

Zero tolerance for hurting Sanatan: Yogi Adityanath on arrests in Ram temple donation theft case

Yogi Adityanath said the state had already made its position clear during his June 19 visit to Ayodhya, where he warned against any attempt to misuse public trust or bring disrepute to a place that holds deep religious significance for millions.

New Delhi.(Agency)

Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath on Friday said the Uttar Pradesh government has adopted a zero-tolerance approach towards anyone attempting to exploit Sanatan values and public faith, as he reacted to the arrest of eight people in the embezzlement of donations linked to the Ayodhya Ram Temple.

Addressing the issue publicly, the chief minister said immediate action was initiated after the Special Investigation Team (SIT) submitted its findings and reiterated that the government had assured people there would be no compromise on matters related to Ayodhya.

"We had said, 'Do not worry about Ayodhya.' As soon as the SIT report was released, action was initiated immediately. Playing with matters of faith is unacceptable. I would also appeal to those attempting to raise this issue today — these are the very people who once denied the existence of Lord Ram," the CM



said while addressing a gathering in Deoria. Yogi added the state had already made its position clear during his June 19 visit to Ayodhya, where he warned against any attempt to misuse public trust or bring disrepute to a place that holds deep religious significance for millions. He said the SIT report had now paved the way for action and that the administration had moved swiftly following the findings. Emphasising that faith cannot be treated casually, the chief minister said there would be

no tolerance for those who attempt to manipulate religious sentiments or misuse institutions connected with public devotion. He described Ayodhya as a symbol of collective faith and said preserving its dignity and values remained a priority for the government.

YOGI TRAINS GUNS AT OPPOSITION

At the same time, Yogi launched a sharp political attack on opposition parties over their criticism of the developments. Without naming individuals directly, he accused sections of the opposition of trying to politicise the issue despite what he called their historical opposition to the Ram Mandir movement. "One side used to say that Lord Ram doesn't even exist, meaning these people wanted to deny Ayodhya itself. They kept fighting the case in court continuously, kept fielding armies of lawyers against the construction of the Ram Janmabhoomi temple, and the other side is the one that would wield sticks and fire bullets at those chanting 'Jai Shri Ram,' he said.

Mamata says no pardon for TMC defectors: Betraying party like abandoning mother

Kolkata.(Agency)

Trinamool Congress chief Mamata Banerjee on Thursday delivered a scathing warning to defecting MLAs, MPs and councillors, comparing party betrayal to abandoning a mother in sickness.

Addressing a virtual meeting of the North Kolkata District Trinamool Congress, she sought to energise workers and cadres amid what she called a "relentless barrage of oppression" by the BJP-led Centre.

Referring to leaders who have left the party, Banerjee said, "It is like a mother who raised you all your life; when she falls ill, you refuse to care for her. There is no pardon for traitors. They might save themselves today, but in the future, the people will



demand an account from them, and so will the workers." Opening her address with greetings to party

workers, the former Chief Minister described the current political climate as one of fear and economic distress.

"It has been a relentless barrage of oppression, case after case. People are driven to suicide and gripped by fear; hawkers' stalls are being demolished. Many are losing their jobs and seeing their life's dreams shattered," she said. Banerjee asserted that only a united Trinamool could offer protection from the crisis. "And regarding this crisis -- a crisis created by the BJP, not us -- you know how our workers have fought, risking their lives and everything they have. From booth-level workers and BLOs to the grassroots cadres it is at the cost of their lives and sacrifices that today's victors have come to power."

India loses key Bangladesh port project to China. Should Delhi be concerned?

Bangladesh has signed a deal with China to build an economic zone near Mongla Port on land once allotted to India. The move deepens Dhaka's engagement with Beijing, while raising India's strategic concerns in the Bay of Bengal.

New Delhi.(Agency)

Amid turbulence in ties between India and Bangladesh, China seems to be stepping into that vacuum. Bangladesh Prime Minister Tarique Rahman, who chose China for his first foreign visit, has signed an agreement with a Chinese state-owned company to develop an economic zone near the strategic Mongla Port, which sits close to India's eastern coastline in the Bay of Bengal. Significantly, the land was originally earmarked for an Indian economic zone, but was delisted by the Muhammad Yunus regime as ties hit rock bottom.

Mongla, Bangladesh's second-largest and second-busiest seaport after Chittagong, is just 188 km from Kolkata and sits close to the Sunderbans. The



economic zone will be developed by China on 110 acres of land adjacent to Mongla Port in Bagerhat, according to a report in Bangladesh's Business Standard. China plans to set up manufacturing industries, warehouses and storage facilities in the

zone.

WHY INDIA SHOULD BE CONCERNED?

For India, the concern is two-fold. First, a strategically key project has slipped out of its hands. Secondly, it opens the door for a larger Chinese presence in the Bay of Bengal and the wider Indian Ocean region.

Even though investment in a port project does not automatically mean military access, China has previously been accused of using overseas ports where it has invested for intelligence gathering and surveillance activities. The agreement signals a major policy shift by Bangladesh. It risks kicking off a strategic contest between India and China in a region that Delhi has traditionally viewed as its sphere of influence and backyard.

Bengal government to table Uniform Civil Code Bill in Assembly on Monday

The UCC seeks to introduce a common civil law governing marriage, divorce, inheritance and adoption across communities. While the BJP says it will promote equality and legal uniformity, opposition parties argue it could infringe on religious freedom and community identity.

Kolkata.(Agency)

The Suwendu Adhikari-led BJP government in West Bengal is set to table the Uniform Civil Code (UCC) Bill for discussion, consideration and passage in the Assembly on Monday during the ongoing Budget session, a source told India Today. The move comes much earlier than the party's stated six-month deadline for implementing the UCC after coming to power in the state.

The proposed UCC Bill is being seen as one of the most closely watched policy initiatives of the state's first BJP government.

The party had promised in its manifesto ahead of the 2026 Assembly elections that it would implement the UCC within six months of assuming office in Bengal. Union Home Minister Amit Shah had highlighted the promise while releasing the party's election manifesto, or "Sankalp Patra," in April. The UCC proposes a common set of civil laws on matters such as marriage, divorce, inheritance and adoption for all citizens, regardless of faith, replacing religion-based personal laws. The proposal specifically includes a ban on polygamy and triple talaq. During his campaign in the state before the polls, Home Minister Shah had said, "Is it appeasement to have uniform laws for every Indian citizen, or is it appeasement.



Amarnath Yatra security tightened with patrols, searches across Jammu border belt

Jammu.(Agency)

Security agencies carried out extensive patrolling, area domination exercises and cordon and search operations on Friday as part of security arrangements ahead of the annual Amarnath Yatra. Officials said the steps were aimed at strengthening the security grid, maintaining peace and vigilance, and ensuring a safe and secure environment for pilgrims.

The yatra is scheduled to begin on July 3. Officials said the operations were also meant to improve operational preparedness, gather ground-level intelligence, identify potential security concerns and ensure effective coordination among the agencies deployed in the region. As part of the exercise, police, in coordination with the Central Industrial Security Force and the Border Security Force, carried out a joint long-range patrolling exercise from Rathana to Salehar, Chak Jagtoo and adjoining areas in the Arnia border belt.

Officials said the patrolling was aimed at maintaining close surveillance along the border, preventing anti-social activities and ensuring a visible security presence. Security personnel also interacted with local residents during the exercise, they said. Officials said the presence of police, CISF and BSF personnel instilled a sense of security among local residents. In another operation, police conducted extensive area domination exercises in R S Pura, Bishnah, Arnia and Miran Sahib to ensure a peaceful atmosphere ahead of the yatra.

The exercises covered sensitive locations, border-adjacent villages, crowded markets, bus stands and other strategic points. Security personnel carried out intensive patrolling, vehicle checking, verification of suspicious persons and enhanced surveillance in vulnerable areas, officials said.



Gurugram Police are set to question two Punjab Police officials over an alleged fake forensic report in the Bhagwant Mann video case. Their answers could widen the probe and lead to arrests if investigators find concrete evidence.

Amit Shah vows tougher action against drug networks, to unveil narcotics control roadmap

New Delhi.(Agency)

Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Friday reiterated the government's commitment to tackling drug abuse, saying the focus was on dismantling narcotics networks while ensuring care and rehabilitation for those affected by addiction.

On the occasion of the International Day Against Drug Abuse and Illicit Trafficking, Shah said India under Prime Minister Narendra Modi's leadership had launched a strong campaign against the global drug menace. "Extending best wishes to all the warriors in our national battle against drugs, on International Day Against Drug Abuse, India under Modi Ji's leadership has mounted the strongest fight against the global challenge of drug abuse, by eliminating



narco-cartels ruthlessly and healing the affected individuals with the care and empathy they deserve," Shah said in a post on X. "May this day reinforce our commitment to shield our young generation from drugs.

#NashaMuktBharat," he added.

Shah is also scheduled to chair the 10th apex-level meeting of the Narco-Coordination Centre (NCORD) and release the "Vision Document on Narcotics Control (2026-2029)".

The meeting, organised by the Narcotics Control Bureau (NCB), will bring together representatives from 44 Central ministries and departments, along with officials from state governments and drug law enforcement agencies. The Ministry of Home Affairs said the vision document has been prepared after consultations with government departments, enforcement agencies and other stakeholders. It will provide a roadmap covering demand reduction, supply reduction and harm reduction measures.

The document focuses on a network-based enforcement approach and addresses emerging challenges such as synthetic drugs, darknet-enabled trafficking, preventing youth from entering drug use, and expanding treatment and rehabilitation facilities.

The government said the framework will guide policy formulation, implementation and institutional strengthening to curb drug trafficking and abuse over the next three years. As part of a drug disposal fortnight campaign, agencies across the country will also destroy around 2,09,500 kg of narcotics worth approximately Rs 6,000 crore in accordance with legal procedures. Observed every year on June 26, the International Day Against Drug Abuse and Illicit Trafficking is a UN-recognised.

Power poles along roads to be shifted for safer, wider stretches

Gurgaon.(Agency)

In a move that could improve road safety and help speed up infrastructure projects, Dakshin Haryana Bijli Vitran Nigam (DHBVN) has started assessing the cost of relocating electricity poles, power lines, transformers and other assets installed along public works department (PWD) roads. The exercise follows a request from PWD, which is planning road improvement and widening works at multiple locations. Officials have been directed to survey affected sites and prepare cost estimates for shifting power infrastructure that may obstruct road projects.

For commuters, the move could eventually mean wider roads, fewer bottlenecks and reduced accident risks caused by poles located close to carriageways. Road widening projects often face delays until utility lines are relocated.

Vikram Singh, managing director of DHBVN and UHBVN, asked all superintending engineers (operation) to provide a rough cost estimate for the potential relocation of electrical infrastructure installed along the roads and berms of PWD. The discom has classified the exercise as a priority so a consolidated proposal can be shared with PWD for further action.

The chief engineer (P&D) of DHBVN stated that PWD has sought details regarding the relocation of utility infrastructure installed along the roadsides. "They have been asked to assess the electric poles, lines, transformers and other electrical assets located in the concerned areas and prepare the potential cost of their relocation," said the official. "DHBVN has placed this work in the most essential category and issued instructions to ensure time-bound action," said Sanjay Chug, spokesperson for DHBVN. While no timeline for the actual shifting has been announced, officials said the exercise has been categorised as a priority task. The assessment is expected to help identify bottlenecks affecting road projects and pave the way for smoother implementation of future road upgrades.

Fire breaks out on ninth floor of commercial building in Greater Noida

Noida.(Agency)

A fire broke out on the ninth floor of a commercial building in Tech Zone 4, Greater Noida, on Thursday. Five fire tenders were rushed to the spot and the blaze was brought under control within 40 minutes, fire department officials said. There were no casualties in the incident.

Chief fire officer (CFO) Pradeep Kumar Chaubey said they were informed at 9.40am about the blaze at Golden Eye Mall. Initial information suggested that several people might be trapped inside the building, prompting authorities to launch an immediate rescue operation. Five fire tenders, along with a hydraulic platform vehicle, rushed to the spot.

Firefighters conducted a thorough inspection of the building and found that no one was trapped inside. Officials later confirmed that the office where the fire had broken out was closed. Their efforts prevented the fire from spreading to other parts of the building.

CFO Chaubey said the fire was completely extinguished and the situation was brought under control without any loss of life. The cause of the fire has not yet been determined. Authorities have launched an investigation to ascertain the circumstances that led to the incident. Further details are awaited as officials continue their assessment of the damage caused by the fire.

50 detained as cops evict protesters from GIMS campus

Noida.(Agency)

Police on Wednesday night detained around 50 contractual staffers of Govt Institute of Medical Sciences (GIMS) and cleared a protest site inside the hospital premises, ending a 10-day agitation over job regularisation after hospital authorities said the demonstration was disrupting medical services.

The action prompted allegations of assault and abuse by the protesters, who claimed police forcibly removed them. Officials, however, denied any lathicharge and said the intervention was necessary to restore normal hospital operations.

Around 700 contractual workers — including nurses, technicians and housekeeping staff — have been sitting in protest on the hospital campus since June 15, demanding regularisation of their jobs and direct employment under GIMS instead of private agencies.

Hospital authorities said the protest, especially at key points such as the main entrance and central hall, was beginning to affect patient movement and delivery of treatment. Officials said multiple rounds of talks involving the hospital management, district officials and police failed to break the deadlock.

The protesters, however, rejected the claim that services were being disrupted. "From Day 1, we made it clear that emergency, ICU and NICU services would not stop. We have worked here since GIMS started. During Covid, we stood here day and night. If new vacancies are opening now, why are we not being given the first chance?" Dinesh, a staff nurse, sought to know.

According to officials, protesters were on Wednesday asked to shift their sit-in to a designated area within the campus to ease movement. While some agreed, a section allegedly refused. The police action followed around 9pm. "Cops entered the premises and started forcing us out. Many staff nurses, including women, were abused and manhandled. Some were injured there itself," a protester alleged.

Police denied the allegation, saying no lathicharge took place. A senior police officer said some demonstrators became aggressive during the relocation attempt. "We repeatedly appealed to them to shift. A few complied, but some started pushing and scuffling with us. Police had to intervene and remove them," the officer added.

There were allegations that outsiders and members of some organisations joined the protest, threatened staff and attempted to damage hospital property. Based on a complaint by GIMS director Brig Rakesh Gupta (retired), police registered a case under charges of obstructing public servants from duty, causing damage to public property, disrupting essential medical services and creating a law-and-order situation.

Mahanagar Metro Exclusive: Karjan Under the Grip of the Mining Mafia!

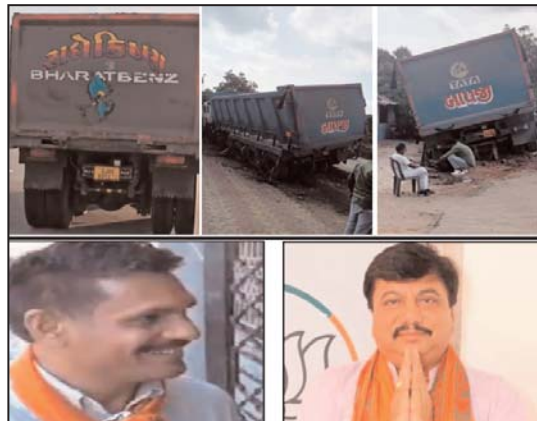
Has Gandhinagar Surrendered Before MLA Akshay Patel and 'Ghugha' Bharwad?

Death Pits Dug 50 Feet Deep in Pingarwada in Gross Violation of Government Rules; How Did a Former Rickshaw Driver Become a Multi-Millionaire Overnight? Why Are the Collector and SDM Silent Over the Alleged Fake Farmer Scam? Massive Exposé of Alleged ₹8 Crore Tender Fixing and Monthly Protection Racket.

Mahanagar Metro Desk

Pawan Makan

BARODA/KARJAN: While the Gujarat government continues to project a policy of "Zero Tolerance" against corruption and illegal activities, Karjan taluka in Vadodara district is allegedly witnessing an unchecked reign of illegal mining and organized criminal influence. Serious allegations have been raised against BJP MLA Akshay Patel and Karjan Municipality member Gokul Bharwad, popularly known as "Ghugha," claiming that administrative authorities have failed to curb large-scale illegal activities. Massive Plunder of Natural Resources According to the allegations, large-scale illegal sand mining has been taking place in Pingarwada village for several years. Although mining regulations reportedly permit excavation only up to 10 feet, excavation pits exceeding 50 feet in depth have allegedly been created at nearly 30–35 locations. It is further alleged that nearly 50 lakh metric tonnes of sand have been illegally extracted and stockpiled near the Sasrod–Nareshwar Road. The report also claims that more than 150 dumpers, 25 JCB machines, and 15 excavators are operating around the clock, causing substantial losses to government revenue. From Rickshaw Driver to Wealthy Businessman? Questions Over Alleged Fake Farmer Status The report raises questions regarding the rapid rise in wealth of Gokul Bharwad, alleging that he was once a rickshaw driver but is now the owner of assets worth several crores. It further alleges that his application for farmer status was initially rejected by an honest Mamlatdar after verification. However, it claims that the application was later approved by the then SDM, enabling Bharwad and his family to obtain farmer status. The report alleges that this status was subsequently used to acquire large parcels of agricultural land through benami transactions. Allegations of Tender Manipulation The report also alleges irregularities in an online municipal road construction tender worth approximately ₹8 crore. According to the allegations, Municipal Engineer Vikram Rana leaked confidential bid information to Gokul Bharwad. Competing contractors were allegedly threatened and pressured into withdrawing their bids, allowing the contract to be awarded to individuals linked to the alleged syndicate. Claims of a Large-Scale Protection Money Network The report further alleges that the illegal mining operations continue due to the involvement



or protection of several officials. Unnamed sources claim that officials within the Mining Department, local administration, police, and traffic authorities allegedly receive monthly payments from the illegal mining network. The report also alleges that illegal gambling and liquor operations contribute to a broader protection money syndicate involving multiple individuals. Questions Raised Before the State Government Mahanagar Metro has called upon the Chief Minister of Gujarat and Minister of State for Home Harsh Sanghavi to order an independent, high-level investigation into the allegations. The publication has questioned whether action will be taken against those allegedly involved in illegal mining, fake farmer certificates, benami properties, and tender manipulation. It states that if an impartial investigation is not initiated, public confidence in the government's

commitment to combating corruption may be seriously undermined. Note: The allegations mentioned in this report are claims made by the publication and have not been independently verified. The individuals named have not publicly responded to these allegations at the time of publication.

Monsoon nears, yet Delhi-Gurgaon Expressway drains remain clogged with waste, debris

Gurgaon.(Agency)

Clogged surface drains along Delhi-Gurgaon Expressway are posing a major challenge as the monsoon looms, raising fears of waterlogging and traffic disruption. The stretch between Rajiv Chowk and Kherki Daula — one of the busiest corridors in the city — remains particularly vulnerable as the drains are brimming with plastic waste and debris. A visit to several locations along the expressway revealed stagnant water in drains, accompanied by a foul smell that has created unhygienic conditions for commuters and nearby residents. Unabated garbage dumping along the roadside of the service lane has compounded the problem. Much of the waste eventually finds its way into the surface drainage, reducing its carrying capacity and obstructing the flow of rainwater.

Residents and daily commuters expressed concern that the situation could lead to severe waterlogging once the monsoon sets in. Navdeep Singh, a resident of Sector 83 who frequently commutes along the expressway, told TOI, "The drains are clogged on both sides of the highway from

Rajiv Chowk to Kherki Daula. Every monsoon, the stretch witnesses severe waterlogging. Even the cleaning effort by civic authorities does not last for long. Basic maintenance, such as timely desilting of drains and cleaning of roads, can go a long way in ensuring proper disposal of rainwater. Why do people need to throw waste on the roadside and why can't civic authorities improve the mechanism for door-to-door waste collection? Garbage should be disposed of properly instead of ending up in drains."

Officials of National Highways Authority of India, which is responsible for maintaining the expressway, said regular cleaning of surface drains is being carried out but admitted that garbage dumping remains a persistent hurdle. "We have intensified efforts and regularly clean and desilt the drains along NH8. However, until the MCG controls garbage dumping, nothing much can be done," a senior NHAI official said. The official added that despite repeated cleaning efforts, fresh waste

continues to accumulate in the drains, undermining maintenance work and increasing the risk of flooding during intense rainfall. "Even when we clean the drain, the situation is back to square one within 24 hours. Unchecked garbage dumping making it difficult to keep the



drain clean despite regular maintenance efforts," the NHAI official said.

GMDA officials also acknowledged the issue of excessive garbage dumping and said coordination with NHAI is underway to improve drainage conditions before the onset of the monsoon. "We have been coordinating with NHAI, and a number of

measures are being taken to improve the drainage system. We are already constructing a culvert at Narsingpur and the drain work is almost complete, which will dispose of the water into Badshapur drain. Additionally, a drain will be constructed at Narsingpur," a senior official of GMDA said.

The authority has intensified cleaning operations at critical junctions that frequently witness waterlogging. "We are constructing additional crossings where cross drains do not exist. Cross drains are being cleaned near key junctions, including IFFCO Chowk, Signature Towers and Jharsa Chowk," the official added. Meanwhile, a senior MCG official said, "We have constituted special teams for the purpose and have managed to reduce this dumping. We are consistently working to completely prevent this garbage dumping in the surface drain." With the monsoon just days away, civic agencies face mounting pressure to ensure that drains are cleared and garbage dumping is checked to avoid a repeat of the annual problem that disrupts traffic and inconveniences thousands of commuters.

Anti-Drugs Day: Crack drug network, get faster promotion

Ahmedabad. (Agency)

A In a move aimed at strengthening the fight against narcotics smuggling, Gujarat Police is set to introduce out-of-turn promotions for officers and personnel who play a significant role in detecting and cracking major drug smuggling cases.

Director General of Police (DGP) G S Malik told TOI, "A policy draft is being prepared which aims to recognise and reward police personnel who risk their lives in busting drug smuggling networks and conduct anti-narcotics drives." The announcement comes ahead of International Anti-Drugs Day and reflects the state's focus on incentivising exceptional work against drug syndicates. Sources in the DGP office said a preliminary list of eligible officers has been drawn up and was under scrutiny before being sent to the state govt for approval. Officials indicated that only officers with clean service records and no pending departmental inquiries or disciplinary proceedings would be considered for the special promotions.

The proposed policy comes amid an intensified

crackdown on narcotics trafficking across Gujarat. Over the last five years, police have registered more than 3,700 cases under the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (NDPS) Act and arrested 5,346 people. During the same period, enforcement agencies seized over 136 tonnes of narcotics valued at more than Rs 13,600 crore. Police officials said Gujarat's extensive coastline has frequently been targeted by international drug syndicates seeking to use the state as a transit point.

However, specialised agencies such as the Anti-Narcotics Task Force, Anti-Terrorist Squad, Special Operations Group and district police units have successfully intercepted several major consignments and dismantled smuggling networks. Deputy chief minister Harsh Sanghavi said sustained enforcement action has made drug traffickers wary of using Gujarat as a transit route. Malik added that recent crackdowns have significantly weakened several international smuggling networks operating through the state.



Senior police officers believe the proposed promotion policy will boost morale within the force and encourage more officers to pursue complex drug investigations. They said the initiative sends a strong message that outstanding efforts in protecting society from the drug trade

will be recognised and rewarded. Officials stressed that the state's anti-drug strategy extends beyond seizures and arrests. Alongside enforcement, agencies are focusing on strengthening intelligence gathering, improving conviction rates and expanding efforts to prevent substance abuse among youth.

With the proposed incentive policy, Gujarat Police hopes to further energise frontline officers in what authorities describe as a long-term battle against organised drug trafficking and addiction, said a senior cop. Narit:

Gujarat's AI weapon against drug networks Ahmedabad: Gujarat Police's technology-driven fight against narcotics received a major boost with the deployment of Narit (Narcotics Analysis & RAG-based Investigation Tool), an artificial intelligence-powered platform designed to strengthen investigations into drug trafficking networks. Gujarat has become the first state in the country to use such a system for profiling narcotics offenders, said a senior cop.

Short news

OHE, point failures delay Western Railway local services; several trains cancelled

Mumbai. (Agency)

Western Railway's suburban services were disrupted on Friday morning after an overhead equipment (OHE) failure between Dadar and Churchgate was followed by a point failure at Churchgate station, resulting in train cancellations and delays of 15-20 minutes. The OHE fault occurred between Dadar and Churchgate from 6 am to 7.22 am, disrupting train operations during the morning rush hour. Several suburban services had to be cancelled during the disruption. Soon after restoration of the OHE, a point failure developed at Churchgate at around 8 am, further affecting



train movements.

Railway officials said both faults have since been rectified and operations have resumed. However, suburban trains continue to run 15-20 minutes behind schedule as the railway works to restore the timetable and clear the backlog of delayed services.

HYDRAA expands lake revival drive with four new projects worth Rs 107 crore

HYDERABAD. (Agency)

HYDRAA on Thursday launched restoration works for four more lakes in and around Hyderabad at an estimated cost of Rs 107 crore as part of its efforts to mitigate urban flooding and improve groundwater recharge. HYDRAA Commissioner AV Ranganath inaugurated the works at Ibrahim Pedda Cheruvu in Ibrahim Bagh, Bhagirathamma Cheruvu in Puppalaguda,



Kamuni Cheruvu in Moosapet and Kapra lake in Medchal-Malkajgiri district. He performed puja at Ibrahim Pedda Cheruvu and Kamuni Cheruvu before formally launching the projects. The restoration covers Kamuni Cheruvu (48 acres), Ibrahim Pedda Cheruvu (97 acres), Bhagirathamma Cheruvu (54 acres) and Kapra lake (112 acres). Locals welcomed the initiative, saying it would help address sewage issues, reduce mosquito breeding and improve the surroundings. Ranganath directed officials to completely remove silt and foul odours, develop proper inlets and outlets for stormwater flow, and maintain the same quality standards adopted for the six lakes restored in the first phase while taking up 14 lakes in the second phase. He said the projects should improve flood mitigation, groundwater recharge and environmental sustainability. Plans are also underway to develop walking tracks, open gyms, children's play areas and other recreational facilities around the lakes.

Namma Metro saw 20 service disruptions since 2024, Bengaluru South MP Tejasvi

The MP said BMRC's O&M spending rose 133%, but commuters still face repeated disruptions despite paying among the highest Metro fares.

Bengaluru. (Agency)

Citing 20 reported technical faults and service disruptions across the Namma Metro network since January 2024, Bengaluru South MP Tejasvi Surya on Thursday sought a comprehensive audit of the Bangalore Metro Rail Corporation Ltd's (BMRC) operations and maintenance practices, expressing concern over recurring breakdowns and passenger safety. In a letter to Bengaluru Development Minister Krishna Byre Gowda, Surya noted that the Purple Line has accounted for the highest number of reported disruptions, raising concerns over maintenance standards, operational efficiency and institutional accountability within BMRC. Referring to the major disruption on June 23, reportedly caused by a fault in the Current Collector Device (CCD), Surya said the incident had brought the

city's mobility to a standstill, leaving thousands of passengers stranded across multiple stations and causing severe overcrowding during peak hours.



The MP pointed out that despite a 133 per cent increase in BMRC's operations and maintenance expenditure, from Rs 262.94 crore in 2017-18 to Rs 613.51 crore in 2023-24, commuters continue to face

repeated service failures despite paying among the highest Metro fares in the country. Seeking greater transparency, Surya asked the state government and

BMRC to furnish details regarding the inspection frequency of third rail infrastructure, including bolts, fasteners and alignment components. He also sought information on when the affected section was last inspected, whether inspections were conducted in-house or outsourced, and requested that inspection reports, maintenance records and audit findings for the past 12 months be made public. Surya further demanded that the Root Cause Analysis (RCA) report on the June 23 incident be placed in the public domain. He also urged BMRC to submit an action taken report outlining measures to improve reliability, passenger safety and accountability with clear timelines.

Citywide school fire safety checks launched after Lucknow blaze

Shimla. (Agency)

In the wake of the Lucknow fire incident, the Surat Fire and Emergency Services (SFES) has launched a citywide awareness and inspection drive across educational institutes to strengthen fire safety preparedness. So far, SFES teams have conducted checking of 52 educational institutes, including schools, colleges and coaching centres. During the visits, fire personnel inspected firefighting arrangements on campuses and checked whether installed fire safety systems were functional and properly maintained. The teams reviewed the condition and operational status of equipment such as fire extinguishers, hose reels and other firefighting systems, besides ensuring that access routes and



evacuation pathways remained unobstructed. Officials said, the campaign focuses on assessing fire safety infrastructure, verifying emergency preparedness and training students and staff to respond effectively during emergencies. Alongside the inspections, SFES conducted on-site training sessions for students, teachers and staff, explaining

evacuation procedures and practical measures to minimise risk during a fire. Chief Fire Officer Basant Pareek demonstrated key survival techniques, including staying low to avoid smoke inhalation. "People should crawl to safety and use a wet handkerchief to cover the mouth and nose while crawling to minimise the impact of toxic smoke and gases," Pareek said. Fire officials said the department has been conducting regular fire safety awareness programmes, holding sessions during the first week of every month at one hospital and one educational institute in each fire zone. Participants are trained in the use of firefighting equipment, evacuation procedures and coordinated emergency response.

IIT study gives boost to Chennai airport riverfront plan

The proposal, planned along Adyar banks, comes as Chennai airport faces pressure on passenger-handling capacity

Mumbai. (Agency)

The city's international airport is pressing ahead with a long-delayed satellite terminal project, repackaged as a riverfront regeneration scheme after a technical study by the Indian Institute of Technology Madras (IIT-M) concluded it could address the city's chronic flooding vulnerabilities while adding passenger capacity. The proposal, planned along the banks of the Adyar river, had languished for years over the cost and scale of land acquisition required. IIT Madras, however, found the project could reinforce flood-prone riverbank stretches, check encroachments on the waterway and unlock tourism infrastructure, according to M Raja Kishore, the airport's director.

The institute also concluded construction could be integrated with existing flood-mitigation frameworks in the Adyar basin, defusing what had been one of the

more sensitive objections to the scheme. "We initially proposed the project in a different form, but it involved substantial land acquisition and was very expensive," Raja Kishore said. "IIT Madras conducted a technical study on the riverfront option and identified several benefits." The airport has submitted the study findings to the relevant authorities and is awaiting approvals before the project can advance.

The terminal push comes as Chennai airport faces mounting pressure on passenger-handling capacity. The facility ranks among the country's most congested, and planners have long sought ways to expand. This also comes after Chennai airport's plan to cater to 55 million passengers per annum was put to rest after the Tamil Nadu government



dropped the plan to acquire 193 acres of land for expansion of the airport in 2024. The airport director has suggested 50:50 funding between the state and the airport authority. It is learnt the state is examining such a proposal but there has been officially no letter from the airport authority to Chennai Unified Metropolitan Transport authority as of now. Separately, airport officials are

examining whether cargo infrastructure can be meaningfully expanded, though Raja Kishore struck a cautious note. Chennai's freight operations are heavily dependent on belly cargo carried aboard passenger aircraft, making a standalone cargo facility a difficult commercial proposition.

"Exclusive cargo operations alone cannot drive growth," he said.

"Belly cargo accounts for a substantial share of traffic and remains critical to future cargo potential." Any expansion, he suggested, would need to be structured to serve both passengers and freight rather than treating the two as separate growth levers.

Chennai airport, one of the largest airports in India, is functioning in only 1,317 acres of land, the smallest when compared to other major airports in India.

Where the mind is not without fear

Satyajit Das

Every year, more than 8.4 lakh people die globally from health conditions linked to toxic workplaces. According to the International Labour Organization, psychosocial risks at work—long hours, job insecurity, bullying and harassment—cause these deaths through cardiovascular disease and mental illness. The ILO also found that 35 percent of workers worldwide work more than 48 hours a week and 23 percent have faced some form of violence or harassment at work. These statistics appear to concern factories, offices and corporations. However, they are also increasingly visible in academia, which should instead embody precisely the opposite values.

Earlier this year, the death by suicide of an assistant professor at AIIMS Bhopal attracted national attention after allegations of workplace harassment, professional humiliation and administrative pressure surfaced. Family and colleagues cited severe mental distress, raising questions about whether authorities had acted on earlier concerns. The National Human Rights Commission's intervention reframed the tragedy as a governance failure, underscoring that faculty burnout, workplace bullying and mental health crises are institutional, not individual, problems.

If the AIIMS episode exposed the human costs of toxic institutional environments, developments across universities show how such environments are created. During a recent visit to a prestigious university, I learned that faculty members were required to record every exit from campus in a register: time out, destination, purpose and time back. It is not an isolated example. Across many Indian universities, biometric attendance, excessive documentation, CCTV monitoring and digital tracking are increasingly shaping everyday work life. These measures are usually justified in the language of accountability and professionalism. In practice, they often function as instruments of control. A controversy at Visva-Bharati University illustrates this clearly. Faculty members strongly opposed an administrative directive requiring permission before leaving campus during working hours. Critics argued that the measure treated academics like factory workers and reflected an administration more concerned with monitoring presence than evaluating academic output.

The episode quickly became symbolic of a wider debate on whether universities were moving away from academic self-governance towards bureaucratic command-and-control systems. This raises a question: what assumptions about faculty underpin such forms of management? The answer is straightforward. They assume that academics cannot be trusted. Scholarship, which is a vocation built on reflection, independent judgement and intellectual risk, is treated as an activity that must be constantly monitored. Michel Foucault argued that power in modern institutions often operates not through direct coercion but through continuous visibility; the awareness that one is always being watched. The result is self-regulation: individuals begin policing themselves. Surveillance does not need to catch wrongdoing. Its purpose is to ensure that no one feels entirely free. The problem with that approach is the failure to understand that academic work does not function like industrial labour. Scholarship develops through reading, conversation, fieldwork, collaboration and reflection. Research requires psychological safety, intellectual trust and a degree of autonomy. Fear and creativity cannot coexist. Beneath these specific controversies lies a deeper structural change in how universities are organised. Earlier models of academic life valued intellectual judgement, originality and scholarly independence. Increasingly, universities are rewarding visibility, measurable compliance and administrative manageability. Performance-driven environments often reward surface conformity while eroding the deeper commitments that meaningful work requires.

Why India and Europe need to realise their potential

For nearly two decades, India–Europe ties have been praised for their potential, but a truly strategic relationship should be judged by tangible results, not unrealized promise.

Shishir Priyadarshi

For nearly two decades, every India-Europe summit, business forum and strategic dialogue has ended with the same conclusion: the relationship holds enormous potential. That is precisely the problem. Relationships that are genuinely strategic should not be measured by their potential. They should be measured by their outcomes. The uncomfortable truth is that while the world has changed dramatically, India-EU relations have often remained trapped in a vocabulary developed for a different era. We continue to speak of cooperation, shared values and untapped opportunities even as the foundations of the global economy are being fundamentally rewritten. What we are witnessing today is not merely a period of economic turbulence. It is the most significant geoeconomic realignment since the end of the Cold War. Trade is being weaponised. Supply chains are being weaponised. Energy is being weaponised. Technology is being weaponised. Even access to critical minerals is increasingly becoming an instrument of strategic competition. In short, we are entering an era defined by the weaponisation of dependence. This marks a profound departure from the assumptions that underpinned the post-war economic order. Institutions such as the World Trade Organization were built on the belief that economic interdependence would promote stability. Dependence was viewed as a source of peace.

Today, many nations see dependence differently. They see it as vulnerability. They have discovered that dependence creates leverage, and leverage creates power. The result is a world becoming less universal and more transactional, less rules-based and more risk-based. For both India and Europe, this creates challenges. But it also creates an extraordinary opportunity. Why India and Europe matter to each other. The complementarity is obvious. Europe brings capital, technology, research capabilities and industrial expertise. India brings scale, talent, demand and growth. Yet neither side has fully adjusted its thinking. India, meanwhile, has changed beyond recognition. Twenty years ago, India was viewed as a future opportunity. Today, it is a present reality. It remains the world's fastest-growing major economy, is on track to become the third-largest economy in the world and possesses one of the most sophisticated digital public infrastructure ecosystems ever created. More importantly, it represents

one of the few major sources of future global demand. Europe still occasionally approaches India through the lens of development assistance, sustainability conditionalities and regulatory instruction. India, for its part, sometimes remains excessively defensive, viewing European initiatives primarily through the prism of market access disputes and compliance burdens. Both approaches belong to the past. Both are searching for trusted partners that can contribute growth, scale and dynamism, which is why the future relationship must be built on co-creation rather than prescription.

The Mother of all Deals

The signing of the India-EU Free Trade Agreement - described by many as the "mother of all deals" - marks the end of one chapter and the beginning of a far more



important one. Negotiating the agreement was difficult; implementing it effectively will be even harder.

At a time when the global economy is fragmenting into competing spheres of influence, the effective implementation of the FTA will determine whether India and Europe become genuine economic partners or merely remain strategic admirers of one another.

The next phase in implementing will require mechanisms, not merely meetings. Joint platforms for infrastructure financing, green industrialisation, technology partnerships and supply-chain resilience must move from concept papers to actual projects. Most importantly, both sides must learn to manage disagreements more intelligently. Differences will persist on carbon border adjustment measures, industrial policy, digital regulation, sustainability standards and market

access. Mature partnerships are not defined by the absence of disagreements. They are defined by the ability to prevent disagreements from defining the relationship. Beyond the FTA—Building for the Future

Trade, while very important, does not define the entire gamut of the relationship. Huge opportunities exist for both India and the EU, to make the next decade a huge win-win to both sides. Nowhere is this more evident than in the green transition. Europe possesses many of the technologies required to decarbonize the global economy. India possesses the scale necessary to make those technologies commercially viable. The success of the energy transition will not be determined in conference halls or policy papers. It will be determined through deployment at scale. Whether in renewable energy, green hydrogen, battery ecosystems or transmission infrastructure, India represents one of the world's largest implementation opportunities.

The same logic applies to infrastructure more broadly. India is undertaking one of the largest infrastructure transformations in human history. Ports, airports, logistics corridors, industrial clusters, digital infrastructure and urban development are being built at unprecedented speed. European engineering, finance and technology can play a significant role in this transformation.

Technology offers another area of convergence. Europe has emerged as a global leader in trusted governance and regulation. India has become a global leader in digital delivery at scale. Combining European expertise in governance with India's experience in implementation could help establish new frameworks for artificial

intelligence, digital identity, cybersecurity and cross-border digital services. Bridges not Blocs

The traditional West is no longer the sole centre of economic gravity. New centres of power are emerging across Asia, Africa and the wider Global South. In this environment, influence will increasingly belong to those capable of building bridges rather than blocs.

India does not seek to join one camp against another. Europe increasingly understands that strategic autonomy requires diversified partnerships rather than exclusive alignments. That creates a rare convergence.

The twenty-first century will not be built by those who retreat behind walls. Nor will it be shaped by those who endlessly discuss potential while others shape reality. The moment has arrived to demonstrate what India and Europe can do together.

Fair play

Onus on CCI to balance deterrence with fairness

Most consumers have little reason to think about competition law. Yet its impact is felt every day — in the prices we pay, the choices we have and the services we receive. When companies collude to keep prices high, restrict consumer options or use their market dominance unfairly, it is ordinary citizens who ultimately bear the cost. That is why the Competition Commission of India (CCI) has become increasingly important. Over the years, it has taken action against cement companies accused of working together to influence prices, automobile manufacturers that limited access to spare parts and repair services, and technology giants such as Google and Meta over concerns related to market dominance and consumer choice. The government's decision to allow the CCI to



calculate penalties on the basis of a company's global turnover rather than just in India reflects a growing concern that existing fines may not be enough to deter large multinational corporations. A penalty that seems

substantial in India may barely register for a company earning billions of dollars worldwide. The logic is understandable. Rules have little value if violating them is cheaper than following them. Companies with enormous resources should not be able to treat penalties as a routine business expense.

At the same time, regulation must be guided by fairness. Businesses need a predictable environment in which to invest and grow. Penalties should be linked to the seriousness of the violation and not create the impression that success itself is being punished. Therefore, there is a need to find the right balance. India must have strong

companies to create jobs and drive growth, but it also needs strong institutions to ensure that markets remain competitive and consumers are protected.

Kicking down the AI ladder

Dario Amodè's call for mandatory third-party testing of frontier AI models is akin to the nuclear non-proliferation treaty, which entrenched privileges of the existing powers. Privatisation of public governance is another danger. India must recall how it earned a seat at the nuclear table

Aunindyo Chakravarty

Dario Amodè knows his audience well. A reference to The Lord of the Rings is an easy way to get people in tech to listen. In his latest policy note, he invoked the indolence of Treebeard to urge quicker action on global artificial intelligence regulation. If only he also recalled J R R Tolkien's larger comment on unchecked power and environmental destruction. Nearly at the same time, economics writer Martin Wolf called for a US-China 'AI disarmament treaty' invoking Cold War language.

Amodè, in particular, seems to want to position himself as the Oppenheimer of our time. But unlike Oppenheimer's change of heart after the atomic bomb, Amodè's warning comes at a time when his company Anthropic seeks a trillion-dollar valuation in an upcoming stock listing. Those calling most loudly for restraint on AI are the ones who built without it and will continue to benefit from it. One only needs to go back to 1968 when the nuclear non-proliferation treaty was hailed as an arms control achievement. The NPT limited proliferation, but entrenched the privileges of the existing nuclear powers. Decades later, the treaty's Article VI commitments to disarmament remain unfulfilled. Quite similarly, led by a handful of American companies, AI has acquired fearsome capabilities without much regulatory oversight. As this lead hardens into pre-eminence, the conversation is conveniently moving towards frameworks, guardrails and cooperation. When Amodè makes a case for mandatory third-party testing of frontier AI, the proposal comes off as neutral. In practice, however, testing by bodies 'authorised and inspected by the government' means that the US government holds influence over which AI systems can be deployed globally. That concern was brought into sharp focus when Anthropic itself, following a US export-control directive,

abruptly disabled access to Fable 5 for users outside the US. This is what an effective veto looks like.

The wider recommendation Amodè makes for a "coalition" of democracies to manage AI supply chains is a palatable packaging of the chip export control regime. India already experiences this under the US's AI diffusion framework where access to advanced chips such as Nvidia's H100 and A100 is contingent on quantity caps and licensing requirements—not over productivity concerns, but because frontier compute enables capabilities from autonomous weapons to cyber operations. The deeper problem is that while AI regulation is necessary, what is being proposed resembles a regulatory capture. Where is the democratic accountability from which any global regulation could feasibly derive authority? The plausible, even imminent, privatisation of public governance is the real danger. Amodè correctly identifies cybersecurity, bioweapons, automated research and development and loss of control of AI systems as risk categories that would trigger regulatory action. But what about other concerns developing economies have? The largest risk, of labour displacement, is left to voluntary corporate measures—entirely inadequate for countries without strong safety nets.

The nuclear analogy becomes interesting here. India rejected what Jaswant Singh called "nuclear apartheid", endured decades of technology denial, built capability regardless, and was eventually included through the 2008 Nuclear Suppliers Group waiver. The lesson here isn't that India should reject global rules but remember how a

seat at the table is truly earned. It must soberly ask what there is to gain by accepting the terms of an existing framework. Rather than pursuing the unlikely goal of autonomy as some have suggested after Fable's pull-out, India should instead seek indispensability within the global AI stack. AI is not a single technology but a cascade of chokepoints, each dominated by different



actors. The India Semiconductor Mission 2.0 emphasises the need to pivot towards design intellectual property, equipment, supply chain resilience and R&D.

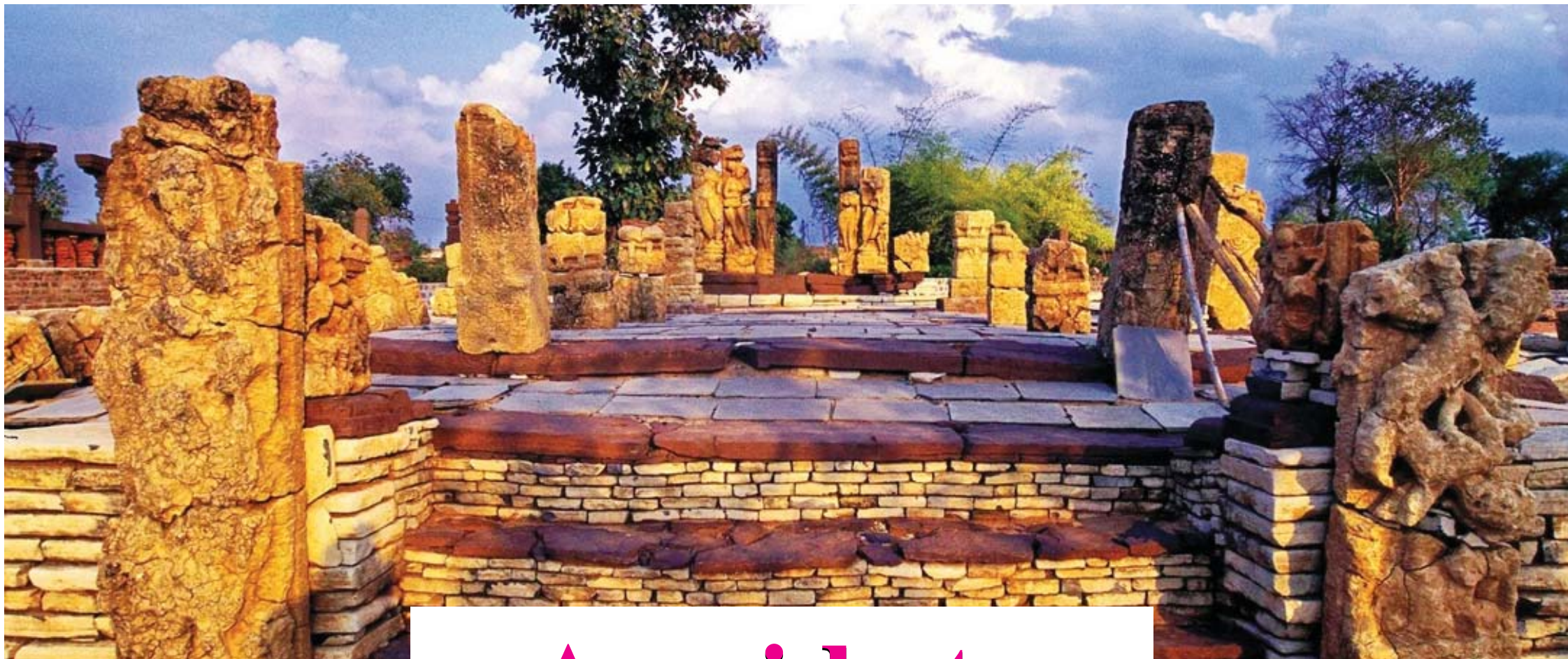
India must prioritise natively built small language models in AI systems across domains such as agriculture, healthcare, governance, that others need to integrate with, on terms it sets. This is what the digital public infrastructure achieved in payments and identity. Something similar is achievable in AI, where India's scale

creates both the problem and the market.

The groundwork laid now could provide the demand-side infrastructure for future manufacturing breakthroughs. Current AI hardware, with its energy and funding limitations, is reaching its physical limits. India needs to have optionality on the hardware paradigms that follow. Like electricity far before it, AI will undergo multiple technological leaps before maturing. India should back a few calculated bets that could reshape the hardware foundations of AI. Photonics is one such bet, with IIT Madras and IIT Delhi already investing in the field whose technological trajectory remains open.

Amodè's plea may only accelerate AI development in ways that he precisely wants to avoid. Language that describes countries even three years behind the AI frontier as mediaeval swordsmen versus US Marines will not engender calls for regulation as much as increase the determination to achieve some semblance of AI 'sovereignty'. Responding to the Fable directive, he wrote: "We believe the government should have the ability to block unsafe deployments, as part of a statutory process that is transparent, fair, clear and grounded in technical facts. This action does not adhere to those principles." But he called for this power. He shouldn't be surprised that the US government exercised it the first chance it got.

Indeed, as former diplomat Stephen Krasner points out, sovereignty is organised hypocrisy at its core. Global AI regulation, as currently conceived, is merely the latest iteration of this phenomenon.



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

A guide to Sirpur

Surang Tila and other ruins

The enormous temple of Surang Tila was unearthed in 2005-06. The temple premises covers a vast area and the main temple stands tall, elevated by a flight of 37 steep limestone steps. It is believed to have been hit by a devastating earthquake around the 12th century AD, and the steps still bear the visual repercussions of this calamity. The temple was built by Mahasivagupta Balarjun in seventh century AD and has been constructed in the panchayatan style of temple architecture, with the main temple in the centre and four temples in the corner. The main temple has five sanctums, four of which had four different types of Shiva lingas for worship, respectively coloured white, red, yellow and black. The remaining sanctum contains a Ganesh idol. The 32-pillared mandapa holds these five sanctums. The complex area has three tantric temples in a platform, dedicated to Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva. The entry gate was believed to be located near the river flowing adjacent to the temple. This was a practice that was started in the temples of Sirpur, and thereafter, spread to other parts of the country.

Laxman Temple

Dating back to 625-650 AD, the Laxman Temple in Sirpur is one of the most famous structures in the city. It is believed to be one of the best examples of brick temples in India and is dedicated to Lord Vishnu. The intricate carvings on the exterior of the temple make it special. These designs include Lord Vishnu, Krishna



Leela symbols, Vaishnava Dwarpal, and pictures bearing resemblance to the famous erotic work as in the Khajuraho Temple. The mandapa which originally bore stone pillars is now in ruins.

Budh Vihar

The Budh Vihar was unearthed in 2003 and houses a statue of Buddha, with Padmapani on either side. It is believed to have been constructed during the time of Somanvansi king, Teevardeo and continued to stay in use until the rule of his grandson Mahashivgupta Balarjun in 7th to 8th century AD. Perhaps the most interesting aspect of this ruin is the entry gate to the temple. The beautiful carvings here depict plenty of scenes from Buddha's life, including love, matrimony, friendship and other ties. This emphasis confirms the influence of Buddhism in Sirpur. The northern and southern arms of this space were used as dwelling chambers.

Ancient marketplace

The ancient marketplace is an impressive set of ruins that are spread over an area of 250 sq m along the river Mahanadi. This place was believed to be the centre of all commercial and trading life of the era. The excavations have revealed that some shops have connecting underground channels, which may imply that the shop owners had more than one shop. There are places which suggest that goods were kept covered in these depressions to guard against natural weathering. The main artefacts unearthed from here indicate that this market was used mainly by coppermiths, goldsmiths, ironsmiths and potters.

Street food

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

Don't let rains ruin your Vacation

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

Accept the rains

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

Storm out impurities

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

Credit: ThinkStock Photos

Chase the sun

Check the weather conditions, pull out your trusty map and find the closest area with less intense rain. Pack your bags and drive off into the sunset—this is your chance to be a true explorer, travelling with the excitement of having no expectations. You may discover a small beach with just enough sunshine for a picnic, or a small town that's perfect for a daytime stroll away from the rains.

A day of museum-hopping

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

Credit: ThinkStock Photos

Do as the locals do. For the locals, life almost always goes on even when things get wet. Take this opportunity to ditch the tourist traps and find out where the city's residents hang out during rainy days. This would set you up for lots of fun and insightful interactions in pubs and local restaurants. Even if you only have a tenuous grasp of the local language, you'll be



surprised how friendly and accommodating people can be. You might just end up discovering an under-the-radar concert or a hole-in-the-wall eatery that no tourist's ever heard of.

Go to the beach anyway!

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



There's more to Singapore than Sentosa

So over-exposed is Singapore that you are acquainted with the city as soon as you land.

Wave to the familiar Merlion, purging water from the marina, there is the recognisable skyline, each building wrestling for postcard space; kerbs cleaned by a punctilious government, each leaf painted the perfect tropical green by a card soldier. Rising on the other side of the marina, are three towers crowned by a ship — the Marina Bay Sands hotel. If your travel plans are dictated by little humans who need periodic feeding and entertainment, this is the place to lock yourself up. Set aside a few hours for the Van Gogh Live and Salvador Dali exhibitions at the ArtsScience museum. Even if you have no academic interest in art, the

museum's child-friendly interactive exhibits make it a gentle engagement. Sit in the panelled room that projects Van Gogh's works on the walls and ceilings, immersing you in his post-impressionist world. It moves even the most number-hardened chartered accountant to tears. Your benevolent dictators can make giant sunflowers, press ancient Chinese motifs on paper, or make an e-card with Dali's moustache and Gogh's swirls on the interactive screen. Be seduced into Dali's world with ceiling installations and pull out human ribcages. In the evening, catch the Lion King Musical, after you've tired yourself out at the casino and shops.

The last village As real is the Singapore of Orchard Street, Clarke Quay and Little China, so is the Singapore of the Pulau Ubin — the last village of the country.

Just don't expect everyone to know where it is, least of all a cab driver. Urbanisation and fervent shopping has nudged Ubin out of the country's consciousness, allotting it a ferry ride off Changi Jetty on an irregular schedule.

The boomerang-shaped granite island has metres of trekking roads and campable beaches. It's here that the national bird, Oriental Pied Hornbill, lives in its natural habitat, as does the wild boar.

If order and urbanity makes you nervous, Ubin will cater you an adventure. Only if you are stoically foolish enough to follow these instructions:

- Arrive at dusk to Changi Jetty so that you have no co-passenger on the bumboat and have to hire it. Instead of SD 2.5, you now pay SD 30 for the ride.

- Forget to withdraw money on the mainland, so that every thought of making it to the morning is presided by the lightness of your wallet.

- Plan your trip in the rains which makes camping impossible, especially since you carry no gear in your prissy little stroller luggage.

- Wait till it is dark to realise that you

a) cannot spend the night in the huts punctuating the roads (a roof on four pillars) and hence b) will have to head to the only resort on the island, an SD 18 cab drive away. Your wet, crouching figure is the object of concern for the schoolgirl here on a class trip.

- As the island's only resort, it charges SD 180 per day. Refuse to spend this much for a night's shelter.

- Eat at the resort's restaurant with the Malaysian TV crew that's shooting for Malay version of American Idol. Learn that they struck upon this idea before USA infected the rest of us.

- Note that the jetty looks habitable and is conveniently placed in the shadow. Nap fitfully till it starts to rain and notice the moored boat on your left.

- Heave onboard; the cabin is ideal. Succumb to childish joy at finding a secret hide-out. They'll never find you here.

- Sleep until the storm wakes you. Metal trembles underneath at every thunder and the reflective surface between the bow and the stern is accumulated water. Still water breeds mosquitoes, snakes and dread of malevolent spirits.

- SD 118 is small price to save yourself from a unsavoury supernatural experience. Head to the office, but it's closed and no amount of hammering helps.

- There's an emergency number taped to the door. Pound on the guest room that still has a light on and explain your predicament. The number is wrong and though friendly, the guests don't have a bed to spare for you.

- The communal shower room is the only shelter. Retrieve luggage from boat. Only now notice the board that says, 'Danger. Do not climb aboard'.

- The fear of being discovered is greater in the shower rooms, but the gate is closer. Not for trespassers the luxury of sleep. Bolt at dawn.

- At the first 'hut', get out your shawl and go to sleep on the parapet. Don't mind the twittering cyclists. They slept in a warm, dry bed.

- The walk back takes you around the island and to the little town where most of the 100 inhabitants of the island live. You can rent a cycle for SD8, but miserliness is the theme for the trip. Get a Coke and stake a seat on the next boat out.

You've had enough of the curated wilderness and enough of the curated urbanity. Solace is the airport.

How to cope in Ubin - Changi Village has ATMs, food courts and provision stores. You can camp and fish here.

- Try the sugarcane juice with plum; also, the pickled plums from Chinese convenience stores.



We talk to a few popular denizens of the Port City to find out why Visakhapatnam is called 'the City of Destiny'. Vizag's tryst with destiny precedes the formation of India by over 100 years, going back to 1844! Sir Arthur Cotton, the legendary British general and engineer spent two years in Waltair, recovering from a 'jungle fever' that haunted him throughout his stay in the tropics. Even in his illness, he developed the Groyne in the sea, which helped break the waves and control erosion. He also redesigned and rebuilt St John's Church and drew plans for a port in the city.

It was the iconic former Vice Chancellor of Andhra University, Dr CR Reddy who is credited with coining the phrase 'City of Destiny' in the 1930s. He was instrumental in relocating the Andhra University, which was located in Bejawada to the port city

which was then a little known fisherman's village — Waltair. Old towns like Ananthapur, Bejawada, Guntur, Machilipatnam, and Rajamundry, had greater credentials at that time since they were much more accomplished educational, cultural and business centers.

"Dr CR Reddy took the bold decision because he believed this was the city of the future. However, his vision of the city was very different from the burgeoning industrial hub and megapolis that it is on course to become. He envisaged that this fisherman's village would become the intellectual capital of the state," says A Prasanna Kumar, director, Centre for Policy Studies. But then destiny as they say, has its own plans and the Port city today is ranked among the fastest growing cities in the world. Later on, it was Dr Abid

Visakhapatnam The city of destiny



Hussain, the legendary district collector and former ambassador to the USA who popularised the phrase, for he rightly believed that it was only a matter of time before Vizag realised its destiny of becoming one of the greatest cities in India, says A Prasanna Kumar, who has been living here for the last 58 years.

"I moved to Vizag in 1954 from Machilipatnam. The city was then called 'India in a Microcosm'. It is perhaps, the only city in the country which has had no history of communal clashes or caste conflicts. There is no narrowness of thinking. It allows outsiders to come and merge seamlessly with the human chain. The city is blessed with tremendous natural splendor and resources," he adds.

Legendary chief Justice, late PV Rajamannar's description of Vizag captures the essence of the city. "Nestled between the sea on one side and a mountain on the other, the city is unlike any other. The sea stands for dynamism, change and adventure and the

mountain stands for permanence, tradition and values. A dialectical process is taking place in this beautiful city, shaping its destiny over the years." Ever since, in various amounts, little bits of recognition have come in to

the city through various forms — be it education, music, acting, art and sculpture. Some of these popular faces from Vizag who've made it big, share their thoughts about this City of Destiny has in store for the world.

Allu Arjun regards Vizag as his lucky charm. "All my films that were shot in Vizag (Arya, Bunny, Desamuduru, Julayi, Parugu, etc.) were superhits. Vizag is my lucky mascot. I shot for Arya at Kailasagiri, the hilltop park with panoramic sea view. The whole unit enjoyed shooting in the serene atmosphere with greenery, fresh breeze and beautiful hills all around. We also shot the film in the adjacent picturesque valleys, which boast of beautiful flora, laterite hillocks and a pleasing landscape. Parugu, Bunny, Desamuduru and Julayi were also shot on the long and vast stretches of the seashore (beach road) in Vizag. This is a popular spot for filmmakers as one can see the sprawling beaches, splendid monuments, ancient shrines, all along the road," shares Allu Arjun.

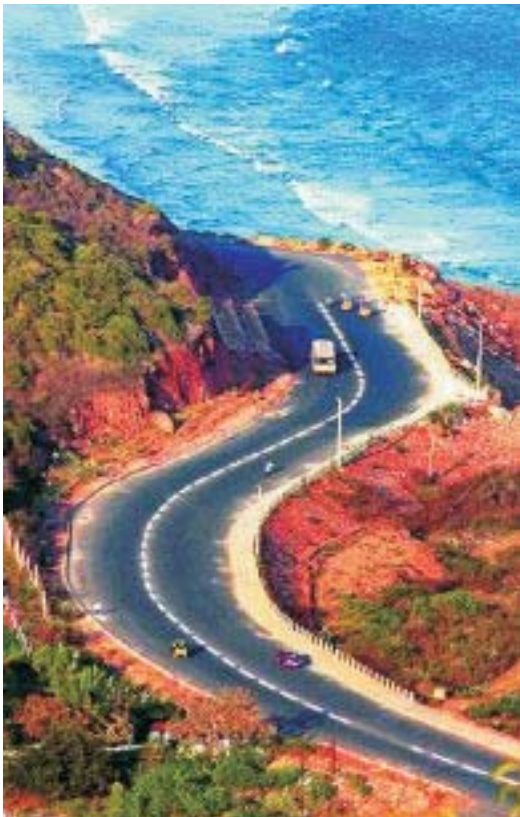
Renowned acting teacher Satyanand, who set up his acting school in Vizag as suggested by Megastar Chiranjeevi, found his

calling in this port city. "I used to work as a character artiste and assistant director in Hyderabad. But I found my true calling only after moving to this beautiful city," he says. "The tranquil atmosphere in Vizag gives you the right fillip to excel in your career. I enjoy a great freedom in my profession if I'm in this city and my institute is the first acting school in Vizag. Think it has something to do with the air in the city," says Satyanand. Tollywood superstars like Pawan Kalyan, Prabhas, Mahesh Babu, Ravi Teja, etc have all learnt their first lessons in acting at his acting school.

Music director and entrepreneur Ramana Gogula says it's the diversity that sets the city apart. "For me, the city is about the ocean and it has sown all the seeds of my creativity and it has taught me to dare to be different. There is so much diversity in the city that it allows people to be themselves. I remember many afternoons when I was down and out I would go and

sit on the beach for a couple of hours and life would be okay again," he says.

Venkat Bothsa, an artist from the city says, "There's not a very big art scene in Vizag. But even if you drive for ten minutes in any direction, you come across such scenic beauty, that it gives you a beautiful background for your work." He further speaks about the scope of art. "There's a lot of scope. The government has also allotted the Nandagiri Kala Gramam, which is a 5-acre land which has residential studios for various artists to work in." Pop singer Smitha of Hairabba Hai fame, who recently opened a spa in the city talks about the scope of fashion and beauty in the city. She says, "People of Vizag have developed a taste for fashion. The last time when I came down, I saw that especially women are into affordable fashion and it immediately struck my mind that I have to give them something from my end and I opened up my spa here."



Delhi HC permits 15-year-old rape survivor to end 28-week pregnancy

Invoking the 'Right to Life,' the girl who filed the petition through her father told the court that she wanted to terminate her pregnancy.

New Delhi.(Agency)

The Delhi High Court has permitted a 15-year-old rape survivor to medically terminate her 28-week pregnancy, observing that although the law does not provide for abortion after 24 weeks, such permission can be accorded in view of grave mental injury and trauma inflicted upon the mind of a minor girl. Invoking the 'Right to Life,' the girl who filed the petition through her father told the court that she wanted to terminate her pregnancy.

The vacation bench of Justice Mini Pushkarna, which was hearing the matter, noted the view of a Medical Board of

AIIMS, New Delhi, which said that the petitioner was medically fit to undergo



the procedure for medical termination of pregnancy. The bench, however, clarified that if the child is born alive in this case,

authorities must offer medical assistance to the baby, involve the Child Welfare Committee, and if so wished by the girl and her father, give the baby up for adoption.

The Delhi government said that in view of a report by AIIMS, it had no objection if the procedure for medical termination of pregnancy was carried out.

Noting the submissions, the judge observed, "The petitioner is permitted to get admitted at AIIMS, New Delhi, on the strength of the present order for medical termination of her pregnancy.

Let the procedure be carried out by a team of competent doctors." The judge further directed AIIMS to preserve the foetus'

tissue for DNA testing in the criminal case.

Jacqueline allowed to withdraw plea from SC

The SC on Thursday permitted Bollywood actor Jacqueline Fernandez to withdraw her plea challenging a Delhi court order to frame charges against her in a Rs 200 crore money laundering case. Fernandez, has been summoned by the ED several times in connection with the probe.

Man, 2 others acquitted in dowry death case

A Delhi court has acquitted a man and two members of his family in a 2016 dowry death case, saying the prosecution failed to prove the allegations beyond reasonable doubt. Additional Sessions Judge Yadvender Singh heard this case against Pawan Singh, Dheeraj Singh and Usha Devi.

DDA begins demolitions in Yamuna Bazar

New Delhi.(Agency)

A day after the Delhi Development Authority (DDA) issued a fresh notice to ghat residents between Ghat No. 2 and 32 in the Yamuna Bazar area to vacate voluntarily, the authority on Thursday carried out a demolition drive in the area to clear the encroachments.

Residents of the area, which is home to around 80 families, have been asked to move to nearby shelter homes. A local said that action had started around 6 in the morning.

Ruining the action, another resident, Prabha Sharma, said, "People have been living here since the British period. We have documents of everything, including house tax papers and lease documents to prove that families have been living here since way back in 1934."

Further, talking about the alternate settlements provided by the authorities to locals like her, Sharma said, "They are sending us to the Rain Basera shelters even though those are extremely unsafe. That area is full of drunkards and criminals. The government isn't concerned about where we go." Another local resident, an elderly man named Brijesh shared, "We have already packed all our belongings, but we have nowhere to go. The authorities concerned have just added to our plight."

Another resident, Rajesh, lamented that the demolition had left his family without any means of income. "Our family has lived here for more than 150 years. We operate boats and have no other options to make money," he said, adding, "We were asked to vacate but no one told us how we were to survive. If we move away from the river, how will we operate our boats? We have lost the only source of livelihood that our family has ever known." He further added that the expenses of finding a new home, shifting, and adopting another source of income would crush his whole family. A police officer privy to the matter said, "We had made adequate deployment to maintain law and order and ensure the smooth conduct of the drive."

The most recent eviction notices issued by the authority had described the settlements as "illegal" and warned that it would remove the encroachments on its own if residents failed to voluntarily leave.

MCD deliberates on rain measures, parking facilities

New Delhi.(Agency)

The House meeting of the Municipal Corporation of Delhi conducted on Thursday largely witnessed discussions on pre-monsoon arrangements.

Leader of Opposition Ankush Narang raised questions about the number of drains under the MCD and how much desilting work has been carried out as of now. Issues related to sanitation, prevention of waterlogging, desilting of drains, strengthening civic amenities and other matters were also discussed.

Mayor Pravesh Wahi stated that the MCD is working on a war footing to address the issue of waterlogging before the onset of the monsoon. Desilting of drains, strengthening of drainage infrastructure, and close monitoring of vulnerable locations across the city are being carried out on priority.

In addition to that, modern machinery and advanced technologies are being deployed to ensure that citizens face minimal inconvenience during the rainy season. He further pointed out that accountability will be fixed on the concerned officials in the cases of waterlogging, and any negligence will be viewed seriously.

Additionally, in a move aimed at clearing long-standing bottlenecks for commuters, the MCD also cleared a revised budget of over Rs 131 crore for the construction of underground multi-level parking facilities in New Friends Colony, Jangpura and Kalkaji.

Upgrade of primary girls' school in Sirsapur

The House also passed a proposal on the construction of seven classrooms, one hall and toilet block in a primary girls' school in Sirsapur after demolition of portal cabins in Civil Lines Zone. The proposal is worth Rs 4.06 crore and has been framed on the basis of architectural drawings.

Delhi govt directs district magistrates to map pollution hotspots

The DMs have been asked to submit periodic progress reports and attend review meetings to monitor the implementation of action points and ensure time-bound outcomes.

New Delhi.(Agency)

The Delhi government on Thursday directed all district magistrates (DMs) to undertake an intensive mapping of pollution hotspots falling in their respective jurisdictions in close coordination with Delhi Police, Traffic Police, Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD), Public Works Department (PWD), Delhi Pollution Control Committee (DPCC) and all other agencies concerned.

The DMs have been asked to submit periodic progress reports and attend review meetings to monitor the implementation of action points and ensure time-bound outcomes. They also need to prepare a comprehensive



inventory of parks where boundary walls are damaged or maintenance is inadequate so that the necessary restoration work can be undertaken.

This came as Delhi Environment Minister Manjinder Singh Sirsa on Thursday chaired a comprehensive review meeting with all DMs of the National Capital Territory of Delhi to

formulate a coordinated district-level strategy for mitigating pollution and strengthening environmental governance across the Capital.

The minister said, "Dust pollution remains one of the most significant contributors to Delhi's deteriorating air quality. Every district magistrate must proactively identify sources of dust generation and work with all departments concerned to implement effective mitigation measures. Whether it is damaged roads, construction activity or poor maintenance, every source of dust must be addressed through coordinated and result-oriented action." The meeting focused on identifying pollution hotspots, improving traffic management.

Shalimar Bagh Fortis hospital under scanner, DM begins inquiry

New Delhi.(Agency)

Following complaints of irregularities and serious negligence in the treatment of patients at Fortis Hospital in Shalimar Bagh, Chief Minister Rekha Gupta ordered an inquiry into the hospital.

On Thursday, a team comprising officials from various departments inspected the hospital and found several irregularities. The government has decided to initiate action against the hospital. A detailed inquiry report is being prepared.

The inquiry was ordered after a family lodged a complaint with the Chief Minister during a public hearing at the Chief Minister Jan Seva Sadan. The family alleged that their son, who had been stabbed in the Shalimar Bagh area, was taken to Fortis



Hospital.

According to the family, the hospital demanded money before beginning his treatment. They further alleged that the delay in providing timely and appropriate treatment led to their son's death. Disturbed by the incident and the alleged irregularities and serious negligence in patient care, the CM ordered an inquiry into the matter.

On Thursday, a team led by SS Parihar, District Magistrate of the Central-North District, along with officials from the Health Department, the Municipal Corporation, the Fire Department and other departments, inspected the hospital.

During the inspection, the team found several irregularities, including misuse of building by-laws, illegal construction, deficiencies in the fire safety system, misuse of the basement, and serious lapses in adherence to the Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) governing medical protocols. The team also examined CCTV footage and found that the youth who later died after suffering a stab injury had walked into the emergency department on his own.

NIA charges 11 over bid to expand terror group's ideology in Bengal, Northeast

The central agency's probe has allegedly revealed the active involvement of the accused persons in a conspiracy to expand the radical ideology of Imam Mahmud Kafila (IMK) - an offshoot of Jama'atul Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB) - in West Bengal and north-eastern states.

New Delhi.(Agency)

The National Investigation Agency (NIA) has filed charges against 11 persons in connection with an alleged terror conspiracy orchestrated by an offshoot of the proscribed Jama'atul Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB) terrorist organisation.

The accused have been charged under various sections of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS) and the stringent Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA) for allegedly attempting to expand extremist ideology in multiple parts of India. The chargesheet has been filed before the special NIA court in Guwahati. The central agency's probe has allegedly revealed the active involvement of the accused persons in a

conspiracy to expand the radical ideology of Imam Mahmud Kafila (IMK) - a manifestation of the JMB - in West Bengal and north-eastern states, including Assam and Tripura.

The conspiracy allegedly involved promotion of the terror outfit's extremist agenda, radicalisation of vulnerable young people, and expansion of its network in India.

According to the NIA, its investigators found that IMK was established by Imam Mahmud Habibullah, senior member of the JMB, in order to promote the banned outfit's nefarious agenda on Indian soil. NIA investigations have also allegedly revealed that the 11

accused had conspired to grow the presence of IMK and JMB in the nation through clandestine meetings, religious



indoctrination programmes, circulation of extremist literature, and use of digital

platforms for anti-India propaganda.

They were promoting allegiance to the leadership of the two outfits, per the anti-terror agency. Two key accused among the 11 named in NIA's chargesheet have been identified as Nasimuddin, who was allegedly spearheading IMK's activities in Assam, and Jagir Mia, who is accused of leading the outfit in Tripura.

During the course of the investigation, NIA purportedly uncovered a trail of incriminating documents, electronic devices and digital records, which were used to build the case against the accused. Further investigation into the case is underway.

India's startup pipeline narrows despite rise in unicorns and IPOs in H1

New Delhi.(Agency)

India's technology startup ecosystem produced more unicorns and faster public listings in the first half of 2026, even as fewer new companies secured funding. Technology startups raised \$7.2 billion across 652 equity funding rounds between January 1 and June 24, according to Tracxn. While total funding rose 12% from a year earlier, the number of deals fell 43%, showing that investors continued to back fewer companies with larger investments.

First-time unded startups fell 31% year on year to 218, while the number of companies added to the Sounicorn Club dropped 47% to 54. Seed funding rounds declined to 420 from 938 in the second half of 2023, and the number of institutional investors active in India fell to 488 from a peak of 824 in H1 2024.

At the same time, companies that had already scaled continued to find routes to the public market. Thirteen technology companies completed initial public offerings during H1 2026, up from 12 a year earlier. Their average market capitalisation rose to \$297 million from \$162 million, while the average time from first funding to IPO fell to 8.1 years from 14.5 years. "The exits and unicorns visible today reflect capital deployed in earlier cycles; the depth of the next cycle will be determined by what is funded at seed today," Tracxn said. "The underlying pattern, fewer rounds at larger average size, has intensified every half-year since 2022 and reflects a settled investor discipline rather than a temporary reaction to macro uncertainty."

Five companies crossed the \$1 billion valuation mark during the period, compared with four in H1 2025. AI infrastructure company Neysa and AI startup Sarvam, both founded in 2023, reached unicorn status within 1.3 years and 2.5 years, respectively. KreditBee, Skyroot and Square Yards also joined the unicorn club after taking between eight and 12 years to reach the milestone.

If silver holds \$50-55 levels, current decline can be a healthy correction: Advait Arora

MUMBAI.(Agency)

Silver prices have dropped about 47% from their peak this year so far. While it has regaled the hearts of consumers, it has certainly disheartened a lot of investors. Ace investor Advait Arora feels the descent of the white metal is not something to despair about. In fact, he has called it a "healthy correction" and is bullish about the long term prospects of the precious metal. "It rallied from around \$30 to more than \$100 in less than a year, delivering returns that very few asset classes could match," writes Arora in social media. After the prices reached a record level of \$108, the precious metal has corrected to around \$56 levels now.

Chances of further decline

Arora thinks it is "absolutely" possible for silver to climb to lower levels compared to its current price. "The \$50-\$55 region is the most important support area on the chart. We are actually right there today. If buyers defend that zone, the broader bullish structure remains intact. If that level breaks decisively, the correction could become deeper and last longer than many investors expect," he said. The investor also added that there is a probability of silver staying in the \$55-80 zone and not jumping back to its heights soon.

Short-term view

Arora's short term is neutral. "The chart is still showing a series of lower highs and lower lows. Until silver can convincingly break above the current falling trendline and reclaim the \$75-\$80 zone, I would view the metal as being in a consolidation phase rather than the start of a fresh bull run," wrote the investor.

Long-term view

When it comes to the outlook on the metal in the long-term, Arora describes it as a "very constructive". By long term he means a view of two years and more. "I believe the reasons that drove silver higher have not disappeared," he said and proceeded to enlist them. These are:

Micron overtakes Meta in market value as AI boom fuels rally

New Delhi.(Agency)

Micron Technology's market value surged past that of Meta Platforms and ahead of Tesla on Thursday, as investors responded positively to the company's latest outlook and growing exposure to the artificial intelligence sector. The memory chipmaker's shares skyrocketed 18.4% to \$1,236, lifting its market capitalisation to \$1.398 trillion, placing it above Meta, which was valued at \$1.392 trillion, while Tesla stood at \$1.4 trillion. The strong performance came after Micron's fourth-quarter forecast released a day earlier, in which the company projected stronger revenue and profit. The company also revealed that customers have committed \$22 billion to secure future supplies of memory chips, helping to ease concerns after a recent decline in its share price. Micron became a trillion-dollar company on May 26 as enthusiasm around artificial intelligence continued to drive investment into companies supplying key technologies for the sector. The milestone came after Samsung Electronics also joined the trillion-dollar club. The company's rise comes amid increasing demand for memory and storage products required to build and operate AI systems.

Developers are expanding data-centre infrastructure and seeking long-term access to critical hardware, while memory manufacturers are benefiting from demand for high-bandwidth memory and storage solutions used in AI training and deployment. Earlier this week, Micon announced a new agreement with Anthropic covering the supply of memory and storage products. The deal also includes a strategic investment by Micron in Anthropic's latest funding round ahead of the AI company's planned stock market debut. As part of the partnership, the two companies will examine how memory and storage technologies perform across AI workloads and how they interact with broader infrastructure systems. "Our compute strategy depends on getting every layer of the stack right, and memory and storage are central to how efficiently we can train and serve Claude," Tom Brown, Anthropic's co-founder and chief compute officer, told Reuters.

Govt restores commercial LPG supply to pre-West Asia crisis levels; eases restrictions

The move comes after the government reviewed the country's fuel availability and found that both domestic production and imported LPG supplies have improved.

New Delhi.(Agency)

Industrial and commercial users of liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) have received a major relief as the Centre has restored the supply of non-domestic packed LPG to the levels that existed before the West Asia crisis. The move comes after the government reviewed the country's fuel availability and found that both domestic production and imported LPG supplies have improved. As a result, restrictions that had been imposed to protect household LPG supplies have now been withdrawn.

COMMERCIAL USERS TO RECEIVE FULL NON-DOMESTIC LPG

SUPPLIES

The Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas, in a statement on Thursday, announced that all sector-specific restrictions on the supply of non-domestic packed LPG have been removed. This means hotels, restaurants, small businesses and other commercial users will once again receive supplies as they did before the crisis. The government has also relaxed the suspension on bulk LPG supplies. Industrial and commercial consumers using bulk LPG will now receive up to 50% of their pre-crisis consumption, offering significant relief to several sectors that had been facing supply constraints.

WHY WERE THE RESTRICTIONS INTRODUCED?

The restrictions were introduced after the West Asia crisis disrupted global energy supplies and created uncertainty over LPG availability. To make sure domestic households did not face any shortage, the government had directed that C3 and C4

hydrocarbon streams should be used only for producing LPG. These raw materials were temporarily diverted away from



commitment to expanding the use of Piped Natural Gas (PNG).

Commercial and industrial consumers who have already shifted to PNG will continue using it. Businesses that have access to PNG networks, or are in the process of switching, will gradually be moved from LPG to PNG in coordination with City Gas Distribution companies. The government believes this will improve energy efficiency while ensuring LPG remains available for consumers who need it most.

BETTER MONITORING OF COMMERCIAL LPG SUPPLIES

The government has also instructed Oil Marketing Companies (OMCs) to continue maintaining detailed records of commercial and industrial LPG consumers. A common database will be created across all OMCs to improve planning, monitoring and supply management.

Will DA rise before the 8th Pay Commission? Here's what the latest data suggests

The wait for the 8th Pay Commission continues, but all eyes are now on the next DA revision. As inflation remains elevated and the July review draws closer, is another DA hike just around the corner?

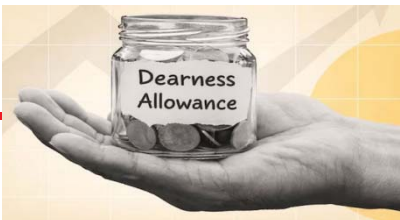
New Delhi.(Agency)

Central government employees may have to wait a little longer for the much-awaited 8th Pay Commission, but there could be some good news before that. While the new pay panel is still at the discussion stage, another Dearness Allowance (DA) hike could arrive much sooner. With July just around the corner and inflation remaining elevated, expectations are growing that employees and pensioners could soon see another increase in their DA. Although there has been no official announcement yet, the

latest inflation figures have added to hopes of a fresh revision.

WHY IS ANOTHER DA HIKE BEING DISCUSSED?

The Centre revises the Dearness Allowance twice every year, usually with



effect from January and July. The allowance is meant to help government employees and pensioners deal with the rising cost of living. The final DA rate is worked out using the Consumer Price Index for Industrial Workers (CPI-IW), which tracks changes in retail prices. Once the required data is available, the government calculates the revised rate

before seeking Cabinet approval. Since the recommendations of the 8th Pay Commission are yet to be implemented, employees will continue to receive DA revisions under the 7th Pay Commission framework.

WHAT DO THE LATEST INFLATION NUMBERS SHOW?

The latest provisional inflation data for May 2026 indicates that price pressures remain noticeable. According to the figures, the overall consumer inflation rate stood at 3.93% in May, up from 3.48% in April. In rural areas, inflation rose to 4.25% from 3.74%, while urban inflation increased to 3.53% from 3.16%. Food inflation also moved higher. The All India Consumer Food Price Index (CFPI) showed food inflation at 4.78% in May compared with 4.20% in April. Rural food inflation climbed to 4.85%, while urban food inflation reached 4.66%. The rise in both overall inflation and food prices suggests that the cost of everyday essentials remains under pressure.

Apple hikes MacBook Pro, iPad Air prices in India by up to Rs 35,000 amid rising chip costs

New Delhi.(Agency)

Apple has increased the starting prices of MacBook and iPad models by 20-42 per cent compared to their launch prices across the globe, including India, mainly due to higher memory chip costs.

The new price list on Apple India's website shows that the company has increased the price of the MacBook Pro built on the M5 series chip by about 20 per cent. The price of the 14-inch MacBook Pro with the M5 Pro chip has been increased to Rs 2,99,900 apiece from the launch price of Rs 2,49,900 a unit. There has been a sharp rise in the price of the iPad Air. The basic model in the 13-inch iPad Air has been increased by 41.22 per cent to Rs 1,19,900 apiece from Rs 84,900 a unit. Counterpoint Research Co-founder and VP for Research, Neil Shah, said Apple's price hikes for the MacBook Neo, MacBook Air, MacBook Pro, iPad Air, and iPad Pro Wi-Fi follow the biggest change in the cost structure of the consumer and enterprise PC and tablet market, being

shaped by the rising semiconductor chip pricing from memory to processor. Apple, in a statement, said that the consumer electronics industry is facing an unprecedented challenge. "The rapid expansion of AI data centres has created an extraordinary surge in demand for memory and storage. We have never seen a component price increase this much, this quickly." We have shielded our customers from these increases so far, but we have now reached a point where we need to begin raising prices on a number of products, including today's increases for iPad and Mac. We know this is not welcome news, and we are working tirelessly to find solutions," the statement said. Price increases for consumer electronics are already widespread across the industry, with many products rising by 40 per cent or more. Memory companies have been allocating an increasing share of their production to AI data centres, leaving the consumer electronics segment with constrained availability and rising

costs. Memory suppliers are reporting margins at historic highs. Memory chip leader Micron reported 86 per cent gross margins, up from 15 per cent in just the past year. Apple, long regarded as the industry's benchmark for supply chain resilience, has begun passing higher component costs on to consumers. That is a strong signal that pricing pressures have reached a level that even the most sophisticated absorption strategies cannot fully offset," CyberMedia Research, VP - Industry Research Group, Shah said. Apple held the price increase for at least two quarters, protecting its user base from any price inflation, but it has reached a point beyond which Apple could absorb the cost increase. "The unprecedented AI infrastructure growth has changed the semiconductor supply chain, driving insatiable demand for DRAM, NAND and Compute chips, not matching up to the capacity to produce and supply to other markets as AI infrastructure is prioritised.



broad-based selloff across Asian markets on June 23. The broader MSCI Asia-Pacific index excluding Japan fell 3.8%, putting it on track for its biggest weekly decline in over a year after an extraordinary rally earlier this quarter.

The selloff followed sharp overnight losses on Wall Street, where Apple erased nearly \$250 billion in market value after announcing price increases for iPads and MacBooks to offset soaring memory and storage chip costs. Apple's shares plunged 6.1%, raising concerns that rising AI infrastructure and semiconductor costs are beginning to squeeze even the world's largest technology companies. The move dampened enthusiasm generated just a day earlier by memory-chip giant Micron Technology, whose blockbuster earnings had fuelled optimism around AI demand and sent its shares to record highs. "Apple's price increases were a reflection of how big tech may at some point start to feel the pain of these higher component costs," Charu Chanana, chief investment strategist at Saxo, told news agency Reuters. That can become a broader ecosystem headwind. Higher input costs, heavier capital expenditure and rising funding needs are making investors more selective about AI exposure. "The technology-heavy selloff was particularly severe across Asia.

Will your family get your EPF pension after your death? Here's what you need to know

Malhotra said the RBI is keeping an eye on whether higher oil prices start affecting the prices of other goods and services across the economy. According to him, such broader inflationary pressure has not appeared so far.

New Delhi.(Agency)

A friend recently told me about a colleague who lost her husband unexpectedly. In the middle of the grief, there were countless questions to deal with—bank accounts, insurance papers and office formalities. But one question kept coming up: Will the family continue to receive any pension from his EPF account?

It's not something most of us think about while we're busy earning a living. Yet, understanding what happens to your EPF pension after your death can make a world of difference to the people you leave behind. The Employees' Pension Scheme

(EPS), linked to the Employees' Provident Fund (EPF), is designed to do exactly that, i.e., provide financial support to your family when they need it the most.

YOUR EPF PENSION DOESN'T ALWAYS END WITH YOU

Many salaried employees believe that once they are gone, their EPF benefits end too. That isn't entirely true. While the provident fund balance is settled separately, the pension component under the EPS can continue to provide a monthly income to eligible family members. According to Adhil Shetty, CEO of BankBazaar, even a short period of contribution can make a difference. "When an EPF member passes away, their pension benefits transition into a lifelong monthly financial safety net for their family, provided the member contributed for at least a month," he says. That means if an employee had made at least one month's contribution to the pension scheme, the family may become

eligible for monthly pension benefits.

WHO RECEIVES THE PENSION AFTER THE MEMBER'S DEATH?

The first person entitled to receive the pension is usually the surviving spouse.



Shetty explains that the widow or widower receives a monthly pension for life or until remarriage. The amount is generally 50% of the member's calculated pension, subject to a minimum monthly pension of Rs 450.

Children are also covered under the scheme.

"Additionally, up to two children receive a monthly support pension of 25% of the spouse's pension amount until they turn 25," says Shetty. If both parents are no longer alive, the scheme provides even greater support. "If both parents are deceased, the children receive an enhanced orphan pension, which is 75% of the spouse's pension value," he adds. This ensures that children continue to receive financial assistance during their formative years.

WHAT IF THERE IS NO SPOUSE OR CHILDREN?

Every family is different, and the pension scheme takes that into account. If the member has no surviving spouse or eligible children, the pension can still reach the people who depended on them

financially. "In the absence of a spouse or children, the pension is payable to the dependent parents or a nominee designated by the member, keeping the family's financial stability intact," says Shetty.

Short news

State ordered to set up SIT probe in Pune realtor murder

Mumbai.(Agency)

The presiding officer in the state assembly, Raju Khare, directed the government to set up an SIT probe in the Ketan Agarwal murder case at Pune's Lohagad on Thursday. "This is a serious issue. An SIT probe should be conducted," said Khare. The demand for the probe was made by BJP MLA Sudhir Mungantiwar.

The issue was raised in the assembly by NCP's Sunil Shelke, who demanded action against the accused Siya Goyal's family. "Siya Goyal was in relationship with her companion for many months but her family hid it from Ketan's family. Action should be taken against them and there should be a trial in a fast-track court," said Shelke. However, SS UBT MLA Bhaskar Jadhav sought clarification on whether a decision taken by the presiding officer has any bearing on the government. He pointed to the incident in March when deputy chairperson of the state council Neelam Gorhe had suspended the superintendent of police in Satara for allegedly manhandling cabinet minister Shamburaj Desai during the zilla parishad polls. Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis did not allow the suspension and said the legislature could not interfere in the functioning of the executive.

7-foot python rescued from village near Dholka in Gujarat

Gandhinagar.(Agency)

An Indian rock python about 7 feet long was rescued from Ruggadh village in Dholka taluka of Ahmedabad district on Wednesday. The snake was spotted by villagers who informed the rescuers.

Villagers called up animal rescuer, Sanket Mistry, after spotting that snake in the farms surrounding the village. "With the guidance of range forest officer A A Bhaliya and forester D B Chavda, our rescuers reached the spot and rescued the python. We released it in its natural habitat away from the village," he said.

Mistry said the python is a calm and non-venomous snake that plays an important role in maintaining ecological balance. The rescue team comprised Anuj Sathwara, Jitu



Meraiya, Sultan Kothariya, Gopal Dabhi, and Vimal Kadiya. Wildlife experts noted that monsoons often push reptiles out of flooded burrows into human settlements in search of dry shelter and food sources like rodents. The forest department has urged citizens to report snake sightings immediately instead of taking matters into their own hands.

26 affected by demolition in Nasir Nagar move HC

Surat.(Agency)

Twenty-six residents affected by the demolition in Nasir Nagar have filed a special civil application in Gujarat High Court challenging the razing of more than 100 houses by the Surat Municipal Corporation (SMC).

The petitioners alleged that the demolition was carried out without following due process. They claimed they were neither served notices nor given prior intimation before their homes were razed and argued that the action violated their rights.

The petition has been filed against the SMC and several municipal officials, as well as senior police officials. The petitioners have additionally named certain private parties whom they allege were linked to the demolition.

The high court is scheduled to hear the matter on Monday.

The demolition was carried out on May 30, 2026, with heavy machinery and a large workforce. According to the petition, the operation took place in the presence of municipal officials and police personnel.

Following the demolition, residents alleged that the action was sudden and undertaken without compliance with mandatory procedures. They claimed they were denied an opportunity to respond or seek legal remedy as no formal notices were issued.

The controversy also involves conflicting statements from civic authorities. Officials of SMC's central zone initially denied involvement in the demolition. Municipal commissioner M Nagarajan maintained the same position until June 20, when he acknowledged in a video message that the action was carried out by the SMC. He, however, declined to comment on procedural compliance or reason for the razing, stating that the matter was sub judice. In a separate video message issued on June 11, central zone head Ashish Naik said SMC teams visited the site for demarcation work.

Hunger, beatings and a pitbull: 12 men recount bonded labour horror in UP

Lucknow.(Agency)

For three months, 68-year-old Meharbaan Shah lived in uncertainty. He didn't know if his son, Dilshad Mohammad, his youngest, was alive. The 24-year-old had left home in Uttar Pradesh's Amroha district five months ago, hoping to find work and support his family. For the first few weeks, Dilshad regularly called his wife, Gulista Begum. Then, one day, the calls stopped. "We looked for him everywhere..." said Meharbaan. "After exhausting every possibility, I left it to God. Gulista, too, lost hope... she believed something terrible must have happened to Dilshad... she returned to her parents' home with their young son."

On Tuesday, Meharbaan's phone rang — it was his son. Dilshad and 11 other men had been rescued on Monday by the Muzaffarnagar Police from a factory manufacturing disposable leaf plates in Titawi area, where they were allegedly held as bonded labourers. Police said the workers were confined for months, forced to work for up to 20 hours a day, subjected to repeated physical abuse.

'One meal, beaten with sticks, no phones': 12 men rescued from UP factory recall horror



The weapons used to torture the men, seized by police. (Muzaffarnagar Police/@muzaffarnagarpol)

"When I heard my son's voice, I was so overwhelmed that I couldn't speak for a few moments," recalled Meharbaan. "The first thing I asked was where he was. He said Muzaffarnagar. I immediately asked him to come home." For Dilshad, the three months at the factory were like living in hell.

Story continues below. Subscribe to see fewer ads. "We were never allowed to leave the premises," he told The Indian Express over the phone. "If anyone asked to go home, questioned the conditions, or even slept for more than three or four hours, they were

beaten and tortured. They also took away my mobile phone, so I had no way of telling my family or anyone outside what we were enduring." "One meal, beaten with sticks, no phones": 12 men rescued from UP factory recall horror The 12 men are served lunch by the police. On Monday, a joint team of the police, district administration and labour department raided the manufacturing unit in Mandi village after receiving information from a man who had reportedly escaped from the factory.

The men, aged between 16 and 44, from Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Chhattisgarh, Haryana and Rajasthan, were rescued.

Police have arrested two people: Pradeep Balyan (49), father of factory owner Ankit Balyan; and Ankit's associate, Shiva Tyagi (26). Ankit is on the run; police said multiple teams are conducting raids to arrest him.

Story continues below. Subscribe to see fewer ads. The accused have been booked under sections of the Child and Adolescent Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Act, 1986; the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2015; and the Bonded Labour System (Abolition) Act, 1976.

Gujarat HC dismisses plea on 'ASI survey' of Somnath Temple, imposes Rs 2 lakh costs on petitioner

Vadodara.(Agency)

THE GUJARAT High Court (HC) on Thursday dismissed a Public Interest Litigation (PIL) concerning the Somnath Temple, holding that it was based on unverified claims sourced from newspaper reports and social media posts and imposed exemplary costs of Rs 2 lakh on the petitioner.

A Division Bench comprising Chief Justice Sunita Agarwal and Justice D N Ray accepted the State government's contention that the petition was devoid of merit and amounted to an abuse of the PIL jurisdiction.

The petitioner, Vilas Tukaram Kharat, a resident of Maharashtra, had sought disclosure of an alleged archaeological survey purportedly conducted beneath the Somnath Temple by the Archaeological



Survey of India (ASI) and IIT Gandhinagar.

During the hearing, Government Pleader G H Virk, appearing for the State, argued that the petition was a "publicity litigation" intended to embroil the Shree Somnath Trust — one of the respondents to the petition — in an "unwarranted" controversy. He also pointed out factual inaccuracies in the pleadings, including the petitioner's reliance on a

purported "Shree Somnath Trust Act, 1955", although no such legislation exists.

The Bench questioned the petitioner on why he had invoked the court's PIL jurisdiction without first approaching the competent authorities to obtain the information sought. The court further noted that although Kharat claimed to represent an NGO, Sanatan Dhamm, he had neither disclosed his occupation nor produced any material to establish his association with the organisation.

The petitioner also admitted during the hearing that the allegations in the PIL were founded entirely on newspaper reports and social media posts. Observing that such petitions undermine the credibility of genuine public interest litigation, the HC dismissed the plea and imposed costs of Rs 2 lakh on the petitioner.

BDA clarifies viral road 'settlement' photos from earlier stage of construction

The authority said the affected portion was subsequently refilled, re-compacted and resurfaced, restoring the road to its original design level.

BENGALURU.(Agency)

The Bangalore Development Authority (BDA) has issued a clarification regarding photographs circulating on social media showing a "localised settlement" on the Major Arterial Road at Nadaprabhu Kempegowda Layout, stating that the images relate to an earlier stage of construction and do not reflect the present condition of the project.

The clarification comes ahead of the inauguration of the Major Arterial Road, with the BDA asserting that the settlement had occurred during the execution stage and was immediately rectified.

According to the BD, the inauguration is only for the main carriageway of the MAR, while service roads are not part of the inauguration. Construction of service roads at five

locations is incomplete due to court stay, and these stretches have not been opened. The authority said the



location shown in the circulated photographs is situated on the left-hand side service road near Chainage 6.40 km within the Sulikere Reserve Forest area. A reinforced cement concrete (RCC) animal crossing box structure measuring 4 m x 4 m and two RCC box culverts have been constructed there. BDA said the

embankment is about seven metres high and achieving the required compaction adjacent to RCC structures was technically challenging due to restrictions on machinery movement within the reserve forest, limited working space and the need to avoid damage to the RCC structures.

During recent rainfall, while service road construction was still under way, a localised settlement of about 300 mm occurred in the embankment

fill adjacent to the animal crossing structure. BDA said there was no structural damage, cracking or distress to the RCC structures.

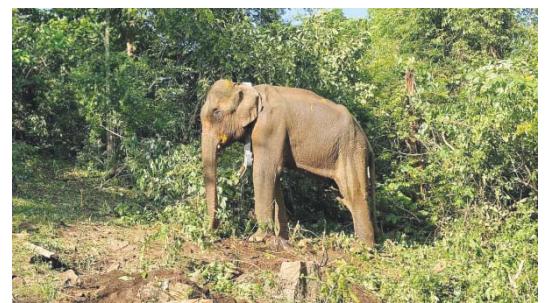
The authority said the affected portion was subsequently refilled, re-compacted and resurfaced, restoring the road to its original design level.

Mouth injuries found in rogue makhna elephant captured in Kothamangalam

KOCHU.(Agency)

The rogue makhna elephant from Pindimana near Kothamangalam in Ernakulam district, which was tranquilised and radio-collared by the Forest Department on Thursday, had suffered injuries to its mouth, veterinarians who examined the animal said.

A makhna is a male elephant that does not have tusks. According to the veterinarians, the teeth on the left side of the elephant's mouth were damaged. Forest officials



suspect that the injury may have been caused when the elephant bit into a cracker-filled pot.

Members of the Rapid Response Team (RRT), who had been monitoring the makhna, said the elephant was feeding only on grass. Though it was first darted with a tranquilliser at around 8.30 am, the animal continued moving deeper into the forest. Two more tranquilliser shots were administered at 2 pm and 3.30 pm before it could be brought under control.

Environmentalists flag sewage pollution, poor water quality at KBR Park lake in Hyderabad

HYDERABAD.(Agency)

Even as concerns mount over tree felling and infrastructure activity around the Kasu Brahmananda Reddy National Park, environmentalists have now turned their gaze inward — to the park's polluted lake.

Fresh allegations have emerged that a stormwater drain (SWD) meant to channel clear rainwater into the waterbody has been deliberately blocked, even as sewage continues to flow in from surrounding localities. With walkers reporting no improvement despite past interventions, the lake's ecological health is once again under scrutiny. The issue surfaced after recent rainfall when an environmentalist and regular walkers noticed that an SWD connecting the park's walking track to the lake had been blocked by a large stone placed at the mouth of the inlet pipe. The

drain is designed to carry rainwater collected from the walking circuit into the lake during the monsoon. "The stone appears to have been deliberately placed. It is not something that could have naturally washed into position. The drain meant to carry clean rainwater has been blocked while sewage continues to enter the lake," an environmentalist alleged. A post by Vata Foundation on X stated: "KBR Park in the heart of Hyderabad is already getting choked by concrete outside in the form of flyovers and underpasses. The lake inside the park too needs immediate attention. The lake inside KBR is being fed with sewage while stormwater is being blocked from entering the lake. Why?" Walkers said the blocked inlet is one of several stormwater connections feeding the lake. They alleged that other drains entering from the Film

Nagar side have long been carrying sewage and polluted water, making the obstruction of a clean-water inlet particularly woThe issue adds to complaints dating back to 2023, with residents, walkers and environmentalists alleging that sewage from surrounding residential and commercial areas enters stormwater drains connected to the park before flowing into the lake and downstream waterbodies. Reports over the past several years have documented sewage inflows from Film Nagar and nearby localities. In June 2024, visitors told media outlets that a drainage segregation pump installed by the Hyderabad Metropolitan Water Supply and Sewerage Board (HMWSSB) had failed to permanently resolve the problem, with sewage continuing to enter the lake and flow towards Lotus Pond.

Sources familiar with the issue said authorities have been relying on a temporary sump-and-pump arrangement to divert sewage. Environmental groups, however, contend that the measure has not provided a lasting solution and contaminated water continues to enter the lake. Activists have also flagged structural damage near the waterbody. A section of the retaining wall adjoining the lake has reportedly collapsed and remains unrepaired. Some suspect recent underground utility works, including optical fibre cable laying, may have weakened the structure, although this could not be independently verified.

According to Telangana Pollution Control Board data, the lake's dissolved oxygen level averages around 4 mg/l against the required 10 mg/l, indicating poor water quality and ecological stress.

NEWS BOX

Bengal T20 League: Shahbaz Ahmed sends clear message to youngsters chasing IPL contracts

New Delhi.. (Agency)

The Bengal T20 League has established itself as one of the state's leading platforms for identifying emerging talent. The competition offers young cricketers the opportunity to play alongside established domestic and IPL names, while performing in front of Cricket Association of Bengal officials, state selectors and IPL scouts. Strong performances in the league have regularly been rewarded with opportunities at the senior domestic level. This year's edition again highlighted the depth of Bengal's white-ball talent. Experienced players led from the front, while several uncapped cricketers made a strong impression with consistent displays. The tournament also reinforced the value of senior professionals mentoring younger teammates during high-pressure matches, a factor that proved important in Rarh Tigers' title-winning campaign. Rarh Tigers finished top of the league table before defeating Sobisco Smashers Malda by nine runs via the DLS method in a rain-affected final to claim their maiden Bengal T20 League title. Reduced to



10 for 3 in a 15-over contest, the Tigers recovered through captain Shahbaz Ahmed's unbeaten 88 from 46 balls, an innings featuring seven fours and six sixes. Gaurav Singh Chauhan provided crucial support with 55 off 30 deliveries as Rarh posted 165 for 4. Malda were set a revised target of 107 in nine overs but ended on 97 for 5 despite Abhimanyu Easwaran's 38 off 22 balls. Sukmeet Singh took two wickets, while Raju Halder and Rohit Kumar claimed one each to secure the title for Rarh Tigers. Shahbaz, retained for the highest fee ahead of the season, capped another productive all-round campaign. The India all-rounder believes the tournament has unearthed several players capable of representing Bengal in the years ahead. He highlighted Rahul Prasad, Rohit and Gaurav Singh Chauhan among those who impressed and said competitions such as the Bengal T20 League provide an important pathway from age-group cricket to the senior domestic game.

National holiday declared in Ecuador after country qualifies for World Cup knockouts

New Delhi. (Agency)

Ecuador declared a national holiday after the country's football team reached the FIFA World Cup knockout stage for the first time in 20 years. Ecuador sealed the qualification place with a dramatic 2-1 comeback victory over Germany in their final group-stage match on Friday, June 26. President Daniel Noboa announced the decision soon after the result, praising the players and coaching staff for overcoming criticism and delivering one of Ecuador's biggest football achievements in



recent history. Thanks to the players and the coach who, despite the criticism, the insults, and the tough times they went through, managed to bounce back and bring this immense joy to the entire country. Tomorrow, holiday! Long live Ecuador," Noboa posted on social media. **ECUADOR vs GERMANY: AS IT HAPPENED**

The celebrations came after Ecuador produced their biggest result in two decades under enormous pressure. Having entered a difficult campaign in the first two matches of the tournament, Ecuador entered the game threatened by the prospect of a group-stage elimination. Germany had already secured qualification and top spot in Group E before kickoff and arrived looking to carry momentum into the Round of 32. Ecuador, meanwhile, had not scored a single goal in the tournament and knew there would be no second chances. Things could hardly have started worse. Germany struck in just the second minute through Leroy Sane, but the goal immediately became a source of controversy. The move began after Aleksandar Pavlovic appeared to catch Ecuador midfielder Pedro Vite with a high boot while flicking the ball into the path of Florian Wirtz. Ecuador protested furiously, expecting play to be brought back for a foul, but referee Tori Penso allowed the goal to stand and VAR chose not to intervene.

FIFA World Cup 2026 becomes highest-scoring edition ever, eclipses Qatar 2022 record

The FIFA World Cup 2026 has already entered the record books. Barely past the group stage, the expanded tournament became the highest-scoring edition in history. Lionel Messi leads the goalscoring charts at the moment with 5 strikes to his name.

New Delhi. (Agency)

Barely past the group stage, FIFA World Cup 2026 is already the highest-scoring edition in history of the tournament. The ongoing edition of football's biggest event rewrote the record books on Thursday, June 25, during the United States' final Group D match against Turkey, when defender Auston Trusty scored the 173rd goal of the competition to move past the previous all-time record of 172 goals set at the 2022 FIFA World Cup in Qatar. The hands of other teams. And the goals did not stop there. Turkey and the United States combined for four more strikes in a dramatic contest that ended in a 3-2 win for the Turkish side, taking



the overall tally of the tournament to 177 goals with the group stage still not fully complete. What makes the number stand out is the speed at which it arrived. The previous record of 172 goals had required all 64 matches of the Qatar World Cup to be completed. World Cup 2026 crossed that mark in only its 59th match - in the group stage. Of course, context matters. This edition is the first under FIFA's expanded 48-team format and will feature 104 matches

in total - 40 more than the previous structure. More games naturally create more opportunities for goals. Yet even accounting for the expansion, the tournament has carried a noticeably attacking flavour, with several traditional heavyweights leaning into aggressive football and elite forwards delivering consistently.

LIONEL MESSI LEADING THE CHARTS

Was 16-year-old Sachin as viral as Sooryavanshi before his India debut?

Long before algorithms and reels, a 16-year-old Sachin Tendulkar captivated India without a single smartphone in sight. As Vaibhav Sooryavanshi debuts, we revisit an analogue era when a nation fell for a myth built on whispers.

New Delhi. (Agency)

Your phone buzzes. A high-definition vertical video rolls down your feed, set to a bass-heavy Anirudh track. A 15-year-old kid with a helmet three sizes too big effortlessly steps inside a 145 clicks thunderbolt and deposits it into the second tier of an IPL stadium. Within thirty seconds, you've dissected his wrist-work, liked the post, and decided exactly where he fits in the pantheon of Indian greats. Before Vaibhav Sooryavanshi has even earned his senior cap, likely in Ireland later today, he

has already been algorithmically mapped, memeified, and consumed by millions. By the time he makes his international debut, there is nothing left to discover. His rise has unfolded entirely in a public cloud. Which raises a rather surreal question: If this is how we discover our geniuses today, how



on earth did India discover Sachin Tendulkar in 1989? For anyone under thirty, teenage Sachin is essentially family folklore. We didn't discover him through an algorithm; we inherited him from our fathers, who leaned back in their chairs to recite the

gospel of a bloodied nose in Sialkot and four legendary sixes against Abdul Qadir in Peshawar. We treat those grainy, endlessly recycled clips as Sachin's definitive origin story, none more famous than that iconic, slightly awkward BBC interview where a curly-haired teenager softly explains his game to Tom Alter. By the time Tendulkar walked out for his Test debut in Karachi, India wasn't discovering a teenager; they were unveiling a deity. Long before anyone pointed a heavy television camera at him, fans knew his name, journalists queued at his school gates, and purists travelled across state lines just to watch a child bat.

Today, seeing is the absolute prerequisite for believing. We demand visual proof in milliseconds. But in the mid-1980s, India had no glowing glass rectangles. You couldn't stream Azad Maidan or track a schoolboy's strike rate on an app. Instead, a simple four-word sentence travelled across the country like high-grade espionage: "There is a boy."

Man City agree club-record deal with Forest to sign World Cup star Elliot Anderson

New Delhi. (Agency)

Manchester City have agreed a club-record £116 million (\$153 million) with Nottingham Forest to sign England midfielder Elliot Anderson, with the 23-year-old set to undergo a medical before completing his move to the Etihad Stadium. According to BBC Sport, City sources said the transfer fee is a fixed £116 million with no add-ons. However, other reports have claimed the deal could rise to £130 million, which would make Anderson the most expensive British player in history. The agreement came after Forest rejected two previous bids before accepting City's improved third offer. Personal terms are not expected to be an issue.

Anderson is currently with England at the FIFA World Cup, where he is preparing for Saturday's Group L match against Panama. Speaking earlier this week, he said his focus remains firmly on international duty. "It's pretty easy really, I'm just focusing on the present, I'm blocking it all out," Anderson

told BBC Sport.

"I've got a plan and it's to perform for England. I'm putting myself in the best position to cross the line and do that."



Anderson joined Forest from Newcastle United for £35 million in 2024 after the Magpies sanctioned his sale to comply with the Premier League's Profit and Sustainability Rules (PSR). Newcastle manager Eddie Howe later described it as

"the most reluctant" sale of his managerial career. The midfielder made an immediate impact at Forest, making 88 appearances and scoring four goals. He helped the club qualify for European competition in the 2024-25 season before playing a key role in their run to the Europa League semi-finals last term.

After representing Scotland at youth level, Anderson switched allegiance to England Under-21s in 2024 and made his senior debut in September 2025.

During the 2025-26 Premier League season, Anderson recorded the most touches (3,300), possessions won (306), duels won (297) and fouls drawn (80), while scoring four league goals.

Forest are expected to reinvest the transfer fee, with Tottenham's Lucas Bergvall and Inter Milan midfielder Davide Frattesi among the players they are considering as midfield reinforcements.

Leading the Golden Boot race is Argentina captain Lionel Messi, who already has five goals to his name and has once again turned up at football's biggest stage. Messi scored his first-ever hat-trick in a World Cup game when he played against Riyadh Mahrez's Algeria. Close behind him are Norway's Erling Haaland, France's Kylian Mbappe and Brazil's Vinicius Junior, all sitting on four goals each after strong starts to the tournament. Even Cristiano Ronaldo, who entered the competition under scrutiny over his place in Portugal's setup, has chipped in with two goals and still has one final group-stage fixture left to play. The attacking quality across the board has become one of the defining themes of the tournament so far. Reacting to the milestone, FIFA president Gianni Infantino celebrated the achievement on social media. "Surpassing the previous highest of 172 goals from Qatar underscores the excitement and attacking prowess that have already made the 2026 FIFA World Cup so. With the knockouts yet to begin and nearly half the tournament still remaining, the final scoring tally could end up setting a benchmark that future editions may struggle to reach. Unforgettable," Infantino wrote.

Anushka Yadav's heavy metal miracle at The Kalinga

Bhubaneswar. (Agency)

In the cage, the world is restricted to a circular 2.135 meters. Out there, in the distance where the hammer lands, reside fame and fortune, certainly, but also something far more precious, self-respect and a sense of belonging within the hammer throwing fraternity. The community is close-knit, self-contained, and entirely unflamboyant. Unlike the explosive sprinters or the theatrical shot-putters, their expressions, even while competing, remain concealed behind a dense curtain of chains, removed from the direct connection that athletes in other events enjoy with the crowd. They tend to keep to themselves. Unless someone is exceptionally open, venturing beyond the familiar company of fellow throwers and family, coaxing them into conversation is much like attempting a hammer throw without the ball and chain; plenty of effort, but nothing really moves.

On the evening of June 24, 2026, an extremely humid night, eleven women hammer throwers lined up at the Kalinga Stadium in Bhubaneswar. At stake was qualification for the upcoming 2026 Asian Games. Anushka Yadav was there, the 18-year-old 2025 National Games champion with a



personal best of 62.89m. Training alongside her was her senior partner, Tanya Chaudhary, 7th at the 2022 Asian Games with a personal best of 65.77m, on paper Delhi's Harshita Sehrawat, the 2024 Interstate Champion with a personal best of 62.77m, and the 2026 Federation Cup champion, Punjab's Manpreet Kaur, rounded out a formidable field.

Also in the fray were Fed Cup silver medallist, Rajasthan's Kulvinder, and the bronze medallist Divya Shandilya of the host state, Odisha.

FROM DARK HORSE TO CHAMPION

Before the competition, and through the tense lead-up, a quiet conversation had been building around Anushka. She was spoken of not only as a dark horse for qualification, but whispers from the training camps suggested her practice throws were consistently crossing the 70m mark.

That straight away made her the perceived frontrunner even though critics pointed toward her age, just 18, and questioned whether she could handle the suffocating stress of a major national trial. r, the definitive favourite.

Australia reach knockouts after Paraguay draw; USA top Group D despite Turkey defeat

FIFA World Cup: Australia booked their place in the Round of 32 after holding Paraguay to a hard-fought 0-0 draw in their final Group D match on Thursday, while the United States finished top of the group despite suffering a dramatic 3-2 defeat to Turkey in Los Angeles.

New Delhi. (Agency)

Australia secured a place in the FIFA World Cup Round of 32 after playing out a tense 0-0 draw with Paraguay in their final Group D match on Thursday, while the United States finished top of the standings despite a dramatic 3-2 defeat to Turkey. The Socceroos needed only a point to progress and produced a disciplined display in Santa Clara to advance to the knockout stage for the third time in seven World Cup appearances. Paraguay finished third and must now wait to discover

whether their tally is enough to earn one of the best third-placed spots. Turkey, already eliminated before kick-off, bowed out with an impressive victory over the group winners in one of the most entertaining contests of the day.

AUSTRALIA DO ENOUGH TO PROGRESS

It was far from a classic as both teams struggled to establish any attacking rhythm in a match littered with fouls and stoppages. Australia controlled possession for long periods and fashioned the better opportunities. Cristian Volpato and Jackson Irvine both tested goalkeeper Carlos Coronel, while Jordan Bos came within inches of finding the breakthrough twice during a frantic finale. Paraguay struggled to create openings despite knowing victory would have guaranteed qualification. Julio Enciso remained their brightest attacking outlet, carrying the ball forward with purpose, but lacked support in the final third. Australia vs Paraguay, FIFA World Cup:

HIGHLIGHTS

Their best opportunity arrived in the closing moments when Mauricio Magalhaes unleashed a strike from inside the area, only to



be denied by a comfortable save. The goalless draw was enough to send Australia through, while Paraguay's World Cup future now hinges on results elsewhere.

TURKEY SIGN OFF WITH STUNNING WIN

Turkey ended their campaign on a high by scoring deep into stoppage time to defeat the

United States 3-2 at SoFi Stadium in Los Angeles. Having already wrapped up first place in the group, United States coach Mauricio Pochettino opted to rotate heavily, making nine changes to his starting line-up with one eye on the knockout stage. The hosts made an ideal start as Auston Trusty powered home Sebastian Berhalter's corner in the third minute. Turkey restored parity seven minutes later through Arda Guler before turning the game around in the 31st minute. Eren Elmal's surging run split open the American defence and Baris Alper Yilmaz finished the move to hand his side a 2-1 lead.

The United States responded immediately after the restart when Berhalter scored his second goal involvement of the evening by finding the net in the 49th minute. Pulisic, returning after recovering from a calf injury suffered in the opening group match, entered shortly before the hour mark and transformed the American attack. The AC Milan forward struck the post in the 63rd minute before Brenden Aaronson squandered the rebound from point-blank range.



Jacqueline Fernandez

Withdraws Plea From Supreme Court In Rs 200 Crore Money Laundering Case

The Supreme Court on Thursday allowed Bollywood actor Jacqueline Fernandez to withdraw her special leave petition challenging a Delhi High Court order refusing to quash the Enforcement Directorate's (ED) prosecution complaint and the trial court's decision framing charges against her in the Rs 200 crore money laundering case linked to alleged conman Suresh Chandra Sekhar.

A Bench of Justices B.V. Nagarathna and Joymalya Bagchi permitted Jacqueline to withdraw her plea when the matter came up for hearing.

The case had earlier been listed before a Bench of Justices Prashant Kumar Mishra and Atul S. Chandurkar on June 11. However, Justice Mishra recused himself from hearing the matter after informing the parties that his son had appeared on behalf of the government in a connected case.

"In one of the connected matters, my son had appeared on behalf of the government. The case must therefore be placed before a different Bench," Justice

Mishra had observed, directing that the matter be listed before a Bench of which he was not a member.

Following the recusal, the matter was listed before a Bench of Justices B.V. Nagarathna and

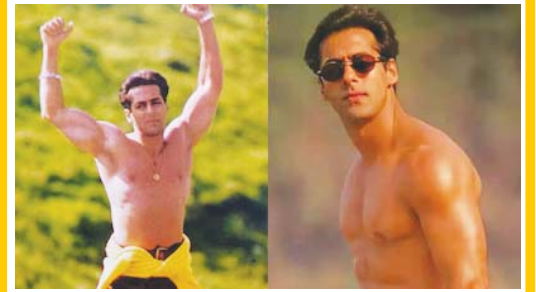
Joymalya Bagchi on June 25. During the hearing on Thursday, Jacqueline sought permission to withdraw her plea from the Supreme Court. The apex court allowed her request and permitted her to withdraw the petition.

In her special leave petition (SLP), Jacqueline had challenged the Delhi High Court's order refusing to quash the ED's prosecution complaint and the trial court's order framing charges against her under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA). Earlier, the actor pleaded not guilty before a Delhi court in the money laundering case and expressed her willingness to face trial. Appearing before the Patiala House Court on June 3, Jacqueline denied the charges framed against her under the PMLA and opted to contest the case on merits.

The trial court also framed money laundering charges against Chandrashekhar, his wife Leena Maria Paul and 14 others, all of whom pleaded not guilty and sought trial. The matter is currently listed before the trial court for further proceedings on July 16.



Salman Khan Didn't Rehearse, Said He'd 'Take Off Shirt' If He Forgot Steps: Co-Star On Actor's Live Show



Salman Khan may not be known as one of Bollywood's best dancers, but according to actor Vinu Dara Singh, that has little to do with talent. Recalling his experience of working with the superstar on several films, Vinu claimed Salman rarely rehearses dance routines and still performs them with remarkable ease.

Speaking to Kadak's YouTube channel, Vinu said Salman has a natural ability to pick up choreography instantly. He even suggested that if the actor devoted time to rehearsals, he could outshine many of the industry's top dancers. "He comes, sits, and asks what he has to do. Then, the dance master does the steps to tell him. He starts the take instantly. Other people take 20 days of rehearsal, they practice those dangerous steps to come and perform them. Salman Khan is watching, not practicing. So just imagine how easily it comes to him, what memory he has, and how talented he is. If he practiced, no one could dance better than him in the industry."

Vinu Dara Singh Says Salman Never Rehearses

Vinu, who has shared screen space with Salman in films including Maine Pyaar Kyun Kiya, Partner and Mujhse Shaadi Karogi, said people often overlook the actor's dancing ability because of his casual approach to rehearsals. "When we think about who is the best dancer in the film industry, Salman's name never comes up. This happens because he doesn't practice dance at all. If Salman Khan decides that he will practice a song for 10-15 days and perform it, then there will be no other dancer like him. People will be surprised to see him. That is Salman Khan for you."

According to Vinu, Salman prefers learning the steps on the spot instead of spending days preparing before a shoot.

'What If You Forget The Steps?'

Vinu also shared a memory from the shooting of Mujhse Shaadi Karogi, when Salman had to perform at a live event in Delhi while filming was underway. He recalled that the choreographer requested time for a rehearsal during the lunch break. Salman watched the choreography once and then asked the team to leave. Vinu admitted he was surprised that the actor was ready to perform in front of a large audience after just one walkthrough. "I asked him, 'What if you forget the steps?' Salman replied that he would just take off his shirt then. That is Salman Khan, and that is why he is loved by all."

Geeta Kapur Reveals She Started Dancing For Money, Says Dance Was Never A Career Option In The 90s



Choreographer and television personality Geeta Kapur recalled her initial days as a dancer in the Bollywood industry, back in the early 90s, when dancing was never considered a viable career option. In an exclusive conversation with IANS, Geeta said the landscape has transformed dramatically over the years, with dance now being viewed as a legitimate and rewarding career path. "The dance concept has changed. It is now looked at as a career option. When we were dancing, it was not a career option," she said.

Recalling her early days, Geeta shared that financial considerations became a motivating factor as opportunities in the field increased.

"We did it because we wanted to earn money. We were getting work at that time. But I won't say it was only about earning money. We did it because we loved it. It was a hobby that turned into a career," she explained. The renowned choreographer added that she never imagined dance would become her profession when she first started learning it.

"For me, dance was a hobby. My mother enrolled me in classes where I learnt the basics of folk dance, Kathak and Bharatanatyam. I never thought I would earn money from it, make a career out of it, or become a choreographer," Geeta recalled.

However, things began to change when she started receiving paid assignments and realised that dance could provide financial stability.

"When I saw that it could be a source of income, especially after I started working with Jaaved Jaaferi, I realised the income was increasing. Earlier we used to perform for Rs 500 or Rs 1,000, and even Rs 1,000 was considered a big amount then," she said. Talking about Geeta Kapur, the dancer has been a part of the Bollywood industry for almost three decades. She has assisted Farah Khan in many of her super hit songs.

Rhea Chakraborty

Wanted To Name Her Brand 'Chudail Ka Badla': 'I felt Like The Black Sheep Of Society'

Actor-entrepreneur Rhea Chakraborty and her brother Shovik Chakraborty opened up about the realities of working together as siblings during their appearance on Neha Dhupia and Angad Bedi's chat show Double Date. The duo candidly discussed the challenges of balancing personal and professional relationships, the difficult phase they went through after 2020, and how building a business together helped them find a new purpose.



During the conversation, Neha Dhupia asked the siblings whether starting a business together was an easy decision. Responding honestly, Rhea admitted that working with a sibling comes with its own set of complications. "It's hard to work with a sibling. It takes a lot of time to understand the distinction between personal and professional. If you're upset with them at home and then they do something small at work, it suddenly feels much bigger because you're already angry," Rhea said. Recalling the early days of their venture, Rhea revealed that disagreements were frequent. "In the beginning, it was very hard for us

Before he left the room, he would give a few threats that he was leaving the house," she said with a laugh. However, she noted that things improved significantly once Shovik moved out, saying, "Him moving out was actually good. We spend the entire day together at the office, so having our own space at home helped create a healthier balance." Despite the occasional clashes, Rhea believes there is one major benefit to working with family. "The positive part of working with a sibling is that there is complete trust," she explained. "But there are also challenges because of the dynamic." Rhea also reflected on watching her younger brother grow into a leader, said "As the elder sister, seeing him as an adult and as the CEO of our company, Chapter 2, has been an interesting journey. I handle areas like compliances and accounts, which he doesn't really want to be involved in." Rhea Chakraborty also revealed that she had some unconventional names in mind, while thinking about the brand "I was very keen on naming the brand Chudail Ka Badla. I was completely sure about it and even imagined creating cool T-shirts and merchandise," said Rhea said with a laugh. "Everyone told me not to be so negative, but I kept saying, 'It's not negative, it's funny,'" she recalled. Rhea further shared that another name she seriously considered was Black Sheep. "I even got bracelets made with 'Black Sheep' written on them because that's how we felt at the time



NEWS BOX

IAEA Chief calls for strong verification system to prevent nuclear weapons development in Iran

TOKYO. (Agency)

A "very strong" verification system is needed in Iran following the Middle East conflict to ensure that the country does not develop nuclear weapons, the UN atomic watchdog chief said Friday. International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) head Rafael Grossi's remarks come as the United States and Iran negotiate a broader agreement to end the war, with Tehran's nuclear programme remaining one of the key sticking points. "I think the objective of this (recent US-Iran) agreement is to ensure that there is no development of nuclear weapons in Iran. The government of Iran has declared quite clearly that this is not their intention," Grossi told reporters in Japan.

"But of course intentions are not enough. We have to have a very strong verification system in place... as soon as is practicable," the IAEA chief said. Grossi also said that he watchdog had "barely initiated" talks with Iran following its recent preliminary agreement with the United States about what to do with Tehran's uranium stockpile. "Initial conversations have taken place... We expect this work to pick up soon," Grossi said. Iran has consistently denied seeking to acquire an atomic bomb, while remaining adamant about its right to operate a full-scale civilian nuclear programme. Under a law passed by the Iranian parliament in the wake of last year's 12-day war with Israel, Tehran suspended cooperation with the IAEA last July.

Russia says 660 Ukrainian drones shot down overnight: defence ministry

RUSSIA (Agency)

Russian air defences shot down 660 Ukrainian drones overnight, the defence ministry said Friday, one of the highest figures since the start of the conflict.

Drones heading toward the capital were iEmergency services specialists are working where the debris fell," Sobyenin said on Telegram, without reporting any casualties or damage. A "massive" drone attack also struck the Tula region, about 180 km (112 miles) south of Moscow, Dmitry Milyaev, the region's governor said. "A private residential house was damaged in a settlement in Shchekino district, as a result of which a woman was wounded," Milyaev said on Telegram. Ukraine has stepped up its long-range drone strike



campaign against Russia in recent months, particularly targeting energy infrastructure, with the aim of depriving the Kremlin of a vital source of revenue to fund its war effort, now in its fifth year. A Ukrainian attack caused a fire last week at a refinery in the southeast of Moscow. ntercepted.

Hospitals Raise Alert As Europe Grapples With Unprecedented Heatwave

world. (Agency)

French authorities banned public alcohol consumption in Paris and warned hospitals faced "saturation", echoing warnings from health authorities around Europe as it baked in a deadly heatwave on Thursday. At least 101 million Europeans faced temperatures of over 35C, with scores of people thought to have been killed by the record-breaking heatwave.

French and British health services reported a surge in emergency calls and visits as the merciless heat struck the elderly and the ill. France and Spain counted the toll from the extreme temperatures, including a three-year-old boy who got trapped in his family's car. We are reaching a saturation point in hospital facilities," Paris police prefect Patrice Faure said. "The number of hospitalisations keeps increasing." In Paris, 25 cardiac arrests were recorded over 24 hours on Wednesday, compared with fewer than 10 usually, Health Minister Stephanie Rist's office said. At the national level, she said a fourfold increase in emergency room visits for heat-related reasons had been recorded.

London Ambulance Service said the extreme heat on Wednesday had led to the highest number of life-threatening emergency calls in a day. Climate crisis AFP calculations based on forecasts from the German weather service and 2025 population projections from the European Joint Research Centre indicated that more than 380 million people would face temperatures of over 30C.

The UN's climate chief Simon Stiell said the heatwave -- made worse by buildings and infrastructure unsuited to such temperatures -- "has the fingerprints of the climate crisis all over it". Until humanity stops burning colossal amounts of coal, oil and gas, extreme heat will keep getting worse," he added. At a community cooling centre in West London, Alley, a 45-year-old man with a disability, fanned his face, complaining that outside it was "baking".

Thousands missing, 235 declared dead as Venezuela begins massive earthquake recovery effort

world. (Agency)

LA GUAIRA, Venezuela (AP) — Venezuelans searched for survivors beneath collapsed buildings Thursday and rescue teams raced to northern areas rocked by a pair of powerful earthquakes that officials say killed around 235 people and left at least 4,300 people injured. "Unfortunately we have received around 235 patients who arrive without vital signs or die when they arrive at our health facilities," Health Minister Carlos Alvarado told state media Thursday. The number of dead and injured is expected to rise with thousands reported missing after the 7.2- and 7.5-magnitude earthquakes that struck Wednesday evening, which was among the strongest in Venezuela in more than a century and was felt throughout the region. Thousands were reported missing and buildings were evacuated as far away as Brazil's Amazon. In response to the devastation, the U.S. Treasury on Thursday moved to waive some sanctions until Oct. 23 to allow transactions related to earthquake relief efforts in Venezuela that would otherwise be prohibited. Meanwhile, in cities across



northern Venezuela, panicked residents poured into the streets and searched for the missing in the debris. The injured were pulled out of the rubble covered in dust and blood, among them children and animals. Venezuelan state TV showed dramatic images of rescues, including a woman who was trapped under a cement slab, only a

barefoot poking out before crews managed to get her out alive. But few government search teams were seen outside Caracas. In the capital, Dayana Delgado, mother of three children, asked where the heavy machinery was that government officials had promised, pointing out that neighbors were the ones digging through the rubble.

"I want to know where my child is, if he's trapped or in a shelter," she said of her 8-year-old son who was missing.

One mother sobbed and collapsed in grief as the bodies of her 3- and 10-year-old children were wrapped in blankets and carried away. Others screamed the names of missing loved ones. Some stood in silent shock.

The coastal region of La Guaira — north of the capital, Caracas — suffered some of the heaviest damage and casualties. The country's main airport is there and was closed due to damage, complicating aid efforts. Retired schoolteacher Juan Alberto Mendaño climbed through wreckage in La Guaira and past a dead body when he spotted a woman who was trapped and signaling with her hand for help.

May God rescue her as quickly as possible," said Mendaño. "When we heard the scream, there was nothing we could do."

Offers to send aid and supplies poured in from around the world, including from the United States, which seized Venezuela's then-president Nicolas Maduro at the beginning of the year in a surprise military operation.

'Unprecedented spike' in new synthetic drugs: UN watchdog

➔ An estimated 331 million people used a drug in 2024, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) said in its 2026 World Drug Report.

VIENNA. (Agency)

Drug use around the world is rising, including a worrying increase of new potent and dangerous synthetic drugs, a UN watchdog warned on Friday.

An estimated 331 million people used a drug in 2024, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) said in its 2026 World Drug Report. This is 6.2 percent of the global population aged 15-64, an increase from 5.2 percent in 2014. Cannabis remained the most popular drug globally in 2024, followed by opioids, amphetamines, cocaine and ecstasy, the UNODC said. But novel synthetic opioids such as fentanyl, nitazenes and orphines, sought as a heroin substitute,

have become increasingly available.

"We have seen an unprecedented spike in new types of drugs on the market, and worryingly, some are more potent or dangerous than before," UNODC head Monica Juma said in a statement.



Drug producers kept coming up with new synthetic drugs "in attempts to skirt regulations and avoid detection," the agency said. Drug seizures in 2024 revealed "five times more drug types" than before 2000, it added. "The number of new psychoactive substances (NPS) reported to have been circulating in drug markets... reached 755 in 2024, with 118 of these substances reported for the first time," the UNODC said. The global opium and heroin market was

still heavily affected by the ban on poppy cultivation introduced by the Taliban in Afghanistan in 2022, the report said. This has made drug dealers look for synthetic alternatives like fentanyl. "A turn away from plant-based opiates toward synthetics could cause a permanent shift in the global opioid market, with ramifications on how these drugs are used and the harms therein," the UNODC said.

The watchdog also observed the emergence of new markets for methamphetamine, produced largely by Myanmar, but also in North America, west and southern Africa and southwest Asia. Cannabis use keeps growing too, also because of legalisation and decriminalisation -- user numbers grew by 40 percent between 2014 and 2024 as almost five percent of the global population aged 15-64 used cannabis in 2024. Cocaine output grew more than fourfold over the monitored decade, and traffickers increased supplies targeting both established markets in Europe, America and Oceania, but also new ones in Africa and Asia, the UNODC said.

Europe's heatwaves pose growing threat to economy, productivity and growth

Europe faces major vulnerabilities, including an ageing population, dense cities, and low AC use, with only 19% of households having air conditioning.

PARIS. (Agency)

When the mercury rises so do the costs for an economy as productivity melts and growth becomes lethargic, providing an additional challenge to Europe as it struggles with high energy prices. "Extreme heat is emerging as a structural economic risk, with Europe highly exposed," wrote the trade credit arm of European insurer Allianz as the continent swelters under its second heatwave of the year. Europe has a number of weaknesses: an ageing population, dense urban centres with many buildings not built for extreme

heat, and just 19 percent of households with air conditioning compared to 90 percent in the United States, the analysts noted. Heatwaves are becoming frequent as Europe warms faster than other regions of



the world, and many scientists consider human activity will cause more extreme weather events. "France is working in slow mode," recently observed Patrick Martin, head of Medef, France's main employers' organisation. "Inevitably, it

disrupts work and leads to less work being accomplished," he told BFM television. Allianz Trade has identified "a critical threshold" of around 30C beyond which productivity losses intensify rapidly. According to AFP's calculations more than 100 million people in Europe were set to experience temperatures in excess of 35C on Thursday, and nearly two-thirds of Europeans living where temperatures would surpass 30C. Medium-term impact -

In a blog post last year the European Central Bank said heatwaves in the spring, autumn and winter can boost economic activity, particularly construction, agriculture and outdoor dining. "By contrast, heatwaves during the already warmer summers reduce economic activity, as physical exertion outdoors becomes increasingly impaired," it said.



offensive posture to make no enemy dare to confront," KCNA said. "To make the enemies feel constant uneasiness and fear is just an important aspect of the exercise of war deterrent." KCNA said the special mission warhead tested is aimed at "inflicting fatal damage on major targets including airfields, ports and power facilities of the enemy." Later Friday, South Korea's Defense Ministry announced plans to beef up its drone forces, citing growing military threats by North Korea which allegedly received technology assistance from Russia. The plans include developing long-range exploding drones, acquiring more than 20,000 low-cost reconnaissance and attack drones and training the country's entire 500,000 troops as "drone warriors." "North Korea is also currently receiving technology transfers from Russia, so there's an urgent need for us to respond proactively to the changing nature of warfare and the evolving operational environment," Defense Minister Ahn Gyu-back told reporters.

Japan cancels 120 flights as twin storms approach

Severe tropical storm Mekkhala, downgraded from a typhoon, brought gusts up to 144 km/h and heavy rain across southern and western Japan.

TOKYO. (Agency)

Japanese airlines cancelled more than 100 flights on Friday as two tropical storms barrelled towards the archipelago, with authorities advising evacuations in some areas because of possible flooding and landslides. Severe tropical storm Mekkhala was downgraded from a typhoon but still carried gusts of up to 144 kilometres (89 miles) per hour, according to forecasters, with heavy rain already pounding parts of southern and western Japan. The weather

system was expected to skirt the islands of Kyushu and Shikoku over the weekend and potentially converge with tropical Higos, which was also swirling further out in the Pacific. That could result in the atmospheric phenomenon known as the Fujiwhara effect when two storms interact, making forecasting their movements and strengths more difficult. Japan Airlines and All Nippon Airways cancelled a total of 120 flights to and from the southern regions of Okinawa and Kagoshima. The Kyoto region advised several thousand residents to evacuate, warning of potential landslides, as footage from public broadcaster NHK showed a raging brown river running through the area.

Officials in Kyoto and Osaka said water levels in rivers were rising and warned that vigilance was required because of the threat

of flooding. Automaker Toyota suspended operations at a plant in Kyushu because of road closures caused by heavy rain, while



Nissan also said it planned to halt some production lines, Kyodo News reported. The Japanese military also cancelled the planned maiden flight of a V-22 Osprey

transport aircraft to Miyako Island that was part of joint exercises with the United States, Kyodo said. In Taiwan, more than 1,600 people were evacuated from their homes, and schools and offices were shut in several areas, as Mekkhala triggered torrential rain, floods and landslides across the island.

No casualties were recorded, but authorities warned on Friday of potentially dangerous debris flows in mountainous areas of Hualien county in the east as well as in Kaohsiung and Pingtung in the south, where the weather forecasting agency said as much as 88cm (34.6 inches) of rain had fallen since Thursday. Scores of people living downstream from a recently

detected barrier lake in a rugged area of Hualien have left their homes, a local official said. Some train lines were suspended.