

PM Modi flags off India's first hydrogen train, dubs it longest in the world

NEW DELHI. (Agency)

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Friday flagged off India's first hydrogen-powered train from Haryana's Jind railway station, marking a major step in the country's push towards cleaner and more sustainable rail transport.

Calling it a landmark achievement, PM Modi said in a post on X that the train reflected the ingenuity and dedication of the Indian Railways team and described it as a proud symbol of Aatmanirbhar Bharat and India's commitment to cleaner, future-ready transportation.

The hydrogen fuel cell train will initially operate on the 89-km Jind-Sonipat route under Northern Railway, connecting Jind Junction, Gohana Junction and Sonipat while stopping at several stations and halts along the corridor. Unlike conventional electric trains that depend

on overhead power lines, the new train produces electricity onboard through a hydrogen fuel cell. The system combines hydrogen with oxygen from the atmosphere to generate power, emitting only water vapour

combustion as well as an external electricity supply.

To ensure safe operations, the train has been fitted with multiple safety mechanisms capable of detecting hydrogen leaks, excessive heat, flames and smoke.

Officials said the integrated monitoring system is designed to continuously assess onboard conditions and respond quickly to any potential hazard.

The train has a maximum operational speed of 75 kmph, while its design speed is 110 kmph, allowing for faster and more efficient services on the Jind-Sonipat section.

Hydrogen-powered passenger trains remain relatively uncommon worldwide. Germany was the first country to introduce it into commercial service, while France, Italy, Japan and China are testing or deploying the technology on a limited scale.

Most hydrogen trains currently in operation internationally are designed for regional routes with two to four coaches.

and heat in the process.

Railway officials said the technology revives the concept of self-powered trains, but replaces fossil fuels such as coal and diesel with clean hydrogen, eliminating the need for



Another Split Or Merger? Tale Of Two NCPs And 3 Meetings With Devendra Fadnavis

Mumbai. (Agency)

Internal rumblings within the Sunetra Pawar-led NCP appear to be intensifying. And all is not quiet in the other NCP led by Sharad Pawar. At the centre of the intense political drama in Maharashtra is Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis. A day after senior party leaders Praful Patel and Sunil Tatkare's late-night meeting with Devendra Fadnavis on Wednesday triggered political speculation, Ajit Pawar's son and party MP Parth Pawar also met the Chief Minister at his residence.

There has been no official word from either side on the meetings. Sources said the discussion focused on recent developments following Fadnavis' meeting with Tatkare and Patel. The meeting reportedly caught NCP leaders by surprise, with party chief and Deputy Chief Minister Sunetra Pawar seeking an explanation from Sunil Tatkare.

The internal strife within the NCP has been in the news recently. The party appears divided into two camps. One is with Sunetra Pawar and her son Parth Pawar, and the other is with Praful Patel and Tatkare.

Insiders say Patel and Tatkare are unhappy with the growing role of Parth Pawar in the party and his style of functioning. Parth Pawar was nominated to the Rajya Sabha after Sunetra Pawar resigned from the Upper House. Sunetra Pawar became Deputy Chief Minister following Ajit Pawar's sudden death in a plane crash.



"Everyone Does Naarebaazi In Democracy": Top Court Relief For Bhagwant Mann

NEW DELHI. (Agency)

The Supreme Court said it is not inclined to hear the Chandigarh administration's petition objecting to the cancellation of a rioting case filed against Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) leaders, including Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann, over holding a protest march in 2020 against electricity tariff hike.

A bench of Chief Justice of India Surya Kant, Justice Joyimalya Bagchi and Justice V Mohanawas was hearing the Chandigarh administration's challenge to the Punjab and Haryana High Court order, which scrapped the case. Additional Solicitor General SV Raju, for Chandigarh, said the administration is facing some technical objections to three cases filed by it, challenging separate orders. Raju then asked for some time to address the matter.

Chief Justice Kant, however, said the bench was not inclined to entertain the challenge. "Mr Raju, naarebaazi (sloganeering) everyone does it in a democracy.

National Conference to hold protest in Delhi over statehood on July 20

SRINAGAR. (Agency)

Jammu and Kashmir is set for a political showdown on July 20, with the ruling National Conference (NC) staging a protest at Jantar Mantar in New Delhi seeking restoration of statehood, while the BJP's Jammu and Kashmir unit will hold a Secretariat gherao against the Omar Abdullah government's outsourcing policy.

The NC has invited 56 leaders from across the country, including Congress president, leaders of other political parties and the Tamil Nadu Chief Minister, to participate in the protest on the opening day of the Monsoon Session of Parliament.

Chief Minister Omar Abdullah said the protest would go ahead despite pending approval from the Delhi government. "The venue or the mode may change but the Delhi programme will not change," Omar said, adding his party will not protest by hiding in some corner.

After assuming office, Omar's cabinet passed a resolution seeking restoration of Jammu and Kashmir's statehood in its original form.

MAHANAGAR METRO EXCLUSIVE

THE COTTON KING OF CORRUPTION

The Dark Ledger of Ex-MLA Satish Patel's Multi-Crore Exploitation of Farmers!

MAHANAGAR METRO

KARJAN/VADODARA: Vadodara: A massive wave of indignation has swept through the political and cooperative sectors of Vadodara district following serious allegations of corruption against Satish Patel, the Chairman of the Cotton East Division. The exposé reveals a deeply entrenched system of exploitation that has crippled local farmers and milk producers while enriching a powerful political syndicate.

The Cotton Procurement Racket: Middlemen Prosper as Farmers Suffer

Serious allegations indicate that under Satish Patel's leadership, a sophisticated fraud is being perpetrated against vulnerable cotton farmers at government procurement centers. According to internal sources, when impoverished farmers arrive to sell their yield, officials deliberately reject their tractors under the pretext of substandard quality or moisture defects. Exhausted by transport costs and fearing the total spoilage of their crops, these desperate farmers are forced to sell



their cotton to local middlemen at throwaway prices. The real fraud begins immediately after: these favored middlemen, allegedly operating in collusion with Satish Patel, buy the rejected cotton cheaply and seamlessly deposit it into government reserves at the highest official rates, pocketing millions in risk-free profits.

From Gandhara Sugar to Baroda Dairy: A Trail of Institutional Fraud

ularities extend far beyond the cotton sector. After allegedly siphoning ₹25 crore from the Gandhara Sugar Mill, the leader has now faced intense scrutiny for turning Baroda Dairy into a personal fiefdom.

Systemic Nepotism: Cooperative regulations have allegedly been bypassed to fill dairy employment slots with relatives, acquaintances, and close associates, systematically denying jobs to qualified local youth.

Anti-Farmer Directives: Decisions within the dairy administration are reportedly being steered to protect management profits rather than the economic interests of the primary milk producers.

Illegal Mining Empires, Crores in Political Funding, and Party-Hopping Explosive intelligence from political insiders reveals that Satish Patel allegedly funneled millions in unaccounted funds to a senior political leader to secure his position within the district and maintain his grip on Baroda Dairy. However, when this massive financial investment failed to yield a state assembly election ticket,

Patel abruptly defected to the Congress party. Local consensus suggests he continues to work behind the scenes to actively undermine the ruling establishment. Furthermore, grave accusations point out that during his tenure as an MLA, Patel leveraged his legislative power to run an extensive illegal sand and soil mining cartel along local riverbeds, amassing billions in undocumented benami properties.

Media Accountability: The Price of Silence

The blatant exploitation of farmers and the systemic looting of cooperative bodies raise serious questions about the state's heavily publicized "zero-tolerance" policy toward corruption. By allowing a controversial figure to retain control over vital cooperative institutions, the administration faces growing criticism from an angry electorate. Vadodara's farming community has signaled that if an independent, high-level forensic probe is not initiated immediately, they will deliver a resounding reply at the ballot box.

'Wait And Watch': MK Stalin Keeps Centre, Opposition Guessing on Delimitation Stand

New Delhi. (Agency)

MK Stalin is not revealing his cards yet. Both the ruling NDA and the Opposition INDIA bloc are looking at his DMK ahead of the Monsoon Session that starts next week. At a meeting with his MPs on Thursday, Stalin told them that the party is in wait-and-watch mode on the proposed Delimitation Bill.

At the virtual meeting, DMK president made it clear that the party's ideology and Tamil Nadu's interests will take precedence over political alignments. Sources say the DMK will not automatically side with either the BJP or the Congress and will decide its stand on

an issue-by-issue basis.

A final decision on the Delimitation Bill will be taken by the DMK only after the government releases the text of the proposed legislation, sources added.

Stalin's 22 MPs in the Lok Sabha are key to the strategies of both the government and the Opposition in Parliament if the Centre makes another attempt to see the Delimitation Bill through.

When the Bill came in Parliament in April, DMK was its most vocal opponent with the party leaders burning the copies of the bill, wearing black clothes to Parliament and voting against it with the Opposition



eventually leading to its defeat.

DMK lost Assembly polls in Tamil Nadu and also its key ally, the Congress. The bitter DMK-Congress divorce has given hopes to the BJP that it can now court the Southern party for issue-based support in Parliament. The DMK has already asked the Lok Sabha Speaker for a new seating

arrangement in the House as it doesn't want to be seen sitting close to the Congress. The party also boycotted the INDIA bloc meet in Delhi last month. All this is good news for the BJP. Sources have indicated that the ruling party is hoping to get DMK MPs to support the amended Delimitation Bill that it plans to present again in the Monsoon Session.

Sources have indicated that the government may bring in the fresh bill with a provision of assurances of a uniform 50% rise in Lok Sabha seats across states. The Opposition during the debate had insisted making the 50% cap part of the bill text.

News box

NEET candidate jumps 16 floors to death in Faridabad housing society

Faridabad.(Agency)

An 18-year-old NEET aspirant allegedly died by suicide after jumping from the 16th floor of her building in Greater Faridabad's Sector 88 on Thursday, a day after she checked her probable score using the online answer key. Police said the incident took place around noon at SRS Residency, where the student lived with her family. According to her relatives, she had recently appeared for NEET and had been under considerable stress after estimating her score. While she had expected a significantly higher result, she calculated that she might score around 600 out of 720 after comparing her responses with the answer key. Family members told police that the disappointment had left her distressed in recent days. On Thursday, she allegedly left her flat, took the lift to the top floor and jumped. Police reached the spot after receiving information and sent the body for an autopsy. The family, originally from Vijayawada in Andhra Pradesh, has been living in the housing society for several years. At the time of the incident, her mother was in Vijayawada and the student was alone at home. Her father, Kateshwar, a senior executive with a private company, told police that she was the elder of his two daughters and had always excelled academically, scoring well in Class 12.

Man comes home drunk, pumps 3 bullets into father after being pulled up

Ghaziabad.(Agency)

A 32-year-old man allegedly whipped out a country-made pistol and shot his father dead after being pulled up for drinking in front of his mother in Modinagar on Wednesday night.

The argument that began over alcohol quickly escalated into a bitter dispute over a family property estimated to be worth more than Rs 150 crore. Police said the accused, Nikhil, fired three bullets at his father, Hariom (55), before fleeing.

Hariom, a farmer from Budana village, had finished dinner and was resting when Nikhil returned home around 11pm in an inebriated state. According to the complaint lodged by Hariom's wife, Meenakshi (50), her husband questioned their elder son over his drinking habits. The exchange soon turned into an argument over property.

"My husband asked Nikhil why he had come home drunk. The argument soon shifted to the property dispute. And in a fit of rage, Nikhil opened fire with the intention of killing my husband," Meenakshi said. "After the commotion, I rushed in and saw Nikhil holding a pistol. He fired three bullets at my husband in front of me. The bullets struck his head and abdomen. My husband slumped to the ground, and Nikhil ran away," she added. With the help of neighbours and relatives, the family rushed Hariom to a nearby private hospital, where doctors declared him dead on arrival.

Consumer forum asks RWA to pay resident Rs 1L for dog bite

Ghaziabad.(Agency)

The district consumer commission has ordered the RWA of Kendriya Vihar-II in Sector 82 to pay Rs 1 lakh in compensation to a resident, holding it responsible for failing to tackle stray dog menace that led to a four-year-old girl being mauled inside the housing society. Calling it a "deficiency in service", the commission ruled that an RWA collecting maintenance and security charges cannot evade its responsibility to ensure residents' safety within the residential premises.

Allowing the complaint on July 10, the bench of president Anil Kumar Pundir and member Anju Sharma asked the RWA, through its president, to pay the amount towards the mental agony, harassment, risk and injuries suffered by the child, besides Rs 5,000 towards litigation costs. The amount must be paid within 30 days, failing which it will attract 6% annual simple interest until payment. A separate complaint against Noida Authority over stray dogs was dismissed.

The complaint was filed by resident Ashish Kumar Aggarwal, who alleged that his daughter, Shayra (4), was attacked by a pack of stray dogs in the green park behind the RWA office around 9.20pm on June 29, 2022. She suffered a category-III bite on her back and was rescued by a passerby.

Aggarwal told the commission that the attack was not an isolated incident. Residents had repeatedly alerted the RWA about growing stray dog menace, with several people having been bitten earlier as well. He argued that, having paid maintenance and security charges since 2005, he qualified as a "consumer" under the Consumer Protection Act and was entitled to safe maintenance services. Rejecting the RWA's defence, the commission ruled that collecting maintenance charges created a clear service obligation.

Rift in Karjan BJP: Baman Village and Farmers Declare All-Out War Against Jaydeep Singh Chauhan, Who Became a Millionaire on the Pyre of Youth Unemployment!

'By bringing the sons of his own village to the streets, Netaji executed a multi-crore scrap scam' - BJP's 'One Person, One Post' policy blown to shreds over APMC election claims; Farmers give open warning to boycott the Lotus in the assembly elections

VADODARA/KARJAN:
(By PAWAN MAKAN)

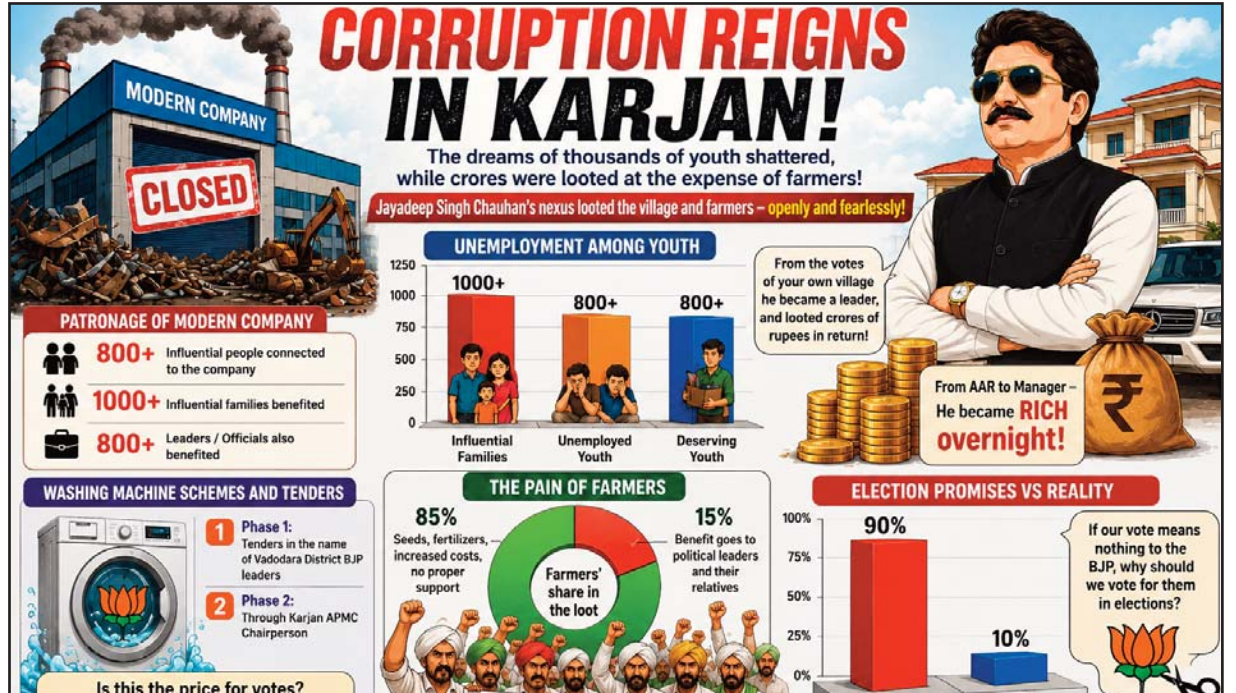
An extremely explosive situation has emerged in the politics of the Vadodara District BJP organization and Karjan Taluka. A living example of the public outrage that erupts when the gap between leaders' words and actions robs people of their livelihood is being witnessed in Baman village of Karjan. The mystery behind the closure of the prestigious Modern Company, located near Por on Highway Number 48, and the alleged role of Jaydeep Singh Chauhan, General Secretary of Vadodara District BJP and Chairman of Karjan APMC, in its dark deeds have now become the talk of the town.

The Collapse of Modern Company: Thousands of Families on the Streets, Divine Blessings of 'Wealth on Netaji's House!'

According to sensational information received, when Modern Company located near Por was operational, it was the sole source of livelihood for hundreds of local youth from Karjan Taluka, especially from Baman village. Jaydeep Singh Chauhan was employed in a high position as the H.R. (Human Resources) Manager in this company. Local residents have leveled serious allegations that instead of protecting the interests of the youth of his own village, activities were planned to shut down the company systematically by misusing power and position.

During the closure of the company, allegations are being made of a massive scam involving the illegal sale of scrap (the company's valuable scrap and machinery) worth crores of rupees. As a result:

Public's Condition: The sons of thousands of poor and middle-class families became unemployed overnight, making it



difficult to keep their home fires burning.

Netaji's Condition: The company went bankrupt, but as the H.R. Manager, Jaydeep Singh Chauhan joined the list of millionaires overnight.

Due to this betrayal, angry youth and villagers of Baman village had previously staged massive protests outside Netaji's residence and on public roads, expressing their anger by shouting loud slogans against Jaydeep Singh Chauhan.

The Mystery of BJP's 'Washing Machine' and Dual Posts

The public and conscious citizens of Karjan Taluka are now aiming their questions directly at the BJP state leadership. If the BJP loudly preaches the discipline of 'One Person, One Post' from its stages, then where do these rules disappear in the case of Jaydeep Singh Chauhan?

1. Post 1: General Secretary of Vadodara District BJP Organization.
2. Post 2: Current Chairman of Karjan APMC.

How can a single individual hold two official power positions simultaneously? The public is asking whether all sins and scams are washed away under the BJP's 'Washing Machine' policy if a corrupt person joins the party? Does Vadodara BJP have no clean, honest, and popular candidate left, that controversial leaders, who repeatedly face public wrath, are being handed important tickets and posts?

Farmers' Red Eyes: 'Bring a Spotless Candidate, or the Lotus Disappears!'

Currently, the atmosphere of the Karjan APMC election is heated. Despite allegations of a multi-crore scam, Jaydeep Singh Chauhan has once again staked his claim for the post of Chairman, pushing the farmers' anger to an all-time high. Farmers are not ready to tolerate a person with a commercial mindset or a company scrap thief staking a claim in the APMC, which is called an institution of the farmers.

All small and big farmers of Kar-

jan Taluka have gathered with one voice to give an ultimatum to the BJP high command that only a true son of the soil and a farmer with a spotless image should get the ticket in the APMC election. If the BJP, blinded by the intoxication of power, rejects this demand of the public and farmers and selects a turncoat or a scam-tainted leader again, a complete and fierce boycott of the BJP will be carried out in the Karjan-Sinor seat in the upcoming Gujarat Assembly elections.

Final Conclusion of Mahanagar Metro:

The public is no longer going to follow herd mentality. The people of Karjan have mentally blown the war trumpet to send home those leaders who kicked the stomachs of thousands using the power of authority and betrayed the youth of their own village. Now it remains to be seen whether the BJP organization wakes up in time or suffers a major political loss by drowning in its infatuation with its controversial leader!

EVs charged from regular house plugs, extension boards: A fire hazard in every other lane in Noida

Noida.(Agency)

A day after sparks at a basement EV-charging point set off a blaze in a Mamura building that killed two, a TOI visit to urban villages found similar charging practices common in Harola, Barola, Hoshiarpur, Raipur and other localities.

Inside homes and parking areas, e-rickshaws and e-scooters are routinely plugged into household sockets or roadside power points, often using extension boards and makeshift wiring. Vehicles are left charging for hours, sometimes overnight, increasing the risk of overheating, short circuits and fires as EV adoption outpaces the availability of regulated charging infrastructure.

Fire officials said domestic electrical systems lack safeguards such as surge protection and thermal cut-offs needed for prolonged high-current charging. The risk is greater in densely populated neighbourhoods with narrow lanes that can delay fire engines. Typically, an e-scooter requires a five- to 16-ampere charging socket depending on the model, while

an e-rickshaw needs 16 amperes. It is not just the socket. For a housing society or home charger, the practical minimum is a separately sized cable from the distribution board, a dedicated circuit breaker, suitable RCD protection, proper earthing and a fixed BIS-compliant EVSE, installed after checking the premises' sanctioned load. Mukesh Sharma of Harola said many paying guest (PG) accommodations and rented houses in the area housed delivery executives and e-rickshaw drivers who charged their vehicle batteries directly from ordinary domestic sockets in stilt parking areas or basements that often house a building's electrical panels, a combination he called a "disaster waiting to happen".

In Barola too, most property owners have rented out their buildings for PG accommodation and exercise little oversight over who lives there or under what conditions. Reema Singh, who has lived in the area for years, said e-rickshaw drivers often charged multiple vehicles from a single power

point via loosely strung plugs and extension cords. "Many leave battery chargers directly inside or on top of e-rickshaws during charging," Singh said, while calling for a clear govt policy defining authorised charging points, along with a dedicated



helpline or reporting mechanism for residents to flag unsafe charging practices. Chief fire officer Pradeep Chaubey said a large number of e-rickshaw drivers and delivery workers charged vehicles overnight on domestic connections not built for the load EV batteries require, often running multiple batteries off extension boards or unauthorised

connections. He said chargers generate significant internal heat and placing them on vehicle seats could increase immediate fire and explosion hazard due to heat entrapment and vibration. He said lithium-ion battery fires burn at very high temperatures and can undergo "thermal runaway", a chain reaction in which internal heat sustains continuous combustion. Such fires, he said, can reignite even after appearing extinguished, requiring large volumes of water and specialised firefighting methods. Officials said many vehicle owners used uncertified chargers or locally assembled battery packs to cut costs, while overcharging, charging damaged packs, or modifying batteries outside safety standards raised the likelihood of an explosion or fire. The danger is compounded in buildings where e-rickshaws are parked on the ground floor or in basements while families live on the floors above, since a fire in the parking area can block staircases and exits with toxic smoke, trapping residents inside.

Maharashtra scraps free saree scheme for 25 lakh families amid rising financial strain

Mumbai. (Agency)

In a significant blow to the state's most vulnerable residents, the Maharashtra government has officially discontinued its flagship "Captive Market Scheme", which provided free sarees to nearly 25 lakh families holding Antyodaya ration cards. The decision, formalised through a Government Resolution (GR) issued by the Textile Department on Thursday night, signals a major retrenchment in state-sponsored welfare as the government grapples with mounting fiscal pressures. Launched in June 2023 under the "Integrated and Sustainable Textile Policy 2023-28" by then-Chief Minister Eknath Shinde, the scheme was designed to serve a dual purpose: providing essential support to the state's poorest households during the festive season and creating a guaranteed "captive market" for Maharashtra's struggling powerloom sector.

For the past three years—2023, 2024, and 2025—the government allocated an annual budget of ₹100 crore to distribute powerloom-woven sarees to Antyodaya families ahead of Diwali. However, the latest GR confirms that the programme will not continue in the current financial year.

The Textile Department's order justifies the termination by pointing to the state's broader economic outlook.

Railway Board declares chief health inspectors, health inspectors as sensitive posts; mandates periodic transfers

Panchkula. (Agency)

The Railway Board has expanded the list of sensitive posts in Indian Railways by including Chief Health Inspectors (CHI) and Health Inspectors (HI) of the Medical Department, making them subject to mandatory periodic transfers.

The Railway Board informed all General Managers of Zonal Railways and Production Units that the posts of Chief Health Inspectors and Health Inspectors have been added to the list of sensitive posts for the purpose of periodic transfer.

According to the order, employees holding these posts will now be covered under the Railway Board's policy of periodic transfer after every four years, a measure aimed at enhancing transparency, accountability and administrative efficiency in sensitive assignment.

Monsoon set to intensify across north, central and east India; heavy rain forecast in several states

Panchkula. (Agency)

The southwest monsoon is set to strengthen across northwest India over the next few days, with the India Meteorological Department (IMD) forecasting increased rainfall activity across Haryana, Chandigarh, Delhi and Punjab from July 20. According to the IMD's All India Weather Summary and Forecast Bulletin issued on Friday morning, isolated to scattered rainfall is likely over Haryana, Chandigarh, Delhi and Punjab during July 17-19. Rainfall activity is expected to intensify thereafter, with fairly widespread to widespread rainfall forecast across the region during July 20-22. The weather office has also forecast isolated heavy rainfall over Haryana, Chandigarh, Delhi and Punjab on July 20 and July 22, indicating an active phase of the southwest monsoon over the plains of northwest India.

Neighbouring hill states are expected to receive more intense rainfall. Himachal Pradesh and Jammu & Kashmir are likely to witness widespread rainfall from July 18 onwards, while Uttarakhand is expected to experience widespread rain during July 17-22. The IMD has also forecast isolated heavy to very heavy rainfall over parts of these hill states during the period.

Brace for moderate rain as week-long dry spell ends

“Light to moderate rain and thundershowers are very likely in all districts of North Gujarat, a few places in all South Gujarat districts and at isolated places in Saurashtra and Kutch till July 22,” the weather department said.

Ahmedabad. (Agency)

After nearly a week's break, it rained in several parts of the state on Thursday. As many as 94 talukas in southern, northern, and Saurashtra districts reported rainfall. Till 8 pm, Paddhari in Rajkot received the highest 53 mm of rain, followed by Kamrej (46 mm) in Surat, Rapar (43 mm) in Kutch, Magrol (38 mm) and Bardoli (38 mm) in Surat, Dhandhuka (31 mm) in Ahmedabad, Netrang (29 mm) in Bharuch and Areth (24 mm) in Surat, weathermen said.

Meanwhile, the India Meteorological Department (IMD) said the state might continue to experience light to moderate rain till July 22. “Light to moderate rain and thundershowers are very likely in all districts of North Gujarat, a few places in all South Gujarat districts and at isolated



places in Saurashtra and Kutch till July 22,” the weather department said. “Due to a well-marked low-pressure area over the northwest Bay of Bengal and adjoining

Inside Hydrogen Train, leak detectors, auto shutdown, real time safety monitoring

Does not need manual intervention to shut off gas supply is unusual activity detected

Chandigarh. (Agency)

India's first hydrogen-powered train, to be flagged off by Prime Minister Narendra Modi from Haryana's Jind railway station on Friday, has multiple layers of safety features that can detect gas leak, heat, and smoke, and an automatic shut-off system that will cut off the hydrogen supply, without waiting for manual reaction, in case anything unusual is found.

“The train is fitted with devices that continuously watch for hydrogen leaks, unusual heat, flames or smoke, so any problem is caught within seconds. On top of this, non-stop ventilation keeps air moving through the train at all times, so that even if a tiny

amount of hydrogen were to leak, it gets safely carried away and diluted in the open air instead of collecting anywhere,” as per an official statement issued by the



Ministry of Railways. “There is also an automatic shut-off system. If anything unusual is detected, it can automatically cut off the hydrogen supply on its own, without waiting for a person to react”.

With the launch of the 10-coach train, which will operate between Jind and Sonipat section of Northern Railway, India will join a select group of nations that has adopted the clean technology.

“India becomes one of the select group of nations that have such trains. This will go a long way in ensuring that India adopts clean technology in the railway sector,” PM Modi said in a statement. Unlike electric trains that draw power from overhead wires, the Hydrogen Fuel Cell Trainset generates electricity on board through a Proton Exchange Membrane (PEM) fuel cell.

Hydrogen stored in cylinders reacts with oxygen from the atmosphere to produce electricity for the traction motors, with water vapour and heat as the only direct by-products.

Dream big, work hard and aspire to serve the nation: Bihar Governor to students

Patna. (Agency)

Bihar Governor Lieutenant General Syed Ata Hasnain (Retd.) today urged students to dream big, work hard and aspire to serve the nation by joining the armed forces, police, and other public services. Addressing the 20th Foundation Day celebrations of Shoshit Samadhan Kendra in Patna, he said the true purpose of education is not merely to help students score well in examinations, but to shape responsible, compassionate and self-confident citizens committed to serving society. The Governor said success is determined not by a person's family or economic background, but by

dedication, discipline and perseverance.

Citing the example of Lieutenant Vishal Kumar of Bihar, who received the prestigious Sword of Honour at the Indian Military Academy's Passing Out Parade in Dehradun, he said strong determination can help any young person achieve excellence. He noted that Vishal, the son of a soldier from the Bihar Regiment, had risen to become an Army officer through hard work. The Governor also appealed to parents to prioritise their children's education regardless of their circumstances and to support their aspirations. He said parents should focus on enabling their children to achieve greater success than they themselves may

have attained. Praising the work of Shoshit Samadhan Kendra, Hasnain said the institution has made a significant contribution to providing quality education to children from rural and underprivileged backgrounds.

He commended the students for their discipline, confidence, and eagerness to learn. Referring to science and other academic projects presented by students, the Governor appreciated their confidence and effective communication in English. He said that while the mother tongue remains important, proficiency in an international language such as English opens up new opportunities in today's world.

Surat floods: 54,000 given cash aid, 26K households also got govt help: Officials

On July 7, the city recorded up to 14 inches of rain, inundating several of its areas because of flooding in Mithi and Bhedwad creeks in Surat and Tapi districts.

Surat. (Agency)

Till Thursday evening, Rs 18 crore had been given to people affected by recent floods in Surat as compensation, district collector Tejas Parmar said. Out of the total amount, Rs. 4.85 crore cash aid was given to 53,999 people and the rest to 26,313 households, he added.

On July 7, the city recorded up to 14 inches of rain, inundating several of its areas because of flooding in Mithi and Bhedwad creeks in Surat and Tapi districts. Floodwater began receding on July 9. Later, Gujarat Chief Minister Bhupendra Patel visited Surat and asked the district administration to carry out a survey and ensure that the flood-affected were compensated.

“Areas that were majorly hit are Limbayat, Dindoli, Varachha, Udhna, Sachin, Simada, Laskana, Sarthana, etc. The survey is still going, and the

number of beneficiaries may increase,” Parmar said. Also, with the state government announcing a relief package for Surat businesses, the process to ascertain losses by industries in the region was underway, officials at the collectorate said. Industry sources said that hundreds of powerloom factories were affected.

Viraj Patel, who owns a powerloom unit at S K Nagar Industries in Limbayat, said, “The creek water entered my factory, which has 60 machines. I have incurred losses worth crores of rupees.”

Meanwhile, Federation of Surat Textile Traders Association is likely to meet the collector on Friday.

The Federation's Dinesh Katariya said, “We will request the collector to permit us to collect documents from textile traders whose shops suffered damages.”



North Odisha-West Bengal coasts, along with a monsoon trough, an upper air cyclonic circulation over southwest Rajasthan and a fresh Western Disturbance is likely to affect Northwest India from July 19, parts of Gujarat are likely to see rain,” it added.

The IMD has also warned fishermen against venturing into the sea till July 20 on account of strong winds that were likely in North and South Gujarat coasts. “Squally winds of speeds up to 45 to 55 kmph is expected along and off Gujarat coast,” it said.

Meanwhile, the state has received 25 per cent of its estimated rainfall of the season, with South Gujarat recording the highest 35.29 per cent. Since June 1, 8,324 people have been relocated from low-lying areas, and another 3,711 rescued. The highest relocations (4,683) and rescues (3,416) took place in Surat.

'Utkala' hosts spectacular Rath Yatra, thousands join sacred procession

Kolkata (Agency)

Devotion and festivity filled the streets of south Kolkata on Thursday as Utkala, the Odia community from the city, launched its annual Rath Yatra celebrations with a grand chariot procession that drew devotees from across the city.

The Odisha Festival will be inaugurated at Northern Park by the Chief Minister Suwendu Adhikari, on Friday. The programme will also include the presentation of the Utkala Samman to Prof. P. K. Mishra, followed by Kathak and Odissi dance performances.

The procession began at the temple in Kidderpore and proceeded to Northern Park in Bhawanipur, where the idols of Lord Jagannath, Lord Balabhadra and Devi Subhadra will remain until July 23. The deities will return to the temple during the Bahuda Yatra on July 24.

The traditional Chhera Pahanra (ceremonial sweeping around the chariot) ritual, was performed by Ram Gopal Bansal, Chairman of BMW Industries Ltd. This age-old ritual symbolises humility and selfless service to the divine. The procession was further enriched by devotional Kirtan (chanting) and the rhythmic Ghanta-Shankh (bell-conch shell).

These cultural performances added to the spiritual atmosphere and engaged devotees and onlookers throughout the journey.

Rath Yatra is one of the most celebrated festivals in Hinduism, commemorating Lord Jagannath's annual journey to his aunt's residence. The festival symbolises inclusivity, divine love, and spiritual unity.

The Kidderpore Jagannath Temple, established by Kolkata's Utkala (Odia) community in 1975, has long served as a spiritual and cultural hub for Odias living in the city. The temple is believed to have been sanctified by the erstwhile Shankaracharya of Puri. This temple had been following the rituals of the Rath Yatra since its inception, albeit on a small scale till 2003. After that celebrations became grand.

A Celebration of Gratitude Towards Nature in Uttar Pradesh

In the Indian philosophical tradition, there is a timeless saying: 'Vriksho Rakshati Rakshitah', if we protect trees, they protect us. Few messages capture the relationship between nature and humanity more meaningfully than this. If we preserve trees, they, in turn, sustain and protect us. This is an eternal truth, and it has defined the inseparable bond between humans and nature since the dawn of civilization. Forests have provided us with shade, rivers have nurtured civilizations, and the roots of trees have sustained the very essence of life. Yet, in the relentless pursuit of modern development, we have gradually forgotten that we also bear a responsibility toward the nature that gives us life. At a time when climate change has emerged as a global challenge, Uttar Pradesh, under the leadership of Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, has presented an inspiring example to the nation, one that reflects not only remarkable administrative efficiency but also a profound expression of gratitude toward nature.

On July 12, Uttar Pradesh created a record by planting more than 350 million saplings in a single day. This achievement is not only astonishing but also reflects the Yogi government's meticulous planning, coordination, and unwavering resolve. It highlights the clarity of leadership and determination required to transform seemingly impossible goals into reality. At the heart of this campaign lies Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath's environmental vision. He has consistently maintained that development and environmental conservation are complementary rather than contradictory. This philosophy has shaped Uttar Pradesh's forest policy, enabling the state to achieve this historic milestone through a remarkable blend of administrative capability, long-term vision, and public participation.

Chief Minister Yogi has described the plantation drive as a Mahayagya, a grand sacred offering. This expression carries deep significance in Indian tradition. A Yagya symbolizes sacrifice, dedication, and collective action undertaken for the welfare of all. When we plant a sapling, we do not expect an immediate reward for ourselves; instead, we invest in shade, clean air, water conservation, and a healthier future for generations to come. In Sanatan culture, trees are revered as divine, rivers are worshipped as mothers, and mountains are considered sacred because our ancient sages possessed a profound scientific and spiritual understanding of harmonious coexistence with nature. Over the past nine years, the Uttar Pradesh government has planted billions of saplings, not only revitalizing this principle of coexistence but also reviving a cultural heritage in which gratitude toward nature formed the very foundation of life.

In a vast and densely populated state like Uttar Pradesh, where industrialization and urbanization are advancing rapidly, expanding green cover is an enormous challenge. That is precisely what makes this achievement even more remarkable. Since 2017, more than 2.8 billion saplings have been planted across the state, resulting in a historic increase of nearly 380,000 acres in tree cover. This reflects a transformation that is gradually reshaping the state's geography, climate, and ecological balance. The greening of barren land and the improvement in groundwater levels demonstrate that when policies are implemented consistently over time, their cumulative impact can be truly transformative. Trees do far more than provide shade and fruit, they bind the soil, recharge groundwater, absorb carbon dioxide from the atmosphere to help stabilize the climate, and provide food and shelter to countless birds, animals, and other living organisms.

World's future hinges on using nuclear energy wisely

Early-warning systems and advanced monitoring technologies form a crucial layer of nuclear safety

The existence of the nucleus in an atom became known to humanity as recently as the first decade of the last century. Hidden within that tiny space is an enormous amount of stored energy. Under special conditions, when heavy atoms split or lighter atoms combine, energy is released. The surprising part is the scale of this energy release. HistoryWe are used to energy from burning fuels such as coal, petrol or wood which involve chemical reactions due to the extra-nuclear part of the atom. However, nuclear reactions occur at a much deeper level and can release millions of times more energy than ordinary chemical processes. This is called nuclear energy.

This difference is enormous, as burning a kilogram of standard coal gives 8 kWh of thermal energy whereas the same amount of pure Uranium-235 (a heavy atom) releases nuclear energy equivalent to roughly 26,000,000 kWh of thermal energy. As such nuclear energy is a powerful tool, and society's future may depend on learning how to use it wisely, since immense power also brings immense responsibility.

The discovery of nuclear energy has transformed modern civilisation. It has enabled clean electricity generation, revolutionised medicine, advanced scientific research and strengthened industry. Yet, the same knowledge also gave rise to the most destructive weapons ever created.

Unfortunately, each powerful technology has two faces. Nuclear technology, often called 'dual-use technology', can be used for both peaceful and malicious intent. The same scientific principles that can produce electricity and save lives can also create weapons of devastating capability. At a time when geopolitical tensions continue to rise, it is important to strengthen our preparedness against any possible nuclear emergency. Here, keeping aside numerous peaceful uses, let us focus on what we need to plug for safety. Unlike conventional wars, nuclear wars possess the ability not only to devastate military targets and cities but also to produce long-term environmental, social, economic and health consequences that may affect future generations. What nuclear war can unleash

Radioactive particles spread through the atmosphere and settle over vast regions, contaminating air, soil, water resources and food supplies. Ionising radiation emitted by radioactive materials possesses sufficient energy to damage biological molecules, including DNA. Modern scientific studies suggest that large-scale nuclear conflicts may trigger severe climatic changes, often described as 'nuclear winter'. Smoke and dust released from burning cities and industrial regions can enter the upper atmosphere and reduce the amount of sunlight reaching the Earth's surface. Such changes may significantly lower global



temperatures, disrupt agricultural production, create food shortages and threaten ecosystems worldwide. Economic systems and international trade networks would also experience severe disruption, potentially leading to widespread humanitarian crises. Nuclear wars can also produce significant social and psychological impacts. Large populations may be displaced from impacted areas, resulting in refugee crises and long-term social instability. Survivors may suffer psychological trauma, anxiety, depression and fear associated with radiation exposure and uncertainty about future health effects.

History

Safety measures

Given these dangers, numerous safety measures and preventive strategies have been developed to reduce the risk of nuclear conflict and minimise its consequences. The most important safety measure is prevention through diplomacy and international cooperation. Verification systems and international

inspections help ensure compliance and increase transparency among participating countries.

Early-warning systems and advanced monitoring technologies form another crucial layer of nuclear safety. Countries located in regions of strategic tension must continue strengthening their early-warning and disaster preparedness systems.

Reliable communication channels between nations are essential in case of any misunderstandings or technical errors during periods of tension which could otherwise lead to unintended escalation.

There are several areas where nuclear energy is used for peaceful purposes. But there can be accidental radioactive fallout, in which case preparedness and civil defence measures are equally important. Governments need to establish emergency response systems and develop plans for evacuation, shelter construction, medical support and disaster management. Public education programmes can help individuals understand protective measures during nuclear emergencies. Research in radiation detection, medical treatment for radiation exposure, environmental monitoring and emergency management systems improves the ability of societies to respond effectively during crises. Major outreach activities

should be planned to educate the masses. Disaster management centres at divisional and state levels need to come forward with regular programmes to train the citizens on how to cope during radioactive fallout. Scientists, educators, policymakers and citizens, all have roles in promoting awareness and encouraging peaceful solutions to global conflicts.

Education regarding nuclear risks helps societies understand the severe consequences associated with nuclear warfare while strengthening support for efforts toward international stability.

The history of nuclear science teaches us that knowledge itself is neither good nor evil. The same understanding of the atomic nucleus has illuminated hospitals, powered cities, explored the universe and created weapons capable of destroying civilisation.

Whether nuclear science remains a force for progress or becomes a source of catastrophe ultimately depends on human wisdom, cooperation and responsibility.

Poll reform : Consensus is a prerequisite for ONOE

ONOE risks diluting India's federal structure by subordinating state-level political priorities to national narratives

BJP MP PP Chaudhary, chairperson of the Joint Parliamentary Committee (JPC) examining the Bills on simultaneous polls, has stated that the proposed 'One Nation, One Election' (ONOE) reform could become operational by the 2029 Lok Sabha elections. According to him, the panel has found that "almost 99 per cent of stakeholders, particularly from civil society and various organisations, favour simultaneous elections." A balanced assessment of ONOE requires looking beyond political rhetoric to gauge its constitutional, administrative and democratic implications. The proposal continues to draw strong objections from some Opposition parties, constitutional experts and advocates of federalism. The challenge is to develop a mechanism that is acceptable to all concerned. PoliticsThe case in favour of ONOE rests largely on economic efficiency and smoother governance. Frequent elections involve substantial financial costs, leading to

repeated imposition of the Model Code of Conduct. The JPC has cited studies estimating that synchronised



elections could save nearly Rs 7 lakh crore by reducing disruptions to administration, industry, tourism and public services. Supporters also argue that

uninterrupted five-year cycles would enable governments to focus on long-term development, policy implementation and investment. However, there is much more to elections than potential gains in terms of money and governance. ONOE risks diluting India's federal structure by subordinating state-level political priorities to national narratives. The constitutional mechanism proposed to synchronise electoral cycles, particularly the possibility of curtailing or extending the tenure of legislatures or holding elections only for the remainder of a term, needs to be discussed thoroughly. Concerns have also been raised about granting the Election Commission wider discretionary powers in managing synchronisation. Electoral convenience should not erode a level playing field. The onus is on the JPC to adopt a calibrated approach so that the reform ensures efficiency as well as democratic integrity.

Pakistan's water politics in full flow

Islamabad has turned the dispute over Indus Waters Treaty into narrative warfare

PAKISTAN has a habit of turning its disputes with India into theatre. What begins as a technical disagreement over design parameters is recast as a moral test. A procedural objection becomes evidence of Indian bad faith, and a narrow finding is made to carry the weight of national alarm. It is doing this again with the Indus Waters Treaty (IWT). HistoryIslamabad appears before a Court of Arbitration, quotes international law and claims fidelity to the treaty. India stays away. For Pakistan, that settles it. The Court proceeds without India. Its award is binding, and New Delhi must obey.

That account leaves out Pakistan's campaign outside the courtroom. Islamabad is turning an engineering dispute into a political script. Information Minister Attaullah Tarar described the effort as a significant success "in the narrative domain." Pakistan is loading more rhetoric onto the award than it can bear. It says India is politicising water, then carries a pondage dispute internationally in the language of survival and war. Pakistan's script obscures India's changing needs. Demand for electricity, irrigation and storage capacity has risen steadily, particularly in the northern states. That has strengthened calls in India to use the western rivers more fully within the rights the IWT already provides. Some Indian ministers have put that case more sharply, including talk of stopping flows. India should not answer Pakistan in kind. It should state its case plainly. Treaty cooperation cannot be insulated indefinitely from cross-border terrorism.

India's objection predates both the latest award and the decision to hold the treaty in abeyance. It began in 2016, when India sought a Neutral Expert and Pakistan demanded a Court of Arbitration over the same two projects. The World Bank itself paused both processes because concurrent proceedings risked contradictory outcomes. When it made both appointments in 2022, it

said its role was limited and that the IWT did not empower it to decide which process had priority. India declined to participate when proceedings began in 2023, maintaining that the Court had been improperly constituted. HistoryThe procedural collision remains. In January 2025, the Neutral Expert held that he was competent to decide all differences referred to him. The Court of Arbitration has separately held that it too is competent. Two treaty mechanisms are advancing over related ground. After the Pahalgam terror attack, India's position hardened. It now says that the IWT remains in abeyance. India argues that the machinery cannot function normally while Pakistan sustains cross-border terrorism and then demands business as usual on the rivers. On July 3, India's Ministry of External Affairs said that Pakistan must credibly and irrevocably abjure support for cross-border terrorism before normal treaty cooperation can resume. Pakistan has itself relied on consent to resist arbitral authority. In the Dallah case, Pakistan resisted enforcement on the ground that it had never agreed to commercial arbitration, and the UK Supreme Court upheld the objection. The Indus dispute is different because India is a party to a treaty containing arbitral procedures. The issue is not whether India consented to dispute settlement, but how far that consent extends and whether the IWT's graded procedure was followed. Pakistan's presentation goes well beyond what the maximum pondage award actually decides. Pondage is not long-



data, and power system needs. It also requires the pondage calculation to account for applicable minimum environmental flow obligations. It does not, by itself, make Ratle unlawful, require Kishenganga to be redesigned, or hand Pakistan a veto over run-of-the-river projects in Jammu and Kashmir.

Pakistan relies on the award as binding and without appeal. India maintains that this cannot cure what it regards as a prior jurisdictional defect. Islamabad has the award, but no order requiring an Indian project to be

redesigned and no immediate means of compelling such a change. HistoryPakistan's water stress is real, but its causes are not all external. On June 11, Dawn reported severe shortages in Sindh and Balochistan, while Punjab was drawing more than its allocated share. The dispute shows that a part of Pakistan's problem lies in how it divides and uses its water. Tarbela's silt is not an Indian conspiracy. A dry canal in Sindh is not automatically proof of Indian coercion. Pakistan's water insecurity also reflects ageing reservoirs, provincial disputes, water-intensive cropping patterns and falling groundwater, all aggravated by a more volatile climate.

The award is narrow. Pakistan's campaign is not. Islamabad is combining the vocabulary of arbitration with humanitarian alarm to build pressure abroad. This year, it has written twice to the President of the UN Security Council, turning the Council into a stage for Indus politics. Pakistan calls this treaty defence. It is narrative warfare. Pakistan is addressing foreign governments and its own public at once. That does not

strengthen its legal case. India's non-participation may carry costs, but absence is not agreement. The chair was empty because India contests the room itself. Pakistan speaks of water as lifeline, red line and war. India must keep speaking of terrorism, trust and jurisdiction. The question is no longer who won the award. It is whether a treaty can still work when its procedures point in different directions and the trust needed to sustain cooperation has collapsed.

Soak in the regalia of the fairytale-like princely state of Jodhpur in Rajasthan's second largest city.

As little kids, we would pester our grandparents to tell and retell the stories of beautiful queens, handsome maharajas, fierce battles and bejewelled royal palaces. I managed to behold and soak in the regalia of one such fairytale-like princely state on my recent trip to Rajasthan's second largest city and home to the Maharajas since 1459, Jodhpur.

Colourful cityscape

The silky sand dunes of the Thar Desert dotted with camels basking in the sun, towering forts and palaces glistening in red sandstone and the narrow lanes leading to shops that open into an alluring world of handicrafts are some of the welcoming sights here. We were fortunate to have a host-cum-tour guide to walk us into different eras every time we stepped inside historical monuments, temples and gardens. Madan Lal Jangid, a 69-year-old French professor, entrepreneur, researcher and an avid traveller could not be dismissed as one of those guides who takes tourism to be a revenue-making business. "I cannot wrap up the history of a place in 45 minutes, make money and let you go feeling satisfied. I remember when a diplomat from Canada had been here, we spent at least 4-5 hours in Mehrangarh Fort discussing the many stories behind every pillar and rock. That is how you connect; summarising a history in stock-and-trade terms is a fruitless exercise," asserts he. Our car moved through the nooks and crannies of the city in a way that the seat's window became a frame to the colourful images outside running past one after the other. From veiled women keeping up with their husbands' pace, the paan wala sprinkling water on the cascading betel leaves, little boys encircling foreign tourists to that old woman under the shade of the Clock Tower with a heap of coloured shoelaces awaiting buyers; the transition seemed like we turn pages in a photo album.

The royal quarters of Mehrangarh Fort

The mighty walls of the Mehrangarh Fort have many secrets buried inside. Maintained by the present generation of Marwar Kings, Maharaja Gaj Singh II, the expansive courtyards, exquisite palatial spaces like the Moti Mahal (Pearl Palace), Phool Mahal (Flower Palace), Sheesha Mahal (Mirror Palace), and hidden balconies for women to listen to court proceedings, chambers and galleries enrich the fort's heritage. Our host informs us that this is the only fort where you will find the provision of an elevator allowing people to not worry about any physical barriers during their tour. There is yet another purpose of the elevator; it leads you to the Mehran Terrace, a roof-top restaurant where people take delight in indulging in the traditional Rajasthani thali. And what better way to admire the beauty of a world-class historical monument than sitting on the terrace beneath the twinkling stars and dim-lit candles on the dining table?

On reaching the top floor, the view of the entire cityscape is breathtaking. All the gates of the fort are visible and the panoramic view seems sketched on a blue canvas. Blue, because the cluster of buildings are bathed in that colour and there is a reason too. The colour was earlier identified with a certain privileged section of society, a marker of a higher caste but slowly as civilization

Jodhpur

A royal retreat

grew, such social indicators ceased to have any significance. Subsequently, blue emerged as the universal colour of all communities irrespective of distinctions. Jodhpur is not only known as the 'sun' city, it is also referred to as the 'blue' city, like Jaipur is the Pink City. Note: The rooftop restaurant opens during the evenings after the fort closes. Tourists who do not intend to move around the fort and would rather revel in the maharaja-style dining on the terrace can do so. The Chokhelao garden (200-



year-old and recently refurbished) is often mistaken to be the Mehran Terrace but both are different, though within the premises of the fort area. The Chokhelao Garden leads to the Mehran Terrace

Jaswant Thada

Located half way up the road that climbs onwards to the Mehrangarh fort is Jaswant Thada. Immaculate in white marble, this mausoleum was built in the year 1899 in the memory of Maharaja Jaswant Singh II. A tomb with an array of domes is the crematorium for Jodhpur rulers. As the sun rays kiss the milky surface of the monument, the memorial comes alive in a glaze and its intricate carved jalis (screens) emit a glow.

The grandeur of Umaid Bhavan

This palace was born out of a crisis. When consecutive seasons went without rain, a famine-like situation arose that threatened the economic lives of people. Maharaja Umaid Singh decided to construct a palace that would not only relieve employment worries but also remain a monument of symbolic value for years. A visionary and benevolent king succeeded in his famine-relief policy that provided employment to thousands for a period of

almost two decades from 1929-44. Anecdotes are many when it comes to discussing the Umaid Bhavan (initially called Chittar Palace for it stood on the Chittar Hills). The Art Deco furniture and impeccable interiors were originally crafted by Maples of London but unfortunately all furnishings could not reach the Palace. In the wake of World War II, the furniture-laden ship succumbed to a tragedy and was sunk by the Germans en route to India. Nothing could deter the Maharaja's plans and in came a Polish artist and refugee from war-torn Europe, Stephen Norblin, who mended what was wrecked. Familiar with the work of Art Deco connoisseurs, Norblin did not fail the King. As you look through the paintings (essentially inspired by the episodes of Ramayana), gaze at the artefacts ranging from antique clocks (some in the shape of railway locomotives and others in windmills) to ornate ceilings; you would be quick to notice a harmonious "blend of occidental symmetry and oriental texture," in the words of our host.

Umaid Bhavan has been divided into three sections- one portion is dedicated to the museum and exhibition area, the other is converted into a hotel and the third segment is owned by the current family of the royals headed by Maharaja Gaj Singh II.

Clock Tower and marketplace

Rajasthan is a land that celebrates colour and what better way to explore it than doing the rounds of the market area on the Nayi Sadak with the huge Clock Tower in the backdrop. Once you take a left from the Nayi Sadak, you reach the inviting world of lac bangles

sparkling in embedded mirror work and bold colours almost blinding you at first sight. A walk through the Lakhara Bazaar reminds you of Delhi's Chandni Chowk where everybody is scuttling around but with a sense of purpose. With bandhej designs, tie-dye prints, ethnic footwear and all things jodhpuri, you are bound to go neck-deep in shopping. Amid all the chatter of the localites, bickering of buyers and sellers, firing of 'mirchi' vadas and mawa kachoris (chilli-infused snacks) Jodhpur brightens up in the evenings. Biting into one of the spicy vadas, our host shared a trivia, "Rajiv Gandhi loved the mirchi vadas here and would never leave the city after every visit without his share of the popular snack".

Trivia: Most clothing items on sale are second-hand; yes, it is believed that these articles where once worn by the queens and now re-designed and modified to allure shoppers. Slip into that Rajasthani attire and feel like a real queen if you will

Jodhpur: A royal retreat Credit: Reuters

Mandore Garden is more than flower-beds Gardens are supposed to make you feel happy but I entered into the gates of the Mandore Garden with a heavy heart. It was once a prominent entry point to the Mehrangarh Fort but today stands like an ordinary gateway. Its walls embossed in palm prints continue to speak of the cruel ritual of sati (burning of wives in the funeral pyre of their dead husbands) rampant during the time. Once inside, between the

crevices of lush green trees you can catch a glimpse of the Mandore temple that is believed to be named after Ravana's wife, Mandodari. On one hand, while a woman is a symbol of divinity, she is also subjected to atrocities like sati and dowry deaths; a conundrum unresolved.

Osian Village and the Great Indian Desert

If Jaisalmer prides in its Golden Fort (fondly known as 'Sonar Kella' after Satyajit Ray's film by the same name), Jodhpur too flaunts the 'Khajuraho of Rajasthan', i.e. Osian Village. It is one of the ancient villages and pilgrimage centres of the Oswal Jain community that is home to ruins of Brahmanical and Jain temples dating back to the 8th Century. Almost a two-hour drive from the main city, Osian is an oasis in The Thar Desert. Once in our lifetime, some of us wish to see snow, some want to feel the sea from up-close and others long to be on the mountains. But when you find yourself standing in the middle of a desert, surrounded with nothing but golden-yellow sand dunes, the openness engulfs you. Footprints on the desert that begin to form a trail but suddenly dissolve after a distance seem like a reminder of how fragile permanence can be. Tents and resort camps situated on the picturesque Osian sand dunes can make for a peaceful stay for tourists hoping to escape their busy lives.

Bishnoi Villages The Chipko Movement can be traced back to the origin of the Bishnois (a community of nature and wildlife lovers) that revolted against the Maharaja's decision to fell trees in order to build the Mehrangarh Fort. Since the feudal power dismissed the protests by the bishnois who hugged the trees as an act of resistance, many of them were hacked with the trees. Since then, there is a day that commemorates the sacrifice of the bishnois in Khejerli Village. A glimpse into the cultural life of the bishnois in Khejerli Village, (south-east of Jodhpur is considered a place of pilgrimage) can definitely be a value addition to your trip. Village tours and safaris are conducted in Khejerli and Guda Bishnoi Villages; they are home to chinkaras and blackbucks that roam the countryside throughout the day but return to their native villages at the sunset.

Things to do in Shillong—the abode of clouds

The city of Shillong is often considered to be a place where nature is in its primal beauty; where clouds and the sun express their own camaraderie through a vivid interlay of sunshine and shadow; where the colonial remnants meet the upsurge of modern day influence and where music runs through the veins of everyone you come across. So naturally, there is a

lot to see in Shillong, which is, by the way, true to the core; but to tag the city as merely a 'places to visit paradise' would be sheer injustice to the lesser known opportunities for action and adventure. Things to do in Shillong can be turned into a full-fledged vacation idea rather than just a part of the itinerary.

Embark on a musical journey in the city

often referred to as India's Rock Capital and a watchful stroll along the narrow alleys is a good start to have. Extend your sojourn and see names like Lou Majaw, Afflatus and Soulmate in their own territory. For the ones who like things ready-on-a-platter, we suggest you visit Shillong during any music concert. Once your thirst for melody is quenched, time for some water rappelling at the Elephant Falls; golfer or non golfer, Shillong Golf Course is one place you would not want to miss out on; take a leisurely stroll along the Wards Lake and indulge in water activities like boating, skiing and rowing at the Umiam Lake.

Take a stroll around Wards Lake

Located in the midst of the colonial era Shillong, Wards Lake is a popular hangout place for the tourists and locals alike. Unlike the Umiam Lake, this one is more planned and all the facilities have been provided keeping in mind requirements of the leisure traveller. The entire area is adorned with flower beds, beautiful trees, lovely high lands and a bridge. Seekers of tranquility will have their share of personal space amid a growing city; nature lovers can admire the man-made corner for the greens and photography enthusiasts will not mind spending some

time in Wards Lake. Extend your walk towards the northeast direction of the lake and after about 15 minutes you will arrive at the Shillong Golf Course which with all its greenery and pine trees!

Boating at Umiam Lake

Located about 15 kms north of Shillong, this lake is basically a water reservoir that was formed due to the damming of the Umiam river. Historically this lake holds a special place in North East India, courtesy the fact that the dam that gave birth to Umiam Lake is the first Hydel power project in the region. A massive water body, the total catchment area of the lake and dam is spread over 220 square kms. This beautiful lake is a paradise for the nature lovers and ones who crave for a hide out from the daily hustle of city life. The water of Umiam Lake is very clean and hence offers a never-to-be missed opportunity of boating and other water activities. Hire a boat and sail into its crystal clear water to enjoy the surrounding beauty of the entire landscape. The water sports complex at Umiam Lake offers adventure sports options like water skiing, sailing and rowing to the visitors.

Golfing in Shillong Golf Course

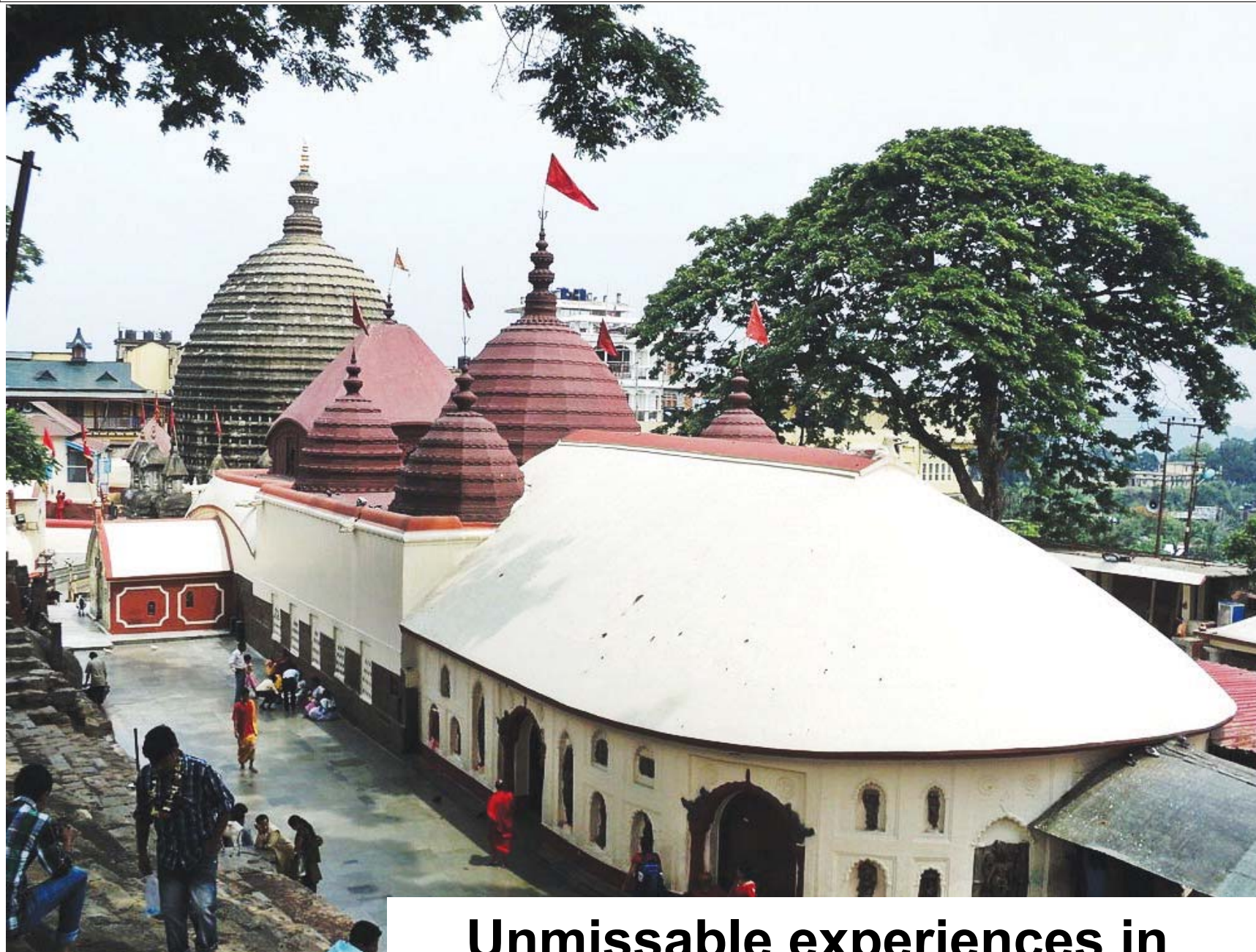
Courtesy its past as the British capital of the then undivided Assam, Shillong has the imprints of the days bygone; Shillong Golf Course is one of them. But it will be sheer

injustice to the magnanimous entity if we box it up only as a colonial remnant and a place for the professional players to test their skills. The 18-hole course is a green paradise with grass spread across like carpet with trees standing like watchful protectors. The lush green hills that form the backdrop of beautiful pine and rhododendron trees add to the splendor of the landscape. Be a part of the golf tournaments that are held on this venue to be one with the surroundings and its legacy.

Waterfall rappelling at Elephant Falls

Elephant Falls is the combination of three small torrents that form a strong stream that adorns the fern-covered rocks. The place got its name in the colonial era when the Englishmen spotted a giant rock resembling an elephant near the fall. The rock got destroyed during an earth quake and the Englishmen left the country but the name stayed. Due to its origin in three streams, the water force of Elephant Falls is one to reckon with which offers ample opportunities for adventure sports like waterfall rappelling. For starters, you can try rappelling from the height of 40 ft and don't worry; you will be well harnessed under expert surveillance. Climb down from your starting point and feel the immense water pressure on you while you struggle to find your footing in the slippery rocks.





Unmissable experiences in Guwahati

Apart from the stipulated tourist destinations, Guwahati is a place where you can indulge in several outdoor activities. The presence of one of India's biggest and mightiest rivers and the hills that surround the city offer a perfect opportunity for travelers who do not like to confine their travel diaries only to sightseeing and guided tours. The moment an aircraft approaches the Lokpriya Gopinath Bordoloi International Airport (also known as the Borjhar airport locally in Guwahati), one notices the green hills and paddy fields that lie below with almost no human inhabitation. Not to mention the curvaceous outlines of the ever flowing Brahmaputra that tickles the

imagination of restless travelers.

The moderate weather during October to February is the ideal time to embark on an activity-packed Guwahati vacation. Go for a leisurely walk along the pavements of old Guwahati; take a river cruise on the Brahmaputra or trek up the nearby hills? it's your pick! Assam witnesses immense and regular rainfall from late April to late July, so if you are a rain lover, this is the time you should mark in your calendar but make sure there is no flood condition at that time.

River cruise on the Brahmaputra

The river runs through the entire length of Assam but the stretch that touches Guwahati is the most highlighted one, courtesy the city's commercial and political status and the famous Saraighat Bridge. The Brahmaputra divides the city into two parts while on its imposing journey from the

Himalayan glaciers to the Bay of Bengal. After the completion of Saraighat Bridge, these waters were traversed just for fishing and coastline trading but the scene has changed drastically in the past decade or so. Now several ferry service providers offer laid-back river cruises for the travelers.

The Bharalu ghat and the Kachari ghat in the city are the main places from where you can book a cruise. Usually operated in the afternoon, these cruises last for two to three hours and take you along the majestic waters of the Brahmaputra. These ferries have sitting area for the guests and one can avail the food and beverage services onboard. Imagine yourself on one of these ferries with a cup of tea standing witness to the sunset on the crimson western sky!

Heritage walks in old Guwahati

There is a reason why the phrase - old is gold - exists in our vocabulary and the old Guwahati area further cements that saying. Though there is no specific new Guwahati on either maps or local lingo, we can recommend certain localities that will bring back the old world

charm once you set foot in them. And we are referring to the literal meaning of the word

'foot' here as these vintage parts are best explored if you walk down its alleys and corridors. The major areas that fall under this bracket are? the academic hub of Panbazar, the colonial remnant Uzanbazar, the roads of Kharghuli, the entire area of Digholipukhuri and some parts of Aambari area.

We suggest you start with Panbazar amid its old bookshops and historic publishing houses. Home to Assam's premier educational institute, Cotton College, Panbazar is a place which is always alive with young student crowd. Then head towards the Digholipukhuri (a massive pond with boating facilities), one of the most happening landmarks of the city before rerouting to Uzanbazar where you will come face to face with some of the oldest residential colonies in Guwahati. From here you can head to the Kharghuli area where a beautiful stretch of road goes parallel with the Brahmaputra amid lush greenery.

Trekking in Nilachal Hills

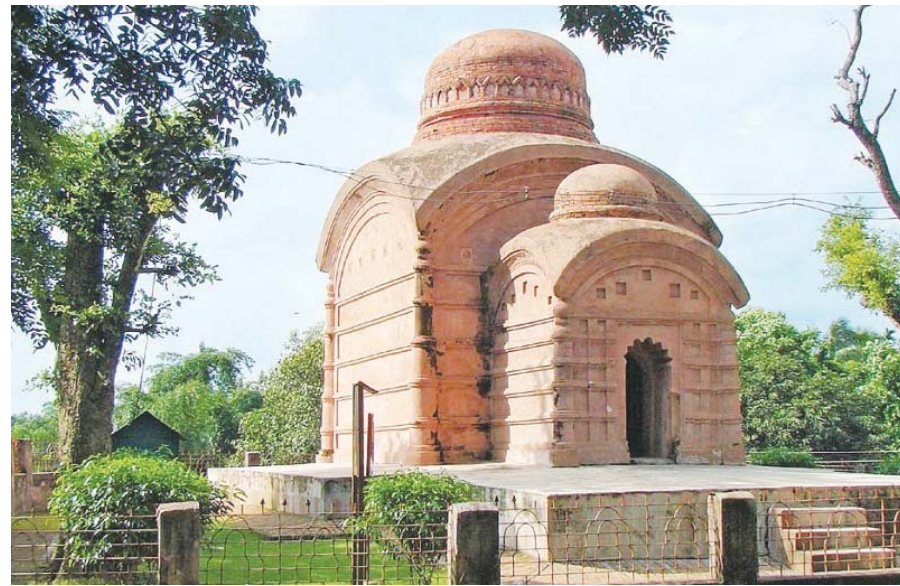
If you are in North East and you don't climb a hill, your stay is incomplete so this is one thing you must do! The entire city is surrounded by hills and the best parts to go trekking are Nilachal hill and the hills of Nizorapaar. For easy accessibility and identification of Nilachal hill, just ask your cabbie or auto rickshaw driver to go to Kamakhya Temple. You will be dropped at the entry gate of the temple which is adjacent to the main road. From there, you can start your hike amid rich flora and fauna and even if you don't intend to visit the temple, be assured that your trekking experience will be one to cherish.

The next hiking destination you can hit is the hills of Nizorapaar. Located in the famous Chanmari area of Guwahati, this hill is somewhat more populated than Nilachal but scores in terms of scenic beauty and mindboggling views. The roads are serpentine and some parts offer steep climb that you normally don't expect in an inhabited hilly region. You may come across the odd vehicle but as you go up, the number will come down drastically.

Go for a ride in Accoland

Who does not like a fun outing in an amusement park located in the backdrop of a hillock? So even if you are not accompanied by a kid, you can anyway head towards Accoland, the best amusement park in Guwahati. Located on Rani Road in Patgaon area, this place is just over 5 kms from the Guwahati airport. Accoland is loaded with over 12 different rides and 16 other fun activities which give you the opportunity to get some adrenaline highs.

As common with amusement parks, the atmosphere here is of joy and fun so this is the best place to unwind a bit. Traveling, no matter how exciting it could be, always runs the risk of being tad tiresome and sometimes takes a toll on the traveler. But take a dip in the massive swimming pool in Accoland and get rejuvenated for the rest of the journey. The food joints in the park offer delicious snacks and beverage options and nothing completes fun like food, right?



Himachal's pot secret - it's not what you think

A 20-minute drive from Palampur in the Kangra District of Himachal Pradesh brings you to Andretta, a quaint artist village, said to be established by an Irish theatre artiste and environmentalist called Norah Richards, who lived there during the Partition. Flanked by the Shivalik hills and the mighty Dhauladhar range, this Italian-sounding village is literally off the beaten path.

Andretta first figured on my radar because of a pottery and craft centre run by the renowned potter Mansimran Singh (fondly known as Mini) and his British wife Mary Singh. The son of the famous potter Sardar Gurcharan Singh (who set up Delhi Blue Art Pottery in 1952, inspired by blue Persian glaze), Mini set up Andretta Pottery and Craft Society in Himachal Pradesh in 1983. Equipped with a production studio, the facility provides three-month long courses. Feeling terribly burnt out by the manic city life, I longed for a break. Delighted at the prospect of trying my hand at pottery, I set about exploring how to make this happen.

According to Google Maps, Andretta didn't exist. There was nothing but basic information available online. This would be the perfect break I was seeking. Like most travel nuts, I'd have liked to read up and familiarise myself with what to expect, but that seemed unlikely in this case. My sense of thrill was fuelled further. Andretta was remote. It was in the midst of nature. And, it offered culture along the way.

After some R&D, I managed to contact Jugal Kishore, the manager of Andretta Pottery. The course was inclusive of boarding, lodging and instruction. The boarding was a home stay which provided homecooked meals, but they could accommodate only four students that time of the year (I went last September). Much to my disappointment, I was told that they were

booked for the next two months. Clearly, I had underestimated the remoteness of Andretta. Jugalji's affable voice on the line offered to inform me in case of any cancellations. Much to my delight, he did call. How long did I wish to stay, he asked. Two weeks. That's not enough time to learn pottery, I was told, but it was up to me to take a call. I confirmed. We finalised the dates; I inquired the best route to get to Andretta and it was done.

It merits mentioning that Andretta is not the most convenient place to get to. One look at the HPTDC deluxe bus made me rethink the overnight journey I had booked my ticket for. Nevertheless, the decrepit vehicle (which made my bones ache) arrived at Palampur the next morning. My black bag, an unrecognisable gray from dust now, was handed to me. Refreshing dew-laden green greeted my eyes. There was a row of private cabs parked as Jugalji had predicted, to take me on the last leg of the journey - down the road to Andretta.

In 20 minutes, I was dropped off at Jugalji's home, which housed the centre's students. The homestay was a five-minute walk from the Pottery. Though fatigued, I was delighted to meet Jugalji and his lovely wife, Lata. As the introductions proceeded, I was distracted by the view from where I stood. My gaze met the majestic Dhauladhar. They were breathtaking. Over a cup of very welcome tea, I was told it had rained the past few days, but that morning had brought clear skies. Behind the house stood the forests of the Shivalik Hills; lush green and reverberating with early morning bird chatter. I took in the fragrance of the flora drenched in the wetness of the rain. Used to the uniformly ugly Mumbai urban landscape, my eyes greedily took in



the view. It was perfect.

Having arrived on a Sunday, I had the day to myself. Andretta is a hub for art lovers. Richards arrived in Andretta in the 1920s and built a traditional Kangra-style mud house with a small outdoor theatre, which in no time became a centre for creative arts. Her home is a 10-minute walk from the Pottery Society. It is said that a young Prithvi Raj Kapoor also spent time learning theatre here. B C Sanyal, who played a key role in setting up the Lalit Kala Akademi in New Delhi was a frequent visitor. Freda Bedi, actor Kabir Bedi's mother also lived in Andretta and is said to have been friends with Richards. Portrait painter Sardar Soba Singh and Sardar Gurcharan Singh were few of those Richards invited in her quest to establish Andretta as an Artist Village.

The next day was class. My city-bred perception of class involves a group of students and an instruction routine. Instead, classes at Andretta Pottery offered direction through tips on the technique of pottery. The structure was

devoid of the pressure of a fixed number of hours. It ensured that the basics were put in place before rushing a student towards throwing a pot. Both, Mini and Jugalji offered attentive supervision, but it was up to the student to make best use of time at hand; ease of access to the studio was granted. Learning at Andretta, it became clear to me, would involve self-discipline and perseverance.

Andretta Pottery uses clay from the property. After a quick walk through by Jugalji, I was asked to pull clay out from storage bins and knead it, like dough. Then I fetched water from the stream that ran behind the studio to soften the clay. The wheels at the studio were manual and I learnt the technique to kick the wheel to get it moving. I would have never fathomed that pottery could be this labour intensive. Agnieszka, a Polish co-student, who became a dear friend by the time I left, was visiting from London for three months. She worked as a ceramic technician back home. She said the techniques helped her progress faster. She was already handling a kilo of clay on the wheel while I gloriously struggled to centre a small lump.

I spent up to six hours every day on the wheel, breaking only for lunch and tea. By the evening, I would be physically exhausted with only enough energy to drag myself back to the house. Sunday was a day off and that's when we would explore the village and its neighbouring areas on foot.

We would walk to Panchrukhi, the closest village market. No eateries or coffee shops dotted the market, but grocery, booze, fruit

and vegetables were available aplenty. For anything a level above basic, including Internet, we visited Palampur. (Data card speed was excruciatingly slow. Mobile connectivity, however was good.)

The two weeks flew by in a blink. It was too little time to even get all the pottery basics right, but I managed to make quite a few things in a technique called Slabbing. Mini teased me on the first day, saying, "You think you can learn pottery in two weeks!" He was right, I'm going back.

A head's up

Getting there: Take an overnight Deluxe bus from ISBT Delhi to Palampur (13 km from Andretta), or an overnight Volvo to Dharamsala (48 km from Andretta). Book on www.hptdc.nic.in. You could take an overnight train to Pathankot (120 km away), or a flight to Dharamsala or Amritsar (235 km away) and drive down.

Accommodation: The Andretta Pottery centre offers homestays. E-mail Jugal Sankhyan on sankhyan.j@gmail.com. The Mirage: Run by New Zealander Denis Haarap and his French wife, this property is a traditional mud house restored by the couple. Visit www.mirageandretta.com

Cost: Andretta Pottery is Rs 1,000/day all inclusive. Cab hires to travel to Bir/Dharamsala cost Rs 800-1,500 for a return drive. This trip won't burn any holes in your pocket. Walking trails: Visit Norah Richard's mud home and Norah Centre for Arts and Soba Singh Art Gallery. There are several temples and monasteries not too far from Andretta. Dharamsala, the home of the Dalai Lama is 48 km away. Bir, a Tibetan colony approximately 28 km from Andretta, is fast emerging as a paragliding destination.

Delhi riots case: High Court seeks police response on Sharjeel Imam's bail plea

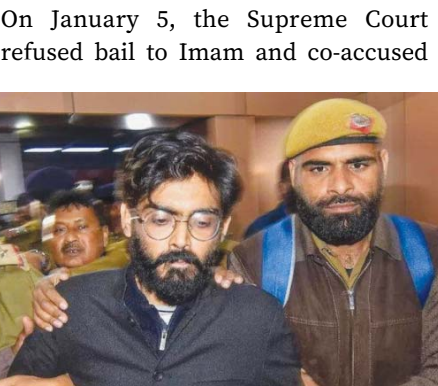
Court sought police's response to Sharjeel Imam's bail appeal after he argued that the trial court wrongly refused to examine his plea on merits despite the 2020 Delhi riots conspiracy case remaining stuck at the stage of arguments on charge nearly six years after his arrest.

New Delhi. (Agency)

The Delhi High Court on Friday sought the response of the Delhi Police on student activist Sharjeel Imam's appeal challenging the rejection of his bail plea in the larger conspiracy case linked to the February 2020 northeast Delhi riots. A division bench of Justices Prathiba M Singh and Vikas Mahajan issued notice to the Delhi Police on Imam's appeal against a July 4 trial court order dismissing his second regular bail application. The bench granted the police two weeks

to file its response and listed the matter for hearing on August 27. Imam was arrested on August 25, 2020, under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA) for allegedly being one of the "masterminds" behind the February 2020 riots in northeast Delhi. The violence, which erupted during protests against the Citizenship (Amendment) Act (CAA) and the proposed National Register of Citizens (NRC), claimed 53 lives and left over 700 people injured. Rejecting Imam's bail plea earlier this month, the trial court

had said it had "no option but to follow" the Supreme Court's January 5 order and, therefore, could neither entertain the application nor grant the relief sought. It held that the bail plea was not maintainable before it. In his appeal before the high court, Imam contended that the trial court had failed to independently assess his plea for regular bail. He argued that despite nearly six years since his arrest, the proceedings in the case had not progressed beyond the stage of arguments on charge.



Umar Khalid in the larger conspiracy case while granting bail to co-accused Gulfisha Fatima, Meeran Haider, Shifa

Ur Rehman, Mohammad Saleem Khan and Shadab Ahmad. A bench of Justices Aravind Kumar and N V Anjaria had held that a prima facie case existed against Imam and Khalid under the UAPA and observed that all accused could not be treated alike given the "hierarchy of participation" in the alleged conspiracy. The high court will now examine Imam's challenge to the trial court's refusal to consider his bail plea on merits after receiving the Delhi Police's response.

No business writing doctor: Supreme Court's sharp rap in 4-year-old's rape case

New Delhi. (Agency)

The Supreme Court on Friday tore into two private hospitals for allegedly refusing to provide treatment to a four-year-old rape victim who later succumbed to her injuries in Ghaziabad. Calling the conduct of the hospitals "merciless" and "ruthless", the Supreme Court directed them to pay compensation to the bereaved family.



The top court's anger was specifically against an ayurvedic doctor who failed to provide initial medical care to the child. "You have no business writing doctor with your name if you don't perform your duty," a three-judge bench, led by Chief Justice Surya Kant, said. "If you had sensitivity, you would have gone with the child to another hospital if you didn't have the facility. You ignored because she was poor?" the court further said, according to a report in Bar and Bench.

‘Sheesh Mahal’ ops likely to be handed over to private firm

New Delhi. (Agency)

The Delhi government may rope in a private hospitality company to operate and maintain bungalow No. 6 on Flagstaff Road, the former official residence of ex-chief minister Arvind Kejriwal, which is to be turned into a guest house for commercial use. Officials said that a portion of the camp office within the premises of the bungalow will also be completed for further utilisation. The Public Works Department (PWD) is exploring ways to figure out the operation and maintenance of the bungalow, which is currently lying vacant and unutilised, PWD minister Parvesh Sahib Singh said. "We may approach some reputed hospitality chain to run the guest house and generate revenue for the government," Singh added. Like other state guest houses, the bungalow will be used to house travelling ministers and officials for a fee. The minister added that the remaining portion of the camp office may be used for official events. A portion of the building inside will be developed to host seminars, dinners and meetings, for which "we currently have to rent out a space in private hotels", Singh added. The final approval to this proposal is yet to be given by higher authorities, the minister said. At present, around 10 staff members are deployed to maintain the bungalow, including daily sweeping, cleaning and operating electrical appliances such as refrigerators and air conditioners. In the past few months, the Delhi government has floated several options for repurposing the ex-CM's residence at Flagstaff Road, which came under intense scrutiny for its alleged lavish renovation under Kejriwal's tenure. In 2022, the Delhi government's vigilance department initiated an inquiry at the direction of former Delhi LG V K Saxena on the case of alleged "irregularities and cost escalation in renovation of the house" by PWD in the revamp of the existing house.

Sonam Wangchuk's protest a hit. But has his cause flopped?

New Delhi. (Agency)

Twenty days, over nine kgs lost, muscle mass disappearing, and organ failure a possibility. Yet the loudest thing about activist Sonam Wangchuk's hunger strike seems to be the silence surrounding its cause - the resignation of Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan over the spate of exam paper leaks. While Wangchuk's protest has captured national attention, drawing support from actors and the opposition, the cause behind it seems to have faded away. As Wangchuk's health deteriorates by the day, the Centre has held on to its stoic silence. Prime Minister Narendra Modi even seemed to pour cold water on demands for Pradhan's



sacking with his effusive birthday wish for the minister a couple of weeks back. In fact, the narrative at the Jantar Mantar protest site itself has shifted - from calls for Pradhan to step down to wean Wangchuk off his fast, considering his health. The sit-in at Jantar Mantar, India's OG protest hub, was started by the Cockroach Janta Party (CJP), a Gen Z-led satirical movement, on June 20. The 59-year-old Wangchuk joined

the protest on June 28, kicking off his hunger strike. The CJP's frontline leaders, including founder Abhijit Dipke, did not join the fast. Wangchuk gave the CJP protest a face. **SONAM WANGCHUK'S FAST ENTER DAY 20** Initially, Wangchuk's protest failed to gather steam. Cockroach Party founder Abhijit Dipke's apolitical framing of their protest did not help matters. "We don't want existing parties to come. They are the ones who were in power when things did not improve. They are a reason why we are here," Dipke said in an interview. Even Wangchuk suggested that he joined the CJP protest as it had no political colour. "If I saw even a hint of politics in this, I wouldn't have come here," he said.

Delhi Police files 973-page chargesheet in IRS officer's daughter rape-murder case

New Delhi. (Agency)

Delhi Police has filed a 973-page chargesheet in a city court against Rahul Meena, the former domestic help accused of raping and murdering the 22-year-old daughter of a senior IRS officer, police sources said on Friday. According to police, Meena entered the house on April 22 using his prior knowledge of a spare key when the woman was alone. He was arrested from a hotel in Dwarka the same evening after CCTV footage showed him entering the residential complex at 6.30 am and leaving at 7.20 am.



found by her parents when they returned from the gym at around 8 am. She was taken to a nearby hospital, where she was declared

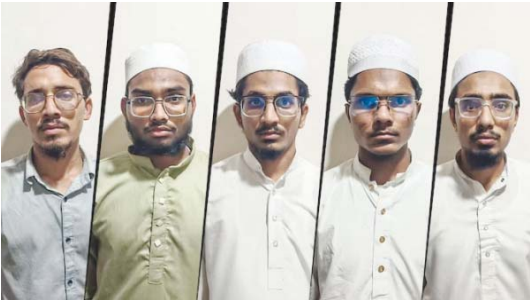
dead. The chargesheet alleges that Meena raped the woman and strangled her with a mobile phone charging cable after she resisted his demand for money. It also says he stole cash estimated at between Rs 2 lakh and Rs 2.5 lakh, changed into the victim's brother's clothes and fled the scene. Sources said fingerprints, palm prints and thumb impressions recovered from the crime scene matched those of the accused, and his DNA matched samples collected from the victim's body. Police have listed 82 witnesses to establish the sequence of events.

Gujarat Police arrests 5 more Jaish operatives plotting blasts across India

New Delhi. (Agency)

The Gujarat Anti-Terrorism Squad (ATS) has arrested five more accused allegedly linked to a module of the banned terror outfit Jaish-e-Mohammed (JeM), taking the total number of arrests in the case to 13, sources told. The latest arrests came after the ATS had earlier apprehended eight suspects. Officials believe the five newly arrested accused were part of the same network and were picked up from different districts of Gujarat. The arrested accused have been identified as Bilal Abid Shera, Mohammed Aiyub Sunasara alias Mohammed Khali, Mohammed Aiyub Kadiwal alias Mohammed Khadiyan, Mohammed Shafi Mukhi alias Shafi

Chapi, Mohammed Hasan Karadiya alias Hasan Haidarpuri, and six to seven times, with some explosives detonating successfully while others failed. According to sources, the accused had allegedly been in contact with one another for more than six months and were planning bomb blasts in Gujarat as well as other parts of the country. Officials claimed that the module was linked to Pakistan-based Jaish-e-Mohammed. Sources said the accused had allegedly manufactured improvised explosive devices (IEDs) in Gujarat and carried out multiple trial explosions in isolated locations. The



A major breakthrough in the investigation came after forensic analysis of electronic devices seized from three of the arrested suspects, sources said. The examination

trial runs were reportedly conducted allegedly revealed that the three accused were in direct contact with the top leadership of Jaish-e-Mohammed and had remained in regular communication with the outfit's headquarters in Pakistan's Bahawalpur. The electronic evidence suggests sustained communication between the suspects and the Pakistan-based handlers. Sources further claimed that after India's Operation Sindoor caused significant damage to Jaish-e-Mohammed's headquarters in Bahawalpur, the terror outfit has been attempting to reorganise and rebuild its network. Officials are examining whether the arrested module was part of those efforts.

Stock markets rally in early trade propelled by buying in IT firms

MUMBAI. (Agency)

The government has increased the windfall gains tax on exports of diesel and ATF, while lowering the levy on petrol for the fortnight beginning July 16. The rate of Special Additional Excise Duty (SAED) on diesel exports has been increased to Rs 15.5 a litre from Rs 8.5 a litre. Similarly, SAED on ATF expory disincentivising exports in the backdrop of the West Asia crises. Benchmark indices Sensex and Nifty climbed in early trade on Friday, driven by buying in IT stocks after Tech Mahindra reported a 28.4 per cent rise in consolidated net profit for the June quarter. After a subdued ending in the previous trade, the 30-share BSE Sensex jumped 480.95 points to 77,656.56 in early deals. The 50-share NSE Nifty climbed 125.05 points to 24,201. From the Sensex pack, Tech Mahindra climbed 3 per cent after the IT company reported a 28.4 per cent rise in consolidated net profit for the June quarter at Rs 1,465 crore, and expressed confidence about the demand environment. Infosys, Tata Consultancy Services, HCL Tech, Mahindra & Mahindra and Reliance Industries were also among the winners. Sun Pharma, Bharti Airtel, Trent and UltraTech Cement were among the laggards. The BSE IT index traded 1.25 per cent higher at 28,189.45. Brent crude, the global oil benchmark, quoted 0.85 per cent higher at USD 84.95 per barrel. In Asian markets, Japan's Nikkei 225 index, Shanghai's SSE Composite index and Hong Kong's Hang Seng index quoted lower. US markets ended in negative territory on Thursday.

South Indian Bank reports 17.4% jump in profit at Rs378 cr

New Delhi. (Agency)

Healthy net interest income growth, a sharp improvement in asset quality and the resultant drop in provisions coupled with a lower tax outgo buoyed the net income of the mid-sized private sector lender South Indian Bank in the June quarter to Rs378 crore, up 17.39% year-on-year. The Thrissur-headquartered bank said on Thursday that its gross NPAs more than halved to 1.38% in the reporting quarter from 3.15% in the year-ago period, and so did the net NPAs, which plunged to 0.26% from 0.68% a year ago. Net interest income rose 23.05% to Rs1,025 crore, while other income fell by 39.07% to Rs379 crore from `622 crore in June quarter of FY26. But this was offset to a large extent by a reduction in tax outgoes, which declined to `84 crore from `239 crore. The net interest margin, which is the difference between what it earns in interest on loans and what it pay for funds, rose 20 bps to 3.23%. The bank said its retail deposits grew 3.66% to Rs1,24,306 crore, of which NRI deposits grew by Rs4,139 crore or 12.8% to Rs36,432 crore and the low cost Casa grew 14.61%. Gross advances grew 17.% to Rs1,04,368 crore, of which corporate segment grew 12.38% to `41,704 crore, gold loans jumped 42.90% to Rs24,930 crore and home loans grew 78.65% to Rs5,856 crore and vehicle loans rose to 12.63% to Rs2,497 crore. During the reporting period, the bank saw consistent growth across all targeted segments, focusing on quality asset acquisition in corporate lending, auto loans, and gold loans, said chief executive PR Seshadri said in the statement.

NTPC-NPCIL JV floats Rs28,000 crore tender for Rajasthan nuclear power project

New Delhi. (Agency)

Anushakti Vidhyut Nigam Ltd (ASHVINI), the joint venture of state-owned NTPC and Nuclear Power Corporation of India Ltd (NPCIL), has invited bids for the construction of the key nuclear section of the proposed 2,800 MW Mahi Banswara Nuclear Power Plant in Rajasthan. The estimated value of the Engineering, Procurement and Construction (EPC) contract is over ₹28,000 crore. The tender, issued on Thursday, covers the Nuclear Island Mega EPC Package, which includes the reactor building, nuclear structures, heavy water upgrading plant, water systems and waste management facilities. The nuclear island is the core of a nuclear power plant where the reactor and other critical systems are located. According to the tender document, the selected contractor will be responsible for engineering, design, supply, civil construction, installation, testing, commissioning, and operation and maintenance of the package.

MAHANAGAR METRO

Tata, SP Group explore share swap to unlock Tata Sons stake. Here's what it means

New Delhi. (Agency)

The long-running dispute over Shapoorji Pallonji (SP) Group's stake in Tata Sons may be moving towards a fresh solution. Tata Sons and the SP Group have held fresh discussions to explore ways to monetise part of the latter's stake in Tata Sons, reported The Economic Times. One proposal being discussed is a share swap, under which the SP Group could receive shares of listed Tata companies in exchange for part of its holding in Tata Sons. The discussions come as the SP Group looks to reduce its debt burden, while Tata Sons is understood to be keen on avoiding additional borrowing to facilitate any transaction.

WHY IS SP GROUP LOOKING TO

SELL? The SP Group owns 18.37% of Tata Sons, the holding company of the Tata Group. According to the report, the group wants to monetise roughly 7% of its stake to help repay part of its estimated Rs 60,000 crore debt. The debt reduction effort is already underway. Last week, the group secured commitments worth about Rs 21,500 crore in the first tranche of its refinancing programme. The fundraising includes Rs 15,200 crore of three-year rupee bonds and about \$650 million in dollar bonds, backed by its Tata Sons shareholding. The transaction is expected to close on July 20. WHAT IS THE SHARE SWAP PLAN? Instead of Tata Sons buying back the stake with cash, one option under discussion is a share swap. Under such

an arrangement, the SP Group would receive a basket of listed Tata Group company shares in exchange for part



of its Tata Sons stake. This could help the SP Group unlock value from its investment without requiring Tata Sons to raise fresh debt for the transaction. However, people familiar with the discussions told The Economic Times

that the two sides remain divided over both the structure of the deal and the valuation of the shares involved.

WHY IS VALUATION THE BIGGEST HURDLE?

One of the biggest sticking points is deciding how much the unlisted Tata Sons stake is worth.

Since Tata Sons is not listed on the stock exchange, there is no market price for its shares. That makes valuation more complex than a transaction involving listed companies. According to the report, the combined market value of the Tata Group's 16 listed companies stood at around Rs 25.28 lakh crore on Thursday, while Tata Sons' holdings in these companies were estimated to be worth about Rs 11.9 lakh crore. The SP

EPFO plans universal PF for self-employed, gig and unorganised workers

New Delhi. (Agency)

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For years, the Employees' Provident Fund (EPF) has largely been linked to salaried jobs in the organised sector. But what if you're a freelancer, a gig worker, a shop owner or someone who works for yourself? You may soon be able to save for retirement through the same system. The Employees' Provident Fund Organisation (EPFO) is working on a framework that could allow self-employed individuals, gig workers, people employed in the unorganised sector and workers in exempted establishments to voluntarily contribute to a universal provident fund scheme, reported The Times of India. If the proposal goes ahead,

millions who are currently outside the EPF network could finally get access to a structured retirement savings plan. The proposal is still in its early stages, but if it gets the green light, it could bring social security benefits to millions of workers who are currently outside the EPF system.

WHO COULD BENEFIT?

At present, EPF mainly covers employees working in establishments with 20 or more workers. This leaves a large section of India's workforce outside the social security system. The proposed scheme aims to include self-employed professionals, freelancers and consultants, gig workers, including delivery partners and cab drivers, workers in

the unorganised sector, and employees of exempted establishments who are not part of the regular EPFO framework.

The idea is to give these workers an opportunity to build retirement savings through a voluntary provident fund account.

FLEXIBLE CONTRIBUTIONS

Unlike the existing EPF system, where employers and employees make monthly contributions, the proposed scheme is expected to offer much greater flexibility. Subscribers may be able to contribute as often as they like, daily, monthly or even once a year, depending on their income and financial situation. This could make the scheme more practical for people whose

Rupee rises 14 paise to 96.28 against US dollar in early trade

MUMBAI. (Agency)

- The rupee gained 14 paise to 96.28 against the US dollar in early trade on Friday buoyed by positive sentiments at the domestic equity markets. However, heavy FII outflows and higher global crude oil prices amid heightened tensions in West Asia prevented further gains in the local unit, forex traders said. At the interbank foreign exchange, the rupee opened at 96.35 against the greenback before rising further to 96.28, up 14 paise from its previous close. The rupee depreciated for the fourth straight day on Thursday, shedding 17 paise to settle at 96.42 against the US dollar. The US expanded its airstrike campaign

against Iran early on Friday by increasingly hitting bridges, part of President Donald Trump's threats to start striking infrastructure to pressure Tehran to ease its chokehold on the Strait of Hormuz. Iran launched new missile attacks against US-allied nations in West Asia and warned that its attacks would escalate.

"Continued geopolitical uncertainties in West Asia sustained demand for safe-haven assets and kept investors cautious towards emerging-market currencies, including the rupee. Rupee is expected to remain in the range of 96.00-96.50 for the day with a downside bias as dollar index remains up and oil prices remain

near USD 85 per barrel," Anil Kumar Bhansali, Head of Treasury and Executive Director, Finrex Treasury Advisors LLP, said. Meanwhile, the dollar index, which gauges the greenback's strength against a basket of six currencies, was trading marginally up by 0.02 per cent at 100.78. Brent crude, the global oil benchmark, was trading 0.39 per cent higher at USD 84.83 per barrel in futures trade. On the domestic equity market front, Sensex jumped 480.95 points to 77,656.56 in early trade on Friday while the Nifty was up 125.05 points to 24,201. Foreign Institutional Investors offloaded equities worth Rs 4,205.56 crore on a net basis on Thursday, according to exchange data.

Short sellers earn \$8.7 billion: Why investors are betting against Elon Musk's SpaceX

New Delhi. (Agency)

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SpaceX's stock market debut grabbed plenty of attention last month, but not everyone who made money from the listing actually bought the shares. Investors who bet that the stock would fall are now sitting on massive gains. According to data from analytics firm Ortex Technologies, short sellers have made an estimated \$8.7 billion in paper profits after SpaceX shares slipped close to, and briefly below, their IPO price, reported Reuters. The stock, which was listed at \$135, had surged to a high of \$225.64 soon after its debut. However, that rally has faded, giving short sellers an opportunity to profit from the decline.

WHAT IS SHORT SELLING?

Short selling is an investment strategy where traders borrow shares, sell them in the market and later buy them

back. If the share price falls, they buy the shares at a lower price, return them to the lender and keep the difference as profit. It is a high-risk strategy because if the share price rises instead of falling, losses can be unlimited.

SHARES LOSE MOMENTUM AFTER STRONG DEBUT

SpaceX shares have seen sharp swings since the company's stock market listing. After climbing strongly in the initial days, the stock gradually lost momentum. On Wednesday, the shares briefly fell below their IPO price for the first time before recovering to end the trading session just above the listing price. According to Ortex, traders betting against the stock continued increasing their positions even as the share price declined. Peter

Hillerberg, co-founder of Ortex Technologies, said the stock had been "a rollercoaster" for short sellers, but the outcome had ultimately worked in their favour. Instead of booking profits early, many bearish investors



continued adding to their positions as the stock fell.

NEARLY HALF THE TRADABLE SHARES ARE ON LOAN

Ortex estimates that around 49% of SpaceX's free float, or tradable shares, are currently on loan. While borrowed shares can be used for different purposes, the firm believes that most of them have been borrowed for short selling. Such a high level of short interest suggests that many investors remain cautious about the company's future performance.

WHY ARE INVESTORS BETTING AGAINST SPACEX?

Some investors believe SpaceX's valuation remains expensive despite the recent decline in its share price. There are also concerns over the company's heavy investment in artificial intelligence, much of which is being financed through debt.

A century after his martyrdom, remembering Teja Singh Samundri's role in the Akali movement

Chandigarh.(Agency)

A hundred years after the martyrdom of Akali leader Sardar Teja Singh Samundri, historians continue to regard him as one of the principal architects of the Gurdwara Reform Movement, whose blend of personal sacrifice, organisational acumen and commitment to education helped shape modern Sikh institutions.

Samundri's association with the movement began in September 1920 when he volunteered in response to an appeal seeking "100 martyrs" for the restoration of the boundary wall of Gurdwara Rakab Ganj in Delhi. The wall had been partially demolished by the British administration to make way for a road leading to the Viceroy's Palace after the imperial capital shifted from Calcutta to Delhi.

The demolition sparked widespread resentment among Sikhs and came to be known as the Rakab Ganj Affair. A World War I veteran known for championing public causes, Samundri was the first to enlist for the proposed martyrdom campaign.

'Beef raid' on UP house: Police arrest four more after 'encounter'

Lucknow.(Agency)

Nearly three weeks after it arrested three women after a raid on a house in Kaushambi's Sarai Akil area over allegations of cow slaughter and cooking of beef, police have made more arrests in connection with the case following an "encounter".

According to police, they received information that the accused were hiding in an orchard. When they reached the spot, the suspects opened fire, police said, and in the exchange, Mohammad Arshad alias Cheddhan sustained a bullet injury to his leg. Three other suspects, Sunne alias Ilyas Khan, Nafees and Fakrul, were arrested, while two of the accused managed to escape, police said.

Kaushambi Circle Officer Shivank Singh said a forensic report from a laboratory in Mathura had confirmed that the meat samples seized during the June 24 raid from Arshad's house in Kaushambi were that of beef. The accused have been booked under various provisions of the Uttar Pradesh Prevention of Cow Slaughter Act at Sarai Akil Police Station in Kaushambi.

The three women who were held during the June 24 raid, Shama Parveen, Shaista and Fatima, are related to Arshad, who has six previous criminal cases registered against him, the last of them in 2016. All four are residents of Panara Gopalpur village.

Rs 40 lakh, gold recovered from Bengal madrasa in ED raids across 4 states in 'terror funding' case

Lucknow.(Agency)

The Enforcement Directorate (ED) on Thursday said it recovered Rs 40 lakh in cash and 180 gm of gold coins from a madrasa in West Bengal during searches at 16 locations across Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal, Delhi and Haryana as part of a money laundering probe into an alleged terror funding and illegal infiltration syndicate.

The recovery was made from Al-Jamiatul Islamia Darul Uloom, in Haroa in North 24 Parganas district of West Bengal. "The madrasa management and the staff failed to give satisfactory justification about the legal source of the cash and the coins," an official said.

Officials said the alleged syndicate is accused of helping Rohingya and Bangladeshi nationals illegally enter India using forged identity documents. The central agency is investigating whether foreign contributions routed through charitable trusts, organisations and other entities were diverted via multiple bank accounts and hawala channels to finance these activities.

Beard, niqab, using Arabic expressions: MP flags 'profiling' in Gujarat's 'anti-radicalisation' SOPs

Gujarat has asked police to operationalise 'Anti-radicalisation Cells' in all districts; Rajya Sabha MP John Brittas has written to CM Bhupendra Patel to put the SOPs in abeyance.

Ahmedabad.(Agency)

Rajya Sabha MP John Brittas has asked the Gujarat Chief Minister to put on hold Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) of "Anti-Radicalisation Cells" in the state until it is determined that they do not "permit profiling or surveillance" based on a person's religion, attire, or language. The MP's letter, written to Chief Minister Bhupendra Patel on July 14, refers to a communication from the State Intelligence Bureau of the Gujarat Police to all superintendents and commissioners of police regarding the SOPs for these Anti-Radicalisation Cells (ARC).

The communication, issued on June 19, had come after the government approved 139 new posts in ARCs across districts, and

operationalised them. The SIB's letter to SPs and CPs defined "Who can be called a radicalised person", and detailed the procedures on prevention, detection, activities and work against the unity and sovereignty of the country, create an environment of fear in the people, and tries to propagate these ideas".



intervention, rehabilitation and monitoring of such individuals.

According to the SOPs, a radicalised individual is "someone who uses their radical ideas to carry out anti-national

"Such individuals", the SOPs said, "believe that their religion is the one true religion and aim to harm those professing other faiths. They disseminate such hardline ideas through social media, newspapers, radio, television, magazines, public gatherings and try to radicalise vulnerable people."

SOPs define radical individual in broad terms

Brittas wrote to the Chief Minister that while the state has a duty to prevent terrorism and violent extremism, "the contents attributed to the SOPs" were "disquieting" enough to merit his "immediate attention".

Maratha quota: Can a politically dominant community be 'backward'? Bombay HC examines

Mumbai.(Agency)

Have Marathas been left out of the country's development and can they be considered socially and educationally backward? The question has landed before the Bombay High Court (HC) as the State of Maharashtra defends the constitutional validity of the Maharashtra State Reservation for Socially and Educationally Backward Classes (SEBC) Act, 2024, which grants 10 per cent reservation to the Maratha community in the education sector and government jobs.

During hearings on a batch of pleas challenging the 2024 law, a three-judge bench of Acting Chief Justice Ravindra V Ghuge and Justices NJ Jamadar and Sandeep V Marne asked whether Marathas, arguably Maharashtra's most politically influential community for decades — having produced scores of chief ministers and ministers —

can be considered "out of the mainstream of national life" — one of the factors to consider when examining whether exceptional circumstances exist to breach the 50 per cent



reservation ceiling. To this, the state argued that the political prominence of a few individuals cannot determine the backwardness of an entire community.

Marathas' long-standing reservation demand

Marathas' decades-long demand for reservation in educational institutions and jobs, often resulting in protests and violence, is one of the state's politically sensitive issues. Even though the community constitutes nearly one-third of Maharashtra's population and has had a significant presence in the state's politics and cooperative sectors, supporters of the quota demands have argued that that the division of landholdings and agrarian distress over the years have eroded prosperity among middle-class and lower middle-class Marathas.

Why did the last two Maratha quota laws fail?

The State of Maharashtra has twice enacted laws to reserve seats for Marathas, but both later failed on the floor of the court.

Mira Road crane was operational on 11th floor when it collapsed, killing one

Mumbai.(Agency)

At least one person died and two others were injured after a construction crane crashed from the 11th floor of an under-construction building at JP North Society in Mumbai's Mira Road on Thursday, July 16. According to the preliminary investigation, the crane was operational on the 11th floor at around 8:30 pm, when it lost balance and crashed.

The police are now investigating to ascertain the exact cause of the Mira Road crane collapse, following which an FIR will be registered in the matter.

Senior inspector of Kashi Gaon police station, Rahul Patil said, "The crane was operational and it appears the operator lost balance due to which the crane fell off the 11th floor. The

operator appears to be a young man who too had sustained injuries in the matter."The officer is also probing if the operator had necessary training to use the crane and whether necessary safety precautions had been taken by



the contractor before the crane collapse.

"There has been loss of life and also damage to several cars as well. We are in the process of registering an FIR in the matter on charges of negligence as

prima facie it appears several safety precautions should have been in place considering the height at which the crane was being operated. We are lucky that it did not fall on a crowd of people," the senior inspector said.

Mira Road crane collapse: How it happened

The incident took place around 8.30 pm at a construction site near the JK Iris residential complex, where a multi-level parking tower was under construction. According to police, the tower crane, stationed on the 11th floor,

suddenly gave way and came crashing into the society premises, killing one identified as 21-year-old Mohammad Khokhar and causing panic among the residents. Several vehicles parked below were also damaged from the impact of the fall.

Parents allege delay by school led to son's death in Bengaluru

BENGALURU.(Agency)

More than a month after the death of a Class 5 student who collapsed inside a classroom at a private school on June 10, his parents have alleged that the school management's delay in rushing him to hospital and informing them contributed to his death. The allegations were made after the family recently reviewed the school's CCTV footage.

The deceased Arhan Pasha (12) was a Class 5 student of New Blossom School in Weavers Colony on Bannerghatta Road. Arhan's father told reporters that on around 11.30am on June 10, the boy informed his teacher that he was feeling unwell and requested that his father be called. However, the teacher allegedly did not pay attention to his request.

He further alleged that during break, Arhan again complained that he was feeling unwell, but the teacher told him to remain in school until end of classes at 3pm.

Around 1.30pm, the boy collapsed inside the classroom, only after which the school authorities informed the family. The child's uncle rushed to school and took him to a nearby hospital on a two-wheeler. According to the father, doctors said that if the child had been brought to hospital 20 minutes earlier, his life could have been saved.

'We have no purpose left': Parents of 11-year-old killed in Mumbai tree collapse seek legal action

BENGALURU.(Agency)

"Everything in our life was centred around our son. We planned our daily routine around him, his school and even our holidays. With him gone, we are repurposing the objective of our life."

Two weeks after 11-year-old Vihan Srivastava was killed when a tree fell on his school van in Chembur, his parents say they are struggling to rebuild a life that revolved around their only child. Even as



the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) has ordered a fresh inquiry into the incident, the family says the civic body's first report has only deepened their grief.

Calling the findings of the initial inquiry "shocking" and "unacceptable", the family has demanded an independent probe and warned that it will move court if accountability is not fixed.

"When the incident happened, the inquiry committee was formed swiftly and we were relieved to see some quick response. However, the report has shifted the entire onus on the contractors. Even though the department was responsible for not taking adequate measures, there has been no action against anyone.

Otters were eating fish Gujarat man hoped to catch, so he bludgeoned them to death

Viral video shows man whacking otters with a stick, pulling the animals out by their tails and throwing them on the ground; Forest Department tracks accused to his village in Navsari

Surat.(Agency)

The video is odd — until it becomes shocking. A man wearing shorts and a T-shirt stands in a shallow, fast-flowing stream in which a net-like structure built with bamboo sticks has been erected. The net is trapping fish — a large number of small, silvery creatures can be seen writhing and jumping.

The man is carrying a short, stout stick in each hand — he looks like he is waiting for something. Suddenly, he lunges, and begins to rain repeated, savage blows on

something grey-brown in the water. He then bends, pulls his victim out by its tail, and throws it on the ground by the stream. The small, grey-brown animal is almost dead, and thrashes weakly in its final moments. It is a smooth-coated otter (Lutrogale perspicillata), an otter species native to the Indian subcontinent and Southeast Asia.

The smooth-coated otter is categorised as 'Vulnerable' in IUCN's Red List of Threatened Species. It is listed in Schedule 1 of The Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972, and enjoys the highest level of



protection with strict penalties for their hunting, trading, and poaching. The Valsad Forest Department has now swooped on an individual from

Dharampur taluka in the district for his alleged involvement in killing smooth-coated otters by inflicting repeated blows on the animals with a bamboo stick.

The accused, identified as Gulabbhai Halpati, has been arrested under Sections 9 ("Prohibition of hunting") and 39 ("Wild animals, etc., to be government property") of The Wildlife (Protection) Act. He was produced before the Chikhli court on Wednesday (July 15), and sent to Navsari Sub Jail in the evening.

NEWS BOX

Slovenian referee moved to tears after World Cup final appointment

New Delhi. (Agency)

Being part of a FIFA World Cup final is an emotional moment for the players involved as they step on to represent their countries on the grandest stage of them all. And when it comes to the referees, Slovenia's Slavko Vincic has shown it is the same for them as well. Vincic was selected as the main referee for the summit clash between Argentina and Spain in New York on Sunday, July 19 alongside compatriots Tomaz Klanecnik and Andraz Kovacic, who will serve as the assistant referees. As soon as the announcement was made public in front of the referee contingent, Vincic struggled to hold back his tears and was



quickly congratulated by the rest. VINCIC'S REFEREEING CAREER SO FAR Slavko Vincic is among UEFA's most experienced referees, having been a FIFA-listed official since 2010. Over the years, he has overseen several marquee fixtures, including the 2024 UEFA Champions League final. At the international level, he handled two matches during the 2022 FIFA World Cup and has already taken charge of this latest assignment at the tournament came on July 1, when Mexico defeated Ecuador 2-0 in the Round of 32. The fiercely contested encounter produced multiple bookings, with Ecuador's Piero Hincapié receiving a straight red card after breaching FIFA regulations by covering his mouth while confronting Mexico striker Santiago Gimenez. Three games at the ongoing edition. Klanecnik and Kovacic have formed a long-standing officiating partnership, working together on the international circuit for more than 10 years. They will once again join Vincic's team, while experienced Jordanian official Adham Makhadmeh has been appointed as the fourth official.

No pressure on Rohit Sharma: Team India make stance clear as retirement buzz grows

New Delhi. (Agency)

India batting coach Sitanshu Kotak denied that the team management is putting pressure on Rohit Sharma as retirement rumours gathered pace after the Cardiff ODI against England. Rohit has been going through a lean patch in ODIs, scoring 241 runs at an average of 30.1 and a strike rate of 88.6 in the last eight games. During the second ODI in Cardiff, Rohit struggled for rhythm and scored 26 off 47 balls before falling to Will Jacks. Soon after this, a report from PTI stated that the former India captain was set for his final appearance in the national team colours during the 3rd ODI at Lord's. It also claimed that the



selectors won't back Rohit after the England tour, meaning that he won't be in the plans for the ODI World Cup next year. Kotak was quizzed on whether India would be looking beyond Rohit and give a chance to Yashasvi Jaiswal or Ishan Kishan at the top going forward. The India batting coach said that a big player like Rohit is immune to pressure and brushed aside concerns about his form after the first two ODIs. "See, I don't think a big player like Rohit Sharma can have any sort of pressure. He's too good a player to feel that. Yes, he didn't get runs in the opening two matches, but I don't think that makes any difference. But today, it also looked like he'd probably get a good inning out

What if Lionel Messi had played for Spain?

Long before Lionel Messi became the face of Argentine football, Spain believed it had a chance to make him its own. As Argentina and Spain prepare to meet in the World Cup final, one of football's great what-ifs returns to the spotlight: what if Messi had chosen Spain?

New Delhi. (Agency)

In another version of football history, Lionel Messi walks into the World Cup final wearing red. The stadium is still packed. The noise is still deafening. Argentina are still on one side and Spain on the other. But the player at the centre of it all stands in a different line. He is not wrapped in sky blue and white. He wears the colours of Spain. Before the Ballon d'Ors, before Barcelona's golden era, before the Copa America triumphs and World Cup glory, Messi was a teenage footballer whose international future remained uncertain. Spain had

discovered him, developed him, and, for a brief period, believed it could convince him to become one of its own. As Argentina prepares to meet Spain in the World Cup final, football finds itself confronting one of the sport's most intriguing alternate histories. What if the greatest player of his generation had chosen the other side? One of the most revealing details from that period comes from Gines Melendez, the influential Spanish youth coach who was among the first officials tasked with assessing Messi's potential. Recalling the first tapes he watched of the teenager, Melendez admitted he barely knew who the youngster was. "In fact, I thought he was called Leonardo because everyone called him Leo," he told ESPN, as he recalled the battle for Messi's international allegiance. The remark has since become one of the most memorable anecdotes from football's



who this gifted teenager in Barcelona's academy system might become. By then, Messi was already living in Spain. At 13, he had left Rosario and moved to Barcelona after the Catalan club agreed

to fund treatment for his growth hormone deficiency. His football education took place almost entirely in Spain. He attended school there, trained within La Masia, and rose through the ranks alongside players who would later become members of Spain's national team. Under FIFA regulations, representing Spain was a genuine possibility. Spanish football authorities quickly recognised what was at stake. The coaches and federation officials followed Messi's development closely and explored avenues that could eventually bring him into Spain's youth setup. Years later, Vicente del Bosque, the former Spain manager who led the country to its only World Cup title in 2010, would openly acknowledge the effort. "The federation made every effort to get Messi to play for Spain.

Smriti Mandhana ready for India captaincy. But is she good enough?

New Delhi. (Agency)

For months now, questions have swirled around the future of India women's cricket and whether the team should usher in a new era by replacing Harmanpreet Kaur as captain. Those conversations only intensified after India's disappointing campaign at the Women's T20 World Cup, where they failed to progress beyond the group stage. The fallout from that exit led to calls for sweeping changes. Several former players and experts argued that India should begin planning for the future by moving on not only from Harmanpreet but also from head coach Amol Muzumdar. Among those voices was ICC Hall of Famer Diana Edulji, who publicly suggested that India should start looking beyond their long-serving skipper. The obvious question,

then, is who takes over if the selectors decide to make that transition.

The answer, at least on paper, appears straightforward. Smriti Mandhana is



India's vice-captain, one of the team's senior-most players and arguably the biggest face of women's cricket in the country after Harmanpreet. Amid the debate, Mandhana recently said that she is ready to captain India if given the opportunity. Mithali Raj also tipped the opener to be the one to succeed

Harmanpreet and take the Indian women's team forward in all three formats. Add to that her success with Royal Challengers Bengaluru in the Women's Premier League, where she has won two titles as captain, and the case becomes even stronger.

Yet leading a franchise and captaining India are two very different assignments. Winning the WPL is one thing; steering the national team through ICC tournaments, intense scrutiny and the pressure of expectations is quite another. The question remains: is Mandhana ready to prove that her leadership credentials extend well beyond franchise cricket?

HER COACH CERTAINLY THINKS SO

Although her record with India is encouraging, Mandhana has also endured difficult spells as captain. Last year was particularly challenging.

Carlos Alcaraz finally returns to action, named in start list for Cincinnati Open

New Delhi. (Agency)

Carlos Alcaraz is poised to make his long-awaited return to competitive tennis after being named in the official start list for the Cincinnati Open, which is set to take place from August 13 to 23. The tournament is expected to mark the Spaniard's first appearance since April, when a wrist problem forced him off the ATP Tour. The 23-year-old sustained the injury during the Barcelona Open and subsequently missed a significant portion of the season. The setback ruled him out of several marquee events, including the Madrid Open, the Italian Open, Roland Garros and Wimbledon. Alcaraz had entered many of those tournaments among the leading contenders, making his absence one of the



biggest stories of the year. His time away from the court coincided with a dominant run from world No.1 Jannik Sinner, who capitalised on the Spaniard's absence to strengthen his grip on the top spot in men's tennis. Nevertheless, Alcaraz's return comes at a crucial stage of the calendar as players begin preparations for the final Grand Slam of the season. Tournament organisers have included the defending champion in the Cincinnati field, although his participation remains subject to medical clearance. Alcaraz captured the title in Ohio last year, adding another prestigious trophy to a rapidly growing collection that already includes multiple Grand Slam and Masters 1000 crowns.

No rift between Virat Kohli and Gautam Gambhir: India batting coach slams rumours

New Delhi. (Agency)

India batting coach Sitanshu Kotak shut down rumours of a rift between Virat Kohli and Gautam Gambhir, saying that both men are on talking terms and there are no issues within their working relationship. Kotak also added that he doesn't understand where the rumours were coming from in the first place.

Ever since Kohli announced his retirement from Test cricket last year, there has been considerable speculation surrounding his relationship with head coach Gambhir. More fuel was added to the fire when Kohli and Gambhir weren't seen interacting with each other during the

training sessions on the eve of the first ODI between India and England in Edgbaston. While Kohli was practising



before the series opener, Gambhir was seen observing things in close quarters, but he didn't approach the star batter for a chat. It was Kotak who was seen speaking with Kohli. During the post-

match press conference after the second ODI in Cardiff, Kotak dismissed the noise around both men saying that they chatted at least 10 times during the match. "Virat and Gautam, they must have talked 10 times today. I don't think they need a bridge," said Kotak to the reporters. The India batting coach also said that Kohli shouldn't be disturbed when he is in rhythm and out in the middle. "And Virat, basically, before going into batting, he talked about certain things. Because, Virat, I honestly say, as a batting coach, till the time he doesn't feel anything, or if he doesn't see anything, his batting shouldn't be disturbed. And we shouldn't say much, the way he bats.

Slavko Vincic, referee for World Cup final, has a shocking past with Messi, Argentina

FIFA has appointed Slavko Vincic to referee the World Cup final between Argentina and Spain. But the announcement will have the Albiceleste fans sweating as Vincic was the official for one of Argentina's shocking losses in recent times in the tournament.

New Delhi. (Agency)

In the early hours of Friday, July 17, FIFA announced the referees who will be officiating the World Cup 2026 final between Argentina and Spain. Slovenia's Slavko Vincic was given the honour of being the main referee for the clash with his compatriots Tomaz Klanecnik and Andraz Kovacic, who will serve as the assistant referees.

There was a touching moment soon enough as Vincic was moved to tears while receiving his referee kit before Sunday's clash. While the footballing world welcomed the news with happiness, that may not be the case with Argentina fans. Vincic doesn't bring them good memories at all, especially in the World Cup. VINCIC'S SHOCKING PAST WITH ARGENTINA

While the title may suggest a lot of drama, it is pretty straightforward when it comes to Vincic and his officiating record during Argentina matches.

He hasn't officiated a lot of the Albiceleste games in his career, but the biggest one in his record came all the way back in 2022 during the Qatar World Cup 2022.



The stage was the Lusail stadium in Qatar with Argentina taking on Saudi Arabia in their opening fixture on November 22. Vincic started officiating the game and gave Argentina a penalty in the 8th minute, which Messi converted. He even dished out a total of six yellow cards to

Saudi Arabian players during the course of the game. However, in the end, he was at the whistle when Argentina succumbed to one of their shocking results in World Cup. Saudi Arabia turned the game around in the second half to stun everyone and win the match 2-1, leaving Messi and Argentina red-faced at the start of the campaign. It was the only time Messi and Co. lost a match when Vincic was at the helm of things.

WHAT ABOUT VINCIC AND SPAIN?

Vincic has frequently been assigned to Spain's biggest fixtures in European competitions. He first took charge of La Roja in a 2017 friendly against Colombia before officiating their Euro 2020 group-stage encounter with Sweden.



Tamannaah Bhatia

Begins Shooting For Ragini 3 In London, Film Sets 2027 Release

Balaji Motion Pictures' upcoming horror film Ragini 3 has officially gone on floors. Starring Tamannaah Bhatia in the lead role, the film has begun its first schedule in London. It is set to release in theatres in 2027. Directed by Shashanka Ghosh, Ragini 3 takes the popular Indian horror franchise into a thrilling new chapter. Mixing scares with romance and unexpected turns, the film promises a fresh take on the genre, while keeping the franchise's signature edge.

Tamannaah Bhatia Begins Shooting For Ragini 3

On July 15, Tamannaah Bhatia took to her Instagram stories to share a picture from the sets of Ragini 3 as she began shooting for the supernatural thriller. The photo shows her holding a clapperboard. Check out the photo below!

The London schedule marks the start of the film's production. Additional shooting will take place over the coming months. Story details have been kept under wraps. The film is expected to continue the franchise's mix of horror, suspense and commercial entertainment.

What We Know About Ragini 3

As per reports, the film also stars Aamir Khan's son Junaid Khan and Rockstar actress Nargis Fakhri. Variety India reported that Aayush Sharma will also play a crucial role in the film. However, the cast hasn't officially been announced.

Described as a high-concept supernatural thriller, Ragini 3 is being positioned as a "date-night horror" blending elements of suspense, humour, and scares. The film also signals a shift for the Ragini MMS franchise, which was earlier known for its erotic-horror themes. This new instalment is expected to move away from that space and focus more on supernatural storytelling.

Produced by Ekta Kapoor's Balaji Motion Pictures, a division of Balaji Telefilms Ltd., Ragini 3 is currently being filmed across London, with more details about the cast and story set to be unveiled in the coming months.

The Ragini MMS franchise began in 2011 with Rajkummar Rao and Kainaz Motivala in the lead roles.



Why Aamir Khan's Ex-Wives Reena Dutta And Kiran Rao Were Missing From His Wedding With Gauri Spratt?



Aamir Khan got married to his longtime partner, Gauri Spratt, in an intimate registered ceremony at his Mumbai residence on July 5, surrounded by close friends and family. While pictures and videos from the private celebration quickly went viral, many fans couldn't help but notice the absence of the actor's former wives, Reena Dutta and Kiran Rao. Days later, the reason behind their absence has finally come to light. Aamir's close friend and Lagaan co-star Amin Hajee has revealed the reason and also shared how Gauri is different from both his ex-wives.

Aamir Khan and Gauri Spratt kept their wedding an intimate affair, but it continued to make headlines long after the ceremony. The registered wedding at the actor's Mumbai residence was attended by close family and friends, including Rajkumar Hirani, Ashutosh Gowariker and Raj Thackeray. Aamir's children, Ira Khan, Junaid Khan and Azad Rao Khan, were also part of the celebrations. However, the absence of his former wives, Reena Dutta and Kiran Rao, sparked curiosity among fans. Now, Aamir's friend Amin Hajee has revealed why the two chose not to attend the wedding, despite Kiran being present at Ira Khan's wedding earlier.

While speaking to Rediff.com, Amin shared that Kiran was in the UK during the wedding, while her son Azad returned to Mumbai to be a part of Aamir's big day. He said, "Kiran was in the UK at the time; Azad flew back for the wedding. I think some absences are natural. Sometimes giving people their space is also a gesture of love and respect. You don't want to make someone uncomfortable on such an important occasion. But they continue to share a healthy relationship. Through the Paani Foundation, Aamir, Satya (Satyajit Bhatkal), Kiran and Reena still work together professionally."

'I Wanted To Name My Son Ram Khan': Sohail Khan Reveals Why He Named Him Nirvan Instead



Sohail Khan and his former wife, Seema Sajdeh, recently reunited on Kunal Kemmu's reality show, Alliance. Since joining the show, Seema has been guiding Sohail through the game's dynamics and strategy. During the latest episode, the actor looked back on a memorable moment from their personal life, opening up about the heartfelt story behind the name of their elder son, Nirvan Khan.

During the conversation, Aly Goni, who recently entered the show as a wild card, praised Sohail Khan and Seema Sajdeh's sons, Nirvan and Yohan Khan, describing them as extremely well-mannered. He also remarked that their elder son, Nirvaan, is a spitting image of Sohail. Responding to the compliment, Sohail went on to share the heartfelt story behind how he and Seema chose Nirvaan's name. He shared, "When Seema was carrying Nirvaan, tab humne masti mazak main decide kiya tha ki agar Ladka hua toh main naam rakhunga aur Ladki hui toh Seema will name her. Mera yeh tha, ki main apne bete ka naam Ram Khan rakhna chahta tha. We are very secular that way (When Seema was pregnant with Nirvaan, we jokingly decided that if we had a boy, I would choose his name, and if we had a girl, Seema would name her. I wanted to name my son Ram Khan. We are very secular that way)." But things were different after Seema delivered their elder son. He went on to add, "When Seema came into consciousness after giving birth, she had also thought of a name in her mind. The doctor said it's a boy, so I entered the room, she looked at me, and she was a little drowsy, and said, 'how's Nirvaan doing?'" She said it in a way I didn't want to change after that."

Sohail further shared that, much like the meaning behind his name, Nirvaan has a calm and composed personality. Sohail Khan and Seema Sajdeh tied the knot in 1998 after eloping despite opposition from their families. During their marriage, they welcomed two sons, Nirvaan and Yohan. After spending more than two decades together, the couple officially parted ways in 2022. Despite their separation, they have maintained an amicable relationship and continue to co-parent their sons. After Seema made an entry in Alliance, Sohail shared that while their relationship has evolved over the years, his respect for her remains unchanged.

'Main Anti-National Nahi Hu':

Sonakshi Sinha

Issues Strong Statement To Back Sonam Wangchuk

Sonakshi Sinha has issued a strongly-worded video statement to back Sonam Wangchuk, who is currently observing a hunger strike in New Delhi amid the ongoing Cockroach Janta Party (CJP) protests. In her video, Sinha expressed concerns for Wangchuk's health and said, "I've never given a statement out like this, but today we can't ignore



him. Sonam Wangchuk. We all know him. We know what he has done for our country, what his achievements are and how many awards he has won."

The actress referred to his 18th day of fasting and continued, "He is hungry. He hasn't eaten anything. For whom is he doing this? He is doing this for the future of children who lost their lives. He is fighting a system which is not working properly. I know this. You know this. We all know this." Sonakshi then questioned those who

are still silent and not speaking up in support of Wangchuk and added, "A lot many people are still silent. I can't stay silent. Whatever will happen, let it happen. No problem. I can't remain silent." She also requested the government to initiate a dialogue with Sonam and said, "Why is nobody listening. Nobody cares. Nobody is open for a dialogue."

The actress then mentioned that she decided to issue a video statement because it was high-time for her to speak up. "Main koi anti-national nahi hu," she said.

Sonakshi Sinha is not the first Bollywood celebrity to express concern for Wangchuk's health. Previously, Zeenat Aman, Prakash Raj, Naseeruddin Shah, Ratna Pathak Shah, Abhay Deol, Omi Vaidya and others also voiced support for Sonam Wangchuk and the CJP protest.

"My thoughts today are in the country's capital city where @wangchuksworld world is entering the 17th day of his indefinite hunger strike. I read in a news article that Mr. Wangchuk "...has started losing muscle mass and is in immense pain." And that, when asked to end his fast, he replied "Don't ask me to end my fast."



NEWS BOX

SpaceX Starship launch aborted on the pad at the last moment

world.(Agency)

SpaceX's mega Starship rocket came within a second or so from blasting off on a test flight Thursday, but some of the engines failed to ignite, triggering a launch abort amid billowing clouds of smoke and vapor.

Elon Musk, the company's founder and CEO, said two engines will be replaced "to be confident of a good flight" before sending Starship from Texas on a space-skimming journey halfway around the world. It will be the 13th flight for Starship, which at 407 feet (124 meters) tall with 33 main engines is the world's biggest and most powerful rocket.SpaceX's launch webcast showed the start of engine ignition three seconds before the planned liftoff, viewed from a drone high above the pad. Although the company did not elaborate, onscreen data showed four engines not firing, with the remaining 29 engines immediately shutting down and keeping the rocket anchored to the pad. It was the first time a full-scale Starship experienced a last-second abort like this.The launch team immediately began draining the fuel from the rocket.

"Most probable launch timing is early next week," Musk said via X.Everything was going SpaceX's way, even the weather, until the partial engine ignition. In the end, the rocket's automatic launch system worked as planned by halting everything. Too few operating engines could have doomed the launch. Some earlier Starship flights ended in explosive fireballs.Elon Musk's company had newest, most advanced Starlinks aboardTwenty of SpaceX's newest and most advanced Starlinks were on board Starship for release during the planned hourlong flight from Starbase, the company's hub near the Texas-Mexico border.

Philippines Condemns Chinese Media's Video Depicting Filipinos As Monkeys

world.(Agency)

The Philippines strongly condemned state-run China Daily for releasing an AI-generated video that depicted Filipinos as monkeys, saying the "racist" imagery is "offensive, distressing and unacceptable" and drawing a firm line against dehumanising propaganda.

Manila demanded that the video posted on China Daily's Facebook account on July 10 be taken down. The Chinese Embassy in Manila did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

The video portrayed a monkey dressed in Filipino attire being directed by arms representing the United States and Japan on what to sing. After being called "stupid," the monkey pulled a sheet of lyrics bearing the words "South China Sea arbitration award" before being thrown into the sea and blasted by a vessel's water cannon.Philippine Defense Secretary Gilberto Teodoro denounced the material as "contemptible propaganda" and "a disgrace to any State that claims to exercise responsible regional leadership.

FBI arrests gangster Nitish Kaushal days after adding him to most wanted list

WASHINGTON.(Agency)

US Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) on Thursday arrested Indian-origin man Nitish Kaushal in Vermont, days after adding him to its Most Wanted list as part of its crackdown on transnational organised crime.The FBI said Kaushal was arrested as authorities closed in on the Bhagwanpuria gang.According to the agency, Kaushal is allegedly involved in murder, kidnapping and drug trafficking in the US. The FBI said the Indian national carried out violent acts on behalf of the Bhagwanpuria organised crime group, including kidnappings and assaults.

"Nitish Kaushal is wanted by the FBI for his alleged involvement in a transnational criminal organisation engaged in, among other things, acts involving murder, kidnapping, drug trafficking, extortion, weapons trafficking, money laundering and human smuggling," the agency had said earlier this week.

The FBI had also warned that Kaushal should be considered armed, dangerous, and an escape risk.The US District Court for the Central District of California in Los Angeles issued a federal arrest warrant for Kaushal on June 25 after charging him with racketeering conspiracy.

Japan imperial rules tweaked but still no woman emperor

The future of the imperial household, mythically descended from the Shinto sun goddess Amaterasu, hinges currently on Prince Hisahito, the 19-year-old nephew of serving Emperor Naruhito, 66.

TOKYO.(Agency)

Japan's parliament enacted changes to the imperial succession law on Friday but maintained the bar on a woman becoming emperor despite surveys suggesting wide public support for the idea.The future of the imperial household, mythically descended from the Shinto sun goddess Amaterasu,

hinges currently on Prince Hisahito, the 19-year-old nephew of serving Emperor Naruhito, 66.If Hisahito, barely out of school and currently studying biology and insects and who is not married, has no son, then under the rules as they stand he will have no heir and the bloodline will end.The bill, passed by a large majority by the upper house on Friday, allows the adoption of male distant relatives over 15 back into the imperial family -- as long as they are single.It also lets women keep their royal status after marrying a commoner, something which is already allowed for men.Japan's Imperial Household Law, in place since 1947, does not allow women to ascend the Chrysanthemum Throne, and the right to the throne can only be passed through the male line.This rules out popular Princess Aiko, 24, daughter of

Naruhito, or Hisahito's two elder sisters, ever becoming emperor.The legislation passed after considerable



wrangling within the conservative ruling party of Sanae Takaichi, Japan's first woman prime minister, who opposes female succession.Seiichiro Murakami, a veteran of the ruling Liberal Democratic Party, said after the bill passed the lower house on July 10 that it was "utterly outrageous" to rule

out the possibility of Aiko as emperor.

Former imperial family member Asahiko Kuni, 81, has said it would be unrealistic to adopt distant male relatives, adding he would advise his grandchildren to refuse such a proposal.Kuni is a member of one of the 11 imperial branch families that left the imperial register after World War II."By the age of 15, a person has grown up breathing the air of freedom," Kuni told the Asahi Shimbun daily."I think it would be difficult to adapt to life in the imperial family.""There might be people who want to join the imperial family, but if they understood the hardships of life as a royal member, they probably wouldn't say such a thing," Kuni added.The top-selling Yomiuri Shimbun daily, usually a vocal supporter of the LDP, also criticised the government in a recent editorial.

US bombing appears to cripple tower at Iran's key Chabahar port

world.(Agency)

US airstrikes on Friday appeared to have collapsed a surveillance tower at Iran's Chabahar port on the Gulf of Oman, a strategically important commercial hub and a key trade gateway for Afghanistan.US Defence Secretary Pete Hegseth shared an image showing the surveillance tower apparently collapsing. The image had earlier circulated on social media through activist accounts before being reposted by Hegseth.Iranian state media acknowledged a third round of US strikes on the port but did not immediately confirm the collapse of the tower.Tehran has described

the structure as being used to monitor commercial traffic entering the port. However, Iran's paramilitary Revolutionary Guard



also maintains a presence at ports across the country.The strike comes as Washington broadens its military campaign against Iran, targeting critical military and transport infrastructure after accusing Tehran of threatening

commercial shipping in the Strait of Hormuz. At least seven people were killed in the latest wave of US strikes, while Iran retaliated with missile and drone attacks targeting US-linked sites in Qatar, Bahrain and Kuwait, further escalating tensions across the Gulf.

Chabahar has been targeted repeatedly in recent days as the conflict widens beyond military installations to include key logistics and maritime infrastructure. The port's location on the Gulf of Oman makes it strategically significant, as it provides direct access to the Arabian Sea while bypassing the Strait of Hormuz, one of the world's busiest energy shipping routes.

US airstrikes in Iran kill at least seven as campaign expands; Tehran targets Qatar

DUBAI.(Agency)

The United States expanded its airstrike campaign against Iran early Friday by increasingly hitting bridges, part of US President Donald Trump's threats to start striking infrastructure to pressure Tehran to ease its chokehold on the Strait of Hormuz.Iran launched new missile attacks against U.S.-allied nations in the Middle East, including Qatar, a key mediator in the war.The interim ceasefire agreed to last month has collapsed, and the region has endured days of back-and-forth attacks by the US and Iran as they battle for control of the strait. Iranian officials say US strikes have killed more than 35 people and wounded over 300 others, with new casualties reported in Friday's strikes.When the US and Israel launched the war on Iran on Feb. 28, Tehran effectively closed the strait to shipping traffic, a move that sent the price of oil soaring and gave Iran major leverage in negotiations.Speaking in a primetime address to the American public, Trump insisted the war was going well."We are likewise winning big in Iran, and you will see the fruits of that labor very, very shortly," Trump said.

US airstrikes hit bridges in Iran

The US airstrikes hit bridges overnight into Friday in Iran's southern Hormozgan province, killing at least seven people, Iranian state television reported. The attacks hit Bandar Khamir, a city on Iran's coast on the Strait of Hormuz.The US military's Central Command said it hit dozens of targets in its latest airstrikes, which concluded at dawn Friday, the sixth night in a row of American attacks.Iranian state media said the US strikes Thursday hit around Tehran and Semnan province, home to Iran's ballistic missile production and space program. On Friday, Qatar twice warned the public to take shelter as a barrage of Iranian missiles targeted the nation. People heard explosions overhead as air defenses fired to intercept the missiles. Qatar's Interior Ministry said falling debris wounded a child. Qatar is a key mediator with Pakistan in trying to reach an end to the Iran war. But talks have broken down over Iran's chokehold on the Strait of Hormuz. Iran earlier targeted Bahrain and Kuwait over U.S. airstrikes hitting bridges.

Trump administration revives rule that could deny green cards to US immigrants using public benefits

The policy was first implemented in February 2020 as one of Trump's moves to limit legal immigration during his first administration, but it was reversed after Biden came to power.

MIAMI.(Agency)

The Trump administration is reviving a rule that could deny green cards to immigrants who use public benefits that could include food stamps, Medicaid, housing vouchers and others.The policy, known as "public charge," appeared on Thursday in the Federal Register. It will be formally published on July 20 and take effect Sept. 18. Under the policy, applicants for green cards have to

show they wouldn't be burdens to the country or "public charges."The policy was first implemented in February 2020 as one of President Donald Trump's moves to limit legal immigration



during his first administration, but it was reversed after Democratic President Joe Biden came to power. Its return comes when the Republican administration is implementing a hard-line policy to curb both illegal and legal

immigration, and when the cost of healthcare and food is rising. The federal government "is reaffirming the requirement of self-reliance, protecting public resources and ending policies that encouraged dependency on the backs of hard-working American taxpayers," US Citizenship and Immigration Services said in a post published on its X account."Under President Trump, USCIS is restoring the basic principle that immigrants must be able to support themselves," the post said.While the administration's crackdown on immigration has an increased focus on deportations and immigration enforcement in cities across the country and at borders and entry points, it has also taken actions that target legal immigrants and mixed-status families.

Trump firm plans to sell priority access to Truth Social posts, possibly his own

President Donald Trump's media company is planning to charge for special high-speed access to Truth Social posts, including possibly his own affecting national security and financial markets.

NEW YORK.(Agency)

President Donald Trump's media company is planning to charge for special high-speed access to Truth Social posts, including possibly his own affecting national security and financial markets.The move announced Thursday would allow Wall Street trading firms and other institutions to get news from top Truth Social contributors in milliseconds so they could profit off subsequent moves in stocks, bonds and interest rates.

Called Truth PSI, the new service comes amid a flurry of other deals by Trump and his family company that critics say are exploiting the presidency for profit. It follows similar offers of paid access on rival platforms, though with one key difference: The most popular Truth Social poster is the president himself and, as the biggest shareholder of the public traded parent company, would directly benefit."He's selling expedited, privileged access to information about what he is doing as president," said Kathleen Clark of Washington University School of Law and an expert in government conflicts of interest rules. "It's yet more brazen corruption, an improper exploitation of government power to enrich himself." The Trump family company declined to

comment about whether the new feature is profiting off the presidency. Truth Social's public parent, Trump



Media & Technology, did not respond to emailed questions, including whether the president's posts will be excluded from the offering.A press release states it would allow traders to see "the highest-ranking Truth Social accounts" ahead of others. The president has the most followers — 12.9 million —

followed by his oldest son, Don Jr. and, close behind, his son Eric.The release did not say how much customers would be charged.In the past few months, Trump has announced major decisions and musings on his platform including posts about the Iran war, tariffs and the US Immigration and Customs Enforcement crackdown in US cities. The Iran posts in particular are impactful because investors are worried that higher oil prices will continue to stoke inflation and possibly force the Federal Reserve to raise interest rates.Stock in Trump Media & Technology has plunged more than 70% since the president took office last year, erasing \$6 billion in shareholder wealth. Those losses, along with billions more of investor losses tied to new Trump family crypto businesses.