



explanations from responsible departments have been met with limited responses. According to members of the media, officials have either declined to comment or avoided answering specific questions regarding the decision-making process behind the demolition. The situation has led to growing criticism from sections of civil society and affected residents, who argue that transparency is essential in matters involving public welfare and displacement. Another issue being debated is the role played by law-enforcement personnel during interactions between journalists and

administrative officials. Some observers have questioned whether police presence was being used primarily for maintaining public order or whether it inadvertently created barriers between the administration and the media. Authorities have not publicly responded to these concerns. One of the biggest concerns emerging from the controversy is whether responsibility will ultimately be fixed on specific officials if procedural lapses are found. Citizens and activists argue that public confidence depends not merely on announcing inquiries but on ensuring that investigations lead to meaningful conclusions and accountability wherever warranted. Many residents fear that the matter could become another case where committee reports are prepared but decisive action remains elusive. The Nasirnagar controversy has become a test case for administrative transparency and public accountability in Surat. Displaced families continue to seek clarity regarding the decisions that affected their homes and livelihoods, while journalists and civic groups are demanding a comprehensive explanation of the events that led to the demolition. Mahanagar Metro News has stated that it will continue examining the issue and seeking answers from the authorities responsible for the operation. As public scrutiny intensifies, one question remains at the center of the controversy:

'I am thief' written on chest, head shaved: Mob assaults theft suspect in Ludhiana

The FIR against unidentified persons for assaulting the man has been registered at Basti Jodhewal police station.

Ludhiana. (Agency)

A man suspected of snatching a mobile phone was allegedly assaulted by a mob in Kailash Nagar area of Ludhiana.

The mob tied the man to a pole, pasted a note on his chest which read "Main chor hun" (I am a thief) and shaved his head and an eyebrow. The Ludhiana Police booked unidentified persons for wrongful restraint, causing hurting, intentional insult and other offences after the video went viral on social media.

The FIR against unidentified persons for assaulting the man has been registered at Basti Jodhewal police station.

ASI Balbir Singh, investigation officer in the case, said that police registered the FIR after the video went viral on social media. "We are yet to identify the victim. The suspects in the videos are also yet to be identified. Prima facie, the incident happened on Wednesday. The man was

suspected of snatching a mobile phone," said the ASI.

In the purported video, the mob is seen tying the man's arms and waist with a rope and he is then tied to a pole. He is also constantly hit on the head even as he keeps begging for mercy. His head was shaved from the middle and shirt removed. Some people in the mob say that "earlier also he was caught for stealing but did not mend his ways". Some keep shooting the incident on their phones. Some others kick him and say "now will you dare to steal again?"

The FIR against unidentified persons has been registered under the sections 115(2)(voluntarily causing hurt), 127 (2)(wrongful confinement), 127 (8), (wrongful confinement in secret), 352(intentional insult with intent to provoke breach of peace), 351 (2) (criminal intimidation) and 190 (unlawful assembly) of BNS.



Short news

'He finally landed a good job': UP family loses breadwinner in US strike

Kolkata. (Agency)

Three Indian seafarers killed in US strike: "He promised us he would return soon." That was the last conversation Ramji Chaurasia (70) had with his elder son, Shivanand, two days ago. The 37-year-old had been working on a ship, the Palau-flagged tanker MT Settebello, as Engine Petty Officer (Fitter), for the last six months. Over the past month, however, the family had been worried due to the Iran-US-Israel war.

On Thursday, their worst fears came true. Shivanand was among three Indian seafarers who were killed after an attack by US forces on the ship off the coast of Oman on June 9 amid the ongoing standoff over the Strait of Hormuz.

Ramji still remembers how overjoyed they were when Shivanand called them up in November last year saying he got a welding job aboard an oil tanker. His son had been working at a welding shop in Pune at the time. Before leaving for Mumbai to join the vessel, he visited his village, Sirauli, located about 7-8 km from the Deoria district headquarters in Eastern Uttar Pradesh. Speaking to The Indian Express, Ramji said, "It had been over six months since we last saw our son. He had called his wife, Sushila, two days ago and spoke to her and the children — six-year-old son Samar and two-year-old daughter Vamika. He told us he would return soon. We were worried because people were talking about the war and how many ships were stranded there."

After KGMU 'conversion' case, UP mandates anti-radicalisation units in all colleges

Lucknow. (Agency)

All state universities and higher educational institutions across Uttar Pradesh have been directed to set up 'anti-radicalisation' units by the Uttar Pradesh Governor Secretariat to curb any attempts of "forced religious conversion" on campuses. In December last year, the King George's Medical University (KGMU) in Lucknow was rocked by claims that a "love jihad" network was running from its campus after a junior resident doctor was arrested for alleged forced conversion and sexual exploitation.

In a letter dated May 29, sent by the office of the Governor-cum-Chancellor to vice-chancellors and directors of state universities and institutions, universities have been asked to immediately implement preventive measures aimed at curbing such cases.

The letter, issued by Dr Sudhir M Bobde, Special Executive Officer to the Chancellor, states that reports of attempts to convert students through inducements or psychological pressure are being received frequently. It said educational institutions must remain vigilant to ensure a "safe, religion-neutral and academic environment" and adopt strategies to eliminate such attempts. The letter also states, "At the university and institutional level, 'Anti-Radicalisation' units or Student Welfare Cells should be made highly active". The communication emphasises that higher educational institutions are not only centres of learning and innovation but also play a crucial role in the moral, intellectual and social development of youth. It adds that any effort to influence students through fear, mental pressure or unethical inducements for religious conversion is "unacceptable, unethical and against the law". The communication, a copy of which is with , added, "Any kind of illegal or forced religious conversion attempt carried out by influencing students, instilling fear, creating mental pressure or offering unethical inducements is completely unacceptable, unethical and contrary to law."

FIR against comic Pranit More, others over obscene comments during stand-up show

According to an official, Maharashtra Cyber continues to monitor online media ecosystems to identify and take appropriate action against content that violate laws and adversely affect public order or dignity.

Chandigarh. (Agency)

Maharashtra Cyber police on Thursday registered an FIR against stand-up comedian Pranit More, web developer Himanshu Jangra, Dr Sejal Pawar and others for allegedly making obscene comments during a show in Gurugram recently.

Summons have been issued to the three, directing them to appear before Maharashtra Cyber for inquiry.

According to an official, Maharashtra Cyber continues to monitor online media ecosystems to identify and take appropriate action against content that violate laws and adversely affect public order or dignity.

The case was registered at the Nodal Cyber Police Station following preliminary probe into viral video clips from the show hosted by More, said the official. The case was registered against More, Jangra, Pawar and other unidentified individuals under

relevant sections of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS) along with the Information Technology Act, the official said.



The case arises from videos circulated through YouTube, Instagram, and other social media platforms during More's show. The content being widely circulated allegedly contains obscene, offensive, and objectionable remarks concerning women, consent, and deceased persons, which are

against accepted societal norms and attract provisions of criminal law, the official added.

The investigation conducted by Maharashtra Cyber revealed that one of the clips allegedly contained remarks made by Himanshu Jangra suggesting entitlement to sexual favours in return for an amount of Rs 370 spent on chicken biryani during a date, thereby portraying women in a derogatory manner and trivialising issues relating to consent and dignity, the official said. More was seen laughing at Jangra's comment.

Another clip allegedly featured Dr Sejal Pawar making obscene and derogatory comment concerning cadavers of males used for educational purposes. The content alleged to be disrespectful to the dignity of the deceased and contrary to accepted standards of public decency, the official said.

Man from UP nabbed for sacrilege bid at Golden Temple complex

The Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) has filed an official complaint regarding the incident, however, police said that and FIR is yet to be registered.

Amritsar. (Agency)

A man from Uttar Pradesh was on Thursday nabbed by guards for an alleged sacrilege bid at Gurdwara Shaheed Baba Gurbaksh Singh Ji, situated inside the Golden Temple complex. Akal Takht Jathedar Giani Kuldeep Singh Gargaj said that one Abhijit from Saharanpur in Uttar Pradesh entered the sanctum during a Akhand Path around 2 am on Thursday. "After completing parkarma (circumambulation) of Guru Granth Sahib, he reportedly picked up the Sri Sahib (sword). Sewadars immediately apprehended him and handed him over to the police," he said. The Shiromani



Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) has filed an official complaint regarding the incident, however, police said that and FIR is yet to be registered. Gargaj added that the incident was similar to a December 2021

sacrilege attempt, when an individual crossed a safety grill inside Golden Temple and picked up the Sri Sahib.

He also called Thursday's incident a major failure of the Punjab government and criticised authorities for not yet identifying the person involved in the 2021 case.

The Jathedar added that the current case could be part of a larger conspiracy or a deliberate effort to hurt Sikh sentiments.

He urged the sangat to strengthen panthic pehridari (community vigilance) and tighten security arrangements at gurdwaras in villages, towns and cities, and to remain alert to suspicious activities.

Himachal Pradesh doubles entry fee to wildlife parks for Indians and foreigners

Entry fee for Indians revised to Rs 300, up from previous Rs 150; for foreign nationals, the fee is fixed at Rs 600

Shimla. (Agency)

Himachal Pradesh has introduced new regulations for sanctuaries, titled the Wildlife Protection Himachal Pradesh (Amendment) Rules, 2026, under which the entry fee for Indian citizens and foreign nationals has been doubled. The new regulations, amended from the Wildlife Protection Himachal Pradesh Rules, 1975, came into effect on Wednesday.

Under the revised fee structure for entry and activities within the sanctuary areas, the Indians citizens will be required to pay an entry fee of Rs 300 compared to the former fee of Rs 150. Similarly, for the foreign nationals, the fee is fixed at Rs 600, which is twice as much as the previous fee of Rs 300.

The officiating Chief Secretary-cum-Additional Chief Secretary (Forests) KK Pant has issued the notification in this regard.

The revised rules prescribe enhanced charges for entry, photography, research activities, and the use of vehicles and equipment in wildlife sanctuaries.

The state has a total of 28 wildlife sanctuaries covering approximately 5965 sq km. Out of these, Kais, Kanawar, Khokhan, Manali, Sainj and Tirthan are in the Kullu district. Shimla has three sanctuaries, including Shimla Water Catchment Wildlife Sanctuary, Talra Wildlife Sanctuary and Daranghati Wildlife Sanctuary. Chail Wildlife Sanctuary and Majathal Wildlife



Sanctuary are in the Solan district. Under the new fee structure, Indian citizens will be required to pay an entry and photography fee of Rs 300 per day for the first three days; an additional charge of Rs 500 per day will apply thereafter. For foreign nationals, the fee is fixed at

Rs 600 per day for the first three days and Rs 1,000 per day for each additional day.

Children below the age of five will be exempt from the fee, while school students will be charged at half the prescribed rates. The notification said, "The fees for use

of mobile cameras have been factored into and are inbuilt in the Entrance Fees-Rule 28(3) (a) and (b). The fees proposed under Rule 28(4) are only for the use of professional cameras."

An additional charge of Rs 1,000 per day for light vehicles and Rs 2,000 per day for heavy vehicles has also been introduced. The use of mobile phone cameras will be covered under the entry fee, while separate charges will apply for professional photography equipment. For professional still cameras, Indian citizens will be charged Rs 625 for the first three days and Rs 125 for each additional day. The foreign nationals will pay double these rates, at Rs 1,250 and Rs 250, respectively.



Jhansi first UP district with 'no child labour in its 496 villages'

Lucknow. (Agency)

In line with Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath's announcement to make Uttar Pradesh child labour-free by 2027, Jhansi is set to become the first district of the state where all 496 of its gram panchayats would be declared child labour-free. Meanwhile, the district is also gearing up to eradicate child labour from its urban areas.

Divisional Commissioner of Jhansi, Bimal Kumar Dubey is scheduled to present the district's child labour-free model before CM Adityanath and Labour Minister Anil Rajbhar



at a state-level consultation in Lucknow on 'World Day Against Child Labour' on June 12. Dubey said the milestone is the result of a year-long campaign that combined administrative mobilisation, community participation, village-level monitoring and support from trade bodies, NGOs and welfare departments.

What it means
Officials clarified that 'child labour-free' status does not imply that every household in the district was physically inspected. Rather, it means that all identified child labourers were withdrawn from work, enrolled in schools, and their families linked with welfare schemes. A working child under the age of 14 years is considered a child labour as per Indian laws. Village-level child welfare and protection committees, school management, and local bodies verified the absence of child labour before declaring their respective areas child labour-free. Officials said the declaration currently covers all 496 gram panchayats in the district. Efforts in urban areas are continuing through ward-level interventions, involving resident welfare committees and elected representatives, to raise awareness against child labour.

Nehru and Modi: A tale of two Prime Ministers

Berjis Desai

Jawaharlal Nehru was sworn in as the country's first democratically elected Prime Minister on May 13, 1952. He remained in office for a period of 4,397 days until his passing on May 27, 1964. For the alert student of constitutional history, on August 15, 1947, Nehru was head only of the interim government responsible to the Constituent Assembly that sat as the provisional Parliament. Today, Narendra Modi transcends Nehru's term in office by completing 4,398 days as Prime Minister. Modi and Nehru, our longest-standing PMs, are a picture in contrast—diametrically opposite in upbringing, mindset, belief, temperament, style of functioning, value system and political philosophy. Nehru was attended to by English governesses and Irish tutors along with a retinue of attendants in a 42-room house of his prosperous barrister father, before studying at Harrow, where British aristocrats schooled their children, and Trinity College, Cambridge. He wrote in his autobiography that he had a garden, a tennis court and a swimming pool and a pet pony to ride. His childhood, he wrote, "was sheltered and uneventful". Narendra, whose father ran a tiny tea shop at a railway station, lived with his five siblings in a dingy house without electricity. He received substandard education in the vernacular and did not have access to radio or newspapers. There was no toothbrush, shower, toilet, or even tap water in Modi's household, which he left at 17 on a personal spiritual journey, never to return. Jawaharlal, the child, was agast to watch his father sip imported red claret, which he thought was blood, as he puts it in his autobiography. Narendra, the child, watched his mother clean utensils of others with glass-mixed ash, which often made her fingers bleed. Nehru's clipped English accent endeared him to the elite, which felt he was one of them. Hyper-conscious of his international image, Nehru perceived the country through the prism of Fabian socialism, which cost the nation dear. He inordinately delayed Kashmir's accession into India, promised a plebiscite, took the matter to the UN, and denied permission to the Indian Army to take over what later permanently became Pakistan Occupied Kashmir. His naivety in trusting the Chinese resulted in the loss of the strategic Aksai Chin, which he dismissed as "barren land". He signed the one-sided Indus Waters Treaty, giving Pakistan 80 percent of the water by volume, and said that he did not understand the fuss over it. Seventy-two years later, Modi performed the near-impossible constitutional feat of abrogating Kashmir's special status, which was providing a fig leaf to Pakistan's pernicious propaganda. He boldly suspended the IWT. He shaped the military strategy of proactive calibrated response and secured the nation's borders. Yet, a section of the intellectual elite remains allergic to sons of the soil like Modi, who do not speak King's English. A super performer indeed, they concede, but not one of us. As generations of bureaucrats have testified, Modi is a brilliant learner on the job. He listens; he is curious; he delves into the minutest detail. He follows up, evaluates, decides. No room exists for those who are underprepared and sloppy. Details bored Nehru. Temperamental, prone to making emotional decisions, highly opinionated and a mediocre administrator. JRD Tata, who adored him, said that Nehru had no interest in discussing economics, and he would look out of his window at a giant panda playing in the garden. Nehru adapted Soviet-style five-year plans with emphasis on land reforms, dams and heavy industry without thought as to how the benefits of development will percolate to the ground level. Modi revolutionised a religion-neutral, efficient welfare state to scientifically alleviate poverty—direct cash benefit transfer to the poorest, cooking gas cylinders and water on tap, direct housing assistance, health insurance for the poor, financial inclusion through Jan Dhan bank accounts, cash payments for maternal welfare, sanitation and hygiene, separate toilets for women—the list is endless.

A young Nepal seeks partnership over patronage

To take Indo-Nepal relations forward, it is important to focus on what can be done and avoid being mired in legacy issues

Jayant Prasad

THE Indian government warmly received the chairman of Nepal's ruling Rastrriya Swatantra Party (RSP) Rabi Lamichhane in New Delhi last week. He came at the invitation of BJP President Nitin Nabin. Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Home Minister Amit Shah, National Security Adviser Ajit Doval and Foreign Minister S Jaishankar met Lamichhane. Some commentators in both India and Nepal found this to be special, unmindful of the fact that New Delhi has a tradition of welcoming chiefs of political parties and former Nepali PMs and according them protocol akin to that of a visiting Head of Government. When I was based in Kathmandu from 2011 to 2013, besides the incumbent PM, Baburam Bhattarai, other leaders who visited India and enjoyed the highest level of access to the government leadership included Pushpa Kamal Dahal, Madhav Nepal and Sushil Koirala, all of whom were not holding government office. On Lamichhane's heels came Nepal's Foreign Minister Shisir Khanal. Nepal's sub-Himalayan location ties its destiny closely with India. It is therefore important for the two countries to maintain healthy communications. Since Nepal's PM Balendra Shah is preoccupied with internal issues and there is little prospect of his early visit to India, it was sensible to invite Lamichhane and Shisir Khanal. This is an opportune time to engage Nepal, for there has been a momentous change there, with political power passing into the hands of a young generation, decisively sweeping aside established parties. One of the youngest republics in the world has the youngest Head of Government, who leads a council of ministers with the youngest average age. The RSP is just two seats short of a two-thirds parliamentary majority, a position that has resulted largely from the charisma of Balendra Shah. His government has a relatively free hand in shaping policy. The RSP and Gen Z, which supports it, believe that, unlike Nepal's previous political transitions, the recent transformation in Nepal was entirely internal. While this is largely true, India quietly supported the timely electoral process. On the eve of his departure from Kathmandu, Lamichhane promised to recalibrate Nepal-India relations transparently. When, as a TV anchor, he set a world record by hosting a 62-hour talk show in April 2013, the theme of his broadcast was "Buddha Was Born in Nepal", popular with Nepali

nationalists who presumed that Indians wanted to take away this credit from Nepal. Lamichhane's visit helped the Indian leadership understand the expectations of Nepal's RSP-led government. Bibek Thoj Thapa, 29, an analyst with the Nepal Institute for International Cooperation and Engagement, says that Gen Z would like to see "India as a partner, not as a big brother, building bilateral relations based on shared responsibility, without being transactional." While the new government has changed the style of diplomatic conduct, it has reaffirmed the traditional parameters of Nepalese foreign policy, anchored in neutrality, independence and the constitutional principle of non-alignment, with a focus on development diplomacy. The new protocol-based code of conduct for diplomatic interaction does not alter the

internal dissension, sabotage by the old guard and the weight of popular expectations.

The government's constraints also include a lack of resources and a deficit of experience, leading to clashes with the judiciary, which has stayed many decisions taken by Shah. It includes several contentious issues with India that require resolution, such as the border disputes, the 1950 Treaty revision and the operationalisation of the Pokhara and Bhairahawa airports. India has withheld permission to allow international flights at these airports due to their proximity to an Indian Air Force station.

The new government cannot succeed without active engagement and support from India. On its part, India will have to conduct diplomacy sensitively, without a heavy hand and ensure non-reciprocity as the guiding principle for putting India's relations with Nepal back on the rails.

To take the India-Nepal relationship forward, it is important to focus on what can be done and avoid being mired in legacy issues. By expanding a 35-square-km resolvable issue into a 370-square-km intractable dispute, the previous KP Sharma Oli-led government has not just hamstrung efforts to resolve the Kalapani controversy but also inserted a permanent thorn in the India-Nepal relationship. Landlocked Nepal's economy suffers from high logistics costs. Almost all of its third-country trade passes through designated Indian ports after transshipment at land borders by road or rail. Although China in 2016 allowed access through its east coast ports, this route has not been used by Nepalese exporters because Kolkata and Visakhapatnam are substantially closer than the designated Chinese ports of Tianjin, Shenzhen, Lianyungang or Zhanjiang. Nepalese goods can be transported in the future via the Ganga river, thereby enabling Nepal to overcome the limitations imposed by its landlocked status. The two prerequisites for this are India's facilitation of the passage of barges originating in Nepal to the Bay of Bengal and the availability of 24/7 water in the canals linking Nepalese rivers to the Ganga. The most promising of these is the Saptakoshi, the biggest Nepalese river at the shortest distance to the Bay of Bengal.

The other promising areas of India-Nepal cooperation include the completion of the Raxaul-Kathmandu railway, an international airport at Nijgarh, strengthening the Himalayan and Churia Hills ecosystems, education, health, tourism, biotechnology and people-to-people exchanges. This listing seems overambitious and the impediments are many. But if India and Nepal want to build a future together, this might be the way to go.



existing contours of Nepalese policy. While the style has changed, the substance remains unaltered. According to Nepal's former Ambassador to India, Professor Lok Raj Baral, "there is more continuity than change" in the new government's foreign policy. The Nepal government's policy for the forthcoming fiscal year aspires to achieve 7% average annual real GDP growth, create 1.5 million permanent jobs over five years and produce 30,000 MW of hydropower in the near future. If these were to happen, Nepal would become the most prosperous country in South Asia. Nepal's present hydropower production is less than 4,000 MW. The three main challenges for the government to reckon with are:

Beyond stigma : Personal relationships cannot define character

For far too long, the idea of "character" in India has been shaped by rigid moral codes, often applied unevenly and disproportionately to women

Recent observations by the Supreme Court that consensual premarital relationships cannot be treated as a "blot on character" mark an important moment in India's evolving understanding of personal liberty. The court's message is simple yet profound: private choices made by consenting adults should not become grounds for social condemnation or institutional discrimination. The case before the court illustrates this principle vividly. The dispute arose from the cancellation of the candidature of a police constable aspirant who had disclosed, while applying for the post, that a criminal case had been registered against him by a woman with whom he had allegedly been in a relationship for nearly four years. The woman claimed that the appellant had promised to marry her but eventually married another woman. The authorities treated the mere existence of the relationship as evidence of questionable character. The SC rightly rejected this



approach, observing that consensual premarital relationships cannot automatically amount to moral turpitude. For far too long, the idea of "character" in India

has been shaped by rigid moral codes, often applied unevenly and disproportionately to women. Employment opportunities and social acceptance have frequently been influenced by judgments about an individual's private life rather than professional competence or adherence to the law. By separating legality from morality, the court has reaffirmed a constitutional principle: the State cannot police the intimate choices of adults. At the same time, the judiciary has emphasised the need to distinguish between consensual relationships and genuine cases of coercion or deception. Not every failed relationship warrants criminal prosecution. Laws meant to protect women must remain robust, but they should not become instruments for adjudicating private morality. A mature society safeguards dignity not through stigma and silence, but through respect for autonomy, informed dialogue and commitment to consent.

Why RBI should sell some gold

If forex reserves are sold when needed, why are we so emotional about parting with gold

Subhash Chandra Garg

A BLOOMBERG report (June 2) claimed that the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) sold about \$12 billion worth of its gold reserves in two weeks through May 22. The Central bank denied the allegation the next day, stating clearly that its gold stock remained unchanged at 880.52 tonnes. Bloomberg retracted its report. As soon as Bloomberg made the allegation, an intense media war (most aggressively on social media) broke out, speculating about the actual state of the Indian economy. Many commentators argued that this showed the precarious situation of the rupee and India's foreign exchange reserves.

The banking regulator, while denying that any gold was sold, carelessly attached a page from its May 2026 Bulletin, which had the April (not May) weekly gold stock data. This made social media users question the veracity of the RBI's denial and accused it of spreading falsehoods. This imputation was plainly wrong as the monetary regulator would never make a false factual statement. Many recalled 1991 when India had to sell and mortgage its gold to avert an imminent default on its debt-servicing obligations. While the immediate issue has been laid to rest, the wider question of Indians' touchiness about the sale of RBI's gold remains. How should the Reserve Bank deal with its gold reserves? Should it buy more or sell some when needed or just stay put? As per the apex banking regulator's data (it started publishing about the physical quantity of gold it held from 2020), at March-end 2026, it had 880.34 tonnes of gold; in March 2020, its gold reserves were 653.01 tonnes. Going further back, the RBI had 560.3 tonnes in March 2018 (IMF data). The financial regulator began buying gold from the market in 2018-19 (as decided by an RBI committee, of which I was its

member as Secretary, Economic Affairs). The idea was that the RBI should buy small quantities of gold, especially in situations when there was excessive inflow of foreign exchange, which would also help prevent the rupee from unwanted strengthening.

The purchases increased the gold reserves to 693.45 tonnes in March 2021. The financial system regulator bought a good quantity of gold the next year, taking its gold reserves to 760.43 tonnes in March 2022. After slowing down purchases in 2022-23 (794.63 tonnes) and in 2023-24 (822.09 tonnes), the RBI bought a large quantity of gold again in 2024-25, taking its reserves to 879.58 tonnes. In 2025-26, there was hardly any purchase and the gold reserves increased by just 0.76 tonnes. The RBI bought 0.18 tonnes of gold in April 2026, which is where its current stock stands. In eight years, the Central bank bought a total of 320 tonnes of gold. While India moved to the eighth position globally, the RBI's gold reserves are about 10% of those of the US (8,133 tonnes). China held 2313.5 tonnes in the first quarter of 2026.

A standout feature of India's gold reserves accumulation strategy is that the apex monetary regulator uses foreign currency reserves (US dollars, euros, etc.) to buy gold. India does not have any current account surplus as its imports exceed exports. India's reserves are primarily built from capital account surpluses (largely from volatile foreign portfolio investment and foreign debt).

The rising price of gold has also brought in another important change in the role of gold reserves. As gold prices have been rising for the last two years, the dollar value of the RBI's gold reserves has gone up sharply. At the end of March 2018, the apex body's gold reserves equalled \$21.615 billion. In March 2026, these were

valued at \$120.742 billion. While the physical gold quantity increased by 57%, the dollar value increased by 460%. In rupee terms, the gold value rose still higher. In the Central bank's balance sheet, it was placed at Rs 1.44 trillion on June 30, 2018 and Rs 10.94 trillion on March 31, 2026, generating a massive growth of 660%. The financial regulator revalues its gold on a daily basis at



90% of the London Bullion Market Association (LBMA) price in US dollar and at the prevailing rupee-US dollar market exchange rate.

The Bloomberg report touched a raw nerve — of Indians viewing any gold sales by the regulatory body as tantamount to India's economic house being on fire. Why are we so touchy? If the RBI can buy gold from the market (as much as 320 tonnes in the last eight years), why should it not sell when advisable? Why did the alleged sale of 12 tonnes alarm so many people?

The alacrity with which the Central bank had to clarify and assure that all the gold was intact betrayed its

underlying nervousness about selling gold.

Can we stop being overly sentimental about selling gold? Gold is a reserve financial asset for the apex monetary regulator, like other assets which it holds, primarily foreign exchange reserves. If foreign currency reserves can be used/sold, what is so special about gold that it must not be sold? The RBI today sits on the horns of this golden trilemma: should it buy more gold to catch up with the US and China? Should it sell some gold to close the dollar demand-supply gap when needed? Or, should it stay still — neither buy nor sell gold?

Currently, there is a major gap — the dollar demand exceeds its supply. The Central bank can easily clear this gap by using its forex reserves, including gold. Its inability or unwillingness to use gold (it makes up about 20% of the forex currency reserves) is forcing the government and the RBI to undertake other desperate measures to shore up the dollar supply. On June 5, the financial regulator introduced extraordinary (and imprudent) measures like bearing the partial hedging cost of the PSUs' borrowings and the full cost for banks' FCNR (B) deposits, inducing them to raise foreign borrowings and deposits. The Central banking authority and the government should consider the option of selling some gold dispassionately. It will require changing its own and the people's mindset that gold is like any other foreign exchange asset and there is no odium attached to gold sales, when required. The notion that selling gold amounts to economic desperation or signifies that the economy is in trouble is wrong and needs to be laid to rest. Currently, international gold prices are quite high and the RBI is sitting on considerable gains as it bought its gold in the last eight years at far lower prices. It makes sense to book some profit and shore up usable foreign currency reserves.

5 reasons why you should visit

Kerala

during the Monsoon

During the rains, god's own country transforms into a veritable paradise with lush greenery gracing its backwaters and hills, cloudy sunsets, cool breeze and the cheerful fervour of an array of festivals. Intermittent showers heighten the romance of the season. It might not be the best time to hit the beaches, but here are five reasons why Kerala in the monsoon will leave you singing in the rain.

Snake boat races

The months between July and September are water sports season, with the backwaters around Alappuzha playing host to a series of snake boat races. The most famous of the lot is the Nehru Trophy Boat Race, generally held on the second Saturday of August every year. The regatta takes place on the Punnamada Lake, and features ceremonial processions and magnificent floats. Its star attraction is the synchronised rowing of traditional 30-metre-long snake-boats or chundan valloms, which have a raised prow resembling a snake.

The Onam sadya feast

This ten-day harvest festival celebrates the homecoming of the mythical king Mahabali, but it's also a good excuse to feast on some of Kerala's most lip-smacking vegetarian fare. Traditionally served on palm leaves, the nine-course banquet is held on the last or tenth day. It's best savoured at a local home, but you don't manage to get an invite then most local restaurants also offer these meals. The preceding days are filled with costume parades, boat races and shopping discounts.

Great hotel deals

Sandwiched between Kerala's sweltering summers and its peak tourist season (November to March), the monsoon is a great time to snag deals at otherwise expensive hotels and resorts. If you've ever fantasised

about an idyllic nouseboat crawl through the backwaters, then this is the time to get the best bargains. To avail the best discounts, make sure you plan your visit before the end of September, after which tariffs being climbing up again.

Ayurvedic therapies

Kerala is home to several excellent spas and wellness resorts, and there's no better time to pamper yourself than the monsoon season. According to Ayurveda, the cool, pleasant weather is ideal for rejuvenation. Sign up for a week-long retreat at top-notch stays such as the Kairali Ayurvedic Healing Village Health Resort in Palakkad or Somatheeram Ayurvedic Health Resort in Kovalam with relaxing oil-based therapies, massages, yoga and a balanced diet that'll cleanse your mind, body and soul.

Wayanad's natural splendour

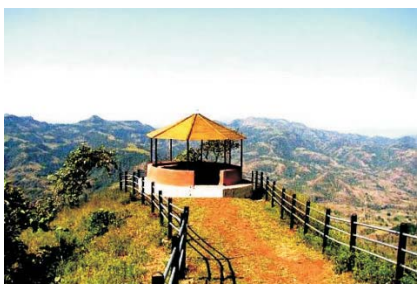
With virescent hills carpeted with plantations, rainforests and tumbling waterfalls, Wayanad is a photographer's delight. After you've had your fill of its misty coffee, tea and spice plantations, head to the Wayanad Wildlife Sanctuary that hosts numerous migrating birds in this period. Wayanad's tourism department also holds an annual monsoon carnival in July with village excursions, rain treks as well as local sports such as mud football and archery.



5 hill stations in

Maharashtra

to get away to



Panchgani

Deriving its name from the surrounding five hills that envelop it, Panchgani offers a window to the past. Located just about 38 metres below Mahabaleshwar, at an altitude of 1334 metres, the approach to this beautiful hill station is replete with lovely views of the Krishna River to one side, and the plains on the other. A quintessentially residential area, it exudes a charm that harks to a time gone by. Whether in the old colonial architecture, the Parsi homes, and century-old boarding lodges. The best vantage point to take in the world below can be found at Table Land, a flat mountain peak overlooking the plains. To mix things up, head to the local bazaar where business moves along at an unhurried pace, setting a leisurely tone for your time spent here.

Keechakadara

As accounted in the Mahabharata, this is the place where Bheema killed Keechaka, the villain and threw him into the valley below. Taking its name from the incident, Keechakadara is also often referred to as Chikhaldara. Aside from its mythological roots, there's more to this beautiful hill station. Situated at an altitude of 1118 metres in the Vidarbha region, this is the only hill resort in the area, and has the added attraction of being the only coffee-growing area in Maharashtra. This is even a great place for wild life enthusiasts to do some spotting as panthers, bears, sambar, wild boar, and wild dogs thrive here and it is

neighbouring by the famous Melghat Tiger Project which has 82 tigers. Hurricane Point, Prospect Point, and Devi Point are all great vantage points to take in the views, and this is also a good starting point for excursions to Gavilgad and Narnala Fort.

Bhandardara

Also cradled within the Sahyadri Hills, Bhandardara, with its soaring mountain ranges, plunging waterfalls and carpet of green, attracts tourists all through the year. For a short hour-long journey, this hill station offers city dwellers a drastically contrasting landscape and stunning surroundings. Bright



green paddy fields and clear blue skies punctuated with a labyrinth of gurgling streams, provide all the essential ingredients for a weekend away from the madding crowds. There's enough to keep you busy through the days. Built in 1910, Wilson Dam stands 150-metres-high and has a beautiful garden at the base. of Wilson Dam there is a garden endowed with thick greenery, streams and gigantic trees, the silently serene Arthur lake which mirrors the beauty of its surroundings in its blue waters, Mount Kalsubai, which is Maharashtra's highest peak at 1646 metres and draws in serious trekkers to its summit, the Agasti Risha Ashram which has been mentioned in the Ramayan and the ancient Ratangad Fort which offers panoramic views from its ramparts.

Matheran

Discovered back in 1850 by Hugh Malet, collector for the Thane district, Matheran sits atop the Sahyadris Mountain range and is another hot weekend getaway for city slickers. This gorgeous and quaint hill station is best accessed via the slow-moving toy train which chugs along over a leisurely two-hour-long journey from the valley below. Sprawled across a lush green, undulating hilltop, Matheran sits at a height of about 800 metres with drastic, steep cliffs offering the most stunning views of the plains below. Make your way up to Hart Point at night, and take in the dreamy, twinkling lights of Mumbai far below, meander through the winding ways and feast your eyes on the British-Parsi architecture of the local homes, walk up to Charlotte Lake, and do a spot of shopping in the market where you'll find lots of leather goodies, hats and ofcourse the famous sweet-sticky chikki best eaten hot and fresh.

Mahabaleshwar

Translating to mean 'God of Great Power' in Sanskrit, Mahabaleshwar is a favourite hill destination with Maharashtrians. Once the summer capital of the Bombay Presidency during the British Raj, it offers visitors a perfect blend of modernity with old-world charm. Aside from being abound with natural beauty, there's lots you can do here to keep entertained. All parts of the hill station are

Through the length of its state, Maharashtra encompasses a landscape ranging from the steeply rising Western Ghats, all the way down to the seashore of the Arabian Sea. Cradled within is carpeted green mountain walls, are the most stunning hill stations, each with a charm that's all their own. Take a break from the frenzied pace of the city and get away to these oases of calm.

accessible by car, so getting around is no problem, and if you're feeling adventurous, just climb onto a horse and get going. Make your way to Malcolm Peth, the bazaar at the heart of Mahabaleshwar, which has a good mix of hotels, shops and restaurants. Visit Mount Malcolm which was built in 1829 and once served as the Governor's residence, Moraji Castle which was home to Mahatma Gandhi back in 1945, and wind down at the Mahabaleshwar Club in the evening over drinks. During the day you can take the short drive up to Venna Lake and go boating or fishing, and proceed a little further down to Panchgani, and walk through the strawberry fields.

The historic village of Masouleh

The village of Masouleh is located in Gilan Province in Iran, perched high on a densely forested mountainside about 60 km inland from the Caspian Sea. Forever covered in fog, which barely leaves the village, Masouleh is an incredible spectacle—a series of cottages built on a slope, such that each house's courtyard is another house's rooftop. The village is located about 1,050 m above sea level, but the range of elevation varies by over a hundred metres in the village. Because of this, houses are constructed

in stepped terraces and are interconnected. The terrace of each house functions as the courtyard of the house above. In some cases, public streets are laid out along interconnected roofs. Due to its unique layout, Masouleh does not permit any motor vehicles to enter as the small streets and many stairs make it impossible for vehicles to operate in the village. Masouleh's peculiar architecture can be compared, to some extent, to the Libyan village of Ghadames, where interconnected rooftops create a network of passageways.

The village buildings are mostly two storeys and made of adobe, rods and bole. Between these houses are narrow, meandering steps that lead to the upper level of the city. Given that these old houses are mostly made

out of clay and wood, it is truly amazing that the roofs can also serve as sidewalks and walkways. Moreover, they are constantly exposed to wear and tear of the weather, such as deluges of rain and heaps of snow. Due to its high location, the climate of Masouleh is different from the rest of Iran, which is hot and dry. Here, warm, moist air blowing southwest from the Caspian is

blocked by the Alborz Mountains, creating heavy precipitation and fog on the seaward side of the mountains. The abundant rainfall has spawned dense forests and gushing rivers in the area.

The first village of Masouleh was established more than a thousand years ago, around 6 km northwest of the current village and is called Old

Masouleh. Masouleh had once been the 'Silk Road of the Gilan' region and people from far and near gathered here for business to sell and buy merchandise; however, as of

late, there are fewer signs of the young and old selling dream dolls and colourful socks in the alleys of Masouleh as people have migrated from this once trade centre due to unemployment and lack of income. As of recent, Masouleh is developing into a popular tourist destination.



There are many Tibetan monasteries in Arunachal Pradesh, which was once a part of Tibet. The people are Indian now, but they still have Tibetan roots in terms of how they worship, how they dress, what they eat etc. Since people are prohibited to practice Tibetan Buddhism in Tibet, places like Tawang and Bomdila are perfect to learn about the religion. Unlike some Buddhist areas in the world, here they don't have to send a boy from their family to be a monk at the monastery. It's all by choice of the boys themselves. The monasteries also serve as schools for children where they learn the local language, English and Tibetan. The best time to visit these monasteries is between October and April. There are three main monasteries—Tawang, Bomdila and Urgelling—and a couple of smaller ones that you can visit in Arunachal Pradesh.

Tawang Monastery

Established in 1860, this is the largest monastery in India and the second largest in Asia, after the Lhasa Potala 'palace' which is in Old Tibet, China. It's also

called Galden Namgye Lhatse and was founded as per the wish of the 5th Dalai Lama. It preserves two ancient scripts, Kangyur and Tengyur. The gompa is situated at an altitude of 10000 feet and is 'the must see' place in all of Arunachal Pradesh.

Bomdila Monastery

Also known as Gentse Gaden Rabgyel Lling, the absolutely stunning gompa is the largest in Bomdila. Mahayana Buddhism is practiced here by people, who are called Monpa. It was built in 1965 and blessed by HH Dalai Lama 14th. During festivals, one can see amazing mandalas made from sand. After the festivities, monks mess up



the detailed design as a symbol of their belief in the impermanence of life. It's located at 8500 feet above sea level, and is a replica of a monastery in South Tibet. You have to pass Bomdila to visit Tawang, so you can stop here on your way up or on your way back home.

Urgelling Monastery

This is the birthplace of His Holiness Dalai Lama 6th. It's just 5 km south of Tawang, so you can visit it on the same day you see Tawang Monastery. This is as old as the 15th century. In the 1700s, it was ransacked and many things were stolen. It's now a very simple and small monastery, and not often visited. They believe that the leaves of the tree planted by the Dalai Lama 6th can cure illness when kept in hot

Tsun Gon Thog Jee Choeling

Tsun Gon Thog Jee Choeling is actually a nunnery. You can warm up with a cup of hot tea and chat with the nuns. It's very interesting to see how female 'monks' or nuns live. The woman who greeted us, Sonar, was the sweetest girl I have ever met. While we were there, the nuns sat outside and had a lively debate.

Thegtse Sang-ngag Choekhorling Monastery of Mon-yul Kid-mo Jong

The gompa is located near Tawang in Khin-

mey, which is derived from Monpa word that means 'listening to the dogs bark'. The monastery was earlier covered in forest and people could hear the hunting dogs bark. Once they met a guru while hunting who taught them not to kill and they thereafter made a monastery there in 1480. You can visit the gompa and the walk up to there is stunning. The gompa is a part of Nyingma sect of Tibetan Buddhism, where monks can marry and have long hair.

These are the main monasteries that must be visited while in Arunachal Pradesh, but there is more you can do to get acquainted with the culture of the state. Other than trying food, you can meet locals and learn more about the culture. Besides, visit craft centres to see men at work making and painting sculptures of Buddha for monasteries. Some also make masks that are worn by monks during festivals, and you can even buy these as souvenirs. Also, see the women weaving clothes and painting Tibetan artwork.

Rather than just walking around the monastery, try to interact. The monks seem happy to talk with you, and the teachers and people in charge will even give you a tour if you ask. They'll probably offer you tea or hot water as well. Take time to listen to some of the students being taught in classes, and talk with the kids about what they are learning. There is a monk called Sange Lama in Bomdila that can read future. Furthermore, there is a new monastery being built where foreigners and Indian tourists will be able to learn about Tibetan Buddhism.



MCD inquiry report finds licence approval after expiry in B&B fire case

A key finding of the MCD's Public Health Department inquiry report, as narrated by highly placed sources, relates to the licence renewal process.

New Delhi.(Agency)

A fire that killed 23 people at a B&B in Delhi's Hauz Rani has now exposed far more than a single administrative lapse, with an internal Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD) inquiry pointing to repeated clearances despite expired licences, overlooked violations, and a pattern of regulatory failure that persisted for years

until it ended in tragedy.

A key finding of the MCD's Public Health Department inquiry report, as narrated by highly placed sources, relates to the licence renewal process. The renewal application for the 2025-26 licence, which was set to expire on March 31, 2026, was submitted on April 18, 2025.

After undergoing the required process, the application appeared on the concerned official's portal only in January 2026 and was finally approved on June 2—just one day before the tragedy.

Which means that after the licence for 2025-2026 expired on March 31, 2026, the establishment, Flourish Stay B&B, didn't have an active licence. On June 3, the day of the tragedy, even as the fire was engulfing the building, the owner logged onto the portal and submitted a fresh renewal

application for the 2026-27 licence. The application was rejected a few hours later.

The report, submitted to the MCD commissioner on Thursday, found that a health trade licence was approved by the concerned civic official after it had already expired. It flagged multiple instances of approvals being granted over time despite apparent violations at the establishment. This raises questions about regulatory oversight within the civic body, especially as no major action has yet been taken against the officials concerned since the fire tragedy.

The establishment had been operating for nearly a decade and underwent significant expansion after its current owner purchased the property in 2022, according to sources.

The owner had obtained permission from

the Delhi Tourism Department to operate a bed-and-breakfast with six rooms.

However, the property later exceeded this limit and came under the regulatory jurisdiction of the MCD. Beyond the Public Health Department, the role of other municipal departments, including the Building Department, is also

under scrutiny. Three additional floors were reportedly added after the 2022 ownership change, and the permissions for the expanded structure are being reviewed.

It was also found that the establishment obtained a tea and snacks licence in 2023 but was allegedly operating as a full-fledged restaurant. Despite this, the licence continued to be renewed in 2023, 2024 and 2025.

Unable to apply for eatery licence, B&B facility opted for tea-and-snack route

The property had repeatedly applied for and received an instant tea and snacks licence over the years, even though it should have applied for an eating establishment licence. A source explained that such licences can only be granted for commercial establishments or roadside setups.



jurisdiction of the MCD.

Beyond the Public Health Department, the role of other municipal departments, including the Building Department, is also

Heavy rainfall, thunderstorms may pound Delhi

New Delhi.(Agency)

Bringing relief from a severe heat spell, rains accompanied by strong winds lashed parts of Delhi on Thursday night. The India Meteorological Department (IMD) issued a red alert for the national capital for Friday, warning of thunderstorms, lightning and winds gusting up to 90 km per hour.

Weather experts said that the sudden change in weather conditions has been triggered by a cyclonic



circulation over central Pakistan and adjoining areas which has enhanced atmospheric instability over northwest India, including Delhi-NCR.

The weather activity is expected to intensify from Friday as the system gains strength. Temperatures are likely to dip over the next few days under the influence of cloud cover and rainfall, the IMD said.

A red alert is issued when severe weather conditions pose a threat to life and property. The IMD advised people to move to safe buildings, avoid weak structures, stay away from windows and avoid venturing near water bodies.

The capital's Air Quality Index stood in the 'moderate' category on Thursday.

Factory unit damaged in blaze in Delhi, 18 fire tenders used to douse

New Delhi.(Agency)

A portion of a factory building collapsed after a fire broke out at an industrial unit in Delhi's Mayapuri area on Thursday, prompting the deployment of 18 fire tenders, officials said.

According to the DFS, information regarding the blaze at a factory in Phase-I of the Mayapuri Industrial Area was received around 11.17 am. Officials said the fire engulfed a steel-cutting and packing materials factory operating on the first and second floors of a building spread across nearly 500 square yards.

The structure comprised a basement, ground floor and two upper floors. As the intensity of the blaze



increased, additional fire tenders were rushed to the spot to control the flames. During firefighting operations, portions of the first and second floors collapsed. Fire officials said the building remains structurally unsafe due to damage caused by the blaze and the collapse.

The fire was brought under control around 2.20 pm. No injuries or casualties were reported till the filing of the report.

Fire breaks out at north Delhi PG accommodation
A fire broke out at a paying guest accommodation in north Delhi's Sabzi Mandi area on Thursday, officials said. The blaze erupted on the fourth floor of a four-storey building allegedly being used as a PG facility. All students evacuated safely and no injuries were reported, officials said.

A tiffin box, a broken sandal: The details I cannot forget from the AI 171 crash

New Delhi.(Agency)

You mostly remember the odd things. And it is almost always completely unintended. Two things have stayed with me since June 12, 2025. On rare days—very rare days—my surface without warning. A plastic tiffin box. And the broken clasp on a black pair of sandals. I have often wondered why, whenever the Air India AI 171 crash is mentioned, my mind returns to those two things. Maybe because sometimes it is the details that survive when the larger horror becomes almost impossible to process. Amid the wreckage at BJ Medical College in Ahmedabad, the lingering smell of aviation fuel and burnt human remains, and the personal belongings strewn across the site, there sat a clear glass tiffin box among the debris of lives abruptly cut short.



It lay beside a woman's handbag. The box had a blue rubber seal.

I remember noticing it while reporting from the crash site. I remember speaking about it on camera. Afterwards, I found myself wondering about it more often than I should have. Who packed it? Who was it meant for? A spouse waiting at home? A child? A parent? Someone had packed a meal believing there would be another ordinary day at the end of that flight. There wasn't.

From the BJ Medical College, the story

quickly moved to Ahmedabad Civil Hospital and the mortuary.

So did I. The twisted wreckage gave way to casualty lists. The casualty lists gave way to families.

And the grief only deepened with every relative who arrived through the night and over the days that followed. A mother. A grandparent. A wife. A brother. A daughter.

I met her just hours after the crash. She had come looking for her father. She sat waiting for the result of a DNA test. Eventually, the sample matched remains that had been charred beyond recognition.

I could not bring myself to ask her name. Perhaps I should have. Perhaps I was afraid of making her pain more real than it already was. I remember crouching beside her and trying to offer comfort to a daughter who had just lost her father. She was devastated. She wanted answers.

A Tinder right swipe gone wrong: Haryana judge loses Rs 52 lakh to honeytrap

New Delhi.(Agency)

A Haryana judge was allegedly duped of more than Rs 52 lakh in a suspected honeytrap scam after matching on Tinder with a man who claimed to be working in a secret government department. The alleged fraud, however, took an unusual turn when the complaint was not filed by the judge herself, but in the name of her domestic worker, who told police she had been cheated through the online dating app. While the Delhi court denied bail to the accused, it also raised concerns over the manner in which the complaint was filed. As per the complaint, the judge connected with the accused on Tinder in November. The man introduced himself as "Abhimanyu Vashishth."



Over time, the two started a relationship, during which the judge transferred more than Rs 52 lakh to bank accounts linked to the accused after he persuaded her to invest funds with promises of lucrative returns.

When the promised profits never materialised, allegations of cheating and fraud surfaced.

However, the FIR was not filed by the judicial officer herself. Instead, the

complaint was lodged in the name of her domestic help, who claimed she had been deceived through an online dating platform. The accused was arrested and sent to judicial custody. After a lower court declined bail, he approached a sessions court seeking relief. While considering the plea, Additional Sessions Judge Saurabh Partap Singh Laler noted that nearly all disputed transactions originated from the judge's bank accounts rather than those of the domestic worker. The court observed that the complaint did not appear to identify the actual victim and remarked that a judge had chosen to approach the criminal justice system indirectly rather than in her own name. The judge acknowledged that victims of romance scams may experience embarrassment, but stressed that such concerns cannot override the need for a transparent

Three killed, two injured in residential building fire in Delhi's Govindpuri

Eight residents trapped due to heavy smoke were evacuated and rushed to Safdarjung Hospital and the AIIMS Trauma Centre.

New Delhi.(Agency)

A fire that broke out in a residential building in southeast Delhi's Govindpuri area early Friday claimed the lives of three people, including two women, officials said.

According to police, a PCR call was received at 2.24 am regarding a fire in a five-storey residential building in Tughlakabad Extension, Govindpuri.

Police personnel rushed to the spot and initiated rescue operations for residents trapped inside the building. Four fire tenders and ambulances later joined the operation, a senior police officer said. Eight residents trapped due to heavy smoke were evacuated and rushed to Safdarjung Hospital and the AIIMS Trauma Centre. Of them, three people, a man and two women succumbed to injuries, while two others remain in critical condition.

Fire officials said seven fire tenders were rushed to the spot after receiving information about the blaze. The fire was brought under control at around 4 am.

According to officials, the fire originated in the parking area on the ground floor, where three scooters, two motorcycles, and a bicycle caught fire. Smoke and flames rapidly spread to the upper floors of the building. The ground, first, and second floors were completely gutted, while the remaining floors suffered partial damage.

Delhi Fire Services personnel climbed to the terrace and entered the building after cutting open the terrace gate lock. Two girls trapped on the terrace were rescued and taken to hospital, officials said.

Initial inquiry suggests the fire may have been triggered by an electrical short circuit on the ground floor. The blaze quickly engulfed seven parked two-wheelers, including an electric scooter that was being charged.

"This appears to be the probable cause. The exact reason will be determined after a detailed inquiry and investigation," police said.

The incident comes less than 10 days after a major fire at a restaurant in Delhi's Malviya Nagar claimed at least 21 lives, including those of foreign nationals.

Make rain harvesting system functional: Delhi L-G Sandhu

New Delhi.(Agency)

Lieutenant-Governor Taranjit Singh Sandhu on Thursday chaired a high-level review meeting to assess the status of rainwater harvesting systems and overall monsoon preparedness across the city.

During the review, the L-G issued clear directions along with strict timelines to expedite all pending structural repairs and ensure that every rainwater harvesting system becomes fully operational ahead of the monsoon season. He set the last week of June as the final deadline for all civic agencies to complete desilting, repair and maintenance of rooftop pipes, perforation gratings and collection pits or chambers where rainwater is ultimately stored.

The L-G also directed officials to comprehensively assess the total installed capacity of all rainwater harvesting structures across Delhi to create a robust, data-driven baseline for future urban planning, groundwater recharge and long-term water conservation efforts. Stressing the need to modernise civic infrastructure,

he instructed agencies to move away from slow conventional processes and adopt advanced, high-efficiency water conservation technologies.

The Delhi Development Authority (DDA) informed the meeting that out of 624 existing rainwater harvesting structures under its jurisdiction, 621 are fully functional. Cleaning and desilting work has already been completed at 587 structures this year, while maintenance and corrective cleaning are underway at the remaining 34 sites. Zonal teams have been directed to complete all pending work by June 30. To further improve groundwater recharge, the DDA is implementing an action plan to construct 24 new rainwater harvesting pits at major public locations and sports complexes, including Bhikaji Cama Place Multi-Level Car Parking, Vikas Sadan and DDA Sports Complexes in Saket, Commonwealth Games Village, Chilla, Yamuna, Poorvi Delhi, Netaji Subhash

and Dwarka Sector 23. Roadside installations are also being developed under the Palam-Dwarka Flyover.

The Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD) presented the status of 1,289



rooftop rainwater harvesting locations spread across its 12 operational zones. Maintenance and operational checks have been completed at 1,277 locations, while rectification work is underway at the remaining 12 sites. The civic body's Horticulture Department manages 400 dedicated ground recharge pits, of which

cleaning and maintenance have been completed at 199 locations. Officials said the remaining pits would be cleared before the June-end deadline.

In compliance with National Green Tribunal directions to scientifically monitor groundwater fluctuations and assess the effectiveness of harvesting systems, the MCD has installed automated digital level indicator piezometers on a pilot basis. These monitoring units are operational at MC Primary School in Punjabi Bagh, Turkman Gate Road and MC Primary School at DDALIG Flats in Shahdara North. The New Delhi Municipal Council (NDMC) informed the meeting that work on 290 out of its 340 existing and planned rainwater harvesting structures has been completed, making them clean and operational. The remaining 50 pits, including 28 modular systems and 22 conventional structures, are being cleaned on a fast-track basis and are expected to be completed by June 25.

SEBI proposes uniform pricing mechanism for illiquid stocks across exchanges

Mumbai.(Agency)

India's market regulator, the Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI), on Thursday proposed a new mechanism to prevent the same stock from trading at significantly different prices across exchanges. The move is aimed at improving price discovery and liquidity, particularly in thinly traded shares. In a consultation paper, SEBI said that when a stock does not trade on one exchange but remains active on another, the inactive exchange should use the active exchange's closing price to determine the next day's pre-open base price and price band. The previous day closing price of the scrip is taken as the base price for the pre-open session of a scrip and the price bands as discussed above are applicable on the said base price," the regulator said. Currently, exchanges calculate circuit limits independently based on their own previous closing prices. In illiquid stocks, this can lead to prolonged periods of non-trading on one exchange, freezing prices and circuit limits even as the stock continues to move on another platform.

The resulting divergence can create two different market prices for the same security and restrict trading. SEBI said the proposal is intended to eliminate such anomalies and ensure uniform price bands for stocks listed on multiple exchanges. The regulator has also suggested that if a stock trades on more than one exchange but remains inactive on one of them, the inactive exchange should adopt the closing price from the exchange with the highest trading volume.

To implement this system, exchanges would need to establish arrangements for sharing closing-price data.

Rupee surges 65 paise to 95.20 against US dollar in early trade

MUMBAI.(Agency)

The rupee surged 65 paise to 95.20 against the US dollar in early trade on Friday as global crude oil prices retreated after US President Donald Trump indicated an imminent deal with Iran. A weaker greenback and positive sentiment at the domestic equity markets provided further boost to the local unit, according to forex traders. At the interbank foreign exchange, the rupee opened at 95.40 before rising further to 95.20 against the greenback. The rupee had plunged 60 paise to settle at 95.85 against the US dollar on Thursday. "The rupee opened stronger on Friday, fuelled by a sharp retreat in global crude oil prices.

This relief comes in the wake of statements from US President Donald Trump indicating an imminent deal with Iran and the cancellation of planned military strikes," Aamir Makda, Commodity & Currency Analyst, Commodity Technical Research, Choice Broking, said. "We expect the rupee to maintain a positive bias between 95 and 95.30 throughout the day. While the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has recently rolled out a series of aggressive measures to stimulate dollar inflows and defend the local currency, Thursday's slide below pre-intervention levels underscores the relentless pressure on the rupee," Makda said. The dollar index, which gauges the greenback's strength against a basket of six currencies, was trading at 99.75, down 0.11 per cent.

Brent crude, the global oil benchmark, was trading lower by 1.07 per cent at USD 89.41 per barrel in futures trade. On the domestic equity market front, Sensex jumped 921.30 points to 74,753.85, while Nifty surged 254.20 points to 23,417.25.

Foreign institutional investors offloaded equities worth Rs 1,987.09 crore on a net basis on Thursday, according to exchange data.

Stock markets surge tracking global rally, drop in oil prices as US ends war with Iran

MUMBAI.(Agency)

Benchmark indices Sensex and Nifty rebounded in early trade on Friday and were trading sharply higher, following a rally in global markets and a drop in crude oil prices after US President Donald Trump declared that his country has ended the war with Iran.

The 30-share BSE Sensex jumped 921.30 points to 74,753.85 during initial deals. The 50-share NSE Nifty surged 254.20 points to 23,417.25. US President Donald Trump said that a deal to end the war with Iran is nearly complete and is expected to be signed over the weekend in Europe, as he called off military strikes on the gulf nation hours after threatening to take control of its oil industry. Trump, speaking to reporters at the Oval office on Thursday afternoon, said Vice President JD Vance is expected to attend the signing ceremony which could take place in Europe as soon as this weekend. Later, addressing a tele-rally in favour of Georgia Lt Governor Burt Jones, who is running for the post of Governor, Trump declared that the US has ended the war with Iran. "I don't know if you heard, but we ended the war with Iran today (Thursday), and they have agreed never to have a nuclear weapon, something that we insisted on. That was the whole purpose," Trump said. From the 30-Sensex firms, InterGlobe Aviation, Larsen & Toubro, Bajaj Finance, Eternal, Trent and HDFC Bank were among the biggest winners. Tech Mahindra was the only laggard from the pack. Brent crude, the global oil benchmark, dropped 1.62 per cent to USD 88.92 per barrel. In Asian markets, South Korea's Kospi jumped over 8 per cent, while Japan's Nikkei 225 index climbed more than 3 per cent. Shanghai's SSE Composite index and Hong Kong's Hang Seng index were also quoting higher. US markets ended significantly higher on Thursday.

"The biggest overnight trigger came from the United States, where markets rebounded strongly after President Donald Trump signalled a diplomatic breakthrough with Iran and called off planned military strikes.

Earning Rs 20 lakh? Claim these tax benefits under the new tax regime

Think the new tax regime leaves no room for tax savings? If you earn Rs 20 lakh a year, you may be surprised to learn that several tax-friendly benefits are still available.

New Delhi.(Agency)

When the new tax regime was introduced, many salaried employees quickly came to one conclusion: tax-saving opportunities were over. After all, the regime removed several popular deductions that taxpayers had relied on for years. But is the new regime really as restrictive as many people think? Not quite. While the list of deductions is certainly shorter, there are still several benefits available that can help reduce the tax burden. For someone earning around Rs 20 lakh a year, these benefits can add up to meaningful savings and lower the overall tax outgo.

BIGGEST MYTH: NO TAX BENEFITS UNDER NEW REGIME

One of the biggest misunderstandings about the new tax regime is that it leaves no room for tax planning. Tax experts say that is far from the truth.

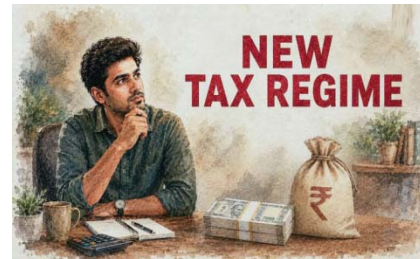
Gaurav Makhijani, Tax Head at Makhijani Gera & Associates, said many salaried employees overlook the benefits that continue to be available under the new regime. According to him, meal benefits, company car and fuel facilities, driver allowance, health and wellness benefits, employer contributions to the National Pension System (NPS), and the standard deduction can all help improve tax efficiency. "The new tax regime still carries many benefits. When combined with the lower slab rates under the new regime, the overall tax burden can be considerably reduced," he said.

THE STANDARD DEDUCTION STILL OFFERS RELIEF

One benefit that remains available to all salaried taxpayers under the new regime is

the standard deduction of Rs 75,000.

Unlike investment-linked deductions, this benefit does not require any additional paperwork or financial commitment. It



directly reduces taxable income and is available automatically to eligible salaried individuals. For taxpayers earning Rs 20 lakh annually, this deduction provides an immediate reduction in taxable income before tax calculations begin.

MEAL BENEFITS CAN QUIETLY BOOST SAVINGS

Many employees pay little attention to meal cards or meal allowances while reviewing their salary structure. However, these benefits can make a noticeable difference. Makhijani said meal benefits of up to Rs 200 per meal can provide a significant annual tax-efficient benefit.

He explained that meal benefits alone can generate a tax-efficient benefit of roughly Rs 1.05 lakh annually, assuming two meals a day, 22 working days a month, across 12 months. While the amount may seem small on a daily basis, over a year it can meaningfully reduce taxable income. EMPLOYER NPS CONTRIBUTION REMAINS A POWERFUL TOOL

Among the benefits available under the new regime, employer contributions to NPS continue to stand out. Makhijani said employer contributions of up to 14% are not taxed in the hands of employees and effectively reduce taxable income. "Employer contributions to NPS is one of the most significant tax benefits available under the new regime," he said.

Gold demand picks up despite PM's appeal to avoid buying

New Delhi.(Agency)

Gold is once again doing what it often does best — surprising everyone. Even after a clear appeal from Prime Minister Narendra Modi asking people to refrain from gold purchases for a year, demand has quietly started picking up again. The reason is likely that softer prices have brought jewellery buyers back into the market. In India, gold buying is not just about policy or advice. It is closely tied to tradition, weddings, savings, and timing. And when prices dip, buyers tend to return, no matter the bigger economic picture. Gold prices fell to their lowest level since April 2, this week, touching Rs 1,46,444 per 10 grams on Thursday. The metal is also down around 1.5% for the week so far, making it more attractive for retail buyers. This correction was enough to trigger fresh buying interest, especially in the jewellery segment. Chanda Venkatesh, managing director at CapsGold, a bullion merchant based in Hyderabad, said the price dip played a key role in reviving demand. He said that demand improved as the recent price correction drew buyers back,

particularly those making jewellery purchases, the report mentioned.

The recent improvement in demand comes even after Prime Minister Narendra Modi urged Indians to avoid buying gold for at least one year. The aim is to protect foreign exchange reserves



and reduce dependence on expensive imports during a period of global uncertainty. Soon after this appeal, India also increased import tariffs on gold and silver to 15% from 6%, further pushing up the cost of importing bullion. But despite these steps, consumer behaviour has not changed much on the ground.

Jewellery demand, in particular, continues to respond more strongly to price movements than to policy messaging. Market data suggests that while demand is improving, it is still cautious. Dealers have reported narrower discounts in the wholesale market compared to last week, indicating slightly better sentiment. Discounts of up to \$35 an ounce over official domestic prices were being quoted recently, down from around \$87 earlier. This suggests some recovery, but not a strong one. A Mumbai-based bullion dealer said jewellers are restocking but remain careful. The dealer added that purchases remain measured as confidence in retail demand for the coming months is still weak, mentioned report.

Gold and silver prices have also been influenced by global developments, especially shifting geopolitical expectations and market sentiment. At the time of writing at 11.45 am, MCX gold was trading at Rs 1,49,942, up Rs 1,021, while silver stood at Rs 2,42,232, higher by Rs 2,579.

Asian shares surge and oil prices slip after Trump claims a breakthrough in Iran war talks

HONG KONG.(Agency)

Asian shares climbed sharply on Friday, tracking big Wall Street gains, and oil prices slipped after US President Donald Trump claimed there was a breakthrough in talks to end the Iran war. US futures edged higher. South Korea's Kospi jumped 7.8% to 8,370.82, narrowing losses from earlier this month from sell-offs of shares related to artificial intelligence. The Kospi has roughly doubled over the past six months, with a record closing high of 8,801.49 on June 3. Samsung Electronics, South Korea's most valuable company, advanced 11.2%. Computer chipmaker SK Hynix rose 7.2%. Tokyo's Nikkei 225 gained 3.5% to 66,442.95, also led by gains for technology stocks. SoftBank Group, a multinational investment holding company with a strong AI focus, was up 2%. Chip equipment maker Tokyo Electron jumped 10.3%. Hong Kong's

Hang Seng gained 1.8% to 24,689.32 and the Shanghai Composite index rose 1.6% to 4,050.51.

In Australia, the S&P/ASX 200 traded 1.9% higher to 8,798.10. Taiwan's Taiex gained 2.6%, while India's Sensex advanced 1.2%. The renewed investor optimism came after Trump said Thursday he had called off military strikes against Iran. He asserted that the U.S. had made "a great settlement of the war with Iran," adding that an extension of the shaky ceasefire between the two sides could be finalized in "the next few days." Few details were offered. Global markets retreated earlier in the week as tensions between the U.S. and Iran escalated. High oil prices have added to inflationary pressures globally as the Strait of Hormuz, a key waterway for the world's oil and gas transit, remained largely closed. "Trump has said many times before that a deal is very

close, only for hostilities to resume," ING commodities analysts Warren Patterson and Ewa Manthey wrote in a note on Friday. "However, there does appear to be more positive noise around the deal this time." (But) we would be cautious about assuming that the extension of the ceasefire is a done deal," they added. "Even if it is, it could be fragile." Brent crude oil, the international standard, fell 1.7% to \$88.87 per barrel early Friday. That was still much higher than the roughly \$70 a barrel level it was at before the war began in late February. Benchmark U.S. crude shed 1.6% to \$86.33 a barrel.

On Thursday, Wall Street's benchmark S&P 500 surged 1.8% to 7,394.30, back to where it was in early May. The Dow Jones Industrial Average rallied 1.9% to 50,848.75, and the technology-heavy Nasdaq composite climbed 2.5% to 25,809.66.

Government's new petrol, diesel order: Who is affected, and why was it introduced?

The Centre has restricted industrial and commercial bulk fuel purchases from retail pumps. The move aims to protect pump supplies for ordinary consumers amid a wide retail-bulk price gap.

New Delhi.(Agency)

The government has restricted industrial, commercial and institutional users from buying petrol and diesel from retail pumps, directing them instead to procure fuel from authorised bulk sale points, according to an official order issued by the Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas. The move comes at a time when the prolonged conflict in West Asia has disrupted global energy supply chains, pushed up crude oil prices and created pressure on fuel availability. With bulk fuel prices rising sharply, several large consumers had reportedly shifted to cheaper retail pumps, prompting the government to step in to

prevent diversion of fuel meant primarily for ordinary vehicle owners. The Ministry's order, titled the Motor Spirit and High Speed Diesel (Temporary Regulation of Supply through Retail Outlets) Order, 2026, said there had been an "abnormal increase" in the sale of petrol and diesel through retail outlets in certain parts of the country due to industrial, commercial and institutional consumers moving to retail pumps because of the price advantage. The issue became particularly visible in diesel. For example, retail diesel prices in Delhi were around Rs 95 per litre, while bulk diesel was priced at around Rs 134 per litre, making petrol pumps a cheaper option for large consumers such as factories, construction companies and commercial establishments. The government said the restrictions are aimed at ensuring that fuel sold through retail outlets remains available for ordinary consumers and is not diverted for large-scale industrial use.

HOW DID THE WEST ASIA WAR

TRIGGER THIS SITUATION?

The conflict in West Asia, which intensified earlier this year, has disrupted global energy markets and increased concerns over oil supplies, particularly through critical shipping routes. India, which imports the majority of its crude oil

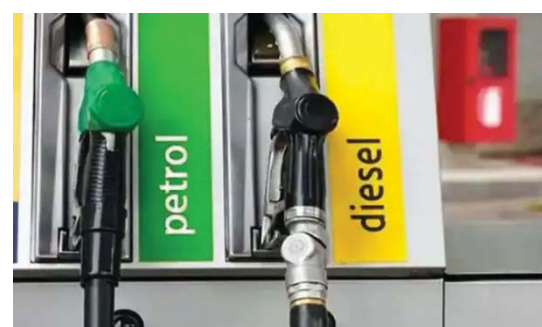
per litre, while bulk diesel prices were around Rs 134 per litre. This difference made retail pumps a cheaper source of fuel for industries, construction companies, large institutions and commercial establishments that require diesel in large quantities for machinery, generators and vehicle fleets.

WHO IS AFFECTED BY THE NEW ORDER?

The restrictions mainly affect industrial units, factories, construction companies, commercial establishments and institutions that purchase fuel in large quantities.

These users will now have to buy petrol and diesel through authorised bulk supply channels instead of retail fuel stations.

The order does not impact ordinary vehicle owners. People can continue buying petrol and diesel for their cars, motorcycles and other vehicles as usual. The government has, however, limited diesel sales in approved containers to 200 litres per customer or vehicle per day. The fuel purchased through such containers cannot be resold.



requirement, is highly exposed to such disruptions. The volatility in global oil markets led to a sharp increase in bulk fuel prices. However, retail fuel prices remained relatively lower, creating a large price gap. For example, diesel sold at petrol pumps in Delhi was priced around Rs 95

Short news

Discrimination, poverty keep Chennai's Ezhil Nagar children out of schools: Study

CHENNAI.(Agency)

A study of nearly 100 out-of-school children in Chennai's Ezhil Nagar resettlement site on the city's outskirts has shown that poverty, family distress and discriminatory school practices are among the major factors driving children out of schools.

The study, released ahead of the World Day Against Child Labour by the Information and Resource Centre for the Deprived Urban Communities (IRCDUC), stated that school dropout should be tackled through effective coordinated intervention from multiple government departments, including school education, social welfare, labour, police and health, as it is beyond the mandate of a single department.

It found that nearly 70% of the families of these out-of-school children survived on monthly incomes between Rs 5,000 and Rs 10,000, with parents engaged in informal occupations such as domestic work, street vending, conservancy work, and daily-wage labour. Adolescents aged 16-18 years formed the largest group among out-of-school children, with many dropping out to support their families or struggling to return to formal education after prolonged absences. Of the 96 children assessed in detail, 54 were found to be living in highly vulnerable circumstances, including in single-mother households or families affected by separation, domestic violence, parental illness, disability and inadequate care giving arrangements. Eleven children were identified as using tobacco products.

Chennai's power demand peaked at 5,000 megawatt on June 10

CHENNAI.(Agency)

Chennai's electricity demand touched 5,014 MW on Wednesday, the highest ever recorded in the city, surpassing the previous peak of 4,852 MW set just weeks earlier on May 22. This comes amidst the city already grappling with frequent power outages. When the city was drawing around 4,200-4,400 MW last June, officials said an 8-10% year-on-year increase is generally expected due to commercial and housing expansion, urbanisation and the penetration of air conditioners.

However, the demand has gone up by roughly 14-19% this time around, which officials said could be due to the persisting heat which has carried over from May.

Chennai has recorded maximum temperatures hovering around 40°C for several days in recent weeks, with IMD data showing temperatures remaining above normal across the city.

A senior TNPDC official said that although summer has officially ended, the heat wave's impact continues to be felt across the city. Increased use of household appliances, particularly ACs, has driven the steady climb in consumption. Demand is expected to ease gradually as the southwest monsoon advances in the coming weeks.

The power utility said a few complaints related to night-time outages were received on Wednesday. Inspections identified locations where transformers need to be replaced or upgraded to handle the growing load. Efforts are also being taken to prevent damage to underground cables during road-cutting works conducted by government departments and service agencies, the release added.

E. coli bacteria found in drinking water sources near Kent Mahal complex in Kochi

KOCHI.(Agency)

The long-running sewage and solid waste dumping dispute involving Kent Mahal Apartments in Brahmapuram has taken a significant turn, with laboratory tests detecting bacterial contamination in wastewater samples as well as in drinking water drawn from nearby wells.

For nearly a decade, residents of Vadavucode-Puthencruz have alleged that wastewater discharged from the apartment complex has been affecting nearby water bodies, fields and residential areas. The test results have now brought renewed attention to a controversy that has remained unresolved despite years of complaints, official interventions and court proceedings. The Community Health Centre, Vadavucode, recently collected two samples of water discharged through the channel running behind the apartment complex and sent them to the Regional Public Health Laboratory. It detected the presence of coliform bacteria in the samples.

An analysis of drinking water samples collected from nearby wells at the Regional Analytical Laboratory, Kakkanaad detected both coliform bacteria and E. coli, raising concerns about groundwater quality in the areas.

Cyberabad Police Cracks 8 kg Gold Heist In 72 Hours, 3 Arrested

Police solve high-value villa theft in Cyberabad recovering 7.8 kg gold and arresting three suspects.

Hyderabad.(Agency)

Cyberabad Police cracked a sensational high-value villa theft case within three days, arresting three members of a gang from Nepal and recovering nearly 8 kg of stolen gold ornaments worth crores of rupees.

The theft took place on June 6 at a luxury villa in Hill Ridge Villas, Gachibowli, while the elderly homeowners were away. When the couple returned home on June 7, they initially noticed that a gold chain adorning a small idol was missing and filed a police complaint. However, the next day, when their son opened a locker inside the house, he discovered that around 7.8 kg of gold ornaments and over 1.3 kg of silver items were missing.

The initial police investigation zeroed in on domestic help who had gained access to the house by working there and studying the family's movements.

"The accused located the locker key kept beside the locker, opened it, removed the jewellery, relocked the locker and fled with the key," said

CP Cyberabad M Ramesh. To crack the high-value, high-profile case, Commissioner of Police M Ramesh formed special teams, and they were dispatched to Uttar Pradesh, Bihar

communities. According to investigators, the gang's kingpin, identified as Suresh alias Suraj, allegedly

brings workers from Nepal and places them as domestic staff in high-end villas.

Information about the residents' schedules is then collected and used to plan thefts.

"The gang specifically targets affluent households. They gather information through workers placed inside homes and strike when family members are away," CP Cyberabad said.

With the help of technical and field intelligence, the accused were finally tracked down and arrested on Bilaspur Road in the Rampur district of Uttar Pradesh with the help of local police.

Police recovered the entire stolen property, including 7.837 kg of gold ornaments, 1.361 kg of silver items, cash and mobile phones, while teams are now searching for the absconding kingpin and other possible members of the gang.



and Uttarakhand to nab the accused.

Investigators identified the accused as Kamal Shahi (32), his wife Vimla Shahi, and Kalpana Shahi, all natives of Nepal. Police said the trio was part of a larger network that allegedly targets wealthy families living in upscale gated

Gaming scam, forged IDs, minors employed: Pune police raid 2 call centres

Pune.(Agency)

Twelve people have been booked after the Pune police busted two alleged "call centres" which allegedly cheated people through online gaming, where investigators claim customers were duped into transferring money through a network of bank accounts opened using forged Aadhaar and PAN documents.

The police said five minors were also found working at the premises and an illegal pistol with six live cartridges was recovered during the raids at the "call centres" of J K India Private Solutions Limited on the fourth floor of Amanora Chambers in Amanora Mall in Hadapsar and the third floor of Bhakti Commercial Complex in Fursungi around 4 pm Wednesday. The raids went on till the early hours of Thursday. A First Information Report (FIR) in this case was lodged at the Hadapsar police station on

Thursday. The police said people playing games on the company's website were allegedly duped into transferring money into



various bank accounts. As stated in the FIR, the accused, Santosh Datta Venjanekar, 47, a resident of Park Infinia in Fursungi, allegedly forged the PAN and Aadhaar cards of the employees of the "call centres" to procure SIM

cards and open bank accounts used to cheat people through online gaming. He also allegedly procured a pistol and six live cartridges without a gun licence, the FIR stated.

According to the police, Venjanekar allegedly employed minor children and made them work illegally at the call centres. They said they have also seized electronic devices such as computer hard disks, auto-dialler machines, pen drives, laptops, CCTV DVRs, SIM box setups, various documents, bank passbooks, cheque books, and gold and silver ornaments. The 12 people have been booked under the provisions of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS) sections 318 (4), 316 (2), 338, 61 (2), 45, and 3 (5), the Information Technology Act, the Regulation of Online Gaming Act, the Indian Arms Act, and the Juvenile Justice Act. Further investigation is on, the police said.

Dharavi Project Gains Momentum As Relocation Begins For Around 900 Residents

Mumbai (Maharashtra).(Agency)

The Dharavi Redevelopment Project has taken another step towards on-ground implementation, with the BMC beginning to issue notices to Shahunagar residents to vacate their homes for redevelopment work.

According to a press release, the move follows similar notices issued by the DRP/SRA last month to residents in Sector 6, where families have been asked in advance to prepare for relocation to rented accommodation or transit housing. Government officials said the objective is to free up land within Dharavi to expedite rehabilitation and renewal construction work so that permanent homes can be delivered to residents at the earliest. The exercise also reflects the collective intent of the Maharashtra Government and associated state agencies to move the project collectively from planning to execution and accelerate redevelopment work on the ground, the release said. The latest action can be seen as a defining push

after Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis' recent directive of making 10,000 homes available by 2028. Around 900 BMC tenants residing in Shahu Nagar will have to temporarily relocate. "Those opting for transit accommodation will



be allotted homes in MHADA buildings in Sector 5 of Dharavi. Around 500 MHADA units have already been kept ready by the DRP and NMDPL for families choosing this option. The rest have the option of rented accommodation," a government official said. "An agreement will be executed with the residents before they vacate, setting out the terms of temporary

relocation and their rehabilitation entitlement. Shahu Nagar residents will receive their new and permanent homes within the same vicinity, within five years from the commencement certificate," the official added. The transit units are larger apartments with better-quality living spaces than many of the existing structures, fully maintained by DRP/NMDPL. The official said the arrangement is aimed at ensuring residents have access to safe and comfortable accommodation until their permanent homes are ready. The release noted that under the relocation package, families living in units of up to 275 sq ft will receive a monthly rent allowance of Rs 22,000, while those residing in 375 sq ft units will receive Rs 30,000 per month.

"The rent support will be increased by 5 per cent annually. In addition, every family will receive a one-time shifting allowance of Rs 15,000, irrespective of whether they opt for rented accommodation or transit housing," the official said.

GIDA office gets a makeover in hues of women's empowerment

KOCHI.(Agency)

With paintings of astronaut Sunita Williams, Mother Teresa, and Malala Yousafzai alongside depictions of women of the suburban islands striving to earn their livelihood, the wall of the Goshree Islands Development Authority (GIDA) office on Queen's Walkway has been transformed to pay tribute to the strength and resilience of women.

"This is one of the most busy walkways in the city, and the GIDA office is the only major building in the area. We planned to make the building attractive by highlighting the history of the Goshree islands. The then chief minister, who was also the chairman of GIDA, had cleared the proposal. However, following a proposal from Zion Creations, we decided to paint the building on a theme of women's empowerment," said Reghuram, secretary of GIDA, adding that more walls will be similarly painted to make the building more attractive.

With its beautiful setting and calm environment, the building has also been attracting youngsters and social media influencers. The paintings are the work of artists with Kochi-based Zion Creations.

Mansoor Ali of Zion Creations said that the works aim to honour women. "We have been planning a women's empowerment initiative and painted the building with the photos of successful women on it.

Air India flight crash | Unhealed scars, burning memories: Aakash's ashes await final journey to Ganga

13-year-old boy was sleeping on pavement opposite his parents' tea stall when the Air India flight crashed into the hostel buildings nearby

Ahmedabad.(Agency)

Sita still bears the physical scars of that tragic day: severe burns she suffered while trying to put out the fire from her boy, Aakash, on June 12 last year.

On that fateful afternoon, the 13-year-old boy was sleeping on the pavement opposite their tea stall when the Air India passenger flight crashed into the hostel buildings nearby, scattering debris and highly inflammable aviation gasoline across a wide swathe of the area. This, in turn, led to fires at the temperature of over 700 degrees Celsius. Aakash also caught fire, leading to his death in front of his horrified mother Sita and grandmother Babi Patni. They tried hard to save him, but their efforts remained futile. Speaking about her recovery a year later, her

husband Suresh Patni said, "Sita's treatment is still underway. She still has about 30% burns left to heal."

Aakash's family had been rendered homeless a fortnight before the June 12 plane crash last year when they were evicted by their landlord. At that time, they had been living on the pavement opposite the road from their tea shop in the Meghaninagar area of Ahmedabad, near the UG hostels of the BJ Medical College where the plane crashed, leaving 260 killed including 19 on the ground and 241 on board. When The Indian Express met Babi Patni near the postmortem room at Ahmedabad Civil Hospital last year, all she could say was, "Aakash was sleeping on the road when the plane fell out of the sky. Maaro kaanudo



maari saame badi gayo (My grandson caught fire right in front of my eyes)."

At their home, sitting next to a 'memorial' of their younger son, Suresh and Sita said they never visited the crash site again. "It brings up memories too hard to bear," she said, with tears in her eyes. Days after the solemn

commemoration of a year since the disaster that took away their son, Suresh and Sita will travel to Varanasi to immerse his ashes in the Ganga. A matki carrying Aakash's ashes, covered in a faded white cloth, still hangs from the top grill of the hall window in the family's one-bedroom apartment on the first floor of the New Lakshminagar Society in Meghaninagar, just 200 metres from their tea stall located at the main gate of the Atulyam hostel buildings. Next to his ashes, a full-size cut out of their dear boy in a blue suit is placed, with a silver chain placed around his neck. Speaking to The Indian Express on Thursday, Suresh, an auto rickshaw driver, said, "We had carried out Aakash's final rites after his body was identified four days after the crash.

NEWS BOX

Raul Jimenez lives his World Cup moment after defying the impossible

New Delhi. (Agency)

The scoreboard at the Estadio Azteca read Mexico 2, South Africa 0. Eighty thousand people were celebrating the perfect start to a home World Cup. Raul Jimenez, meanwhile, was standing in the middle of it all with tears in his eyes. For most footballers, scoring in a World Cup opener in front of their own supporters would be the defining moment of a career. For Jimenez, it felt like something even bigger. Because there was a time when the idea of playing in another World Cup seemed wildly optimistic. There was a time when simply waking up the next morning was the only victory that mattered. On Thursday night, six years after a skull fracture nearly ended both his career and his life, Jimenez climbed above the South African defence and powered home a header that sent the Azteca into delirium. He pointed towards the sky, thinking of his late father who passed away earlier this year, before emotion finally caught up with him.

FROM THE HOSPITAL BED TO THE WORLD CUP

The image of Jimenez celebrating in Mexico City could hardly have felt further away from what happened on November 29, 2020. Playing for Wolverhampton Wanderers



against Arsenal, the Mexican striker challenged David Luiz for a corner. The collision between the two players was sickening. Jimenez was knocked unconscious and required immediate medical attention before being rushed to hospital.

Doctors later confirmed he had suffered a fractured skull and traumatic brain injury. Emergency surgery followed as medical staff worked to relieve pressure on his brain. The conversation was no longer about goals, transfers or form. Family members, teammates and supporters were simply hoping he would recover. Jimenez would later describe his survival as a miracle, while those around him admitted there were moments when they did not know what the future would hold.

World Cup: Hwang In-beom fires South Korea to 2-1 comeback victory over Czechia

New Delhi (Agency)

South Korea came from behind to secure a 2-1 victory over Czechia in their FIFA World Cup Group A opener in Guadalajara on Thursday, with Hwang In-beom producing a goal and an assist in a match that swung dramatically in the final half-hour. The Koreans were the better side for much of the contest but looked set to rue a series of missed opportunities before two quickfire moments of quality



turned the game on its head and handed them all three points. Captain Son Heung-min was at the centre of South Korea's attacking play from the outset. The Tottenham forward repeatedly found space in and around the Czech penalty area and fashioned a number of openings, but neither he nor his teammates could find a way past the Czech defence in a first half dominated by the Asians.

Despite spending long periods without the ball, Czechia remained organised and disciplined at the back. Their resistance was rewarded in the 59th minute when captain Ladislav Krejci put them ahead against the run of play. A long throw into the box caused problems for the South Korean defence and Krejci rose highest to send a header into the net, silencing the Korean supporters inside the Guadalajara Stadium. The lead, however, lasted only eight minutes. South Korea drew level in the 67th minute through Hwang In-beom, who showed composure in front of goal after being played through. Spotting the goalkeeper off his line, the midfielder delicately lifted the ball over him to restore parity and breathe life back into his side. Czechia thought they had found a response in the 77th minute when Tomas Soucek headed home from a free-kick delivery. The midfielder wheeled away in celebration, but the joy was short-lived as the assistant referee's flag went up for offside, ruling out what would have been a crucial second goal.

Real Madrid goalkeeper Thibaut Courtois set to retire after FIFA World Cup 2026

FIFA World Cup 2026: Thibaut Courtois has indicated the ongoing World Cup is more likely to be his last tournament with Belgium than not. Any exit would hasten Belgium's transition as younger goalkeepers wait behind a century-capped senior figure.

New Delhi. (Agency)

Real Madrid and Belgium goalkeeper Thibaut Courtois has hinted that he could retire from international football after the ongoing FIFA World Cup, raising uncertainty over his future with the national team. The 34-year-old made the remarks as Belgium prepared for their Group G opener against Egypt in Seattle. Courtois' comments come amid a broader phase of transition for the Belgian national team, with several senior players, part of the 'golden' generation including Kevin de Bruyne, approaching the latter stages of their international careers. "I don't know if we should be talking about the future right now,

but the chances are greater that I won't continue after this tournament than that I will," Courtois said. "I still want to play for a few more years. And then you have to take care of your body. My family is here because this could be my last tournament." However, the Real Madrid goalkeeper left the door open for a potential continuation depending on Belgium's World Cup campaign and his personal discussions after the tournament. "If we have a good World Cup, of course. And continuing to feel the good atmosphere within the group. Afterward, I'll need to have an internal discussion with the coach, (technical director) Vincent Mannaert, and the doctors," he added.

END OF GOLDEN GENERATION? Courtois' remarks come at a time when Belgium are gradually rebuilding their squad, with younger talents being integrated alongside experienced figures. The goalkeeper has been a central figure for more



recent seasons have influenced his thinking about stepping away. "I noticed that during those international breaks you can get some rest and work quietly in the gym. In addition, over the last year and a half, I've had more

little physical problems and injuries, so you naturally think more about the future. I'm considering passing the torch. There's a lot of talent coming through with Senne Lammers and Mike Penders."

He added that he feels fully prepared for Belgium's opening match against Egypt, despite earlier injury setbacks.

"Yes, I'm very hungry, just like the rest of the group. I feel very good and I'm looking forward to it. I also worked very hard on my comeback during the spring. The quadriceps injury was unfortunate because at that moment I felt almost unbeatable. But I'm ready to maintain my level now and stay focused," he said. Belgium enters the World Cup group stage facing Egypt, Iran, and New Zealand, with expectations high as they look to balance immediate competitiveness with long-term squad evolution. Courtois' potential departure would mark the end of an era for the national side and accelerate the transition to a new generation of players.

Brought immense glory to nation: PM Modi condoles shooting legend Jaspal Rana

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Friday expressed grief over the demise of former Asian Games gold medalist Jaspal Rana, describing it as a major loss for Indian sport and paying tribute to his outstanding contributions as both a shooter and coach.



IRVINE, Calif. (Agency)

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Friday condoled the death of legendary shooter and coach Jaspal Rana, describing it as a profound loss to Indian sport and remembering him as a champion who brought immense glory to the nation through both his achievements and his work as a mentor. Rana, 49, passed away at a Delhi hospital on Thursday night after suffering a medical emergency earlier this week. In a post on X, Modi paid tribute to the former Asian Games gold medalist and praised his contribution to Indian shooting. "Deeply saddened by the passing of Shri Jaspal Rana Ji. His passing is a profound loss to the world of Indian sports," the Prime Minister

wrote. He brought immense glory to the nation through his extraordinary achievements in shooting. Equally remarkable was his contribution as a mentor, shaping and guiding young athletes with great dedication. His unwavering commitment to excellence, discipline and service to the sporting world earned him immense admiration. My thoughts are with his family, friends and the entire sporting fraternity in this hour of grief. Om Shanti." Rana had recently fallen ill while returning from the ISSF World Cup in Munich, Germany, with the Indian contingent. After landing in New Delhi, he

was admitted to hospital, where he underwent a medical procedure to have a stent implanted. He remained under medical care before passing away on Thursday night. At the time of his death, Rana was serving as the High-Performance Coach for Indian pistol shooters, a role he took up after years of shaping the country's next generation of talent.

FROM SHOOTING ICON TO MASTER COACH

One of India's most accomplished shooters, Rana enjoyed a decorated career before moving into coaching, where he made an equally significant impact.

Since joining the junior national programme in 2012, he has played a key role in developing several of India's top pistol shooters, including Manu Bhaker, Saurabh Chaudhary, Anish Bhanwala and Chinki Yadav. His work with Bhaker drew widespread attention after the shooter won two bronze medals at the Paris Olympics in 2024, becoming the first Indian athlete to secure two medals at a single edition of the Games.

Australian Open: PV Sindhu dismantles Chen Su Yu to book semifinal berth

IRVINE, Calif. (Agency)

Two-time Olympic medalist PV Sindhu produced one of her most convincing performances of the season to storm into the women's singles semi-finals of the Australian Open Super 500 tournament with a commanding win over Chinese Taipei's Chen Su Yu on Friday. The third seed needed just 31 minutes to brush aside Chen 21-6, 21-9 and secure a place in the last four, keeping her hopes of a first title of the year firmly alive. It is only the second semi-final appearance for Sindhu in eight BWF tournaments this season, a welcome sign for the former world champion after a campaign marked by inconsistent results. Having come through a



competitive all-Indian pre-quarterfinal against Isharani Baruah, Sindhu looked in complete control from the outset against Chen. The Indian dictated the pace of the contest with her attacking play and sharp court coverage, denying her opponent any opportunity to settle into the match.

SINDHU IN COMPLETE CONTROL

The opening game was a one-sided affair as Sindhu raced to a huge lead and wrapped it up 21-6. Chen struggled to cope with the Indian's intensity, repeatedly finding herself on the defensive. There was little change after the interval. Sindhu continued to pile on the pressure, mixing powerful smashes with precise placement to keep Chen chasing the shuttle. The third seed quickly established control of the second game and sealed it 21-9 to complete a comprehensive victory. The dominant display was a marked contrast to her round-of-16 match against Isharani, where she had to dig deep before prevailing 22-20, 21-12 in 42 minutes. With the win, Sindhu moved within two victories of lifting the title and will take confidence from the manner in which she dismantled her quarter-final opponent. India's campaign in the women's singles draw also received a boost from teenager Tanvi Sharma, who advanced to the quarter-finals with a straight-game win over compatriot Malvika Bansod.

South Korea defeat Czechs to make strong World Cup start

Until the 80th-minute mark it seemed that the Czechs would punish the Koreans' wastefulness, but substitute Oh Hyeon-gyu scored the decisive goal in a Guadalajara stadium that was far from full.

GUADALAJARA (Agency)

South Korea got their World Cup campaign off to a winning start by beating the Czech Republic 2-1 Thursday after finally converting some of the many chances they created. Until the 80th-minute mark it seemed that the Czechs would punish the Koreans' wastefulness, but substitute Oh



Hyeon-gyu scored the decisive goal in a Guadalajara stadium that was far from full. Son Heung-min's Koreans had dominated the first half but were unable to find the net. The former Tottenham star blasted one effort over the bar before making a driving run to

his left and evading two Czech defenders only to shoot wide. An entertaining second half began with the Czechs scoring against the run of play as Ladislav Krejci rose at the front post to power a header past Korean goalkeeper Kim Seung-gyu.

WI vs SL, 1st T20I: Holder, Joseph power West Indies to series-opening win

Jason Holder led the charge with the ball before Shai Hope anchored the chase with an unbeaten 65 as West Indies defeated Sri Lanka by seven wickets in the first T20I at Sabina Park on Thursday to take an early lead in the three-match series.

New Delhi. (Agency)

West Indies captain Shai Hope struck an unbeaten half-century after Jason Holder's decisive spell with the ball as the hosts defeated Sri Lanka by seven wickets in the first T20I at Sabina Park on Thursday to take a 1-0 lead in the three-match series. Chasing 148, West Indies completed the task with four balls to spare, though Sri Lanka's bowlers

ensured the contest remained alive until the final over. Hope anchored the chase with a composed 65 not out off 54 deliveries, guiding his side home after a blazing start from the opening pair. Hope and Brandon King put Sri Lanka immediately on the back foot with a 67-run stand in just 38 balls. King, who survived multiple early scares, made 37 off 22 deliveries before falling to Wanindu Hasaranga. The aggressive power play left the West Indies firmly ahead of the chase despite the sluggish nature of the surface. Sri Lanka fought back through the middle overs, led by Hasaranga's 2 for 32 and a disciplined spell from Maheesh Theekshana, who conceded just 20 runs from his four overs. Eshan Malinga also impressed with figures of 1 for 26 as the visitors slowed the scoring considerably and dragged the chase into the final over. However, with six runs required off the last six balls, Rovman

Powell ended the contest swiftly, launching Dilshan Madushanka over deep midwicket for six to seal victory. Earlier, Sri Lanka failed to



capitalise on a promising start after Kusal Mendis provided early momentum with a brisk 36 off 23 balls. The visitors raced to 43 without loss before Holder turned the match in

West Indies' favour. Introduced in the fifth over, Holder struck immediately by dismissing Pathum Nissanka and then trapped Lasith Croospulle lbw with the very next delivery after a successful review. Sri Lanka slipped from 43 for no loss to 56 for 3 by the end of the Powerplay and never fully recovered. Kamindu Mendis attempted to rebuild the innings with a fighting 51 off 39 balls, while Dasun Shanaka chipped in with a useful contribution during a stabilising partnership. But West Indies maintained control through the middle overs, with Roston Chase and the seamers restricting scoring opportunities.

Holder returned to claim his third wicket and finished with outstanding figures of 3 for 18, earning the Player-of-the-Match award. Sri Lanka managed only 147 for 9, with their total ultimately proving insufficient as Hope calmly steered West Indies to a winning start in the series.



Jasleen Royal Calls

Huma Qureshi

Tanmay Bhat And Samay Raina Her 'Unpaid Therapists'

Jasleen Royal has given fans a glimpse into the people who help her through difficult days. The singer-composer recently took to social media to share a heartwarming video featuring some of her closest friends, whom she affectionately called her "unpaid therapists." The video also samples her latest release, Inaam, featuring rapper Badshah.

Jasleen Royal Calls Her Friends 'Unpaid Therapists'

In the video, Jasleen can be seen spending time with her real-life support system, offering fans a candid look at the friendships that have helped her navigate challenging moments. The clip features internet sensation and stand-up comic Samay Raina, comedy star Tanmay Bhat, filmmaker Rajkumar Hirani's son and actor Vir Hirani, gaming creator Kaashvi Hiranandani, Bollywood actress Huma Qureshi, acclaimed producer Amritpal Singh Bindra, and creators Aaditya Kulshreshth and Balraj Singh Ghai.

The video blends intimate moments from get-togethers with lighter downtime activities, including bowling. Through the post, Jasleen underlined the importance of having a strong circle of friends and a dependable emotional support system, especially during tough phases of life.

By calling them her "unpaid therapists," Jasleen added a humorous yet deeply affectionate touch to the video. The phrase captures the warmth of friendships that often become safe spaces, where people can lean on each other without judgment.

Inaam Becomes A Healing Anthem Online

Jasleen's newest song Inaam, featuring Badshah, has also been receiving love from listeners online. The track has quickly emerged as what many fans are calling a healing anthem, with users praising its calming and therapeutic quality.

The song continues Jasleen's streak of creating emotional, soul-stirring music rooted in vulnerability and honest storytelling. Known for blending intimate lyrics with soothing melodies, the singer-composer has built a strong connect with listeners who turn to her music for comfort and reflection.



Isha Rikhi Shares First Photo With Badshah After Confirming Marriage: 'Pati Dev, Audience Has Questions'



Punjabi actress Isha Rikhi has finally confirmed that she is married to rapper and singer Badshah, ending months of speculation around their relationship. The actress made the revelation during an Ask Me Anything session on social media on Wednesday, after fans repeatedly asked her about her marital status and her equation with the singer.

Rumours about Isha and Badshah's wedding had been circulating for several months, especially after photos and videos from what appeared to be an intimate ceremony surfaced online earlier this year. However, both Isha and Badshah had maintained silence on the matter until now.

Isha Rikhi Confirms Marriage With Badshah

During the AMA session, one fan asked Isha, "Ma'am apki aur Badshah bhai ki shaadi ho gayi h fir apne ek dusrey ko follow kyu ni kiya hai?" Responding to the flood of similar questions, Isha wrote, "I think I'm officially flooded with these questions." She then confirmed the marriage and jokingly addressed why she and Badshah do not follow each other on Instagram.

"Yes, I am married. Now, coming to the most asked question: Why don't you follow each other? Honestly, I think my husband owes all of an explanation.

Pati Dev (Badshah), the audience has questions. Please address them at your earliest convenience," she wrote. Her response quickly caught fans' attention, as it marked the first direct confirmation from either side about their marriage.

Isha Rikhi Shares Photo With Badshah

Another fan asked why Isha had not posted any photo with Badshah despite being married to him. The user wrote, "Why you haven't post any picture with Badshah your husband, U are his wife not even a single pic?" To everyone's surprise, Isha responded by sharing an adorable picture with the rapper. In the photo, she can be seen sitting on Badshah's lap as the two share a warm embrace.

'Another Cocktail2 Megadump': Homi Adajania Shares Fresh BTS Photos, Fans Say 'Can't Wait'



The excitement surrounding Cocktail 2 continues to build as director Homi Adajania treated fans to yet another glimpse from the film's sets. Taking to social media, the filmmaker shared what he playfully called "Another Cocktail2 Megadump," featuring a fresh batch of BTS photographs that instantly caught the attention of fans.

Taking to his Instagram handle, Homi Adajania shared a series of photos and wrote, "And another Cocktail2 Megadump! Sharing the #bts Cocktail2 releases June 19th 2026." A Maddock Films and Luv Films production, produced by Dinesh Vijan, Luv Ranjan and Ankur Garg, written by Tarun Jain and Luv Ranjan, and directed by Homi Adajania, Cocktail 2 releases in cinemas worldwide on June 19.

Cocktail 2 trailer begins with Shahid Kapoor's character Kunal sharing his thoughts on love, friendship and the evolving nature of relationships. In a reflective voiceover, he compares new relationships to exciting new experiences. "Whenever a relationship is new, it's exciting because it's new. New friends are fun because their stories are fun for us. We get tired of listening to the same stories from our old friends. But love is like that torn t-shirt in which we get a peaceful sleep for two nights. But when love turns into friendship and love enters friendship, then there's only one solution to get out of it," he says. Kriti Sanon's character Ally lightens the mood with a cheeky remark. "Like a threesome?" she asks.

The story then moves to the scenic landscapes of Italy, where the three protagonists are seen enjoying carefree moments together. While Shahid's character appears to be in a relationship with Rashmika Mandanna's character, Kriti's character is introduced as his close friend who gradually develops deeper feelings for him, setting the stage for emotional complications. As the trailer unfolds, the love triangle takes centre stage. Both Kriti and Rashmika's characters seem determined to win Shahid's heart, creating friction within their circle and raising the emotional stakes. Adding to the nostalgia, the trailer features the beloved track Tum Hi Ho Bandhu, a nod to the original Cocktail, bringing back memories for fans of the 2012 romantic drama.



Nora Fatehi's FIFA World Cup Song Explained: How Indian Stars Are Entering Global Sports Entertainment

Nora Fatehi's latest FIFA moment is not just another international collaboration. It marks a larger shift in how Indian-origin performers are becoming part of global sports entertainment, where music, dance, fashion and spectacle are now almost as important as the match itself. Ahead of the FIFA World Cup 2026, Nora released Siir Siir, an official track from the tournament's music programme.

The song, which dropped on June 8-9, brings together Nora, French singer Vegedream, Bangladeshi producer Sanjoy and FIFA Sound. With its Moroccan flavour, French vocals, stadium-friendly rhythm and Indian creative presence, Siir Siir has quickly become one of the more talked-about cultural crossover moments attached to the World Cup.

Nora is also expected to perform the song live at the official opening ceremony on June 12, 2026, at BMO Field in Toronto. For an artist who has built her career across Bollywood, dance, pop music and international stages, the performance places her once again at the centre of a global sporting spectacle.

What Is Nora Fatehi's FIFA Song Siir Siir About?

Siir Siir is designed as a high-energy World Cup anthem. The track carries a celebratory rhythm and is built around movement, crowd energy and cultural fusion. Nora leads the song as both vocalist and performer, while Vegedream brings in a French sound and Sanjoy adds production rooted in a global pop sensibility.

The track also reflects Nora's Moroccan-Canadian background. Much of the music video was filmed in Morocco, including sequences at the Prince Moulay Abdellah Stadium. Visually, the video leans into football, dance and street celebration, keeping in line with FIFA's usual approach to World Cup music, where the goal is to create a sound that travels across borders.

The title Siir Siir evokes an energetic push forward, almost like a chant of motion and celebration. The song



sits within the FIFA World Cup 2026 album, alongside other global releases, and works as a cultural bridge between North Africa, South Asia, Europe and the larger football world.

Nora has also positioned the track as a moment of strong Indian representation. Beyond her own Bollywood connection, the project reportedly involves Indian creatives across choreography, styling and execution, making the song more than just a personal milestone for the performer.

NEWS BOX

Dan Jarvis named new UK defence minister

LONDON. (Agency)
Former army officer Dan Jarvis was Thursday named Britain's new defence minister, hours after John Healey quit, accusing the government of failing to commit enough money to protect the country. Jarvis was a junior minister for security within the Home Office in embattled Prime Minister Keir Starmer's Labour government. Healey's shock resignation weakens Starmer's authority a week before a by-election that could prompt a bid to replace the prime minister. In stinging criticism, Healey warned that Starmer's long-awaited Defence Investment Plan (DIP) for funding over the next decade -- which the leader has yet to publish -- risked making Britain "less safe". Hours later, Starmer wrote back to Healey saying his spending plans would allow the armed forces to transform and modernise, adding: "I will always do what is needed to keep our country safe." The defence plan has been repeatedly delayed but Starmer has insisted he will publish it before a NATO summit in Turkey on July 7.

New tornadoes touch down outside Chicago as severe storms pummel the Midwest

world. (Agency)
Severe storms that swept through the Midwest knocked out power to hundreds of thousands of customers, damaged buildings and canceled flights, with new tornadoes touching down late Thursday in communities outside Chicago. The National Weather Service said tornadoes had been confirmed in mostly rural areas southwest of Chicago, with some preliminary reports of buildings damaged in Streator, a manufacturing and farm city about 100 miles (162 kilometers) away. That came a day after the weather service received more than a dozen reports of tornadoes across northern Missouri, Iowa, Kansas and Illinois. Trees and utility wires were reported down across the region.

In Des Moines, Iowa, a 54-year-old man died at a homeless encampment in a park Wednesday after being hit by a tree that "broke apart and fell during strong storms," police said in a statement. The man was found critically injured Thursday morning and died at the scene, authorities said. There were no immediate reports of other deaths or injuries from the storms. Intense downpours, hail and thunderstorms continued Thursday, with the National Weather Service issuing tornado watches or warnings for parts of Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Missouri and Wisconsin. Strong storms delayed or halted flights at airports in some cities, including Chicago, Philadelphia and Newark, New Jersey. Parts of the Northeast and mid-Atlantic also strained under high heat and humidity. A home vanishes before residents' eyes Shane Tipton, of Unionville, Missouri, drove home from his factory job Wednesday afternoon unaware that severe weather was on the way, said his daughter, Kylie Rouse. As he stepped out of his truck, he saw a twister bearing down -- and hurried into his mobile home to evacuate his 87-year-old dad, Jimmie Tipton.

They made it back to the truck, drove just far enough away and watched as the tornado obliterated the home. Shattered cabinets, furniture and appliances littered the ground. Clothes hung in trees. They believe they lost one of their hunting dogs, who has been missing since it struck.

Iran Adds Elon Musk's SpaceX, Starlink To Target List In Middle East: Report

World. (Agency)
Iran has reportedly added companies owned by Elon Musk to its list of potential military targets in the Middle East. The warning specifically mentions SpaceX and its satellite internet service Starlink. Tehran believes Starlink technology and other Musk-linked projects have been used to support US-Israel military operations in the region, according to Iran's state-linked news agency Fars. "All interests connected to economic holdings managed by Elon Musk across West Asia, including Arab countries and Israel, are under review for inclusion in Iran's new target bank," the agency stated. Among the assets reportedly being considered as targets are Starlink ground stations located in Israel, Qatar, Jordan, the United Arab Emirates, and Oman, as well as investors in SpaceX and infrastructure linked to Abu Dhabi-based companies Alpha Dhabi and Mubadala.

The state media, citing an unnamed source, claimed that US military, with support from companies linked to Musk, has committed war crimes, including attacks on water infrastructure in southern Iran. "The Islamic Republic of Iran reserves the right to strike all facilities connected to holding companies managed by Musk in the region and in Israel," the source added. Iran also points to previous reports that Musk provided military support to the US military through projects such as Starshield and the launch of military satellites.

Unlike Starlink, which provides internet services to ordinary users, Starshield is designed for military purposes such as secure communications, surveillance and transferring sensitive data. These services help military forces stay connected and share information during operations, according to Forbes. During the Russia-Ukraine conflict, Starlink helped Ukrainian forces stay online even when communication networks were damaged. Similar technology can also be used to support drones and military missions.

The US government recently awarded the company a \$2.29 billion contract. The project will create a network of satellites which will help troops communicate securely from anywhere in the world. Iran says this is one reason why it views Musk-linked companies as being connected to US military activities. Earlier, Iran's Revolutionary Guard also threatened major American technology companies such as Nvidia, Apple, Microsoft and Google and accused them of helping US interests through their technology and services.

Ahead of G7, Carney softens tone toward Trump with trade talks at stake

More than 70% of Canada's exports go to the U.S., so preserving the accord is critical for Canada.

OTTAWA. (Agency)
Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney became a symbol of middle power resistance after a celebrated speech earlier this year, but he is expected to be more muted in his criticism of U.S. President Donald Trump at an upcoming summit in Europe. Carney's speech at the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, helped make him an international political star in January, when he declared the global rules-based order over and condemned coercion by great powers on smaller countries. The prime minister received widespread praise and attention for his remarks and upstaged Trump at the gathering. But the Group of Seven summit of industrialized democracies that begins Monday in France comes ahead of the

scheduled July 1 review of the U.S.-Mexico-Canada Agreement, or USMCA, the latest iteration of the North American free-trade pact that has intertwined the economies of the United States, Mexico and Canada since the early 1990s. It is a crucial moment in trade talks, and Trump said this week that he may not renew the deal. More than 70% of Canada's exports go to the U.S., so preserving the accord is critical for Canada. Canadian historian Robert Bothwell said Trump is more of a problem for Carney "than anybody else because we are more exposed to the United States than anybody else." Trump leaves for the G7 right after he hosts UFC fights at the White House on Sunday for his 80th birthday. The summit will unfold as tensions are ramping up between Trump and Canada. One of the world's most durable and amicable alliances -- born of geography, heritage and centuries of common interests -- is broken, as seen in several recent examples of tension between leaders. Ontario Premier Doug Ford, the

leader of Canada's most populous province, had a reception with the U.S. Chamber of Commerce in Washington canceled Monday at the last minute. Vic Fedeli, one of Ford's ministers, said if Trump forced the chamber to cancel, "Ford should be wearing that as a

Canadian bridge across the Detroit River that Trump previously threatened to block was delayed Thursday due to unresolved issues. Trump's actions, including launching a trade war and suggesting Canada become the 51st U.S. state, have infuriated Canadians and created the political environment for Carney to win the job of prime minister after promising to confront Trump. Trump administration officials keep noting that only two countries, China and Canada, retaliated against America in the trade war. U.S. Trade Representative Jamieson Greer says Canada's retaliatory measures are a major issue in talks.

Daniel Béland, a political science professor at McGill University in Montreal, said Carney seems to have moderated his tone toward the Trump administration to avoid worsening relations. "There is a clear tension between what Prime Minister Carney said in his Davos speech about middle powers standing up to hegemony and his attempt to nudge the U.S. administration 'in the right direction' with regard to the USMCA review and trade policy more generally," Béland said.



badge of honor." Trump said again this week that the U.S. doesn't need anything that Canada has. Carney has set a goal for Canada to double its non-U.S. exports in the next decade, saying Trump's trade war is causing a chill in investment. In other developments, the opening of a major

Rain, aftershocks hamper rescuers as Philippine quake toll hits 55

MANILA. (Agency)
Rescuers battling rain and aftershocks cleared roads and searched for the missing in the southern Philippines on Friday as the death toll from a major quake rose to 55. The 7.8-magnitude tremor just off the coast of Mindanao on Monday brought down buildings and triggered landslides on the southern island while setting off tsunami warnings across the region. A government tally released Friday revealed eight additional deaths, while the number of missing stood at 31 as reports from local jurisdictions trickled in. In hard-hit Sarangani province, provincial disaster chief Rene Punzalan told AFP that many of the blocked roads had been cleared, but helicopters were still being employed to take food and water to cut-off residents who remained without power. "Aftershocks are still slowing us down, plus it also rained last night, so we have to stop the operation for a while," he said of operations in which backhoes were being used to remove large boulders. Punzalan added



that while the search for the missing continued, there was little hope of finding survivors. "Many days have passed since the earthquake, so it's going to be a miracle if any of them can be rescued alive," he said. "Our goal is just to retrieve their bodies." Philippine

President Ferdinand Marcos on Wednesday visited affected areas of General Santos, the affected area's largest city, including a damaged school and an aid distribution area. He said the government would allot 100 million pesos (\$1.6 million).

South Korea's ex-president gets 30 years over North Korea drone incident

SEOUL. (Agency)
South Korea's ex-president Yoon Suk Yeol was sentenced to 30 years in prison on Friday for sending drones into North Korea, a move prosecutors argued was aimed at creating a pretext for his disastrous martial law declaration in 2024. Special prosecutors said back in April that Yoon's effort to "fabricate wartime conditions" with the drones had undermined state security. This sentence comes after Yoon was given life in jail in February for leading an insurrection to "paralyze" South Korea's National Assembly with his martial law declaration.

Yoon was "given 30 years in jail" for the charges involving the drones, a spokesperson for the Seoul Central District Court told AFP Friday, without giving further details. Prosecutors had also argued that the operation heightened tensions with North Korea and led to the leak of classified information, including details about force capabilities after the drones crashed, the Yonhap news agency reported.

Yoon has appealed against the insurrection conviction, insisting that he declared martial law "solely for the sake of the nation". Yoon's legal team had denied the charge involving the drones and said there was "no prior order or

UN experts condemn crackdown on women by Afghan morality police

KABUL. (Agency)
A group of UN experts on Thursday denounced a crackdown on women in Afghanistan's western city of Herat, saying at least two people had been killed during a protest against the restrictions. Herat's morality police started arresting dozens of women on Saturday for not wearing the body-cloaking chador or burqa. A protest against the measures on Tuesday was broken up by force and a boy was shot dead, the UN said, while witnesses told AFP that security forces opened fire. Police have denied that any weapons were used. In a statement Thursday, 10 independent experts appointed by the UN Human Rights Council said at least two people were killed and over 20 were wounded. "Allegations that women were detained for dress code violations are deeply concerning and may constitute arbitrary and unlawful

detention, as it appears to penalise the exercise of their right to freedom of expression and right to be free from gender discrimination," the experts' statement said. "Equality, peaceful



assembly, freedom of expression and movement, and protection from arbitrary detention are fundamental rights," it added. The dress code is governed by the Ministry for the Propagation of Virtue and the Prevention of Vice (PVPV), and women must be almost entirely covered when they leave home. Many women wear a

flowing abaya robe, a Muslim headscarf and a face covering, rather than a chador or burqa. MSF medic detained The women detained in Herat included a medical worker employed by Doctors Without Borders (MSF). She was heading to work at Herat Regional Hospital's paediatric ward when she was stopped by the morality police on Saturday and accused of failing to comply with the dress code, the NGO said. The medic was held for two days and released after having to sign, together with her husband and relatives, a written commitment to wear clothing mandated by the PVPV. MSF "is outraged by the arrest and detention of one of its employees as part of the enforcement of dress code requirements in the city", the group said. "This incident is not isolated. Women in Afghanistan already face very severe restrictions on movement and access to public life."



subsequent approval" by him for the drone operation cited by prosecutors. They said the operation was in response to North Korea sending balloons carrying trash across the border that year and was "a legitimate act of self-defence" unrelated to Yoon's martial law declaration. His lawyers dismissed the prosecution's claims as a "speculative and false novel".

Drone flights remain a flashpoint in tensions between the two Koreas, which remain technically at war. South Korean President Lee Jae Myung expressed regret earlier this year after an investigation found government officials had sent drones into the nuclear-armed North in January. North Korean leader Kim Jong Un's powerful sister called Lee's statement "wise behaviour", but hopes for a rapprochement faded after the diplomatically isolated nation returned to calling the South its "most hostile" enemy.

What to know about the EU's new rules on migration and asylum as they come into effect

BRUSSELS. (Agency)
The European Union is set to implement a new set of rules Friday governing how each of its 27 member states will deal with irregular migration and asylum seekers. The European Migration and Asylum Pact is the culmination of years of grueling negotiations that overhauled the previous system, which was widely considered a failure and gave far-right parties a potent issue to win votes. All EU members were meant to be prepared for Friday's implementation by adapting laws, training staff and beefing up border infrastructure. But even the European Commission admits no member is completely ready. Human rights advocates warn the pact could add to the difficulties of asylum seekers face while trying to find safe haven in the EU.

Here is what to know:
Screening and fast-tracking border procedures Under the new rules, foreigners will be screened at EU borders for up to seven days before they are admitted. Asylum seekers from countries listed as "safe" by the

EU or pose a "security threat" will go through faster asylum procedures of three months instead of six. Some applicants may be kept at the border while their cases are processed. They will be given only one chance to appeal a rejected application. The European Commission says some member states still need to implement a new biometric database called Eurodac that will register and store information of adults and children as young as 6. Many more countries need to set up border facilities to handle screening, asylum processing and detentions. Work also is needed to ensure there are independent rights monitoring at the border, the commission said.

Swiftly returning rejected asylum seekers One of the pillars of the new pact is to speed up voluntary and forced returns of rejected asylum seekers by automatically issuing return orders when an application is rejected. A clear political priority of the center and far-right politicians who swept to power in 2024 across the EU, returnees are slated to be sent to countries deemed safe



like Syria and Bangladesh. The European Agency for Asylum said there were about 802,000 pending first-time asylum applications in March. Member states also are working with EU lawmakers to allow for the creation of "return hubs" in third countries where they can send migrants who can't be repatriated. Questions about deportation centers are being quietly negotiated between a group of five nations and potential partners abroad. Sharing the burden between member nations Among the most contentious issues that has divided EU countries was sharing

responsibility for asylum seekers, especially in times of crisis. Because migrants must apply for asylum in the first EU country they enter, front line countries along the Mediterranean like Greece and Italy have long complained they bear the weight of irregular arrivals. Citing their inability to cope under pressure, these countries allowed passage of many migrants to northern and western Europe without permission. This shifted some of the burden onto northern countries like Germany and Sweden that saw asylum applications soar to record levels, bringing their migration systems to the brink of collapse. The new pact includes a solidarity mechanism to ensure border countries aren't left on their own. Other EU members will either take in a share of asylum seekers or offer financial support to compensate. Countries can also offset their share if they receive migrants through secondary movements, meaning when a migrant arrives in one country and moves on to another. But not all member states were happy with this solution.