



**Mathura Janmasthan trust accuses Falahari Maharaj of fraud, extortion**

The Shri Krishna Janmasthan Seva Sansthan has accused Dinesh Falahari Maharaj of fraud and extortion in Mathura. The complaint escalates a donations row after his call for a CBI inquiry into the trust.



**NEW DELHI.(Agency)**

Shri Krishna Janmasthan Seva Sansthan has lodged a complaint with the police against Dinesh Sharma, also known as Dinesh Falahari Maharaj and Falahari Baba, alleging fraud, extortion and attempts to defame the institution, officials said.

The complaint came a day after Falahari Maharaj wrote to Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath seeking a CBI inquiry into the alleged mismanagement of donations by the Shri Krishna Janmasthan Seva Sansthan. Police said a probe is underway and an FIR will be registered after the findings. There was no immediate response from Dinesh Falahari Maharaj to the allegations.

In the complaint submitted to the station house officer of Govind Nagar police station in Mathura, Anurag Pathak, deputy manager of the Shri Krishna Janmasthan Seva Sansthan, alleged that Sharma has a criminal background and is involved in several fraud-related cases.

Pathak also alleged that Sharma had set up a trust named "Shri Krishna Janmabhumi Sangharsh Nyas", with a name closely resembling that of the registered Shri Krishna Janmasthan-related trusts, to mislead devotees and donors.

According to the complaint, Sharma had been collecting donations through the trust and misappropriating the money for personal use. The Sansthan further alleged that when people opposed the alleged activities, Sharma believed the opposition was being orchestrated by the Shri Krishna Janmasthan Seva Sansthan and then issued threats through his associates.

The complaint claimed that his associates threatened to file false complaints against the Sansthan, demanded Rs 20 lakh as extortion money, and also threatened to defame the institution through social media and the media if the demand was not met.

**PM to lead Yoga Day events in Kolkata; launch projects in Bengal, Odisha**

Prime Minister Narendra Modi will visit West Bengal and Odisha for Yoga Day events and launch of developmental projects. The tour combines political outreach, welfare delivery and indigenous defence signalling.

**Newdelhi .(Agency)**

Prime Minister Narendra Modi will undertake a two-day visit to West Bengal and Odisha on June 20 and 21, featuring a packed schedule of public engagements, development initiatives, cultural programmes and national events. The visit will include participation in the 12th International Yoga Day celebrations in Kolkata, commissioning of three indigenously built naval ships, launch of major infrastructure projects, and engagements alongside President Droupadi Murmu in Odisha. On Saturday, PM Modi will begin his West Bengal programme by attending Paschimbanga Divas celebrations at Tarakeswar in Hooghly district. During the event, he will inaugurate and lay foundation



stones for multiple projects spanning railways, agriculture, rural development, fisheries and animal husbandry.

According to the Prime Minister's Office (PMO), the initiatives are intended to improve infrastructure, support livelihoods, strengthen

farmer welfare and accelerate socio-economic progress across the state. A major highlight of the day will be the release of the 23rd instalment of the Pradhan Mantri Kisan Samman Nidhi (PM-KISAN). Under this phase, more than Rs 18,880 crore will be transferred directly to over 9.44 crore farmers nationwide.

In West Bengal, more than Rs 900 crore will reach over 45 lakh beneficiaries. With this transfer, cumulative PM-KISAN assistance in the state will exceed Rs 15,000 crore, while total national disbursement since the scheme's launch in 2019 will cross Rs 4.46 lakh crore.

The PM will also launch several agriculture-focused initiatives in the state, including the Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana, Agri Stack

under the Digital Agriculture Mission, the National Mission on Natural Farming, and the Pradhan Mantri Dhan-Dhaanya Krishi Yojana.

For 2026-27, the crop insurance programme is expected to cover nearly 50 lakh farmers across approximately 14 lakh hectares in West Bengal, supported through premium subsidies and an estimated insured value of Rs 28,140 crore.

Among the projects scheduled for inauguration are the upgraded fishing harbour at Fraserganj in South 24 Parganas, the newly developed Modern Fish Market at Sainthia in Birbhum, and the Regional Semen Production Laboratory and Semen Bank for Goats at Haringhata in Nadia district. Railway projects worth nearly Rs 590 crore will also be launched. On Sunday morning, PM Modi will lead the 12th

**Massive Illegal Mining Plunders Narmada: Multi-Crore Scam Allegedly Thrives Under Karjan MLA's Protection!**

Open loot of natural resources by over 100 dumpers and Hitachi machines

**Mahanagar Metro Desk / Pawan Makan**

**Karjan/Vadodara:** Does the rule of law prevail in Gujarat, or is it a nexus between politicians and the mining mafia? This critical question is currently echoing across the Karjan taluka of Vadodara district. In Vinnagarwada village of Karjan, along the stretch of the Narmada riverbed leading from Sasrod road towards Nareshwar, a brazen and unchecked plunder of natural resources is underway. According to reliable sources, a massive illegal sand and soil mining racket is being operated by an individual named Gokul Bharwad, allegedly under the direct patronage and partnership of Karjan's BJP MLA, Akshay Patel.

**Massive Fleet of Machinery and Multi-Crore Royalty Evasion**

The riverbed of the Narmada is being relentlessly pillaged without an ounce of fear. Sources reveal that a colossal fleet—consisting of 100 to 125 dumpers, 20 to 25 JCB machines, and over 15 Hitachi and loader machines—has been deployed at the mining site operating day and night. Under the guise of a legal lease, government regulations

are being blatantly flouted. Only a nominal royalty is being paid to the state exchequer, while government royalty worth crores of rupees is being systematically evaded every month.

**From Gandhinagar to the Mamlatdar: Is the System 'Compromised'?**

Local villagers have repeatedly filed complaints against this dominant mining mafia, but the outcome has been absolute zero. Flying Squad's Silence: Despite being provided with precise and concrete information regarding this illegal operation, why has an officer named 'Chawda' from the Gandhinagar Flying Squad failed to take action? This remains a glaring question. Helpless Local Authorities: Local Prant Officers and Mamlatdars seemingly lack the authority or courage to even visit the site for an inspection. Whispers of Protection Money: Public chatter suggests that MLA Akshay Patel enjoys direct access to the Chief Minister's Office (CMO). Leveraging this political clout, everything is allegedly 'settled' by channeling lakhs of rupees in monthly protection money (hafta) to officials ranging from the Vadodara Mines and Minerals

Department right up to the top echelons in Gandhinagar.

**Who Shields the Mafia with a Criminal Background?**

Gokul Bharwad, the individual spearheading this entire network, carries a notorious criminal record. He was previously arrested for illegal possession of firearms (revolver). The fact that such a history-sheeter is now openly looting public property under the wing of a sitting MLA poses a direct challenge to the law and order

apparatus of the state.

**The Public Demands Answers: Is This Happening Under the Government's Nose?**

This sensational exposé raises serious question marks over the state administration. Has the law become completely subservient to the Karjan MLA? Demanding swift and stringent action, local residents are now fully prepared to submit a formal, written complaint backed by solid evidence to the

Vadodara District Collector and the District Superintendent of Police (SP). It remains to be seen whether the government—which consistently claims 'Zero Tolerance' against corruption—will unleash the legal bulldozer on this multi-crore sand scam, or if the life-giving Narmada River will continue to be abandoned to the mafia under political pressure.— By Special Investigation Desk, Mahanagar Metro.

**Ram Mandir trust chief gets UP CM cold shoulder amid donation probe?**

Yogi Adityanath will be in Ayodhya for the day today as the SIT probes alleged irregularities in Ram Mandir offerings. The visit comes with the inquiry widening to CCTV and security handling, while Champat Rai is not expected to share the stage.

**New Delhi.(Agency)**

Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath will be in Ayodhya for the day today to participate in a series of religious, cultural and development-related programmes, even as controversy continues over alleged embezzlement and questions surrounding donations and financial transparency linked to the Ram Mandir. Alongside the scheduled public events, administrative protocol decisions linked to the visit have also drawn attention, particularly the reported absence of Trust General Secretary Champat Rai from the Chief Minister's stage engagements. The CM's visit comes at a politically

sensitive time, with scrutiny intensifying over the management of temple-related funds and ongoing discussions about accountability within the Shri Ram Janmabhoomi Teerth Kshetra Trust.

According to the official schedule, the chief minister will inaugurate 72 development projects in Rudauli and lay the foundation stone for 51 additional projects.

He will also inaugurate the medical college located at Hunhuna in the Baba Bazar area and unveil a statue of Veerangana Jhalkari Bai. As part of the visit, Yogi Adityanath is expected to address a public gathering in Rudauli



and later attend religious and cultural programmes in Ayodhya.

One of the key engagements includes participation in the Panchkalyanak Pratishtha Mahotsav at the Shri Rishabh Dev Digambar Jain Temple at around 3:30 pm. The Panch Kalyanak Pratishtha Mahotsav holds special significance in Jainism as it commemorates the five major auspicious events associated with the lives of the Tirthankaras — conception, birth, penance, attainment of omniscience and liberation (moksha).

**Frankenstein state: India's takedown of Pak at UN on terrorism**

**New Delhi .(Agency)**

India described Pakistan as a "Frankenstein state" that harboured and nurtured terrorism as a state policy and was now facing the consequences of its own actions. In a stinging response to Pakistan at a United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) session on Thursday, India's Anupama Singh questioned Islamabad's claims of being a victim of terrorism, stressing that it gets "shocked when its own monster bites back".

Singh, who is the First Secretary at the Permanent Mission to the United Nations, described the situation as a paradox that "only Pakistan could sustain". "This is the country

where the sitting Defence Minister boasts of hosting, training and deploying terrorists as a state policy and yet Pakistan calls itself a victim of terrorism," Singh said.

"It is a living example of a Frankenstein state which is shocked when its own monster bites back," she further said.

While Singh did not specify, she was likely referring to Pakistan Defence Minister Khawaja Asif's remarks last year. In a rare public acknowledgement during an interview, Asif admitted that Pakistan backed, trained, and funded terror organisations for over three decades.

Asif said Pakistan did the "dirty work" for the US and the West post-9/11. However, he called it a "mistake" that Pakistan has paid a heavy price for.



India told the UN Human Rights Council that Pakistan had harboured and nurtured terrorism as state policy. It said Islamabad's claim of being a victim exposed a paradox that only Pakistan could sustain.

## News box

## Wide, signal-free corridor, but traffic still crawls through Noida's office hub

Noida.(Agency)

The 3.5-km stretch of Vishwakarma Road, from Sector 59 metro station to the Sector 62 junction at NH-9, remains a major choke point during rush hours despite being one of the widest corridors in the city.

Over 40 feet wide, with U-turns for a signal-free commute and dedicated service lanes on both sides, the road serves as a key mobility link between Delhi, Ghaziabad and Noida and houses several offices, hospitals, educational institutions and manufacturing units. Traffic spillover from multiple cuts connecting residential and commercial hubs along the route adds to the volume, while unauthorised and haphazardly parked autos and e-rickshaws near the stretch's three metro stations, along with roadside encroachments, add to the squeeze.

Vikram Sharma, a Sector 62 resident who regularly uses the stretch to commute to Anand Vihar, told TOI that during off-peak hours, it hardly took him about 15 minutes to cross the stretch. "But during peak traffic hours, it could extend well beyond 40 minutes," he said. So, what leads to the daily gridlock?

A comprehensive survey carried out last year showed that the stretch witnessed daily traffic of over 50,000 vehicles. But commuters feel the squeeze as autos and e-rickshaws block turns and access across the stretch — right at the NH-9 entry point into Sector 62 to the stretches next to the three metro stations.

## Illegal dyeing units flushing chemical cocktail into Yamuna in Ghaziabad

Ghaziabad.(Agency)

The district administration, in coordination with the Uttar Pradesh Pollution Control Board (UPPCB) and the electricity department, shut down more than 250 industrial units that were discharging untreated industrial effluents into the Yamuna, officials said on Thursday. "The majority of these industries are located in clustered areas of Loni and Sahibabad. Most of them are dyeing units that colour denim and jeans fabric for supply to markets in Delhi. These units discharge polluted wastewater into the Shahdara drain, which ultimately flows into the Yamuna River," regional officer of UPPCB Ankit Singh said.

He added that the authorities are working with the electricity department to ensure that units that were sealed do not resume operations without meeting regulatory requirements. "With the help of the electricity department, we are ensuring that these units do not regain access to electricity and continue their operations without complying with environmental norms," Singh said. Officials said inspections were conducted across multiple industrial clusters in Ghaziabad, which revealed that several units were operating without mandatory environmental clearances. The survey specifically targeted industries flouting pollution-control norms and discharging untreated wastewater.

More than 250 industrial units were shut down so far as part of the exercise. The district administration has also directed departments concerned to strengthen monitoring and take action against any industry found violating environmental regulations. "The exercise will continue in the coming weeks as we identify additional industries that may be contributing to water pollution," Singh said. He added that around 500 water-based industries are operating in Ghaziabad. Authorities are still assessing how many of them are not complying with pollution-control measures.

## Court rejects anticipatory bail to Noida man accused of rape after 'promising marriage'

Noida.(Agency)

A Noida court on Wednesday rejected the anticipatory bail plea of a man accused of establishing sexual relations with a woman on the pretext of marriage. The additional sessions judge said the allegations were of a serious nature, and that there was insufficient ground to grant the applicant protection from arrest.

Citing the Supreme Court's ruling in State of Madhya Pradesh v. Pradeep Sharma (2014), judge Sunil Kumar-I observed that the power to grant anticipatory bail under Section 438 is extraordinary in nature and must be exercised only in exceptional cases — such as when an applicant appears to have been falsely implicated, or when there are reasonable grounds to believe the accused is unlikely to misuse the liberty granted to them.

The case stems from an FIR filed at Sector 49 police station by a woman who worked at Mahagun Mezzaria, under sections 69 (sexual intercourse by deceitful means), 79 (insulting the modesty of a woman), 352 (intentional insult to provoke breach of peace), and 351(2) (criminal intimidation) of Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita.

According to the prosecution, the complainant had filed an application under Section 173(4) of Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita (BNSS), seeking registration of the case, alleging that one Pankaj Malik, alias Mukund, had forced a physical relationship with her multiple times on the false promise of marriage. She later learned that he was already married and had children. When she confronted him, the prosecution said, he allegedly abused and insulted her, and threatened her life if she ever complained.

Counsel for the applicant argued there was no evidence against his client. He submitted that the complainant, a 30-year-old adult aware of her rights, had reached out to the applicant — then working as a manager at a bar in Sector 76 — after a missed call, and that the two began talking. At the time, the counsel said, the complainant was in a live-in relationship with another person, and later left that home after a fight with her roommate and approached the applicant with her belongings. The counsel further claimed that the complainant already knew the applicant was married and had children.

## 3 held in Rs 2.5 cr fraud case, Dubai cybercrime link being probed

Gurgaon.(Agency)

Gurgaon: An alleged cybercrime syndicate with links to Dubai was unearthed with the arrest of three men who cheated a retired Indian Air Force officer of over Rs 2.5 crore. Investigators said part of the laundered money was used to pay operators a fixed monthly salary and fund equipment for a SIM box operation. The complainant, a Wing Commander-rank officer residing in Palam Vihar, approached the cybercrime police station (west) on May 18, alleging he had been duped on the pretext of an investment opportunity. During the investigation, police traced a transaction of nearly Rs 15 lakh to a bank account registered in the name of Ascend Multitrade Private Limited, a Mumbai-based company. Four mobile numbers were linked to the account, one of which was active in Delhi.

This led investigators to an apartment in Vivek Vihar, where the accused were tracked down.

"The directors of the company will also be sent a notice and questioned about the details of the bank account," said ACP (cybercrime) Gaurav Fogat.

A police team raided the apartment on Wednesday and arrested Janak (27) of Vivek Vihar, Dinesh Kumar (30) of Bawal, Rewari, and Pawan Kumar (26) of Fatehabad. According to police, the three had been recruited by their handler six months ago and had been working closely together for the past couple of months, after becoming part of the network through Telegram. During the raid, 36 mobile phones, 53 ATM cards, 24 bank passbooks, five cheque books and two IP cameras were seized. Police suspect the cameras may

have been used to monitor SIM-related setups linked to cybercrime activities, and believe the accused were in the process of establishing a SIM box operation — a



modus operandi the city cyber police have cracked down on multiple times this year. A SIM box is a device that can hold multiple SIM cards — sometimes dozens

at a time — and is typically used to route international calls through local mobile networks, allowing them to masquerade as domestic calls. In scam networks, SIM boxes allow fraudsters to generate or relay large volumes of calls and OTP-linked transactions while masking the true origin of the communication, making it harder for investigators to trace calls back to the people actually orchestrating the fraud.

When the recovered data on accounts and mobile phones was cross-checked with Indian Cybercrime Coordination Centre (I4C), it surfaced 15 complaints from different states involving losses of roughly Rs 3.75 crore. These complaints were filed in Karnataka, Hyderabad, Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan, and police said more cases linked to the network may emerge.

## Teachers deployed as BLOs on leave, govt warns of action as voter verification lags

Gurgaon.(Agency)

Gurgaon: Amid concerns of delay in the ongoing door-to-door voter verification exercise of the SIR, the govt has ordered teachers who have been assigned Booth Level Officer (BLO) duties not to leave their place of posting and complete their work within the set time. Authorities said those found neglecting their responsibilities will face strict action.

The directive comes after several teachers working as BLOs left for their native places when summer vacation started in their respective schools. As a result, voter verification has not begun in several parts of the city. Officials have been asked to prepare a list of BLOs who have not started fieldwork in their respective areas. In Sohna, the process of initiating FIRs against a few of them has already begun.

District election officer (DEO) and deputy commissioner Uttam Singh said instructions have been issued to the district education officer, district elementary education officer, programme officer of the women and child development department and the chief medical officer to ensure compliance by the BLOs deployed from



their departments.

Officials said BLOs have a crucial role in the SIR to maintain accuracy and credibility of electoral rolls. The election

commission has issued strict directions to ensure accountability in the conduct of electoral duties.

The DEO said that under Section 13B(2) of the Representation of the People Act, 1950, BLOs are appointed by the electoral registration officer with the approval of the DEO. Once appointed, they are deemed to be on deputation to the election commission under Section 13CC of the Act. "If any BLO is found negligent, derelict in duty, indiscipline, acting in disregard of the commission's instructions, or involved in activities affecting the purity, impartiality and credibility of the electoral roll, strict departmental and legal action can be taken," Singh said. He said that under the commission's directives, the DEO can suspend a BLO and recommend departmental proceedings. In serious cases involving criminal misconduct, an FIR can also be registered against the concerned person with the approval of the chief electoral officer.

Action in such cases assumes further importance as disciplinary proceedings once initiated cannot be withdrawn without prior approval of the chief electoral officer.

## MCG orders internet, cable TV operators to remove overhead cables by Aug 31

Noida.(Agency)

Gurgaon: MCG on Thursday directed all broadband internet service operators and cable television operators to rectify improperly installed overhead cables across the city by Aug 31, warning that non-compliant networks will be removed without further notice. In a general notice issued following a meeting held on Thursday, the civic body said it observed that broadband internet wires and cable TV wires were erected on and between streetlights and electricity poles in an unorganised and improper manner in several parts of the city.

According to the MCG, the haphazard installation of cables has not only affected the city's appearance but has also created serious public safety concerns. The civic



body noted that low-hanging and loosely strung cables in several locations obstruct traffic, particularly that of two-wheelers, increasing the risk of accidents.

"We have clarified that strict action will be taken against operators who do not follow the directives within the prescribed time limit. In such a situation, the disorganised cables installed on the concerned poles may

be removed by the concerned departments without any additional notice, the responsibility for which will be of the concerned service provider," said an MCG official. The order stated that bunches of cables should not be left hanging on electricity or streetlight poles. All cable bundles should be securely enclosed in suitable cable boxes and firmly clamped onto poles. Every operator must obtain the necessary permission and approval from Dakshin Haryana Bijli Vitran Nigam to install cables on streetlights and electricity poles. Officials stated that the civic body aims to maintain a clean, attractive, and safe city. The corporation instructed all service providers to organize their networks according to prescribed standards and to cooperate in ensuring public safety.

## Cap on bulk buying, outages leave housing societies on edge

Gurgaon.(Agency)

Around 6.30am on Thursday, residents of Tulip Ivory in Sector 69 woke up to a power outage. Hours passed, but the electricity supply was not restored.

By afternoon, lifts, water supply systems, security infrastructure and common area services in the society were running entirely on diesel generators. As outage stretched beyond eight hours, the RWA's concern was no longer the power cut itself but the fuel being burnt to keep the society functioning.

"Around 200 litres of diesel was consumed within two hours, and even whatever we had in store is nearly over. When we asked for diesel, the vendor told us about the capping," said Ajay Pal Singh, RWA president of Tulip Ivory. The power supply was restored more than 12 hours later, around 7.15pm and around 1,400 litres of diesel was used.

Condominiums are bulk consumers of diesel because power outages are frequent across the NCR, especially in summer, when old feeders cannot match rising loads and lines within societies become prone to faults. Residents said Thursday's outage was triggered when a damaged jumper led to the burnout of a vacuum circuit breaker. For thousands of residents, electricity is about far more than lighting and air

conditioning. High-rise societies depend on continuous power for sewage treatment plants, security networks, fire-safety equipment and access-control systems. When grid power fails, diesel generators effectively become the backbone of the society.

"We have already requested residents to use electricity judiciously during power outages and reduce non-essential consumption. However, there is a limit to how much demand can be curtailed. Lifts, security systems and common-area services cannot simply be switched off. The real challenge arises when power cuts are prolonged. If an outage lasts eight to 10 hours, how can societies repeatedly ask residents to manage with reduced services while also dealing with restrictions on diesel procurement? The burden ultimately falls on residents, who are already facing discomfort during the peak summer season," Singh said.

The timing could hardly have been worse. On June 12, the Centre issued the Motor Spirit and High-Speed Diesel (Temporary Regulation of Supply through Retail Outlets) Order, 2026, capping retail diesel sales at 200 litres per vehicle or customer per day and barring bulk consumers from buying fuel at retail pumps. The 90-day

order was prompted by escalating supply concerns linked to the US-Israel conflict with Iran, and was meant to prevent hoarding and protect fuel availability. For housing societies that lean on diesel generators during outages, however, it has triggered fresh anxiety, with some estate offices and management teams already issuing advisories warning residents of the



potential fallout.

Most societies buy diesel from retail pumps. Bulk-purchase outlets exist separately, but charge about Rs 30 more per litre, and the nearest one serving Gurgaon is in Delhi or Rohtak, adding further logistical cost. RWAs argue the govt's order overlooks operational realities on the

ground. "Even when running without load, a generator can consume 30-40 litres of diesel per hour, and consumption rises to 50-70 litres under load. In our society, a one-hour power outage typically results in diesel consumption of around 190 litres. Most suppliers also do not deliver small quantities; a tanker usually carries about 1,000 litres or more. So far this month, we have procured nearly 6,000 litres of diesel and already consumed over 3,500 litres," said Praveen Malik, president of the Rising Homes RWA. He added that his society, spread across 48 towers with 48 lifts and extensive common infrastructure, depends on uninterrupted power to function.

The scale of consumption in larger societies illustrates the stakes. In a high-rise complex with more than 1,000 flats, a 30-minute outage can mean burning through 150-200 litres of diesel to run a genset; an hour-long cut can push consumption to 300-400 litres; and a two-hour outage can drive it as high as 800 litres. For many RWAs, the immediate worry is not scarcity but preparedness. At BPTP Astaire Gardens, residents have already been asked to cut electricity use during backup periods so that available diesel stretches further.

# 2 Khalistani operatives linked to Punjab rail sabotage plot deported

**Gurwinder Singh and Manjeet Singh were crucial Malaysia-based nodes in a Khalistan Zindabad Force-backed terror module, the police said.**

Chandigarh. (Agency)

The Punjab Police, in collaboration with central agencies and the Royal Malaysia Police (RMP), have secured the deportation of two key operatives linked to the banned Khalistan Zindabad Force (KZF) from Malaysia.

Gaurav Yadav, Director General of Police, Punjab, said that the accused were arrested upon arrival at Indira Gandhi International (IGI) Airport in New Delhi on June 17 and subsequently brought to Punjab for interrogation.

The two men, identified as Gurwinder Singh, a resident of Ambala, and Manjeet Singh, from Patiala, were crucial Malaysia-based nodes in a KZF-backed terror module, the police said. Authorities alleged they were actively involved in planning attacks on critical railway infrastructure, particularly dedicated freight corridor lines in Punjab.

This development follows Punjab Police's earlier success in dismantling a terror module responsible for two major incidents on the railway freight corridor, which include an

IED blast near Sirhind in Fatehgarh Sahib district on January 23 and an attempted explosion near Shambhu in



Patiala district on April 27. During the initial probe, four accused were arrested, and substantial militant hardware was recovered, including an RPG launcher, an IED, RDX

explosives, hand grenades, and high-end pistols with ammunition. Further investigations into the transnational conspiracy revealed the role of KZF handlers and financial facilitators based in Malaysia, the police said. Gurwinder and Manjeet are accused of channelling terror funds through offshore accounts to support operatives in Punjab, aiming to carry out terrorist attacks and disrupt public order in the state.

Both deportees were produced before a Patiala court on June 18, where they were remanded to police custody for further interrogation. Investigations are continuing to uncover the full extent of the network and identify other individuals involved in the conspiracy.

The DGP termed the operation a major blow to foreign-backed terror activities targeting Punjab's vital infrastructure. The successful coordination with Malaysian authorities underscores growing international cooperation in counter-terrorism efforts.

## After 'Modi Tattva' module announcement, MSU's sociology department sees 'surge in applications, enquiries about courses'

According to the department head, inquiries are pouring in only from prospective students but also from politicians in the 40-60 age group interested in learning about the Modi Tattva module

Vadodara. (Agency)

THE DEPARTMENT of Sociology at the Maharaja Sayajirao University, (MSU) Vadodara, has got a large number of enquiries for its Bachelors' programme after it announced the "Modi Tattva" module from the current academic year as part of a broader revision of its sociology curriculum.

According to Sociology Department head Dr Virendra Singh, the department has received more than 900 applications for its programmes in the first two rounds of admissions, of which around 100 admissions have been confirmed.

Singh, who is also Chairperson of the Board of Studies, said on Thursday that these numbers are significantly higher compared to last year — when around 40 students enrolled. He said the department

expects the total number of applications to cross 1,200 before admissions conclude. Modi Tattva, a course on Prime Minister



Narendra Modi's leadership as a "concept", integrates indigenous knowledge systems, Hindu religion studies and nationalism — in three major courses that will now be part of the 10 papers of the fourth year of BA in Sociology (honours) as well as the first

year of the post-graduate programme.

"The leadership qualities will be discussed — how you have to take a lead and initiate something without fear of the results," Singh said.

According to him, the course will focus on policy initiatives and governance decisions that sought to address long-standing national issues.

Among the examples expected to be discussed are the "Ministry of Jal Shakti, demonetisation, Ayushman Bharat, the Ram Temple issue and the abrogation of Article 370,"

Singh said. The module is being developed by a six-member team comprising Singh, Dr Pooja Dixit, Miss Tahzeeb Barodawala, Dr Gunjan Shrivastava, Miss Manjari Nandi and Harshita Panchal, all of whom are faculty members in the same department.

## 35 donation boxes, 2 shifts: As SIT probes Ram Mandir 'fund theft', how count is kept

Ayodhya. (Agency)

An innocuously named 'Pilgrim Facilitation Centre' is at the heart of the row brewing over Ram Temple donation funds in Ayodhya. Located 200 metres from the main temple, and bearing its architectural imprint, the building holds a counting room in the basement. It is to this room that collections from the 35-odd donation boxes fixed across the shrine premises are brought and counted.

With around one lakh devotees visiting the temple daily, the counting is done in two shifts — roughly 8 am to 2 pm, and 2 pm to 8 pm — by about 20 tellers each. Daily donations are estimated to be Rs 8 to Rs 13 lakh. But, as per an employee of the Ram Janmabhoomi Kshetra Teerth Trust, deployed in the counting room, "There are days when it reaches Rs 50 to Rs 60 lakh." The employee is among those who has been questioned by a three-member Special Investigation Team

(SIT) appointed by the Uttar Pradesh government to probe allegations that gold, silver and diamond ornaments donated by devotees have been replaced with fake items, besides money being stolen, from the temple's collection. The SIT is stationed at 'Green House', also located a stone's throw from the shrine, and is examining records, and the

process of counting, bookkeeping and deposit of funds, as well as talking to officials involved in managing donations and maintaining accounts. Sources said the SIT's preliminary report is expected in a day or two, and the final report next week.

Police have received no formal complaints so far.

Amid the ongoing row, Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath will be visiting Ayodhya on Friday noon, and is scheduled to visit the temple apart from inaugurating a Ramayan Wax Museum and a municipal zonal office.



## Uttar Pradesh: Mosque panel calls move 'illegal' after Railways' notice to vacate

Lucknow. (Agency)

After the Northern Railways' Varanasi division issued a notice to remove a mosque near the Kashi railway station by June 20, the 'Anjuman Intizamia Masjid Varanasi', the committee managing the religious structure, has sparked a controversy calling the move "illegal".

The committee has claimed that the mosque is not only registered with the Varanasi Municipal Corporation, the notice does not even have any "date, signature or stamp" on it. The railway officials, however, maintained that the mosque, located near the gate 1 of the railway station, is built on railway land. The notice, which reads as "By order, Railways Administration, Northern Railways, Varanasi", says the railways administration will demolish the mosque if it is not removed by June 20.

It was claimed that there was a litigation entitled Anjuman Intizamia V/S Union of India in a local court regarding the ownership of the mosque. The railways notice says the court of the civil judge (junior division), Varanasi, had dismissed the case on August 28, 2024. The Anjuman Intizamia said the case was dismissed since both sides were not present in

the court. On Thursday, office-bearers of the Anjuman Intizamia met the Varanasi District Magistrate (DM) and handed over a memorandum seeking an inquiry into the documents and details placed by them and issue an order that the Railways administration not carry out the demolition. When contacted, Joint Secretary of Anjuman Intizamia, SM Yaseen, said, "The notice pasted outside the mosque on June 13 by railways administration is illegal since it does not have any date, signature and the stamp. We dismiss the claims by the railways in its notice in the memorandum handed over to the DM today." The memorandum says, 1) the mosque 'Ganj Shaheedan' is registered in Varanasi municipal corporation as A 36/4 building; 2) The said mosque has no connection with the railways land as it was mentioned in the counter affidavit in the court case also; 3) The court case was dismissed in the absence of both the sides (petitioner and respondents); 4) This case was not filed for the mosque, but regarding a land in the east side there; 5) The existence of the mosque is clear with the map. The Kashi Railway Station did not exist then.

## Chemist murder was a planned hit, not mistaken identity: Chandigarh Police

Victim allegedly identified and surveilled before attack; absconding accused spent on logistics, police probe gangster links

Chandigarh. (Agency)

The murder of a cashier at a Sector 11 chemist shop in Chandigarh last week was allegedly a planned hit and not a case of mistaken identity, with police sources claiming that the victim had been identified beforehand and surveilled before the attack.

Police sources told The Indian Express that an absconding accused, Amit Kumar, had allegedly spent around Rs 25,000 on each of the two arrested accused — Sunny Mehra and Aryan Sharma — before the shooting, arranging clothes, shoes and other logistics. Police suspect the duo were recruited to execute the killing and had been promised additional payment after the job was completed. The fresh details emerged hours after Sunny and Aryan were injured in a



police encounter on Thursday morning when they allegedly attempted to escape custody and opened fire at a police team while being brought to Chandigarh from Jammu, where they had been arrested a day earlier in connection with the June 13 murder of Janki Das, 45, a cashier at Shri Kumar Medicos in Sector 11.

According to sources, police have found no indication that Janki Das was killed due to mistaken identity. Instead, investigators suspect the assailants conducted a reconnaissance of the victim before the attack. Sources said Sunny had allegedly been instructed to target the man seated at the counter wearing spectacles, while Amit allegedly entered the chemist shop with him and identified Janki Das moments before the shooting.

Police sources believe Amit played a key role in the conspiracy. According to sources, he had allegedly been in touch with certain gangsters operating from Punjab through an intermediary based in Jammu and Kashmir. Investigators suspect he was tasked with arranging the killing and subsequently recruited Sunny and Aryan for the operation.

# GMADA tightening noose around defaulters, but itself owes crores in property tax to MC

Officials said the civic body issues notices to GMADA annually, but the authority has neither cleared the outstanding amount nor provided complete details of its properties for proper tax assessment.

Manipur. (Agency)

While the Greater Mohali Area Development Authority (GMADA) has been cracking down on defaulting builders and developers over pending dues, the authority itself is facing questions over unpaid property tax owed to the Municipal Corporation (MC), Mohali.

According to Municipal Corporation sources, GMADA has not deposited property tax on several of its properties for years, resulting in dues running into crores of rupees. Officials said the civic body issues notices to GMADA annually, but the authority has neither cleared the outstanding amount nor provided complete details of its properties for proper tax assessment.

MC officials maintain that GMADA owns numerous developed and undeveloped properties across the city. However, the

absence of a comprehensive property record has hampered accurate tax calculations. Sources said that after adding interest and penalties, the outstanding amount is estimated to have crossed crores.

**Record sought, details still awaited**

In a letter sent in March this year, the civic body once again sought complete details of GMADA-owned properties. The civic body requested information regarding hockey stadiums, sports complexes, swimming pools, Verka booths, liquor vends, commercial booths, showrooms, vacant plots, leased properties and land already sold



by the authority. Officials said the information is essential for determining the actual tax liability and strengthening the Corporation's revenue base.

**Questions over recovery drive**

The issue has gained attention days after GMADA publicly released a list of defaulting builders and developers, claiming that more than Rs 1,000 crore is pending from various real estate entities and warning of strict recovery action.

**Property tax is a key revenue source**

Municipal Corporation officials said property tax remains one of the civic body's most important revenue streams. The MC collected Rs 56.75 crore in property tax during the last financial year ending March 31. In the current

financial year 2026-27, nearly Rs 6 crore has already been collected by mid-June, with officials expecting the figure to rise substantially in the coming months. When contacted, GMADA ACA Amrinder Singh Malhi said that the authority had received a letter from the Municipal Corporation and that the matter had been forwarded to the Head Office for completing the necessary process.

Meanwhile, when contacted regarding the issue, Estate Officer (EO) Aman Gupta said that he had assumed charge only on Monday. Referring to the corporation's communication, he stated that the complete details would be shared with the Municipal Corporation at the earliest. He added that any property tax due as per the law would be cleared after the required assessment and verification process.

## Regional parties left with two hard rows to plough

Renuka Narayanan

Even in an era of Congress's near-hegemony, state-specific non-Congress parties kept their standing and not just stayed afloat—unlike the BJP's precursor, the Bharatiya Jana Sangh, which groped for an identity and political shape on a post-Independence socio-political canvas awash with colours. The socialists and their offspring challenged the Congress in daunting circumstances in northern and western India. Meanwhile, Tamil Nadu, the fount of social justice revolution under E V Ramasamy Periyar's stewardship, worked towards crystallising its politics into a genre that had nothing to do with the conventional school represented by the Congress. The parties it engendered were antithetical to the Congress brand of politics, a feature that pitted the Dravida Kazhagam governments in Chennai sharply against the Centre. Jostling for space in this complex picture were Punjab's Shiromani Akali Dal, with a pronounced tilt towards Sikhism and militancy, and Jammu and Kashmir's National Conference. As 'Chanakya neeti' kicked in and the Congress resorted to the age-old carrot-and-stick tactics, with generous lashings when necessary, some of these parties were willing to be co-opted by the Centre. With co-option came compromises under the guise of consensus building, followed by capitulation to a way of politics that ensured that at least the roots of these formations did not disintegrate. Every now and then, spurred by popular resentment against the Congress at the Centre and the states it governed, these parties would shift shape into pressure blocs and throw the gauntlet on the Union government or constituents in a larger anti-Congress coalition. The Jana Sangh tried to find a space for itself in such formations. Its principal asset was its ideological sheet anchor, the RSS, which not only crafted a stronger opposition language than what the socialists and the inward-looking state parties could come up with, but was endowed with a huge organisational backup. The unwieldy but spirited experiments managed to overthrow Congress governments thrice: the Janata Party-led endeavour that was formed after Emergency, the National Front that was birthed by an act of rebellion against former PM Rajiv Gandhi by his own colleagues who were aided and abetted by the anti-Congress parties as disparate as the Left and the BJP, and the United Front that came about more to thwart the BJP's growth, was undergirded by the Left and a few regional entities and, out of lack of choice, solicited support from a reluctant Congress. These projects ended well before their time. The United Front's grand plan to check the BJP failed, and instead gave a fillip to the Hindutva-soaked party that many observers erroneously imagined would be permanently cast out for leading the Babri mosque demolition. The BJP drew enough endorsers to prove that it was a major player for time to come. The BJP needed allies to gain a critical mass and get the counterweight to challenge the Congress's pre-eminence. Its treatment of allies opened up a new chapter in the saga of regional parties. The BJP was cut-throat and benign in turns, but its strategists quickly recognised that ideology and principles were not encumbrances for the allies as long as their leaders were appropriately "rewarded" with goodies and political security. Even parties purportedly wedded to their ideological moorings or regional interests ostensibly had no problem because in its self-interest, the BJP afforded leeway to such formations. For instance, when it first aligned with the DMK, it shed its hang-up about the use of Hindi as a compulsory language in schools. Before signing up with J&K's PDP, it put the abrogation of Article 370 on the backburner.

## Preventive care needs greater attention

Government health spending must be increased to decrease the burden on households

Rakesh Kochhar

The National Family Health Survey-6 (NFHS-6) report released recently has highlighted the success of government's interventions in improving maternal and child health parameters and also brought up the threat of rapidly increasing lifestyle diseases. India currently faces the twin challenge of undernutrition and obesity, both representing opposite ends of the malnutrition spectrum and affecting different segments of the population. The sixth round of the survey conducted in 2023-24 involved a sample of over 6.8 lakh households to deliver pinpoint district-level tracking data. When we take into consideration data from National Health Accounts (NHA) estimates for 2022-23, we get a more comprehensive picture of the state of health of the country. India has come a long way from the first NFHS conducted in 1992-93, when just a quarter of childbirths took place in institutions, while recent data show it to be 90%. In the same period, the share of underweight children has fallen from 53.4% to 31.8%. Compared to the NFHS-5 (conducted in 2019-21), the proportion of fully vaccinated children increased from 75% to over 96%, a decrease in stunted children under five years from 35.5% to 32.5%, and wasted children under five years from 19.3% to 16.3%. There has also been a rise in the proportion of pregnant women receiving antenatal care during the first trimester, from 70% to 76%, while overall antenatal care coverage has reached 96%. Maternal nutrition and supplement indicators also show improvement as well as the use of hygienic methods of menstrual protection. These achievements have resulted from flagship initiatives taken by the government under different ministries. There has been an increase in girls attending school, women having their own bank accounts and access to internet, all denoting women's empowerment. Government initiatives such as digital literacy programmes and direct benefit transfers may also have improved maternal and child health outcomes. The survey has worrisome findings, too. There is a rapid rise in obesity, diabetes and hypertension across India. Obesity among women aged 15-49 years, has gone up from 24% in NFHS-5 to 30.7% in NFHS-6 and the corresponding figures for men are 22.9% in NFHS-5 to 27.3% in NFHS-6. There is a difference in urban and rural populations, the former being more often

affected. Obesity is linked to other metabolic diseases such as diabetes, fatty liver, disease and is a harbinger for heart disease, stroke and cancer. Diabetes and hypertension, each, afflict one in five Indians now. Obesity prevalence is highest in Punjab, followed by Tamil Nadu and Kerala and diabetes in Kerala and followed by Tamil Nadu and Punjab. Hypertension prevalence is the maximum in Punjab, followed by Kerala and Andhra Pradesh. States with the lowest undernutrition often have the highest prevalence of lifestyle diseases, reflecting the

concerns about undernutrition to those related to metabolic disease. On the other hand, states like Bihar have higher poverty rates, poor sanitation and healthcare access and lower agricultural productivity. A noteworthy finding of the NFHS-6 is that the number of households with any member covered under a health insurance or financing scheme has increased from 41% in 2019-21 to 60% in 2023-24. Interestingly, coverage is higher in rural areas (62%) as compared to urban areas (56%), possibly due to schemes like Ayushman Bharat PM-JAY and state health insurance programmes.

The Health Ministry recently released the (National Health Accounts) estimates which show that the out-of-pocket expenditure (OOPE) as a share of total health expenditure has fallen from 64.2% in 2013-14 to 43.4% in 2022-23. This is attributed to rising public health spending, expansion of the Ayushman Bharat PM-JAY and access to Ayushman Arogya Mandirs. The report also shows major differences in public health spending across states. Uttar Pradesh has one of the lowest per capita government spending at Rs 1,419 while Kerala spent the highest at Rs 3,592. These figures reflect interstate inequalities in healthcare priorities. It also shows greater dependence of affluent states on private healthcare systems. The share of Government Health Expenditure (GHE) as a percentage of GDP has risen from 1.15% in 2013-14 to 1.43% in 2022-23. But it still is short of the WHO recommendations of 5% share and is not even 50% of the total health expenditure. The share of private hospitals in health expenditure is nearly twice that of government hospitals. India's healthcare system continues to rely heavily on private providers, contributing to concerns about costs and inequalities in access. The NFHS-6 and NHA data show that India has made progress, but significant gaps remain. Government health spending must be increased to decrease the burden on households. State-wise inequalities in healthcare access need to be bridged. The dichotomy of the disease burden, obesity and other lifestyle diseases on the one end and undernutrition on the other must be addressed in planning state-wise nutrition-related interventions. There is a need to increase spending on preventive care, an aspect often not given due importance. There is a need to have public awareness campaigns about lifestyle diseases and incorporate them into school curricula and community programmes. Health education should be a part of "marching towards a healthy India" campaign.



rising disease burden being associated with changing dietary habits due to affluence. Haryana and Chandigarh rank among the high-burden states/UTs. The survey also looked at alcohol consumption across different states. Alcohol intake is linked to liver disease, pancreatitis and cancer of the liver, colon, mouth, lungs, etc. The highest alcohol consumption (50.5%) in men is reported in Arunachal Pradesh, followed by Telangana and Manipur. The national average is 18-19%. Punjab and Chandigarh have some of the highest obesity rates but their alcohol consumption is moderate, suggesting that factors like calorie-rich diet and sedentary lifestyle contribute to their high burden of diabetes and hypertension. While India has to evolve a strategy to combat lifestyle diseases in some states, it still grapples with undernutrition in others. Overall, 31.8% of children are underweight, with the highest rates in Bihar, Gujarat and Jharkhand. Punjab and Haryana have the lowest child undernutrition rates in India. The data suggest that Punjab and Haryana have largely transitioned from

## Chitta challenge

Panchayats can become agents of change

Drug abuse has emerged as one of Himachal Pradesh's gravest social challenges. What was once considered a problem confined to urban centres and border states has seeped into the hill state's villages, threatening families, livelihoods and the future of its youth. Against this backdrop, the state government's decision to involve panchayats in creating "chitta-free villages" marks a significant shift in strategy. For years, the response to the drug menace has been dominated by arrests, seizures and police action. While enforcement remains essential, it has yielded only limited success. Supply chains adapt quickly, traffickers exploit local vulnerabilities and addiction continues to find new victims. The persistence of the problem suggests that it is a social and public health crisis. Panchayats occupy a unique position in rural society. They understand local realities, enjoy community trust and can identify behavioural changes that often go unnoticed by distant authorities. If empowered adequately, they can lead awareness



campaigns, encourage families to seek timely intervention, coordinate with schools and health workers and support rehabilitation efforts without stigma. Village-level vigilance committees can also

help identify trafficking networks and alert law enforcement agencies. However, panchayat representatives need training, financial support and operational guidelines. Expecting elected village bodies to tackle addiction without professional assistance would be unfair and ineffective. The government must strengthen de-addiction centres, expand mental health services and create employment and recreational opportunities for young people vulnerable to substance abuse. Himachal's experiment recognises an important truth: lasting change begins not in government offices but in villages, where collective responsibility can become the strongest antidote to addiction. If supported with sincerity and resources, panchayats may well become the agents of change and frontline defenders of a healthier generation.

## Deal gives Iran the upper hand

As long as Tehran doesn't indulge in overreach, it can achieve its key objectives from negotiations

Shyam Saran

THE much-awaited US-Iran Memorandum of Understanding (MoU), which would put in place a 60-day extension of the current ceasefire, will be signed in Geneva on Friday. The final text of the MoU has not been released so far and differing versions are being circulated both by the US and Iran. The possibility of a last-minute collapse still exists. The prospect of a peace deal which could establish Iran as an influential regional power is regarded by Israel as an existential threat. It has been attempting to derail the deal by continuing its attacks against southern Lebanon and the southern suburbs of Beirut, where there is a significant Shia population and where supporters of the pro-Iran Hezbollah militant group reside. Iran has all along insisted that any ceasefire must include cessation of hostilities in Lebanon. Iran, for the first time, responded with missile attacks on Israel in retaliation for Israeli strikes on Hezbollah targets. This reflects an important shift in the Iran-Israel equation and the regional security dynamics. Like Israel, Iran is asserting its right to intervene beyond its border to safeguard its security. It is a major strategic gain for Iran that US President Donald Trump is leaning heavily on Israel to halt attacks on Lebanon and the MoU specifically mentions that Lebanon is covered by the ceasefire. Israel wants to prevent this and it is possible that in the days leading up to the Geneva meeting, it may ignore the US warning and resume attacks on Lebanon. This could then derail the delicately crafted agreement between Iran and the US. The signing of the MoU will be seen as a major political setback for Israeli PM Benjamin Netanyahu, and may deliver a major defeat for his Likud Party in the forthcoming elections. One, there will be a

60-day ceasefire, including in Lebanon, with cessation of hostilities with the US and Israel, the latter to be guaranteed by the US. Two, the Strait of Hormuz will be opened over a 30-day period, with Iran removing the mines it has planted along the main navigation channel. The US will lift its blockade of the Strait.

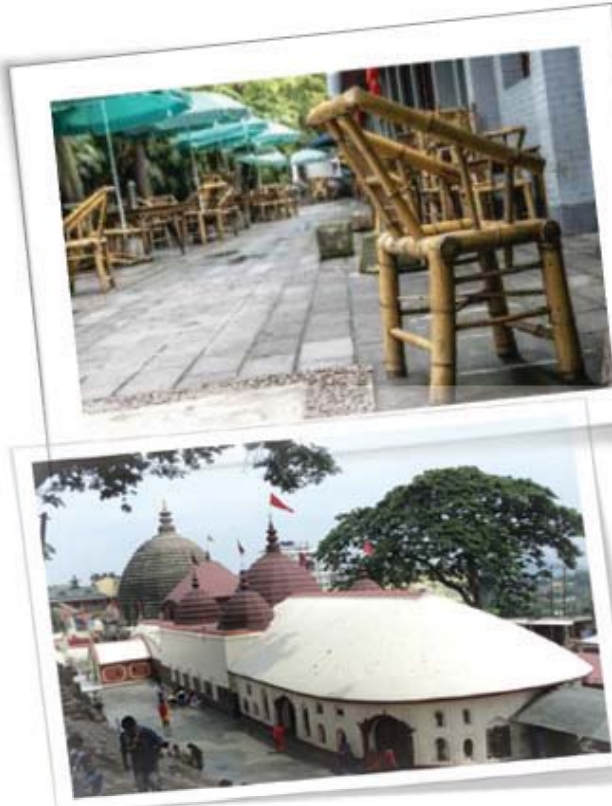


Three, sanctions on the sale of Iranian oil will be lifted. Four, a substantial part of blocked Iranian funds will be released to the country. This may be as much as \$24 billion in two or three tranches. The MoU, if implemented, will be strategically beneficial to Iran. The more fraught question of Iran's nuclear programme, including the fate of 400 kg of uranium enriched to about 60%, will be subject to subsequent negotiations. Iran has reaffirmed its adherence to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, under which it has foresworn ever acquiring nuclear weapons. It may be allowed to hold

enriched uranium, though diluted to a much lower percentage, and there would be a resumption of strict international safeguards over its nuclear facilities under monitoring by the International Atomic Energy Agency. From Iran's perspective, its control over the Strait of Hormuz has proved to be a more potent weapon and leverage than its attempt to emerge as a threshold nuclear weapon state. Perhaps it will be more flexible on reaching a new nuclear deal, which is unlikely to be much different from the original Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) concluded under the administration of President Obama in 2015, which Trump walked out of during his first term (January 2017 to January 2021). Like the JCPOA, subsequent negotiations will exclude Iran's lethal ballistic missile programme. This is especially worrying for Israel and Iran's Gulf neighbours which have been at the receiving end of repeated assaults by these missiles. The fact that Iran can close down navigation in the Strait at will by holding out the mere threat of attacks on shipping, along with the retention of its ballistic missile capability and its return to the international oil market, will mark its emergence as one of the most powerful regional nations. This is the reason why the Gulf states want an early end to hostilities and are engaging in quiet diplomatic engagement with Iran. Surprisingly, this includes the UAE, which in recent days has resumed contact with the Iranian government, despite its close alliance with the US and Israel. Israel had assisted the UAE in intercepting Iranian missiles and drones fired at it by installing and operating an Israeli interception facility. This diplomatic activity accords political legitimacy to the Iranian revolutionary regime and means that Israel's determination to emerge as a

regional superpower, supported by its alliance with the US, is now in a shambles. A new regional balance of power, with Iran serving as an anchor state, is beginning to take shape. This is an extraordinary achievement for a country which lost the top rungs of its leadership and suffered immense damage to its civilian and economic infrastructure through incessant bombing campaigns. It demonstrated resilience and the capacity to inflict greater pain on its Gulf neighbours and the global economy by shutting off the Strait and attacking targets in the Gulf states, whose globally connected economies have been adversely impacted. There are continuing disruptions in the supply not only of oil and gas but also strategic commodities such as chemical fertilisers and helium, used in the semiconductor industry. All these have served as strong bargaining levers for Iran in the negotiations over the MoU. It is possible that hostilities may break out again and Iran would be subjected to a renewed bombing campaign. This will only serve to prolong the pain for the prosperous Gulf economies, trigger higher inflation and a possible recession in the US, besides further disrupting the global economy, which is already under strain. This will probably lead to a resumption of negotiations, with Iran in an even stronger bargaining position than before. As long as it does not indulge in overreach, Iran has every prospect of achieving its key objectives from the negotiations. Iran deployed superior statecraft and strategic thinking, which more than made up for its military inferiority and international isolation. One should have expected no less from the heirs of a sophisticated 5,000-year-old civilisation. There are important lessons in statecraft and the art of diplomacy for countries facing an asymmetry of power. The MoU is said to contain four key understandings:

# 24 hours in Guwahati



Guwahati has been hovering a tad below the radar as a tourist destination of choice, which is surprising because it sits on a cultural and spiritual epicenter and is fast emerging as a world-class city. A silent witness to some epic moments in history stretching back to the days of the Mahabharata, it was in this city where the winning march of the seeming to be invincible Mughals came to a grinding halt. Giving the city its majestic charm, is the river Brahmaputra, which flows through its heart and which is intrinsically linked to its destiny. Add to it the gigantic Himalayan ranges and what you get is a tourist's paradise, a city that could be the answer to your spiritual quest. Incredibly, the city is so green that you might be pardoned for mistaking it for a resort and falling madly in love with it at first sight.

horned rhino could throw one charming bait after another at you, ensnaring you till you get fully entangled! However, just in case you have only 24 hours to explore this beautiful city, here is how you should go about it.

## Paltan Bazaar

Sitting next to Guwahati railway station and home to Assam State Transport Corporation bus terminal, Paltan Bazar is a thriving market place and trade centre. The entire area is stuffed with hotels, restaurants, shopping complexes and street shops. Due to the railway station and the bus terminal, Paltan Bazar is one place in Guwahati that never sleeps; so whatever time of the day it is, there is something or the other for the compulsive shopper! A word of caution-this market is always crowded so be prepared to face an army of busy foot soldiers (read commuters). The furniture market here is the answer to all

Interestingly, Guwahati refuses to rest on its laurels or live in the past. It has marched on with time and has truly grown into a cosmopolitan city complete with bustling markets, a happening nightlife, a vibrant social circle and modern infrastructure. If you happen to be a wildlife enthusiast, this land of the one-

home and office needs. Home decoration materials are also in plenty in the myriad shops and stalls. Go busy bargaining over bamboo products, north eastern tribal garments and articles made of clay and wood in the roadside establishments or shop for various types of tea at the Indian Tea House. As mentioned before, Paltan Bazar is home to many restaurants and dhabas serving Indian and Chinese food items and you will never feel the hunger pangs after all the walking and haggling!

## See the sun rise across the Brahmaputra from Fancy Bazaar

You might be an intrepid traveler who has travelled across the world and witnessed many a sunrise, but the one from across the river Brahmaputra is sure to leave you speechless. This is because, the interplay of soft sunrises and the gentle blue waters of the river, with a few boats drifting on the horizon, seems completely out of this world. Add to this, a deafening silence, broken only by the occasional chirping of a bird and some early riser who has come for a jogging session along the river bank. Take your time and watch the sun make its way through the clouds and shower its warm rays on the city which gets back to life like a well-oiled machine. If you want a specific location to watch the sunrise, the spots near Fancy Bazaar, which sits pretty on one side of the river, are just ideal. There is also a park along the bank of the river; you will find heaps of bamboo piled up just a few yards

away. The well-maintained park has sufficient benches and looks colorful with many native and exotic flowers adorning its space; the fine combination of aroma wafting from them makes the sunrise even more sensational and a great way to start the day!

## Morung Restaurant

Just a heartbeat away from the Guwahati railway station, Morung is a hot favorite among tourists who want to delve into food of the region. Located opposite Acoustic Zone in Bhangagarh, on Rajgarh Road, it is easily accessible from the city. With an assortment of Chinese and pork-specialties native to the region, it will surely set your tongue on fire. The only question is, are you up for the challenge?

The restaurant is known for using local herbs in its dishes which lend them a distinctive taste and color. Some special mentions that you shouldn't miss at any cost include Local Chicken with Dry Bamboo Shoot and Assamese-style Chicken with Sesame Gravy. As for the Chinese menu, you may select from its wide range of dishes such as creamy butter garlic prawn, chilli paneer and chilli pork. The fun of eating at Morung is further intensified by the fact that it has a calm, appetizing environment. To add to that, the owner as well as the staff never tire of offering their warm services.

## Kamakhya Temple

If you are a devotee of Maa Durga, the Kamakhya Temple is your place of solace and

redemption. Even if you are not, it deserves a look in just for the sheer history and religious following it continues to draw from across the country. One of the oldest temples in the country, its original date of construction is lost in the mists of time. It was damaged by invaders during the 16th century and has since been renovated. One of the 51 Shakti Peethas of Goddess Durga, it is believed that the temple stands on the spot where the yoni (female genitalia) of the Devi fell when Lord Shiva was dancing with the corpse of the Goddess. The temple is a magnet for Tantric worshippers and an important pilgrimage destination among the Hindus. The sanctum sanatorium of the temple lies deep inside the temple and can be reached following a flight of stairs. Another interesting anecdote about the temple is that it is a natural cave.

The atmosphere around the temple is a somber one, thanks in part to the huge trees surrounding it which cast long shadows and also the mountains in the backdrop.

## Go party hopping to Kamakazi and Blues

The nights in Guwahati are alive and kicking, which is a good thing considering that after a hectic day of exploring, one needs to let one's hair down. Also, who, in their right mind, would pass up an opportunity to make new friends over a few drinks? If you haven't figured out the most happening places already, opt for either Blues or Kamikaze, which are the best options the city has to offer by a long shot. For instance Blues has some of the finest wines and other beverages to keep you going through the night. There's live rock music to give you company. If you have saved a few dance moves for a special occasion, this is it, bring them out and showcase them in front of the world! Kamakazi, likewise, is a fabulous place to spend the evening in the company of exquisite cocktails and sway to the beat of the energetic and peppy tunes that is being played there. But there is a slight and interesting twist to the tale; the discotheque is a floating one and is perched atop a ferry, which adds to its allure.



With Singapore being one of the most-visited destinations by Indians, there has been a huge surge in the visa requirements for the same. While this fact might not be news to you, the easy process of applying for a visa would surely be. To start with, you do not need an entry visa to visit Singapore if you have an official or diplomatic passport! Add to it the fact that the entire process is online since Singapore High Commission does not accept individual walk-in applications.

## The process of applying for a Singapore visa ?

With the process of applying for a visa entirely online, you need to file for an e-visa and submit the application to an authorized visa agent. You can download the visa application form from the ICA website or obtain one from any of the authorized travel agents/any

# Singapore

## visa guide for Indians

Singapore Overseas Missions.

You can also submit it via a local sponsor, who should essentially have a SingPass Account. Do remember that you need to apply for a visa for Singapore at least 30 days prior to your intended date of arrival in Singapore.

## Documents required ?

While applying for a Singapore visa for Indians, you need to have the following

documents in place or else your visa application would not be accepted.

- 1) A valid passport that is valid for at least six months from your date of departure from Singapore,
- 2) Form 14A, completed and signed,
- 3) A coloured photograph measuring 33 mm (width) and 45 mm (height). This should have been clicked during the past three

months from the date of your visa application,

- 4) All the supported documents that are mentioned in the application form.

## Essential Singapore visa information ?

There is a processing fee of S\$ 30 for a visa. In addition to that, you will also need to submit a fixed fee of another INR 300 per application that should be paid to the authorized visa agent. Once you've submitted the completed visa application form along with the required documents, you can check the status of your application online. If approved, you can get a printout of your e-visa from the authorized travel agent.

List of authorized travel agents ?

Singapore High Commission accepts visa application only through local sponsors or authorized travel agents. Here's a comprehensive list of the authorized agents across India; you can submit your visa application form with them at any of their branches in India -

- 1) Cox & Kings Ltd.
- 2) Club7 Holidays Ltd.
- 3) D.Pauls Travel & Tours Ltd.
- 4) FCM Travel Solutions (India) Pvt. Ltd.
- 5) Jetsave India Tours Pvt.Ltd.
- 6) Make My Trip (India) Pvt.Ltd.
- 7) J & S Travels Pvt. Ltd.
- 8) Riya Travel & Tours (India) Pvt. Ltd.
- 9) Skyline India Travels Pvt. Ltd.
- 10) SOTC
- 11) Thomas Cook India Ltd.
- 12) Zenith Leisure Holidays Ltd.





When it rains, it pours in

# South India



## Goa

Swaying palms, white sands and swirling waters coupled with torrential rains make Goa a must-visit during the rainy months. While swimming is not advisable as the waves can be dangerously big, and the water can get murky, there's no reason not to take a walk along the beach with wet sand between your toes and a gaze at the cloudy horizon over the ocean. Sip on a hot cup of tea, sample delectable Goan cuisine in a roadside cafe, or go biking in the meandering pathways of the state while the rain pours down. Even better, head into the forested hinterland of Goa where the jungle comes alive during the monsoon. Since it's the lean season, don't be surprised if you get some great deals and offers too.

## Coorg

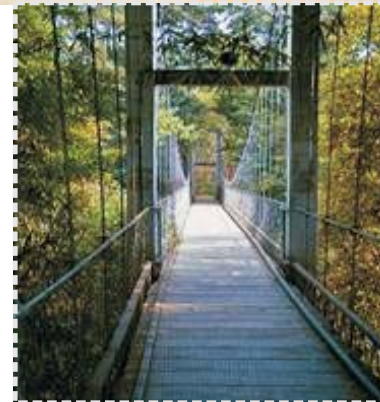
Nestled amidst verdant landscapes, acres of coffee plantations, and rugged mountain terrain interspersed with cardamom-growing fields, Coorg is one of the wettest places in southern India during the monsoons. A six-

hour-drive from the Bangalore airport, Coorg is often praised as 'Scotland of India' on account of its unending green slopes. While a thin layer of mist that haunts over the lush valleys of Coorg, the hill town transforms into a palette comprising many shades of green when the rain comes down. The majestic beauty of this hill town with its cascading waterfalls and cool ambience make Coorg a perfect destination to visit provided you've got your rain gear and are prepared to step out in a

downpour.

## Pondicherry

Mustard-yellow tinted villas, old colonial houses, cobble-stoned streets and a surfeit of seafront restaurants, cafes and bars—the postcard-perfect city of Pondicherry lures you in with its old-world beauty and quaint charm. The wet months of August to December add a dash of romance and create a cool ambience in the city, with its scenic wet trails, cloudy skyline,



and water dripping down the sloping roofs. Take a walk under your umbrella, hire a bicycle to explore this picturesque town or hop on a ferry to get to the beaches nearby—Pondicherry is anything but dull and grey during the monsoon season.

## Munnar

Carpeted with emerald-green tea plantations, the valleys of Munnar get even more mesmerising when dark clouds come rolling in and engulf the hilltops in the months of June to November. Those who want to witness nature at its best can go hiking in the Periyar National Park where a rich variety of flora comes alive during the monsoon. So does the fauna, and it's best to be protected against insects and other creepy crawlies which abound in the forest. The rain-drenched greenery is especially captivating around the many waterfalls around Munnar which become deluged during the monsoon.



**The long hot summer comes to an end as the month of June elapses, and the parched Earth cools down with the incessant downpour which rides in on the Monsoon winds. If you are one of those who don't mind getting a wee bit wet, then there's really no place like South India to truly enjoy the Monsoon. From sipping a cup of hot tea and enjoying hot pakoras at a roadside stall to taking a walk under the umbrella in cool breezy weather, these destinations in the southern part of the country will mesmerise you during the rainy season.**

Istanbul is a pearl embedded in between Asia and Europe, a bridge between western and eastern culture. It's not a coincidence that many of the biggest civilisations of the past centuries, from Romans to Ottomans, fought for its control, transforming it into an ever-changing melting pot. The Silk Road as well as the hippie trail passed through it and till today, it is considered to be the gateway to Asia and a preferred destination for travellers. While many archaeological sites and museums have an entrance fee there are plenty of attractions, markets and neighbourhoods in Istanbul where you don't have to spend a dime. There is enough entertainment to make an enjoyable stay. Following are some of the top free attractions in Istanbul:

## Princes' Islands

A favourite escape of Istanbul from chaos and crowd, Princes' Islands are an archipelago located around 20 km south east of the city. It comprises nine islands, four of which are easily accessible by a public ferry. The main feature of this retreat is that no vehicle is allowed on any of the islands, except for police and rescue services. It's like going back in time, enjoying an afternoon stroll in the alleys of the villages, before exploring the natural beauty of the islands and

## Top free attractions in

# Istanbul

ending the day with a swim and sunbath on one of the beaches. If moving on feet all day long feels too much, then the other possibility is to hire a bicycle to explore this beautiful stretch of land. Horse drawn carts are also available for the more romantic.

Buyukada is the biggest of the islands known for its clock tower, Victorian mansions and its vibrant streets filled with cafes and restaurants. Places like mosques, churches and monasteries are also there if you are into architectural heritage. Heybeliada is another favourite with picturesque bay and lush forests that can be the perfect setting for a well-deserved day of relaxation before going back to the hustle and bustle of the

city.

Given their easy accessibility, as Princes' Islands can be quickly and cheaply reached by boat from both European and Asian sides, the archipelago gets quite crowded during the weekend. Come here on a weekday or early in the morning to enjoy the quietness that these islands have to offer. In summers, ferries are usually running from sunrise to midnight, and if you get late at night, there are a few accommodation options.

## Ortakoy

If you have ever seen a postcard with a picturesque mosque standing in front of the Bosphorus Bridge, then you know what Ortakoy looks like. Ortakoy is a small neighbourhood on

the European side of Istanbul, next to the entrance of the Bosphorus Bridge. Formerly a separate village, it is now a part of Besiktas district and has been integrated into the main city of Istanbul after its expansion.

While walking along its small alleys and cobblestone streets flanked here and there by traditional wooden houses, you'll wonder if you have travelled back in time. Stop in one of the many cafes and relax—a Turkish tea is an affordable choice even for travellers on a shoestring budget. On Sundays, do not miss to visit the popular market with stands selling food and handicrafts. Do try the local delicacy 'kumpir', which is a big baked potato split in two and stuffed with all sorts of good things that can easily replace a whole meal.

The most important landmark and the reason why most of the people come to this neighbourhood is Ortakoy Mosque, completed in 1856 in Ottoman Neo Baroque style. While it cannot compete with Sultanahmet Mosque in size, it's the grandeur that astonishes visitors. With its finely decorated interior, it looks more like a Beaux Arts Parisian residence than a mosque.

## Istiklal Street

Istiklal Street, the main arterial road of Istanbul, is a 1.3-km-long avenue in the heart of the European side of the city, the Beyoglu (Pera) district. It connects Taksim Square all the way down to Tunnel, one of the oldest metro stations in the world used since 1875, located not far away from Galata Tower. Its name translates to Independence Avenue, which was given after the birth of the Republic of Turkey in 1923.

The architecture is a variegated mix, including late Ottoman houses to Art Nouveau buildings and Neo-Gothic residences. While exploring the main avenue and its alleys, you will see mosques as well as Catholic, Armenian and Greek Orthodox churches existing side by side. A not to be missed highlight is Cicek Pasaji (Flower Passage), a beautiful gallery built in European style. However, its most distinctive feature is probably the historical

tram making its way through the crowds of people on the pedestrian avenue. Sitting, eating and relaxing are some of the favourite activities that can be done on Istiklal Street, but many still prefer to go shopping and browsing fashion outlets, vintage shops, fancy bakeries and musical records.

Walking the length of Istiklal Street can sometimes be intimidating because of the massive presence of police at every corner that is ready to take action against any possible revolt.

## Suleymaniye Mosque

Dominating the skyline of the Sultanahmet area at the entrance of the Golden Horn, Suleymaniye Mosque was built on top of a small hill on the order of Sultan Suleyman and completed in 1558. It was built by the famous architect Mimar Sinan, and later served as a reference for the construction of the Blue Mosque, and even of the Taj Mahal in Agra. Built at an elevated position as compared to the surrounding buildings, the mosque stands out and can be seen from a distance, making it a well-known landmark. A mere glance at this massive edifice with glorious design, and it remains deeply entrenched in one's memory.

Suleymaniye Mosque was originally a big complex including a caravanserai, a Koranic School and a hammam, among others. It's considered to be the biggest mosque in Istanbul with a majestic colonnade topped with 28 domes and with a minaret in each corner. The interior might not be as inspiring as that of Sultan Ahmed Mosque, but it still impresses for its size and architectural details. Features of Byzantine architecture were borrowed from the close by Hagia Sophia, with the abundance of perforated walls allowing natural light to enter and semi-domes used as buttresses.

Once you are done with your visit and go back to the ferry landing for a view of the Galata Tower, do have a look at the locals fishing and then grilling and serving their prey to visitors.



# Centre initiates eviction proceedings against Sujan Singh Park North in Delhi

**The 1945 lease, the L&DO said, for the land had been re-entered on August 5, 1960 due to the company's failure to rectify breaches of two clauses of the lease. Re-entry refers to the termination of the lease in event of a breach of the lease.**

**New Delhi.(Agency)**

The Union government has initiated eviction proceedings against Sujan Singh Park North, the upscale colonial-era building complex next to Khan Market in New Delhi that includes the iconic Ambassador Hotel, saying the lease ended

in 1960 due to the failure to address breaches of the conditions. The Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs' Land and Development Office (L&DO) on June 11 issued an eviction notice to Sir Sobha Singh and Sons, the real estate company that built, and still runs the complex after it was given the land on lease to develop Sujan Singh Park in 1945. The firm was asked to respond to the notice by Friday as to why an eviction order should not be passed.

The 1945 lease, the L&DO said, for the land had been re-entered on August 5, 1960 due to the company's failure to rectify breaches of two clauses of the lease. Re-entry refers to the termination of the lease in event of a breach of the lease.

No renewal, fresh allotment or fresh lease had been executed or granted since 1960, and the continued occupation of the property was without authority of law, the

L&DO added. The L&DO initiated the proceedings under the Public Premises (Eviction of Unauthorised Occupants) Act, 1971, and asked the firm to recover possession from "sub-tenants".

Shaunak Kashyap, the advocate for Sir Sobha Singh & Sons Pvt. Ltd, said the company had got "substantive relief" from the Delhi High Court on Wednesday when it moved the court against the June 11 notice. While the court did not stay the notice, Kashyap said it was not necessary. He said the notice rested on a June 9 judgment of the Tis Hazari court, in which the court struck down a decree in favour of the government. The court's judgment would have led to the company's eviction, however, Kashyap said the government told the High Court it would not

rely on the Tis Hazari court judgment. "At the hearing in the High Court on Wednesday, we argued that the notice was

granting us substantial relief...A formal stay was thus unnecessary precisely because the government itself gave up the operative basis of the threatened eviction, based on our arguments before the vacation bench — and that, in the circumstances, is substantive relief," he said.

Kashyap added that the company had challenged the L&DO's jurisdiction. "Any eviction must now begin afresh, on a fresh notice, with the government first proving that its 1960 're-entry' was valid — something it failed to establish in 49 years of trial — through a full inquiry with evidence and cross-examination, in which the residents, Hotel Ambassador, the Traders' Association and the RWA are each entitled to be heard before the Director of Estates."



illegal in so far as it rested on that judgment. This forced the government's counsel to withdraw the operative portion of the notice that threatened eventual eviction, thereby

**'Always praised the family... unbelievable': Son of domestic help killed by employer**

**New Delhi.(Agency)**

Kailash hills in South East Delhi is an idyllic neighbourhood by all means: a slope going downwards from the main road turns into small lanes, which mostly have brutalist grey residential buildings. A few of them, however, have picturesque three-floor white DDA houses, surrounded by greens. Block A is one such lane. On the rooftop of one of these buildings, a woman's body was found in a pool of blood on Thursday morning — her head battered allegedly with a bat by her employer.

The woman was Meena, a house help, and a few meters away from her — on the stairs that lead to the rooftop — sat her employer and alleged killer Dr Manish Gupta: a geeky looking dermatologist who had stints with several skincare giants. On Thursday morning, he had allegedly stabbed Meena after beating her with a bat, allegedly over bringing "bad energy" to the house.

About four hours after police reached the spot, and drove the accused away to the police station, Amit Vohra, a local, was standing outside the building, looking towards the third floor of the building where a blue board mentioning the accused's qualification hangs.

He recalled a phone conversation with the accused who he has known for about a decade. "I heard that a murder happened near his house. I called to check if he was fine, if his son and wife were fine. But his phone was switched off. I then called a police officer. They said he is the one who is the murderer," said Vohra, shocked at the actions of his "reticent" and "kind" neighbour.

"Last I spoke to him was a couple of months back. I remember during Covid, we had arranged some oxygen cylinders together. Some were left, and after some months Manish helped us donate it," said Vohra.

**LG asks departments to finalise process for 20% quota for former Agniveers in Group C posts, sets June 30 deadline**

**New Delhi.(Agency)**

Lieutenant Governor Taranjit Singh Sandhu on Thursday directed all departments concerned to complete the process of implementation of 20% reservation for former Agniveers in Group 'C' posts by month-end, including necessary amendments to the Recruitment Rules.

Chairing a review meeting with the Chief Secretary, Police Commissioner and other senior officials, the LG said the reservation policy should be implemented in the Delhi Police, Fire Services, Prisons, and Forest and Wildlife departments in line with the Centre's vision for rehabilitation and employment of former Agniveers.

Sandhu had earlier proposed recruitments of the former Agniveers to the Delhi Fire Services in a meeting held on June 8. "To optimally harness the discipline and military



training of these youths, the LG directed the execution of a 20% reservation in direct recruitment to vacant Group 'C' posts," the LG office said in a statement. Officials said that this quota will be applicable across key operational departments, specifically covering the recruitment of police constables, fire officials, jail warders, forest guards and wildlife guards. Sandhu said the departments should finalise the procedures and bring necessary amendments to their respective Recruitment Rules by June 30, the statement said. Officials said that the LG also noted that by seamlessly integrating these dedicated individuals into the civic framework, the government will significantly augment the Capital's institutional resilience and drive forward the collective vision of a progressive 'Viksit Dilli'.

**'Took 12 hours to douse the flame': Massive fire at Faridabad shoe factory, 21 tenders deployed**

**New Delhi.(Agency)**

A suspected short circuit at a shoe manufacturing factory on Thursday morning in Faridabad led to a massive fire, officials said, adding that they managed to completely douse it after 12 hours. No casualty was reported as workers were not at the unit at the time of the incident, but the fire spread to buildings outside the premises, leading to evacuation.

Officials said that they were informed about the incident — which took place at Guru Kripa Lifestyle at Sector 32 near the Mewala Maharajpur Metro station — around 7.30 am on Thursday. Fire tenders and State Disaster Response Force (SDRF) officials from across Haryana reached the spot. "As many

as 21 fire tenders were pressed into service. The flames were put out around 7.30 pm. The firm will now assess the damage in their report," Fire Safety Officer Rakesh Yadav said at



the site.

When The Indian Express visited the spot in the afternoon, the approach road had turned muddy and there were piles of shoes under tin sheds which

were completely damaged.

"We deployed 13 tenders from Faridabad, and the rest from Sohna, Palwal, Nuh, Gurgaon and public sector companies like NTPC," Yadav added.

Fire Safety Officer (Faridabad NIT) Sukhbir Yadav said the tenders has to be refilled at least 10 times till afternoon. Company officials present at the site said they were yet to ascertain the damage, but termed it "substantial".

"We think a short circuit triggered it," a worker said. The workers were not allowed to go inside the factory as various sheds had collapsed. "We had to break a brick wall with an excavator so that the hose could reach some of the rooms.

**North Delhi to DND in less time: Govt clears elevated Ring Road, 2 new Yamuna bridges**

**In the first phase, about 25-km long corridor will be developed under three priority sections — 7-km Azadpur Chowk to Metcalfe House junction, 5-km long Majnu Ka Tila to Salimgarh Fort section and Salimgarh Fort to DND flyway section.**

**New Delhi.(Agency)**

The Capital is set to get two more bridges on the Yamuna river with the government approving the first phase of a Rs 12,000 crore elevated Ring Road corridor project from Metcalfe House in the city's Civil Lines area to DND flyover near Ashram. Aimed at ensuring signal-free movement while reducing congestion, the project — which is part of the Delhi government's mega decongestion plan — will help boost connectivity between North, North East and South East Delhi, said officials. It is also expected to reduce vehicular pollution and road accidents on key arterial routes.

Public Works Department (PWD) Minister Parvesh Sahib Singh told The Indian Express on Thursday that the proposed elevated corridor above the

55-km Ring Road — which is considered the lifeline of the Capital's road infrastructure — will be constructed in six sections in two



phases. "The first three sections under Phase 1 have been approved. The feasibility and detailed project report (DPR) has been prepared and is being reviewed. It will soon be sent to the Unified Traffic and Transportation

Infrastructure (Planning & Engineering) Centre or UTTIPEC for further approval..." he said.

In the first phase, about 25-km long corridor will be developed under three priority sections — 7-km Azadpur Chowk to Metcalfe House junction, 5-km long Majnu Ka Tila to Salimgarh Fort section and Salimgarh Fort to DND flyway section.

Officials said the total length of the corridor — when ramps, loops, and additional connecting roads are included — is expected to be around 80 km. Also known as Mahatma Gandhi Marg, the Ring Road — which has 11 junctions sees a vehicle load of 5 lakh vehicles daily. The average speed during peak hours is 23.79 kmph. The project promises to increase this average speed to 45 kmph.

**Civic concerns, blame game after Faridabad biker falls into ditch; dies after waiting for help**

**New Delhi.(Agency)**

Days after the death of a 45-year-old hospital manager from Faridabad, which has been blamed on alleged civic apathy, broken bottles and empty packets of chips line the mounds of soil and ditches at the site of the incident near the Manjhawali Bridge that links Faridabad and Greater Noida (Dankaur). A resident of Faridabad, Atul Joshi died on the intervening night of June 14 and 15 allegedly after his motorcycle plunged into a ditch on the unbarricaded, incomplete stretch of the approach road — where the construction is said to have been halted due to land acquisition delays — to the bridge over Yamuna at the border of the Haryana and Uttar Pradesh.

Police said the victim survived the initial crash that took place around 11 pm on June 14. But he succumbed to his injuries after waiting for more than eight hours for help in the secluded area; he was spotted by locals around 7.30 am.

The death was a reminder of a similar incident in West Delhi's Janakpuri in February, which sparked massive outrage, when a 25-year-old call centre employee, Kamal Dhyani, fell into a pit on



a stretch where construction work was being undertaken by the Delhi Jal Board (DJB).

In the latest incident, according to a senior Faridabad Police officer, Joshi was riding from his residence in Faridabad to Noida on Sunday night at a high speed. Unable to see the dead end in the dark, Joshi rode his motorcycle off the paved surface and into a ditch — his helmet suffered damage, which led to injuries.

**What spot check revealed**

When The Indian Express visited the site on Thursday, no barricades or barriers could be seen, which could have possibly prevented the fall. Vehicles were seen navigating their way from and towards Noida through unpaved kutchra roads at the immediate end of the bridge.

The site of the incident is surrounded by empty fields. Labourers and others working in the fields nearby said that part of the unpaved road is only used to take a U-Turn towards the bridge. Cabs and other vehicles heading towards Noida had to cover the site of the incident — many drivers were seen asking for directions, indicating that Google Maps could not guide them properly as a part of the road is incomplete.

**Firm that runs Sujan Singh Park complex moves Delhi HC against breach of lease order**

**Sir Sobha Singh and Sons has been locked in litigation with the government for nearly seven decades now, since 1960. Ambassador hotel started operating in 1950.**

**New Delhi.(Agency)**

Sir Sobha Singh and Sons, the real estate company that built and runs the Sujan Singh Park complex has moved Delhi High Court against a district court's judgment that ruled that the northern part of the complex has been in breach of conditions of the lease agreement. Urging for an immediate stay on the district court's verdict, the company on Wednesday cited the latest eviction notice issued by the government on June 11. Part of the complex under the government takeover bid also includes the hotel, Ambassador, which is at the heart of the dispute. The government has

termed the hotel as a breach of the lease conditions, thus making termination of the lease, or a 're-entry' by the government over the property, valid. Sir Sobha Singh and Sons, in their petition, has flagged the June 11 eviction notice under the Public Premises (Eviction of Unauthorised Occupants) Act, 1971, terming the company as 'unauthorised occupant' and seeking possession of the land, only two days after the trial court's verdict, "troubling post-judgment chronology".

"The operative order was pronounced on 09.06.2026 (by the district court). The



reasons were signed and uploaded only on 12.06.2026 at 1753 hours. Yet a notice under the Public Premises Act, dated 11.06.2026, had already reproduced the judgment's reasoning. The reasons were thus known to the government before they reached (Sir Sobha Singh and Sons), who had to apply to the court on 12.06.2026 for a copy. This itself is very serious and requires intervention," their petition submits. Heard by Justice Tejas Karia on Wednesday, the Centre, through its standing counsel Ashish Dixit, assured the court that "the proceedings under the PP Act shall be conducted without reference to or being influenced by the (district court's judgment) and all the rights and contentions of the parties are reserved in that respect."

## Rupee rises 20 paise to 94.20 against US dollar in early trade

HYDERABAD.(Agency)

The rupee appreciated 20 paise to 94.20 against the US dollar in early trade on Friday on optimism that trade negotiations between India and the United States are set to gain momentum. Forex traders said the rupee opened on a positive note with oil prices remaining supportive and foreign inflows improving. The overall bias remains positive for the rupee, they said. Moreover, Indian Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri on Thursday said trade was a major subject of discussion between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and US President Donald Trump, with both leaders directing their negotiators to finalise the proposed trade pact at the earliest. At the interbank foreign exchange market the rupee opened at 94.30, then gained momentum and touched 94.20, registering a gain of 20 paise from its previous all-time closing low.

On Tuesday, the rupee settled 10 paise higher at 94.40 against the US dollar. "The RBI is expected to use incoming dollar flows to rebuild forex reserves and gradually reduce its large forward dollar book, estimated at around USD 110 billion.

Market participants believe the central bank may have already purchased USD 38.75 billion over the last two sessions," CR Forex Advisors MD - Amit Pabari said. Pabari further said that this is not a sign of concern.

Rather, it reflects the RBI taking advantage of favourable market conditions. "However, such buying can naturally slow the pace of rupee appreciation, making the move stronger but more gradual," he said. Meanwhile, the dollar index, which gauges the greenback's strength against a basket of six currencies, was trading at 100.92, up 0.08 per cent.

Brent crude, the global oil benchmark, was trading lower by 0.85 per cent at USD 79.17 per barrel in futures trade.

## Gold cheaper by Rs 2,500; silver by Rs 6,867: check latest price in your city

Kolkata.(Agency)

The decline in gold and silver prices today, June 19, was much higher than what was observed on June 18, which followed the decision of the US Fed to retain key policy rates unchanged. That one act retained the attraction of the US dollar. The fall in gold and silver prices has brought relief for consumers while investors have turned cautious since yesterday. The downward pressure is witnessed in the domestic bullion market, MCX and global markets. On MCX, gold is trading at Rs 1,46,817, down by 1.67% or Rs 2,492. Meanwhile, silver has fallen by 2.75% or a massive Rs 6,867 to reach Rs 2,31,050 per kg. If you are planning to buy gold or silver, find out the latest rates in the retail market, MCX, and international markets, as well as the current rates in your city.

**Spot prices of gold and silver**

Decline in gold and silver prices has been observed in the retail market. Gold is trading at Rs 1,47,150 per 10 grams, significantly below the Rs 1.50 lakh level. Meanwhile, the price of silver has dropped by a big extended below the Rs 2.50 lakh a kg. Today, the decline was about Rs 6,370. Buyers were certainly relieved to see the decline. Gold and silver on MCX

Today, gold and silver futures prices on the MCX showed pronounced weakness. Gold contracts expiring on August 5 are trading at Rs 1,46,817, down by 1.67% while silver contracts expiring on July 3 fell by 2.75% to reach Rs 2,31,050. Selling pressure persists for both precious metals, resulting in the recorded price drops. Consequently, investors and buyers are keeping a close watch on the market's future trajectory. Sharp decline in both gold and silver prices was also seen in the international market. Gold is trading down by about 2% and silver has fallen by more than 3%.

## How growing sources of income is posing a challenge to taxpayers, an expert clarifies

New Delhi.(Agency)

The income tax filing season is on right now. Experts point out that the compliance burden on taxpayers has increased in recent years, particularly for individuals earning income from multiple sources. While technology-driven reporting mechanisms such as AIS (Annual Information Statement), TIS (Taxpayer Information Summary), Form 26AS, and extensive third-party data reporting have enhanced transparency, they have also increased the added responsibility on taxpayers to accurately reconcile their income before reporting and filing returns, says Kinjal Bhuta, treasurer at Bombay Chartered Accountants' Society (BCAS). "Today's taxpayers often earn income from a combination of salary, freelance assignments, consulting services, rental properties, capital gains from shares and mutual funds, interest from deposits, foreign investments, dividends, and digital assets etc. Each source of income requires separate documentation and disclosures in the return forms and the disclosures have increased over the years," he said.

Capital gains tax Bhuta has pointed out how accurate reporting of capital gains taxes have become a challenge for many since more and more people have started investing in different types of securities to pocket significant returns. "Capital gains reporting has become particularly complex due to multiple tax rates, grandfathering provisions, holding period requirements, and detailed transaction-wise disclosures. Similarly, taxpayers engaged in freelancing or consultancy often struggle with choice of tax systems and regimes eg: whether presumptive taxes or regular taxes with audit requirements etc," the BCAS treasurer said.

Tallying data With the flow of financial data from different sources to the government rising, taxpayers should be extra cautious so that data with the government and the disclosures made by them tally.

# Accenture warning sends Infosys, TCS and HCLTech tumbling. Here's why

**Major Indian IT stocks fell sharply after Accenture lowered the upper end of its annual revenue growth forecast. The sell-off has renewed concerns over weak discretionary spending, slower deal conversion and the pace of demand recovery.**

New Delhi.(Agency)

Infosys, TCS, HCLTech and other IT stocks remained under pressure on Friday after global IT services giant Accenture cut the upper end of its annual revenue growth forecast, raising fresh concerns about demand in key overseas markets.

As of 10:03 am, the Nifty IT index was down 5.19%, making it the worst-performing sectoral index of the day. Infosys was down 7.59% at Rs 1,041.9, while TCS fell 5.46% to Rs 2,082.9. HCLTech declined 4.31% to Rs 1,111.7, Tech Mahindra slipped 4.41% to Rs 1,383.9, and Wipro dropped 3.38% to Rs

176.66. The selling pressure extended beyond the large-cap names. Persistent Systems fell 3.86%, Coforge declined 2.78%, LTIMindtree dropped 4.43%, and Mphasis lost 5.14%, highlighting the broad-based nature of the selloff across the technology sector. The weakness in IT shares dragged the broader market lower, with the benchmark indices slipping into the red during morning trade.

The sharp decline also pushed several frontline IT stocks to multi-year lows as the market opened for trade. Infosys and Wipro hit their lowest levels in more than five years during the session, while TCS slipped to its weakest level in nearly six years, underscoring the depth of investor concerns over the sector's growth outlook.

**WHY IT STOCKS FELL TODAY**

The selloff was triggered after Accenture lowered the upper end of its FY26 revenue growth guidance. The company's commentary revived concerns that global enterprises, particularly in the US, may continue to remain cautious on discretionary technology spending, a key

revenue driver for Indian IT services firms. The sharp decline followed a selloff in the American Depository Receipts (ADRs) of Indian IT companies overnight after Accenture's guidance disappointed investors. ADRs are certificates traded on



US stock exchanges that represent shares of non-US companies, allowing American investors to buy and sell foreign stocks without trading directly on overseas markets.

Market experts said the correction reflects concerns over a slowdown in discretionary technology spending by global clients,

particularly in the US, which remains the biggest revenue market for Indian IT services firms. "Guidance cuts by Accenture have triggered sell-off in Indian IT majors' ADRs. This can cause correction in IT stocks in the domestic market too. Buying can emerge at lower levels in IT since valuations are becoming attractive," said VK Vijayakumar, Chief Investment Strategist at Geojit Investments.

The pressure on IT stocks also comes amid uncertainty around the pace of technology spending recovery. While companies have reported healthy deal wins in recent quarters, conversion of those deals into revenue has remained slower than expected as clients continue to scrutinise budgets and delay discretionary projects. The sector is also facing investor concerns around the impact of artificial intelligence on traditional outsourcing models. Although Indian IT firms have positioned themselves as beneficiaries of AI adoption, markets remain cautious about how quickly new AI-led opportunities can offset weakness in legacy businesses.

## Government grants copyright society status to PPL India, boosting royalties

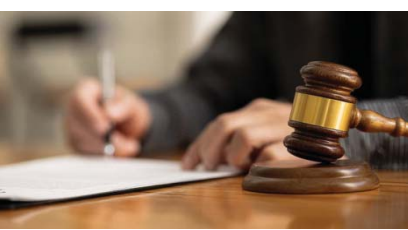
**The government has registered PPL India as a Copyright Society under the Copyright Act, 1957. The move gives music users a clearer licensing route and is expected to improve royalty payments to rights holders and artists.**

New Delhi.(Agency)

In a major development for India's music industry, the government has granted registration to Phonographic Performance Limited (PPL India) as a Copyright Society under the Copyright Act, 1957. The registration provides a formal legal framework for the licencing and administration of sound recording rights in India and is expected to bring greater clarity for businesses that use recorded music commercially.

Established in 1941, PPL India is an 85-year-old not-for-profit organisation that represents around 500 music labels, including leading Indian and international companies such as T-Series, Sony Music, Universal Music, Times Music, Lahari Music, Aditya Music and Global Rhythms. PPL

manages one of the world's largest catalogues of sound recordings and licenses the public performance and



communication of music across hotels, restaurants, retail stores, offices, shopping malls, events, radio stations and other commercial establishments.

The organisation operates on a not-for-profit basis and distributes royalty collections, after deducting administrative expenses, to copyright owners and artists in line with applicable laws and distribution rules. The registration is seen as an important step for copyright owners and artists, as it settles long-standing questions around PPL's legal status. According to PPL, several businesses had previously withheld licence fee payments on the

grounds that the organisation was not registered as a Copyright Society. As a result, music labels and artists represented by PPL were unable to receive royalties from the commercial use of their music. With the registration now in place, PPL expects businesses using copyrighted sound recordings without authorisation to obtain the necessary licences and pay applicable fees, helping ensure that royalties reach rights holders and artists. Commenting on the development, GB Aayeer, CEO of PPL India, said, "The grant of Copyright Society registration is a significant milestone for PPL India and the music labels we represent. We thank the Government of India and DPIIT for their trust and recognition. We remain committed to transparent and efficient rights management, enhancing licensing processes, and ensuring fair rewards for rights holders and creators." Mandar Thakur, Chairman of PPL India, said the registration strengthens the framework for collective administration of sound recording rights in India and provides music users with a transparent and efficient mechanism to obtain licences and comply with copyright laws.

## Sikkim's women-led skincare brand 'Agapi' ventures into Bhutan

GUWAHATI.(Agency)

Sikkim's women-led skincare brand Agapi marked its entry into Bhutan through a strategic partnership with Bhutanese actor, entrepreneur and cultural ambassador Kelly Dorji.

The brand was launched in the country on June 14. Queen Mother Gyalyum Dorji Wangmo Wangchuck, business leaders and diplomats were among the dignitaries who were present. The occasion celebrated not only the introduction of a brand to Bhutan but also the growing spirit of collaboration between the two neighbouring Himalayan regions.

Founded by Rinzing Bhutia, Agapi has built a reputation for creating handcrafted, natural skincare products inspired by Sikkim's rich biodiversity. The brand is committed to sustainability, ethical sourcing, and women's empowerment, working closely with

local communities and creating products that combine traditional knowledge with modern skincare science.

"This expansion is deeply meaningful to us. Bhutan and Sikkim share deep cultural, environmental and spiritual connections, and we are honoured to introduce Agapi to Bhutan through this partnership," said Rinzing, founder of Agapi. She added that the partnership with Kelly Dorji reflects a shared vision of promoting authentic Himalayan products and supporting responsible entrepreneurship.

Known for his advocacy of sustainable initiatives and cultural preservation, Dorji will play a key role in strengthening Agapi's presence in Bhutan and connecting the brand with consumers seeking natural and conscious skincare solutions. During the launch event, guests were introduced to the brand's philosophy of conscious

beauty and social impact. Over the years, Agapi has emerged as one of Sikkim's leading homegrown brands, receiving recognition for its contributions to sustainable enterprise development, women's livelihood generation and the promotion of natural products from the region.

"The Bhutan launch marks a significant milestone in Agapi's growth journey and underscores the brand's commitment to expanding its footprint across the Himalayan region while remaining rooted in its core values of authenticity, sustainability and community empowerment," Rinzing said.

Founded in 2019, Agapi creates handcrafted products using locally sourced natural ingredients while promoting sustainable business practices and empowering women through employment, training and entrepreneurship opportunities.

## India-UK FTA explained ahead of July 15 implementation: Here's how British cars are about to get more affordable

New Delhi.(Agency)

The India-UK Free Trade Agreement officially comes into force on July 15, 2026, and it brings one of the biggest changes to hit the Indian luxury car market in years. Import duties on British-made vehicles are set to fall sharply, and some carmakers have already started slashing prices.

How the tariff cuts work Under the new quota-based system, import duties on eligible British cars will gradually drop to just 10 percent over five years, down from as high as 110 percent today. In year one, petrol cars above 3,000cc and diesel cars above 2,500cc will see duties fall from 110 percent to 30 percent, under a quota of 10,000 vehicles. Petrol cars between 1,500cc and 3,000cc and diesel cars up to 2,500cc will see duties drop from 66 percent to 50 percent, with a 5,000-unit quota. Cars under 1,500cc will also attract a 50 percent duty under a separate 5,000-unit quota. Five-year plan

By the fifth year of the India-UK FTA, tariffs across all ICE vehicle categories are scheduled to fall to just 10 percent. Annual quotas will also expand, allowing up to 37,000 British-made vehicles to be imported into India each year under the concessional tariff structure. Vehicles imported beyond these quotas will continue to attract higher duties, although those tariffs are also expected to decline gradually over time.

It should also be noted that there will be no tariff concessions for electric, hybrid and hydrogen-powered vehicles in the first five years of the India-UK FTA's implementation. From the sixth year onwards, alternative-fuel vehicles priced above GBP 40,000 (Rs 49.94 lakh) will become eligible for phased tariff reductions within specified quotas.

Carmakers started slashing prices Jaguar Land Rover was the first to announce price reductions for models imported as CBUs (completely built units), namely the Range Rover SV and Range Rover Sport SV, ahead of the India-UK FTA coming into effect. The price of the Range Rover SV was slashed to Rs 3.50 crore from Rs 4.25 crore - a Rs 75 lakh cut - while that of the Range Rover Sport SV was cut from Rs 2.75 crore to Rs 2.35 crore, a drop of Rs 40 lakh. While the Defender and Discovery are also imported, they will continue to attract the full extent of taxation as they are manufactured outside the UK at JLR's Nitra plant in Slovakia. The incoming India-EU FTA could lower their prices, though.

## Why Infosys took the biggest hit after Accenture's warning

New Delhi.(Agency)

Global giant Accenture's warning on slower growth sent India's IT stocks tumbling on Friday, wiping out billions of rupees in market value and dragging the Nifty IT index down more than 5%.

As of 10:57 am, the Nifty IT index was down 5.51%, making it the worst-performing sectoral index of the day. Infosys was the biggest casualty, falling 7.85% to Rs 1,039. TCS declined 5.93% to Rs 2,072.7, Tech Mahindra slipped 4.83%, HCLTech fell 3.94%, and Wipro was down 3.28%. The sharp decline also pushed Infosys to its lowest level in more than five years. TCS hovered near a six-year low, while Wipro traded close to levels last seen more than five years ago. The obvious question is: if all IT companies were hit by the same trigger, why did Infosys fall the most?

**WHAT DID ACCENTURE SAY?**

The selloff began after Accenture, one of the world's largest IT services companies, lowered the upper end of its annual revenue growth forecast. Investors closely track Accenture because it serves many of the same global clients as Indian IT firms. When Accenture signals that companies are cutting back or delaying technology spending, markets often assume Indian IT companies could face similar challenges. In

simple terms, Accenture's message was that the recovery in technology spending remains slower than many investors had hoped.

**INFOSYS WAS ALREADY UNDER PRESSURE**

The answer also lies in where Infosys stood before Accenture's warning. For several quarters, investors have been worried about slowing growth across the IT sector. While Infosys has continued to announce large deal wins, clients have remained cautious about spending on discretionary projects—technology initiatives that companies can postpone during uncertain times. That has led to concerns that revenue growth may remain subdued despite healthy order books. When Accenture highlighted continued weakness in client spending, investors saw it as confirmation of those concerns.

**THE ADR IMPACT**

Another factor was the sharp decline in Infosys' American Depository Receipts (ADRs) overnight. ADRs are instruments traded on US stock exchanges that represent shares of foreign companies. They often provide an early indication of how investors are reacting to major developments. Following Accenture's

announcement, Infosys ADRs came under heavy selling pressure in the US. By the time Indian markets opened on Friday, domestic investors had already seen that reaction, adding to the pressure on the stock.

**WHY INFOSYS FEEL MORE THAN PEERS?**

The market reaction suggests investors

cautious outlook reinforced fears that growth could remain under pressure for longer than expected. That explains why Infosys fell more sharply than peers such as HCLTech and Wipro, and even underperformed TCS during the selloff.

**MULTI-YEAR LOWS TRIGGERED MORE SELLING**

Markets are driven not only by fundamentals but also by investor psychology. As Infosys approached a five-year low, more traders and short-term investors rushed to exit their positions. Such levels often trigger additional selling because investors fear further declines if key support levels are breached. This created a snowball effect, amplifying the stock's losses. Is the concern only about Infosys? Not at all. Friday's selloff reflects broader concerns



believe Infosys could be more vulnerable to a prolonged slowdown in discretionary technology spending. Since the company derives a significant share of its business from large global clients that can delay technology budgets during periods of uncertainty, Accenture's

about the outlook for global technology spending. Apart from Infosys, several IT stocks came under pressure. LTIMindtree fell 5.37%, Mphasis dropped 5.49%, Persistent Systems declined 4.76%, Coforge lost 3.62%, and the Nifty IT index plunged more than 5%.

## Short news

**Sudden rain batters Chennai, traffic turns casualty**

CHENNAI.(Agency)

Chennai witnessed a sharp turnaround in weather conditions on Thursday evening, with strong gusty winds and spells of rain sweeping across several parts of the city after a hot and humid day. Residents in areas such as Poonamallee reported powerful winds that resembled cyclonic conditions. The city had experienced high temperatures during the day, with Nungambakkam recording a maximum temperature of 38.3°C and Meenambakkam registering 38.5°C, both around one degree above normal. However, weather conditions changed rapidly during the evening as thunderclouds developed over and around the city.

Light to moderate rainfall was reported in several neighbourhoods. According to rainfall data recorded up to 5.30 pm, Meenambakkam received 17.2 mm of rainfall, while Nungambakkam recorded 0.8 mm. Automated weather stations reported higher rainfall in some suburban locations, including 26.5 mm each at Chembarambakkam and ACS Medical College, 24 mm at Sathyabama University, and 9.5 mm at Poonamallee. Thiruninravur recorded 21.5 mm of rainfall.

The Regional Meteorological Centre (RMC), Chennai, had forecast light to moderate rain accompanied by thunderstorms and lightning over Chennai and its neighbourhoods. The weather department also warned of gusty winds reaching speeds of 40-50 kmph at isolated places across Tamil Nadu, Pondicherry and Karaikal till June 20.

The changing weather pattern brought much-needed relief from the recent spell of intense heat, although humidity levels remained high.

**Madras High Court denies degree certificate to medical student over Maoist funded fees**

CHENNAI.(Agency)

The Madras High Court has refused to order a self-financing medical college near Chennai to hand over the course certificates to an MBBS student whose fee amount of Rs 1.13 crore was seized by the National Investigation Agency (NIA) on charges of her tuition fee being funded by Maoists. The first division bench of Chief Justice Sushrut Arvind Dharmadhikari and Justice G Arul Murugan also dismissed an appeal filed by the student, Puja Kumari of Bihar, challenging a 2024 order of a single judge dismissing her writ petition praying for directing the college to hand her course certificates.

The NIA had taken the action by invoking the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, 1967, to seize the amount from the Chettinad Academy of Research and Education, Kelambakkam, based on an FIR registered in Ranchi, in which the woman's brother and uncle were extorting money for a banned Maoist organisation. The woman had pursued her medical degree from the institution in Kelambakkam.

The bench noted the investigation established that the funds transferred into the bank account of the fifth respondent college towards the appellant's education were directly traceable to illegal terrorist funding. "While it may be true that the appellant is not directly arrayed as an accused, she cannot assert an equitable right to benefit from the fruits of a crime."

**Hyderabad sucks 96% of its groundwater, pollutes the rest**

HYDERABAD.(Agency)

Hyderabad is not just draining its future from the ground. It is also polluting what remains. The city's groundwater extraction has reached 96% of its annual availability, according to the latest assessment by the Telangana Groundwater Department, leaving Hyderabad closer to exhausting its renewable groundwater reserves than any other district in the state.

The figure places Hyderabad in the "critical" category of groundwater stress, just short of the "over-exploited" classification, where annual extraction exceeds annual recharge. In effect, the city is consuming almost every drop of groundwater that nature replenishes each year.

The warning signs extend beyond Hyderabad's municipal limits. Across the metropolitan region, 26 mandals and tahsils in Hyderabad, Rangareddy and Medchal-Malkajgiri districts have already been classified as critical or over-exploited, indicating that pressure on groundwater reserves is spreading across the urban agglomeration. What makes the situation particularly alarming is that this is not happening during a drought.

During the 2021-22 water year, Telangana received 1,181 mm of rainfall against a normal annual average of 906 mm. Groundwater levels rose in 98% of the state's observation wells between the pre-monsoon and post-monsoon periods.

Across much of Telangana, aquifers recovered. Hyderabad's did not. Instead, the city continued drawing down groundwater at a pace that left it perilously close to exhausting its annual replenishment.

**'She couldn't concentrate': Lucknow NEET aspirant dies by suicide before re-test****The 17-year-old told her family that she had done very well in the previous NEET exam. She was very upset after it was declared cancelled.**

Lucknow.(Agency)

A 17-year-old NEET aspirant died by suicide at her Lucknow home early Wednesday morning, three days before the National Eligibility cum Entrance Test-Undergraduate (NEET-UG) re-examination on June 21.

Station House Officer, Bazar Khala police station, Brijesh Singh said her parents told the

police that their daughter had been upset since the May 3 NEET exam was cancelled. No suicide note was found in her room. The National Testing Agency (NTA) on Tuesday cancelled the NEET-UG exam citing a "paper leak", more than a week after over 22.05 lakh candidates appeared for it. Singh told The Indian Express, "The girl's father, who is a

railway official, said his daughter had told them that she had done very well in the previous NEET exam. She was very depressed after it was declared cancelled. She was not able to prepare for the upcoming examination... Whenever they asked her, she used to say that she was not able to concentrate."

The family lives in the railway colony in the Aishbagh locality. The girl was found dead in the early hours on Wednesday. Her parents found her and immediately rushed her to the government hospital around 3.50 am, where she was declared dead on arrival. Police were informed and they reached the spot at 5 am, the SHO added. The family did not file any application to probe the matter further, Singh said. On June 16, a 24-year-old woman allegedly died by suicide ahead of the exam, on account of stress, in Dehradun, police said.

The victim, Riya Kumari, had been preparing for the retest scheduled for June 21. Kumari had been studying at a college in Dehradun while preparing for the medical entrance test. Her father is a retired army personnel.

**Court grants interim relief to BEST, restrains staff from proposed strike**

Mumbai.(Agency)

The Industrial Court of Mumbai on Wednesday granted an ad-interim order in favour of the Brihanmumbai Electric Supply and Transport (BEST) Undertaking, temporarily restraining employees of BEST and wet lease operators from proceeding with a proposed strike from midnight of June 18.

The order was passed in connection with Complaint (ULP) No. 190/2026 filed by BEST under the Maharashtra Recognition of Trade Unions Act and Prevention of Unfair Labour Practices Act, 1971, before the Industrial Court. The undertaking approached the court seeking relief against the strike call issued by the 'BEST Kamgar Sanyukt Kruti Samiti', which represents BEST employees as well as workers engaged through wet lease operators. With the ad-interim relief now in place, the unions and workers covered under the court order have been temporarily barred

from participating in the proposed industrial action until further directions from the court. The court observed that failure to impose such a restraint could cause "great



inconvenience and hardship to the public at large". Despite the court's intervention, union members reportedly resolved to go ahead with the strike, maintaining that several workers across BEST's 27 depots would not report for duty from June 19. The decision was taken at

an internal meeting of union representatives Wednesday evening.

The development comes amid an ongoing dispute between the BEST administration and employee unions over a range of labour-related demands, culminating in a threat of an indefinite strike from midnight of June 18. The unions have argued that several long-pending issues affecting employees and retired staff remain unresolved despite repeated representations to the administration and the state government. Among their key demands, the unions have sought the merger of BEST's 'C' budget (of the BMC) with the Corporation's 'A' budget, payment of statutory and legal dues to retired employees in a lump sum, and implementation of wage agreements for the period 2016-26 along with arrears in line with the recommendations of the 7th Pay Commission.

**Kithaganur Lake: From sewage pit to hosting flora and fauna****The restoration was undertaken under the Wake the Lake initiative, a programme focused on reviving Bengaluru's rapidly shrinking and polluted water bodies.**

BENGALURU.(Agency)

The 25-acre Kithaganur lake in East Bengaluru, which had long suffered from silt accumulation, sewage inflow, encroachments and blocked feeder channels, has now been rejuvenated, leading to a significant improvement in its ecological health and water-storage capacity.

The restoration has increased the lake's water-holding capacity by 22%, benefiting more than 24,000 residents in surrounding localities. The project involved scientific de-silting, strengthening and fencing of lake boundaries, clearing feeder channels, biodiversity enhancement measures and community engagement activities aimed at ensuring long-term conservation of the water body.

The lake, which had gradually lost much of its capacity due to years of neglect and urban pressure, now supports nearly 65 species of flora and fauna.

Environmental experts associated with the project estimate that the restored ecosystem will contribute close to nine tonnes of carbon sequestration annually, while also improving groundwater



recharge and local biodiversity.

The rejuvenated lake was formally handed over to the gram panchayat on June 5, coinciding with World Environment Day. Speaking at the event, Mahadevapura MLA Manjula Arvind Limbavali said lake restoration

should be followed by sustained efforts to protect the ecosystem and prevent it from slipping back into a degraded state. She stressed the need for active participation from local authorities, waste management teams and residents in safeguarding the lake.

The restoration was undertaken under the Wake the Lake initiative, a programme focused on reviving Bengaluru's rapidly shrinking and polluted water bodies. The restoration was undertaken through a collaborative effort involving Daimler Truck Innovation Center India, United Way Bengaluru, local authorities and community stakeholders. Stakeholders involved in the project said the revival of Kithaganur Lake demonstrates how scientific restoration and community participation can help improve urban water security while restoring ecological balance in the city.

**BDA announces four new Town Planning schemes covering 969 acre land in city****BDA is also initiating process for implementation of another 16 TP schemes under Samrudha Sahara scheme, officials said.**

BHUBANESWAR.(Agency)

The Bhubaneswar Development Authority (BDA) will take up four new Town Planning (TP) schemes in the periphery of the state capital covering 969 acre of land.

Official sources said the TP scheme areas fall within the Bhubaneswar Development Plan Area (BDPA) and will be developed under Samrudha Sahara Scheme of the state government aimed at promoting planned urbanisation and accelerating economic development.

Accordingly, BDA has decided to formulate town planning no-42 covering part of Patrapada Mouza over an area of 330.07 acre. Similarly, TP scheme no-43 covering

part of Bhagabanpur mouza over an area of 264.33 acre, TP scheme no-44 taking parts of Bijipur, Bhagabanpur, Baliapada and Kasipur mouzas over an area of 290.67 acre and TP scheme no-45 with part of Bijipur mouza over an area of 83.68 acre will be developed. Collectively, these four schemes cover an area of 968.75 acre, officials said.

The schemes aim to facilitate orderly urban growth through provision of roads, drainage, water supply, sewerage, electricity networks, public utilities, open spaces and social infrastructure while ensuring equitable distribution of development benefits among landowners through land reconstitution and allotment of Town Planning plots.

Under the Town Planning Scheme framework, landowners contribute up to 40 per cent of their land towards creation of public infrastructure such as roads, drainage systems, water supply, sewerage and electricity networks, along with public amenities and open spaces etc. The remaining 60 per cent is returned to them as developed and serviced plots.

This innovative land pooling and reconstitution mechanism enables the creation of modern urban infrastructure while enhancing the value of the retained land and minimising the need for direct land acquisition, thereby ensuring a participatory and equitable model of urban development.

Officials said BDA has already made significant progress in implementation of multiple other Town Planning schemes 1, 2, 3 and 4, covering a combined area of about 1,577 acre in the BDPA.

**CA final exam result out: Dombivli boy in the top 3**

Gauhati.(Agency)

As the Institute of Chartered Accountants of India (ICAI) declared the CA final examination result, Dombivli boy Sohan Manjarekar got the national third rank. Out of 23,776 candidates who appeared for the final examination, only 3,345 have cleared it, recording a pass percentage of 14.07 percent.

Sohan, who was expecting to secure rank within top ten said that featuring in top three was a delight. Sohan's journey in the field of commerce started just because his Class 12 score according to him was not good enough to bag a seat in a good college for science stream. He then joined Mulund College of Commerce (MCC) among few popular commerce colleges in Mumbai. "And in the field of commerce, CA is considered a top course so I had to pursue it. Another reason for me to pursue CA course was because it was my father's dream, which he could not achieve due to financial reasons. Today he is happier than me," said Sohan, adding that he is happy to see that his father is proud of him.

Sohan cleared all three levels of the ICAI exams in first attempt. He completed CA Foundation level, immediately after Class 12, whereas at the intermediate level he had secured all-India rank 6. He completed two years of articleship (mandatory internship for the CA final year candidates) at Deloitte after intermediate level and then completely focused on preparing for CA final exams for nine months. "After the result, I am glad to have taken time off to study," said Sohan who is now again going to look for a job. Apart from gaining experience Sohan believes that taking up a job is a more secure way of building a career. "Starting practice of CA also requires initial capital," said Sohan, who would go for short bike-rides to destress while studying for final exams.

**Telangana EAGLE force takes chase to Odisha, seizes 500 kg ganja**

HYDERABAD.(Agency)

The EAGLE Force seized 500 kg of ganja worth an estimated Rs 2.5 crore following an interstate operation in Odisha late on Wednesday.

Officials said EAGLE maintains surveillance in source regions supplying ganja to Telangana. Acting on credible information, an EAGLE patrol team led by SI K Ravi Prasad tracked a Bolero vehicle from Balimela to Jeypore for nearly 80 km. After a prolonged chase, the team intercepted the vehicle in a forested area. However, the driver managed to escape under the cover of darkness and difficult terrain. Police recovered 140 packets of ganja, including 90 packets weighing 5 kg each and 25 packets weighing 2 kg each, totalling 500 kg. The contraband was handed over to Koraput district police for further investigation. According to vehicle registration records, the Bolero is registered in the name of Amir Ali Khan, a resident of Nabarangapur district in Odisha.

**Police recovered 140 packets of ganja, including 90 packets weighing 5 kg each and 25 packets weighing 2 kg each, totalling 500 kg.**

## NEWS BOX

## IND vs AFG: Harshit Rana added to India squad for third ODI against Afghanistan

New Delhi, (Agency)

India pacer Harshit Rana has been added to the squad for the third and final ODI against Afghanistan in Chennai after completing his rehabilitation at the BCCI Centre of Excellence (CoE). Rana, who has recovered from a knee injury, linked up with the Indian squad ahead of the final match of the three-ODI series at the MA Chidambaram Stadium on Saturday, June 20. The 24-year-old had been ruled out of the 2026 T20 World Cup after suffering a knee injury during India's warm-up match against South Africa in Navi Mumbai. The setback also forced the Kolkata Knight Riders all-rounder to miss the entire IPL 2026 season. India, however, went on to lift the T20 World Cup title in his absence. While Rana has been added to the ODI squad, his inclusion is primarily aimed at helping him reintegrate into the international setup following a lengthy spell on the sidelines. He has already been named in India's squad for the upcoming T20I tours of Ireland and England later this month. The team management views Rana as a long-term seam-bowling all-rounder option and is keen on developing him alongside Nitish Kumar Reddy as part of India's succession planning. Both players are being groomed as potential backups



to Hardik Pandya in the white-ball formats. India have already secured the ODI series against Afghanistan after taking an unassailable 2-0 lead. The hosts have outclassed Afghanistan with both bat and ball, with several young players making a strong impression. With a busy international calendar ahead, including the T20I series in Ireland and England and the Asian Games, the Indian team management could opt to rest some senior players and provide opportunities to members of the extended squad in the final ODI.

## World Cup: Mexico edge South Korea 1-0 to become first side to qualify for last 32 stage

New Delhi, (Agency)

Mexico became the first team to book their place in the FIFA World Cup 2026 Round of 32 after edging South Korea 1-0 in a tense Group A clash in Guadalajara on Friday. The co-hosts made it two wins from two matches and secured qualification for the knockout stage with a game to spare. Backed by a partisan crowd at Akron Stadium, Mexico rode on Luis Romo's second-half strike to maintain their perfect start to the tournament. The midfielder capitalised on a costly error from South Korea goalkeeper Kim Seung-gyu, whose spilt catch inside the penalty area gifted the hosts the breakthrough early in the second half. The result took Mexico to six points from two matches, enough to guarantee progression from Group A regardless of the outcome of the remaining fixtures. Javier Aquirre's side had begun their campaign with a 2-0 victory over South Africa and followed it up with another disciplined performance to



become the first nation to seal a place in the expanded knockout phase of the World Cup. South Korea arrived in Guadalajara on the back of a win over Czechia and knew victory would also put them on the brink of qualification. However, the Asian side struggled to find rhythm in a hostile atmosphere and were ultimately punished for a moment of hesitation at the back. The first half offered little separation between the two sides. Mexico enjoyed greater control of possession and looked the more adventurous team going forward, while South Korea remained compact and dangerous on the counterattack. Neither goalkeeper was seriously tested before the break as both teams cancelled each other out in midfield. The decisive moment arrived five minutes after the restart. A high ball into the South Korea box caused confusion between Kim Seung-gyu and his defenders, with the goalkeeper unable to gather cleanly after colliding with a teammate.

# Hydration or ad breaks? Who are the real winners of FIFA World Cup 2026's new rule

**FIFA World Cup 2026: Lionel Messi arrived at the World Cup carrying a legacy and somehow made it bigger. Cristiano Ronaldo arrived chasing history, but after Round 1, the tournament feels less like a race between rivals and more**

New Delhi, (Agency)

The FIFA World Cup 2026 has delivered everything football fans could have asked for. Stunning goals, tactical masterclasses, breakout stars and moments of pure drama have lit up the biggest stage in the sport. Now, let me get some water and come back. Well, that's exactly the debate raging around the World Cup right now. Known as cooling or hydration breaks, the mandatory three-minute stoppage in each half has left fans, players, coaches and pundits sharply divided. FIFA introduced the rule for the tournament, under which match officials halt

play around the 22nd minute of each half for hydration breaks. The stoppages are enforced in every fixture, regardless of weather conditions or temperature, with referees overseeing the timing to ensure consistency throughout the competition. FIFA has also allowed broadcasters to make use of the breaks by inserting advertisements to maximise revenue, a first for football. As a result, viewers suddenly find themselves watching commercials in the middle of a World Cup match. In effect, football has begun to resemble a four-quarter sport rather than a game of two uninterrupted halves. But is it really necessary? That's the question many are asking. **RUNNING THE FOOTBALL EXPERIENCE?** Football thrives on momentum. A comeback is rarely built in a single moment. It comes through sustained pressure, possession and players gradually finding their rhythm. A team chasing a goal often relies on maintaining intensity and forcing mistakes from opponents who are beginning to tire. That is why many believe the essence of the game is being disrupted by these stoppages. Just when a contest begins to reach a crescendo and key players start finding their

groove, the referee blows the whistle and everyone heads to the touchline. And it is not just supporters who feel that way. Players and coaches have openly questioned



the need for hydration breaks in matches where conditions are far from extreme.

"I think hydration breaks are a bit interesting because I was obviously watching almost all the games. Every time, going to commercial is not really something I like," Netherlands captain Virgil van Dijk told reporters.

"I think for the neutral viewers on TV, it's also not great. So if it's really hot, obviously it will be good to have them. But I think you have to look at it on a game-by-game basis." USA coach Mauricio Pochettino echoed similar

sentiments, saying the breaks only make sense when weather conditions genuinely demand them. "I don't like it. I only like it when the conditions are extreme," the USMNT boss said. "But when the conditions are good, it is unnecessary." The United States boasts several stadiums with retractable roofs and air-conditioning systems, allowing players to perform in comfortable conditions regardless of the weather outside.

**A CHANCE FOR COACHES TO RECALIBRATE?**

Brazil looked short of answers against Morocco before the hydration break arrived at the perfect time. The stoppage gave Carlo Ancelotti an opportunity to gather his players and pass on tactical instructions. Shortly after play resumed, Brazil found an equaliser through Vinicius Jr. and eventually salvaged a point. "You can explain a problem to the players," Ancelotti said afterwards when asked about the benefits of the breaks. "[You can] make a tactical adjustment that can be very good." For coaches, the stoppage effectively acts as a tactical timeout, a rare opportunity in football to reset shape, tweak strategy and disrupt an opponent's rhythm.

## Manika Batra deeply disappointed by Asian Games snub, alleges lack of transparency

**Asian Games 2026: Manika Batra has sought Prime Minister Narendra Modi's intervention after being left out of India's Asian Games table tennis squad. Her appeal has sharpened questions over transparency and the uneven application of TTFI's selection rules.**

New Delhi, (Agency)

India table tennis star Manika Batra has expressed deep disappointment after being left out of the national squad for the 2026 Asian Games in Aichi-Nagoya, Japan. The experienced paddler has now appealed to Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Sports Minister Mansukh Mandaviya, and the Indian Olympic Association to intervene and ensure transparency in the selection process. The surprise exclusion has prompted Batra to raise questions around selection criteria and consistency in the

application of ranking-based norms by the Table Tennis Federation of India (TTFI). Manika, who is currently India's second-highest ranked women's singles player, took



to social media to voice her concerns over the decision and the lack of clarity provided to her. "My non-selection for the Asian Games 2026 squad is deeply disheartening, with no specific reason communicated," she wrote on X on Friday, June 19, one day after the snub. "Questions arise on consistency, as different thresholds and considerations were applied in the previous selection cycle compared to my case. If the same rules are meant to apply as in the last Asian Games selection, then clarity is needed on how those rules have been interpreted this time," she added. The 20th Asian Games are scheduled to be held in Aichi-Nagoya, Japan from September 19 to October 4, with India

aiming to build on its recent multi-sport performances across disciplines. **SELECTION DEBATE OVER CRITERIA CONSISTENCY**

Manika's omission is reportedly linked to her absence from certain domestic ranking events, which has impacted her position in the TTFI national standings. Despite this, she remains part of the reserves list alongside Swastika Ghosh. The TTFI selection system gives weightage to both international and national rankings, with additional discretionary inputs from the selection committee. According to the 2023 policy, 50 percent weightage is assigned to national rankings, 40 percent to world rankings, and 10 percent to selection committee discretion. Manika, a multiple Commonwealth Games medallist and 2018 Asian Games bronze medallist in mixed doubles, is currently ranked 51 in the ITTF world rankings, with Sreeja Akula ahead of her at 45. TTFI has defended its selection process, stating that only the most consistent and highest-ranked players were chosen for the squad. "The selection process ensured that India's highest-ranked and most consistent performers earned the opportunity to represent the country at Asia's biggest multi-sport event," the federation said on Thursday, June 18.

## Why Shivang Kumar isn't rushing his India dream after breakthrough IPL season

**Shivang Kumar did not even attend two Sunrisers Hyderabad trials. Yet, by the end of his debut IPL season, the left-arm wrist-spinner had become a trusted member of Pat Cummins' XI. In an exclusive interaction with India Today.in, Shivang said he is in no rush to realise his India dream, choosing instead to focus on learning, improving, and making the most of the opportunities coming his way.**

New Delhi, (Agency)

Shivang Kumar wasn't supposed to be one of the talking points of this IPL season. He came in quietly, a spinner from Madhya Pradesh with no real fanfare around his name. No big

auction buzz, no expectations. Just a kid who had worked hard in domestic cricket and



earned himself a shot. Thirteen matches and nine wickets later, people are asking questions about him that nobody was asking in March. The batting has largely remained hidden so far, a consequence of SRH's explosive line-up where opportunities down

the order were limited. But those who have followed Shivang closely knew there was more to his game than wrist spin. He has started showing that side in the Madhya Pradesh League, turning heads with a stunning half-century off just 13 balls.

It was a reminder that he is not merely a bowler who can hold a bat. He is a genuine all-round cricketer with the confidence to take the game on. The intent, the fearlessness and the range of strokes felt very much in line with the aggressive brand of cricket SRH have championed in recent years. If the IPL introduced Shivang the bowler, the MPL is beginning to reveal Shivang the complete package.

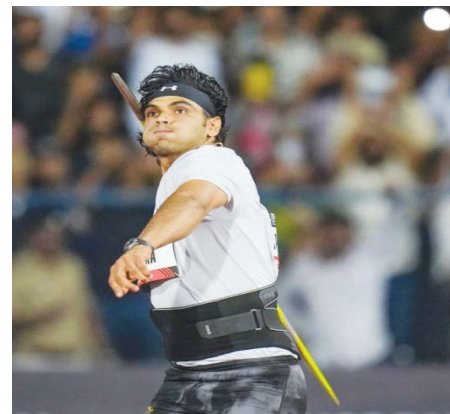
**CHOOSING TO BE DIFFERENT**

Shivang saw the problem before most coaches would have told him to fix it. Left-handers.

end up getting another one," he said. "After the back injury during the World Championships, I had another one in my ankle and then in my shoulder." What followed was a long, deliberate rebuild rather than a quick return. Chopra sat down with his team and his physiotherapist and decided to take his time, throwing again for the first time only a month and a half ago. He based himself at Magglingen, a Swiss Olympic training centre in the mountains above Biel. "It's very quiet, and you can focus on your training and your technique," he said. "I really like it there." He only confirmed his place in Doha a week out from the meet, his favourite venue to open a season, and the place where he broke 90 metres for the first time in his career last year, a personal best of 90.23m that still stands.

**THE NEW COACH**

The most significant change sits in his corner. After Tokyo, Chopra parted ways with legendary Jan Zelezny and returned to Jaiveer Singh Chaudhary, the coach who first put a javelin in his hands some 15 years ago.



## ENG vs NZ, 2nd Test Day 2: Glenn Phillips, Matt Henry turn the screws on England at the Oval

**ENG vs NZ, 2nd Test Day 2: Glenn Phillips scored his maiden Test century and Matt Henry struck twice as New Zealand moved ahead on day two at The Oval. England closed on 222 for six, still 169 behind and under pressure in the second Test.**

London, (Agency)

New Zealand took command of the second Test at The Oval on Thursday after Glenn Phillips' maiden century and a disciplined pace attack left England struggling at 222 for six at stumps on Day Two. After resuming on 291 for seven, the visitors stretched their first-innings total to 391, with Phillips turning an overnight 49 into a memorable hundred before New Zealand's seamers ripped through England's top order to seize control of the

contest. England closed the day still 169 runs behind with only Jordan Cox and the lower order left to rescue the innings. **ENG vs NZ, 2nd Test Day 2: Highlights | Scorecard** Phillips was the architect of New Zealand's strong position. The all-rounder weathered a fierce spell from Jofra Archer late on the opening day and returned on Thursday to complete his first Test century. His knock carried extra significance as it came on the eve of the anniversary of his father's passing.

"That made it pretty special. That was one for him," Phillips said after reaching three figures. The 28-year-old found little resistance from England's bowlers, who persisted with a barrage of short-pitched deliveries that often missed their mark. Phillips shared an 87-run stand with Kyle Jamieson, who added a valuable 41 after being dropped by Ben Duckett early in his innings. By the time New Zealand were bowled out just before lunch, they had added a

crucial 100 runs to their overnight total. **ENGLAND'S TOP ORDER FALTERS** England's reply began brightly through Duckett, who raced to 36 from just 25



deliveries before a costly mix-up ended his innings. Emilio Gay called for a single that was never on and Nathan Smith produced a direct hit to send Duckett back to the pavilion. Gay continued his impressive start to Test cricket, grinding his way to 53. His half-

century came from 112 deliveries, the slowest England fifty of the Bazball era under Ben Stokes and Brendon McCullum. Matt Henry, who battled back spasms during the first Test defeat at Lord's, delivered the decisive blows. He trapped Joe Root lbw for 46, denying the former captain a milestone 14,000 Test runs, before removing Harry Brook in similar fashion. Brook briefly lit up the innings with a stunning back-foot six off Will O'Rourke, but Henry's movement and accuracy proved too much. **NEW ZEALAND FINISH STRONGLY**

With England wobbling, debutants James Rew and Jordan Cox offered some resistance through a promising partnership. Rew looked comfortable during his 24 and survived one chance when Rachin Ravindra spilled a catch. However, O'Rourke struck shortly before stumps, forcing Rew into a glove through to Daryl Mitchell and ensuring New Zealand ended the day firmly on top.

Cocktail 2 Promotions: Kriti Sanon

# Rashmika Mandanna

## Win Hearts At Presidency University In Bengaluru

**K**riti Sanon and Rashmika Mandanna are currently busy promoting their upcoming film, Cocktail 2. The Homi Adajania marks their first collaboration. The film also stars Shahid Kapoor in the lead role. However, the girls were recently seen surprising the students of the Presidency University, Bengaluru. The duo visited the campus to promote the film sans Shahid.

Rashmika Mandanna shares a deep bond with Bengaluru and Karnataka, having completed her higher education in the city and launched her acting career in the Kannada film industry. Given her close connection to the region, she made sure to introduce Kriti Sanon to the essence of Bengaluru, offering her a glimpse into the city's culture and its warm-hearted people. The duo later captivated the audience with their electrifying dance performances and engaging on-stage banter, making for a memorable experience. During a conversation about love and friendship, Kriti jokingly remarked that Rashmika had married her best friend Vijay, prompting loud cheers from students in the audience for Vijay



Deverakonda. Clearly delighted by the reaction, Rashmika smiled and responded by telling the enthusiastic crowd that Vijay loves them all. The camaraderie between Kriti and Rashmika, who portray close friends in the film, was evident throughout the event as they shared effortless chemistry and engaging interactions on stage.

Both actresses also expressed their gratitude to the management of Presidency University for organizing the special meet-and-greet session with the students. The event was attended by Mr. Suhael Ahmed (Vice Chairman), Mr. Salman Ahmed (Vice President), Dr. Nafesa Ahmed (Vice Chairperson), and Ms. Shaima Ahmed from the university's management team.

Meanwhile, Cocktail 2 is a spiritual sequel to the hit 2012 romantic comedy Cocktail led by Saif Ali Khan, Deepika Padukone, and Diana Penty. The advance booking of the second installment has begun. It is all set to take over theatres on June 19.



## Katrina Kaif Cheers For Alia Bhatt And Sharvari's Alpha Trailer: 'The Girls Are Here'



**T**he trailer of YRF's upcoming actioner 'Alpha' starring Alia Bhatt, Sharvari and others was finally unveiled on June 17. The glimpse of the actresses' power-packed action scenes, as well as Bobby Deol and Anil Kapoor's characters, has left fans excited for the film. Katrina Kaif has now shown her support for Alpha, cheering on Alia Bhatt, Sharvari and the film's female-led action narrative. She took to her Instagram stories and heaped praise on the actresses.

### Katrina Kaif Reacts To Alia Bhatt's Alpha Trailer

Impressed by the trailer, Katrina Kaif re-shared it on her Instagram stories and penned a short yet lovely message for Alia and Sharvari. Showing her support, she wrote, "Let's gooo... The girls are HERE @aliaabhatt Superb @sharvari Just on fire, loveee." Alia Bhatt reacted to Katrina's story and wrote, "Katyyy thank you." Check out her Instagram story below!

Interestingly, Katrina Kaif and Alia Bhatt were supposed to share screen space for the first time in Farhan Akhtar's Jee Le Zaraa, alongside Priyanka Chopra. Announced in 2021, the female-led road trip film generated significant buzz but has faced repeated delays due to scheduling conflicts among its leading stars. While Farhan Akhtar has maintained that the project is still alive, its shooting timeline remains uncertain.

### About Alpha Trailer

Coming back to Alpha, the trailer released yesterday gave fans a sneak-peek into the high-stakes world led by Alia Bhatt and Sharvari Wagh. Directed by Shiv Rawail, the film also stars Anil Kapoor and Bobby Deol, with a special appearance by Hrithik Roshan.

The trailer introduces Alia's character as an assassin named Sita, who is trained by Bobby Deol's character. However, their mentor-protégé relationship soon takes a dark turn as the two find themselves on opposing sides. As the conflict intensifies, Sita crosses paths with Sharvari's character, who joins forces with her in the mission ahead.

## Sonali Bendre Only Wanted 'Hopeful' Roles Post Cancer Battle: 'Didn't Want Work That Triggered Me'



**I**n 2018, Sonali Bendre announced that she had been diagnosed with stage four metastatic cancer. Once back after battling and surviving the big C, she began her second innings in 2022 as an actor with a web series titled The Broken News. In the same year, she donned the hat of a judge on the dance reality show, DID Li'l Masters.

At this time, Sonali decided that she would only want to sink her teeth into roles that aren't dark as they could've taken a toll on her emotionally, leaving her depleted. "I really wanted to play hopeful and lighter roles that would've kept me happy through it all and I could've come back pepped up. I wanted work like that, especially since I had been through a really dark period," she says.

"I was coming out of it and didn't want to do work that would trigger me and make me spiral," Sonali adds. And Love Ke Liye Kuch Bhi Karega became a parameter. "It was such a fun film. The amount of fun Saif (Ali Khan) and I had shooting for it! The energy was great on set. There are very few good, fun and light-hearted stories like that which were being written," she states.

Needless to say, her latest release, Raakh – a disturbing watch – wasn't in her bucket list. "Raakh wasn't something I was looking for. I wasn't open to it but it came my way. It just goes to show how compelling the content was. The script was so amazing and so was my character and the entire team involved. There was no way I could've said no to it," Sonali tells us. "I hope I keep getting stuff like Raakh – stuff I can't say no to. I do hope more creators and directors see me as someone that people usually don't see me as. I really didn't think people were seeing me for roles like this one. Every time I felt I wasn't being seen that way, somebody was. It took some time but I'm glad it came to me," she further continues. While she isn't entirely happy with her screen time in it, she feels it has set a good precedent for potential collaborators. "It's not the length I like. I would've loved to see more of me in the series. But I'm glad I took the chance because it has been an exceptionally amazing experience." And though she feels that most makers are unsure about where to place her today, she chooses to focus on the silver lining. "The age I'm at, if I was this age in the nineties when I had started out, I wouldn't have gotten the roles I'm getting today."

# Nora Fatehi

## Calls FIFA Performance A 'Magical Moment', Says 'India Gave Me Wings To Fly'

**B**ollywood dancing diva Nora Fatehi, who performed at the opening ceremony of the FIFA World Cup in Toronto, has credited India, Morocco, and Canada for shaping her into the artist and person she is today.

Brimming with gratitude, Nora, who made her debut in Hindi films in 2014 with the film Roar:

fans across the world for their unwavering support and encouragement.

"What a Magical moment! I needed some time to take all of it in! This journey of mine has been an incredible roller coaster ride! I wanna thank India, Morocco and Canada for building me into the artist and human I am Today!" Nora wrote in the caption section. "Canada gave me the base, Morocco gave me the roots and India gave me the wings to fly!" added the actress of Moroccan descent.

The 34-year-old actress said performing twice at FIFA is such a privilege.

"It's such a privilege to be able to say that I got the opportunity to perform at the FIFA World Cup twice! I am very grateful and thankful to everyone who posted, supported, and spoke positively about my journey and this moment!"

Nora was seen headlining the second Opening ceremony in Toronto and performed the official World Cup song 'Siir Siir'. The other performers in the opening ceremony included names such as VegeDREAM and Sanjoy. The celebration in Toronto also had performances from Jessie Reyez and Alessia Cara before the kick-off. Palestinian artist Elyanna also performed at the Opening Ceremony in Toronto



Tigers of the Sundarbans, shared a string of images of herself performing on the song "SIIR SIIR" at the FIFA World Cup stage during the opening ceremony in Toronto. The track is crooned by her with DJ Sanjoy and French singer VegeDREAM.

Nora, who was raised in Toronto, described the milestone as a magical experience and thanked



## NEWS BOX

## About 300 children and teachers evacuated or rescued after fire breaks out at a Tokyo school

TOKYO. (Agency)

A fire broke out at an elementary school in downtown Tokyo Friday, but all of about 300 students and teachers were evacuated or rescued, officials said. The Tokyo Fire Department said the fire at the Takinogawa No. 3 Elementary School broke out near a music room on the top floor of the four-story building late morning Friday. Firefighters rescued one teacher and several schoolchildren out of the building, with non-life-threatening injuries, the department said. Television footage showed black smoke billowing out of windows on the fourth floor, as firefighters combated the fire at the scene. Dozens of fire engines were deployed. All others inside the building when the fire broke out had evacuated to a nearby park on their own and no one was left behind, officials said.

## US strike on an alleged drug boat kills three in the eastern Pacific Ocean

WASHINGTON (Agency)

The US military attacked a boat accused of smuggling drugs in the eastern Pacific Ocean on Thursday, killing three people, as the Trump administration wages a months-long campaign against alleged traffickers in Latin America. The latest attack brings the number of people who have been killed in boat strikes by the U.S. military to at least 211 since the Trump administration began targeting those it calls "narcoterrorists" in early September.

As with most of the military's statements on strikes in the eastern Pacific Ocean and Caribbean Sea, U.S. Southern Command said it targeted the alleged drug traffickers along known smuggling routes. The military did not provide evidence that the vessel was ferrying drugs. A video posted on X showed a boat speeding through the water before being struck and bursting into flames. President Donald Trump has said the U.S. is in "armed conflict" with cartels in Latin America and has justified the attacks as a necessary escalation to stem the flow of drugs into the United States and fatal overdoses claiming American lives. But his administration has offered little evidence to support its claims of killing "narcoterrorists."

Critics have questioned the overall legality of the boat strikes as well as their effectiveness, in part because the fentanyl behind many fatal overdoses is typically trafficked to the U.S. over land from Mexico, where it is produced with chemicals imported from China and India. Senators on Thursday demanded that the Pentagon release "unedited video" of the strikes. They have drawn intense scrutiny from some Democratic lawmakers and military legal scholars. The U.S. military's first strike in early September drew particular concern from some lawmakers and those who study military law. Two men on the boat initially survived the attack that killed nine others, and they were clinging to the wreckage when the vessel was struck again, killing them. The White House confirmed the follow-up strike, insisting it was done "in self-defense" to ensure the boat was destroyed and in accordance with the laws of armed conflict.

## Obama Center opens in Chicago with a call to defend democracy and a celebrity crowd

World (Agency)

Former President Barack Obama formally opened his presidential center in Chicago on Thursday with a call to defend democracy as three former presidents joined him on stage in an extraordinary event featuring politicians, A-list celebrities, athletes and other internationally known figures. "I hope this center will serve as an affirmation of just how special, how precious our democracy truly is and remind us what we can achieve when we embrace our shared responsibilities as citizens," the nation's first Black president told the crowd. Bono, John Legend, Christina Aguilera, Marc Anthony and Eddie Vedder took turns on the stage ahead of Bruce Springsteen and Stevie Wonder, who closed the show singing "Higher Ground" as the former presidents, world leaders and others danced along. President Donald Trump was conspicuous both in his physical absence and by not being mentioned by any of the speakers or performers. Trump called the \$850 million center a "total disaster" in a social media post in February. Obama voiced his support for character, honesty, integrity, kindness, compassion and sense of duty, praising both Democrats and Republicans, including those he defeated.

"Every president here today, as different as we are, has tried our best to uphold values that John McCain and Mitt Romney believed in no less than I did," Obama said. "It is our greatest inheritance."

Reflecting on his arrival in Chicago in 1985 as an untested political organizer, he said he could not have built the Obama Presidential Center anywhere else. He met his future wife Michelle nearby, their wedding reception was within walking distance, his children were born in the neighborhood and he launched his first candidacy not far away.

"It's an expression of thanks, an acknowledgment that so much of what I hold most dear I owe to the people of this city and the people of the surrounding neighborhoods," Obama said.

Michelle had some emotional words for her husband. The Obamas and their daughters shared the stage with former presidents Joe Biden, George W. Bush and Bill Clinton along with former first ladies Jill Biden, Laura Bush and Hillary Rodham Clinton. Former Vice President Kamala Harris and many other leading Democrats were in the audience. Michelle Obama spoke directly to her husband when she stepped up to the podium. "Eight years in the crucible and not once did you melt in the heat. Not once did you let it harden you."

# Labour's Andy Burnham wins a special election, setting up a showdown with Starmer to lead Britain

LONDON. (Agency)

Labour's Andy Burnham, the current mayor of Greater Manchester, has won a special election for a seat in Parliament that puts him in a position to challenge embattled Prime Minister Keir Starmer for leadership of the country. Burnham decisively won the seat of Makerfield in northwest England over Rob Kenyon of the anti-immigration party Reform UK. The victory announced early Friday cements the status of Burnham, a 56-year-old politician nicknamed the King of the North, as the top contender to replace Starmer as leader of the Labour Party and the country. Burnham won almost 55% of the 45,510 votes counted, over 9,000 more than Kenyon. Burnham's victory speech left no doubt that he wants to lead the country, and not just be one of the more than 400 Labour lawmakers in the 650-seat House of Commons. "Everyone knows that politics isn't working," he said. "Everyone can feel that the country isn't where it should be. Tonight could, just could, be the turning point." Burnham has led Manchester since 2017, overseeing rapid regeneration for the city where the Industrial Revolution was

forged. He is pledging to repeat his signature brand of "Manchesterism" on a national scale. Burnham said he would work to ensure that "the name Makerfield is forever synonymous with bringing about the change this country needs." He said Labour had "a final chance to change" and win back voters' trust. "But it is a chance now, from this result tonight, to build a new politics based on unity and hope, turning away from the path that takes us to a divided, dark politics of the kind we see in the United States," he said. Labour is in power but unpopular. Starmer's popularity has cratered since he led the center-left Labour Party to a landslide election victory in July 2024. He has struggled to deliver promised economic growth, repair tattered public services and ease the cost of living, and been hamstrung by repeated missteps, including his decision to appoint Peter Mandelson, a scandal-tarnished friend of Jeffrey Epstein, as the U.K. ambassador to the United States. Labour is losing liberal voters to the growing Green Party, and facing a rising Reform UK, which consistently leads in nationwide opinion polls. The Nigel Farage

-led party has rapidly gained ground in post-industrial northern England areas like Makerfield, some 200 miles (320 kilometers) northwest of London.



A dismal performance by Labour in May's local elections spurred scores of lawmakers to demand Starmer's resignation. He has refused to budge, but senior colleagues are trying to force a change. Wes Streeting resigned as health secretary in May, saying that "where we need vision, we have a vacuum." Streeting has said he will run in a leadership contest if there is one. Then Josh Simons, the Labour lawmaker for Makerfield, stepped down to trigger a

special election and give Burnham the chance to return to Parliament.

Britain's parliamentary system allows governing parties to change leaders midterm, with the winner becoming prime minister without the need for a national election. Under Labour rules, a lawmaker can challenge the leader if they have backing from a fifth of the party's House of Commons lawmakers — a number that stands at 81. The victorious Burnham will head to London to be sworn in as a lawmaker as soon as Monday. He's likely to seek a meeting with Starmer to argue that the prime minister should exit gracefully and set a timetable for his departure. Culture Secretary Lisa Nandy said Burnham and Starmer would in the next few days have to "have a conversation about what comes next." Labour lawmaker Louise Haigh, a Burnham ally, said Starmer should "do what's best for both the country and the Labour Party" and "consider an orderly and managed transition." "Andy won't be doing anything rash or hasty," she told Sky News. "I'm really hopeful the prime minister and Andy can come to an agreement."

## About 100 Colombian guerrilla dissidents disarm under peace talks with government

BOGOTA. (Agency)

About a hundred Colombian guerrilla dissidents on Thursday surrendered their weapons in a step toward their gradual reintegration into civilian life as part of a peace process with the government of President Gustavo Petro. Dressed in military-style camouflage, the members of the National Coordinating Committee of the Bolivarian Army placed their weapons on a table during a formal ceremony in the department of Putumayo, which borders Ecuador. The group is a dissident faction of the defunct Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia, or FARC. Now disarmed, the dissidents will enter a temporary resettlement zone where the government intends to facilitate their gradual reintegration into civilian life. The government in a statement explained that they "will have their freedom restricted and will be under the control and supervision" of authorities.

"We laid down the iron rifle because we

understand that words are a more powerful weapon," dissident leader Geovany Andrés Rojas said as part of the ceremony. He made the remarks remotely from jail, where he is being held after being captured last year when the group was engaged in peace talks



with the government. His arrest took place in connection with an Interpol Red Notice for drug trafficking charges in the United States. Rojas on Thursday said his capture undermined the confidence of the rank and file but did

not derail the dialogue process.

Petro, a former rebel leader and Colombia's first progressive president, is negotiating with the dissident faction as part of his signature "total peace" policy, which has opened parallel peace negotiations with multiple armed groups. The effort has largely failed.

The dissident groups emerged from factions that did not accept the historic peace agreement signed a decade ago by the state and FARC, formerly Latin America's oldest guerrilla group. The country is estimated to have 27,000 illegally armed group members, according to a 2025 report by the Ideas for Peace Foundation, a think tank focused on the internal conflict.

Last week, Petro established a monitoring mechanism for the temporary relocation zone and ordered the suspension of offensive military and special police operations to allow the dissidents to enter the designated area.

## Iran warns of 'crushing response' if US acts in 'bad faith' during ongoing negotiations

WARSAW. (Agency)

Iran's Parliament Speaker Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf said that Tehran would deliver a "crushing response" to any attempt by the United States or its partners to undermine the ongoing negotiations over a final agreement. Ghalibaf warned that if the agreed framework is violated, new conditions are imposed, or commitments are not honored, Tehran is prepared to take strong retaliatory measures. In a post on X, Ghalibaf said Iran remained committed to implementing the conditions outlined by Supreme Leader Ayatollah Mojtaba Khamenei but would respond forcefully to any breach of the agreement. "We are at your command; the task assigned to us by the Supreme Leader is to pursue the realization of the conditions and clauses of the agreement. "In the event of bad faith, breach of contract, and excessive demands by the opposing side, we have no hesitation in delivering a crushing response to the

enemy," Ghalibaf said.

"They were once slapped during the war; if they wish to tread that path again, they will receive an even harder slap," he added. The warning comes as the United States and Iran begin a 60-day negotiating period aimed at converting the newly signed framework agreement into a comprehensive deal covering sanctions, nuclear restrictions, missile capabilities and regional security issues. Earlier, in his address, Mojtaba Khamenei also cautioned that future face-to-face negotiations should not be interpreted as acceptance of the American position and said that Iran will not submit if Washington DC places excessive demands.

"However, it is self-evident that the in-person negotiations that will take place in the future will not mean acceptance of the enemy's position," he said. US Vice President JD Vance confirmed on Thursday that the formal negotiating clock began on June 18, one day after

the two sides reached a memorandum of understanding.

"I would say the 60-day period officially started today. So, yes, the deal started yesterday. We're going to start the 60-day clock today," Vance told reporters at the White House. Vance defended the agreement, saying the United States had significantly weakened Iran's military capabilities while preserving Tehran's right to legitimate self-defense. "We destroyed a substantial number of their ballistic missiles and their ballistic missile launchers themselves," Vance said, adding that any final agreement would prevent Iran from developing missiles capable of threatening countries beyond the region.

The Vice President also linked the agreement to improving energy markets and maritime security. According to Vance, more than 12.5 million barrels of oil passed through the Strait of Hormuz overnight, the highest volume recorded since the start of the conflict.



declaration signed at the summit, its participants reaffirmed their shared aspiration toward a "just multipolar world as guided by international law and the principles of the UN Charter to promote mutual benefit and respect for all states." They noted that the Kazan summit marked a "significant milestone" in Russia-ASEAN relations and pledged to maintain top-level contacts between Russia and the bloc to advance their "strategic partnership." Putin also held a series of bilateral meetings with ASEAN leaders during the summit, which he co-chaired with Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos Jr., whose country holds the association's rotating presidency. Some of ASEAN's diverse member countries, including the Philippines, are seen to be aligned with the United States, while others have heavy trade and security engagements with China and Russia. Several ASEAN members, including the Philippines, Indonesia, Thailand and Vietnam, have either imported Russian crude oil or expressed interest in purchasing it after global fuel prices soared in the wake of the war in Iran.

## White House postpones sending Vance to Switzerland for talks with Iran on its nuclear program

**Vance took the relatively unusual step of appearing at the White House to defend the deal, arguing that while it offers concessions, Iran first has to comply with US demands.**

WASHINGTON (Agency)

The White House said Thursday night that Vice President JD Vance was delaying a trip to Switzerland to lead a new round of negotiations with Iran over its nuclear program — raising questions about what's next for the tentative agreement to end the war. It said the team led by Vance had been ready to leave but was postponing, citing difficult logistics for negotiations. The announcement followed a report from Al-Mayadeen, a pan-Arab satellite channel that

is politically allied with the Iranian-backed Lebanese militant group Hezbollah, that Iran was delaying sending its delegation to Switzerland over Israel's ongoing military campaign in Lebanon. The postponement came after the U.S. said it had lifted its blockade, allowing oil tankers to begin freely moving through the Strait of Hormuz after months of being unable to use the critical channel. But the initial agreement has drawn sharp criticism from some in the U.S. — including a few congressional Republicans — who worry Washington ceded too much to Iran with relief from sanctions and a potential \$300 billion fund to help with rebuilding. Earlier, Vance took the relatively unusual step of appearing at the White House to defend the deal, arguing that while it offers concessions, Iran first has to comply with U.S. demands. "As they dial up their good behavior, we can dial up the economic relief," Vance said. "If they dial down their good behavior, we can turn it off." The vice president had said during

those remarks that he was not sure of the timing of the planned trip to Switzerland, and the postponement makes that even less



clear. A top Trump administration envoy told U.S. lawmakers in a private briefing that Iran will invite the U.N.'s nuclear watchdog agency to inspect its nuclear sites. And Iranian Supreme Leader Ayatollah Mojtaba Khamenei had seemed to endorse direct negotiations for his officials. "It is obvious that the face-to-face negotiations that will be held in the future will not mean accepting the enemy's opinion," he said in a statement

read by state media. It was Khamenei's first reaction to the agreement, and it was interpreted as a shift in Iran's approach. Hard-liners, especially Khamenei's father, the previous supreme leader, have long opposed direct talks, especially after the U.S. pulled out of the 2015 nuclear deal between Iran and world powers. The supreme leader has not been seen in public since he was wounded in a strike at the start of the war. Lawmakers told Iran will invite UN inspectors to its nuclear sites. The agreement states that Iran's stockpile of highly enriched uranium must at minimum be diluted under international supervision. It also says that Iran shall not procure or develop nuclear weapons — a commitment it has made previously. Trump envoy Steve Witkoff told members of Congress that Iran will invite the International Atomic Energy Agency to inspect its nuclear sites and begin work on identifying and uncovering the locations of Tehran's enriched material, which is believed to be buried under rubble.