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Congress, NCP (SP) hold merger talks amid Maharashtra opposition shake-up

Congress and Sharad Pawar's NCP are discussing a possible merger in Maharashtra. The talks come as the the opposition Maha Vikas Aghadi faces strains and renewed questions over opposition unity.

Mumbai.(Agency)
Amid growing uncertainty within Maharashtra's opposition camp, the Congress and Sharad Pawar-led Nationalist Congress Party are holding discussions over a possible merger, sources said. The move, if it materialises, could trigger a major political realignment in the state. According to the sources, discussions are currently focused on the Maharashtra units of both parties, with the NCP (SP) leadership working on building internal consensus before moving ahead. Once a broad agreement is reached at the state level, the final decision is expected to come from the top leadership of both parties in Delhi.

The possibility of a Congress-NCP (SP) merger had also been discussed before the 2024 Maharashtra Assembly polls. The discussions,

however, were put on hold due to the election campaign. The move comes at a time when the opposition

setbacks in recent months, including a rebellion within Uddhav Sena after six MPs switched to the Eknath Shinde-led Shiv Sena.



Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) is facing internal challenges and questions over its unity. The alliance, comprising the Congress, NCP (SP) and Shiv Sena (UBT), has suffered

At a recent MVA meeting in Mumbai, Shiv Sena (UBT) chief Uddhav Thackeray openly questioned the alliance's cohesion, asking, "We say we are together, but are we really?"

The fresh merger talks come 27 years after Sharad Pawar broke away from the Congress in 1999 to form the Nationalist Congress Party.

In 2023, however, his nephew Ajit Pawar split the NCP, leading a group of MLAs to join the BJP-Shiv Sena government in Maharashtra. The split resulted in both sides claiming the party's legacy and political identity. In May this year, Sharad Pawar's faction had ruled out any possibility of a merger with Ajit Pawar's group, maintaining that the two sides had taken different political paths.

Kejriwal asks PM Modi who is being 'saved' in Ayodhya donation embezzlement case

The AAP chief also asked CM Adityanath why bulldozers were not being used against those accused of stealing devotees' donations and hurting the sentiments of crores of people.

New Delhi .(Agency)

AAP convenor Arvind Kejriwal on Thursday questioned Prime Minister Narendra Modi over the alleged embezzlement of donations meant for the Ram temple in Ayodhya, alleging that only "pawns" had been arrested while the "powerful" people behind the scam were being protected. Addressing a press conference, Kejriwal alleged that corruption had taken place in land purchases, temple construction and the handling of devotees' donations.

"It cannot be accepted that all this was going on and the prime minister was unaware of it," he said. Claiming that the Ram Mandir Trust office bearers were handpicked by the prime minister and that a Union Home Ministry officer is also part of the Trust, Kejriwal questioned why Modi "did not act to stop the theft". "They are hoodwinking us with the arrest of the eight persons; the real people (culprits) are someone else. These eight are merely pawns. I want to ask the PM whom he is saving and why," he said.



Kheda LCB or 'Corruption Branch'?

Singham-Style Valour on Paper, Billion-Rupee 'Settings' with Bootleggers Behind the Scenes!

Mahanagar Metro Desk
Pawan Makan

Nadiad. The law and order situation across the Kheda district, including Nadiad, currently seems to be entirely at the mercy of fate. The Local Crime Branch (LCB), which bears the primary responsibility of crushing crime and criminals in the district, has reportedly turned into a 'Local Corruption Branch' in the eyes of the public. If the Range IG or the State DGP conducts an impartial investigation into the true face of the Kheda LCB—which has been patting its own back by flaunting its June on-record statistics in the media—it could expose an organized dark empire operating under the guise of the khaki uniform. Sources suggest that this multi-million rupee 'special performance' was merely a facade put up by the LCB to save face from the relentless raids by the State Monitoring Cell (SMC) and to mislead high-ranking officials. The Mystery Behind the Cancelled Transfer: The Unbreakable Vekariya-Barot 'Syndicate' The biggest and most baffling question circulating within the Kheda police department is: How did Police Inspector (PI) K.R. Vekariya, who has been entrenched in the LCB for



the past 5 to 6 years, manage to get his transfer to Ahmedabad cancelled? What political umbrella or 'massive financial arrangement' allowed him to confidently retain his lucrative seat? Furthermore, Mukesh Barot—considered the district's chief Vahivatdar (financial syndicate manager)—was given a covert posting as the Second PI in the LCB. Together, they have allegedly established a highly systematic corruption syndicate that operates right under the nose of SP Vijay Patel. The Murky Game of 'Compromise' in Chain Snatching and Matar Firing Cases! The LCB has made grand claims of cracking a chain-snatching incident in the Nadiad West area. However, an investigation into the behind-the-scenes dealings and the exchange of money in this case could

reveal shocking truths. Similarly, questions are being raised about the role played by corrupt officials Vekariya, Mukesh Barot, and defaulter Jayesh Rabari in allegedly hushing up a highly serious incident involving an attack and firing at the residence of a retired PSI in Matar. Accused of being hand-in-glove with bootleggers (liquor smugglers), these officers are allegedly putting law and order on the back burner to provide VIP protection to criminals.

'Gandhigiri' by LCB Amid Rivers of Liquor: Fears of a Major Hooch Tragedy! While illicit country-made and Indian-Made Foreign Liquor (IMFL) reportedly flow freely across the borders of Kheda district, the LCB concluded its "brave" monthly run in June by registering just 7 cases of foreign liquor and a single case of country-made liquor. In stark contrast, a look at the massive raids conducted by the State Monitoring Cell (SMC) in the district during the same month completely shatters the LCB's claims of efficiency. Backed by these alleged facilitators, consignments of country-made liquor from areas like Guntal (Vadtal), Chalali (Chaklasi), Bodiroji (Mahemdabad), Malarpura & Khad (Nadiad Town), and Kakarkhad (Kathlal) are reportedly

being smuggled into Ahmedabad and Vadodara via trains, buses, and private vehicles. Observers warn that the greed of this syndicate could pave the way for a major hooch tragedy (poisonous liquor crisis) in the district. Blind Eye to Gambling Markets: A Fixed Monthly Extortion Network, Massive gambling and betting dens are reportedly thriving under police patronage in Chaklasi, Mahemdabad, Nadiad Town, and Nadiad Rural. Yet, the LCB wrapped up its duties by showing a mere 5 cases related to gambling and cricket betting in June. The reality, as alleged, is that LCB's showpiece PI Keval Vekariya, Mukesh Barot, PSI Champawat, and a shrewd town facilitator named Subhash have set up 'extortion shops' by manufacturing fake complaints and applications to orchestrate forced financial settlements. DGP G.S. Malik Sir! When Will This Corrupt LCB Be Disbanded? If Gujarat's upright and strict DGP G.S. Malik summons the service sheets of Kheda LCB PIs K.R. Vekariya and M.J. Barot, and cross-references them with the list of SMC raids conducted during their tenure, the entire team could face immediate suspension and the LCB might need a complete overhaul.

Mehbooba Mufti to attend Ayatollah Khamenei state funeral in Tehran

Srinagar.(Agency)

Peoples Democratic Party president Mehbooba Mufti is set to travel to Iran to pay final tributes to the country's slain supreme leader, Grand Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei, after receiving an official invitation to attend the state funeral in Tehran from July 3 to 6.

Mufti said she would attend the ceremony after being invited as a distinguished guest of India. "It is an immense honour for me and a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to receive this invitation (from Iran). I will



travel there to pay my last respects to the supreme leader," the PDP chief told PTI.

The invitation was extended by Mohsen Qummi, Director of the International Relations Department at the office of the Supreme Leader of the Islamic Republic of Iran. In his letter, Qummi formally invited Mufti to attend the funeral ceremony as a distinguished guest of India.

The letter said Khamenei was killed on February 28 and that, in accordance with the national period of mourning and the protocols of the Islamic Republic, a state funeral ceremony would be held in Tehran from July 3 to 6. "In light of the profound historical and strategic ties that bind the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Republic of India, I consider it a great honour to invite you excellency, as a distinguished guest of the Indian nation, to attend this solemn ceremony."

Following the talks, the two sides are expected to unveil a joint declaration on economic security cooperation and a joint statement on cooperation in artificial intelligence.

'Partnership anchored in trust, strategic convergence': MEA on India-Japan ties as Modi, Takaichi hold talks

New Delhi.(Agency)

With an emphasis on economic cooperation and technology partnerships, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Thursday held summit talks with Japanese counterpart Sanae Takaichi, focusing on resilient semiconductor supply chains and critical technologies.

Following the talks, the two sides are expected to unveil a joint declaration on economic security cooperation and a joint statement on cooperation in artificial intelligence.

"Taking forward a partnership anchored in trust, shared values and strategic convergence," External Affairs Ministry spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal said on social media as Modi hosted Takaichi for the summit.

Ahead of the meeting, the Ministry of External



Affairs (MEA) described the India-Japan partnership as one "built on trust" and rooted in shared values. The Indian and Japanese sides are also expected to deliberate extensively on ways to boost cooperation on critical minerals and pharmaceuticals. The Japanese prime minister is on a three-day visit to India. She was accorded a warm

ceremonial welcome at the forecourt of the Rashtrapati Bhavan in Delhi on Thursday morning.

There has been an upswing in India-Japan ties. The relationship was elevated to a Special Strategic and Global Partnership in 2014. As the two countries approach the 75th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations in 2027, cooperation continues to deepen across a wide range of sectors, including trade and investment, economic security, defence and security, science and technology, culture, and people-to-people ties. The bilateral framework now comprises over 70 dialogue mechanisms.

PM Modi visited Japan for the 15th Annual Summit in Tokyo in August last year. The annual summit remains the flagship platform

driving the strategic agenda of the partnership. The Japanese prime minister had posted on X photos of her arrival, soon after landing in Delhi.

Sharing her post, Modi wrote, "A very warm welcome to India, Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi."

"We are delighted to host you on your first visit to India, and I look forward to our wide-ranging discussions tomorrow that will further deepen the India-Japan Special Strategic and Global Partnership. Through our joint efforts, we will continue to advance peace, stability and prosperity in the Indo-Pacific and beyond. @takaichi_sanae."

Jaiswal on Wednesday said the visit marks an "important step" in taking forward the Special Strategic and Global Partnership between India and Japan.



News box

Teen murders stepfather after quarrel, on the run

Gurgaon.(Agency)

A 19-year old youth allegedly murdered his stepfather with a hoe after a heated argument at their home in Pataudi late Monday night. According to the police, Shivam and the victim, Manoj (45) frequently quarreled since Manoj married Shivam's mother 13 years ago. On Monday, during an altercation, Shivam allegedly attacked Manoj several times with a hoe, inflicting fatal injuries. Manoj died at the scene, and the accused escaped immediately after the incident.

Receiving a complaint from Prempal, a relative of the deceased, the Pataudi police station registered the case and rushed to the spot with a forensic team to collect evidence. The body was further sent for post-mortem examination. Police told that raids are underway to trace the accused, who remains absconding. In a separate case, Ravi, a 32-year-old marketing executive, died on Tuesday night, nearly a month after he was brutally assaulted during a parking dispute in Sector 7 Extension. On June 6, Ravi went to Sector 7 Extension Road with his friends after celebrating his brother's birthday when an argument broke out with a group of youth over parking a car outside a shop. Ravi told the group that he would remove the vehicle shortly, but the argument escalated into a physical assault. According to police, as the altercation intensified, Ravi's three friends managed to flee the scene. The group caught hold of Ravi and repeatedly assaulted him. His condition deteriorated the following day, leading to his hospitalisation. Doctors later found that he sustained a serious head injury.

After remaining under treatment for nearly a month, he succumbed to his injuries on Tuesday night. He is survived by his wife, a son and a daughter.

Three face FIR for morphing two sisters' photos with AI, sharing them online

Ghaziabad.(Agency)

Police registered an FIR against a man and two others after he allegedly created morphed videos and pictures of a 26-year-old woman and her sister using AI. The accused, Himanshu alias Lukka, has allegedly been harassing the woman for some time now. The complainant said that in April last year, she had gotten engaged. The accused contacted her to-be in-laws and cast false aspersions on her character, leading to them breaking off the engagement. The woman's family tried to persuade Himanshu to stop harassing her as he was insisting that she get into a relationship with him, but he allegedly refused to stop. He then began creating morphed images and videos of her as well as her older sister, who is married, and sending them to both of them and her sister's husband. He has also allegedly routinely defamed her on social media platforms such as Instagram by creating fake IDs and posting obscene comments and posts on various such profiles. The harassment has persisted for over a year despite the woman and her family's attempts to dissuade him. DCP (city) Dhawal Jaiswal said they have filed an FIR against Himanshu and two of his associates — Manohar and Sonu, a father-son duo — under BNS sections (stalking), 351(3) (criminal intimidation), 61(2) (criminal conspiracy) of BNS and relevant sections of the IT Act at Crossings Republik police station.

"The accused's location was traced to Punjab and teams have been formed to nab them," the DCP added.

IndiGo adds nine routes, links Noida airport to 15 cities

Noida.(Agency)

IndiGo expanded its network from Noida International Airport on Wednesday, launching flights to nine more cities, including Jaipur, Jodhpur, Dharamshala, Bhopal, Dehradun, Bareilly, Kishangarh, Pantnagar and Chandigarh. The airline commenced commercial operations from Noida airport on June 15 with the inaugural flight from Lucknow to Noida. It has since been running daily flights to Bengaluru, Hyderabad, Jammu and Amritsar. The July 1 additions take the number of cities connected to the airport to 15. Akasa, which started operations from Noida airport on June 16, flies to Bengaluru and Navi Mumbai. While IndiGo will operate daily to most cities, it will fly to Bareilly on Monday, Wednesday, Friday and Sunday, and Kishangarh (Ajmer) on Tuesday, Thursday and Friday. IndiGo will start direct Navi Mumbai flights on July 10. A direct flight service to Srinagar will also start soon," NIAL nodal officer



Shailendra Bhatia said. Currently, the airline has a Jaipur layover for the Noida-Navi Mumbai route and Noida-Srinagar flights are routed via Chandigarh. RK Shahi, a resident of Sector Zeta 1 in Greater Noida, who flew from Noida airport to Hyderabad on Tuesday afternoon, said, "It took me just 40 minutes to reach the airport from home, against the 90 minutes it usually takes to reach IGI. There's no rush at Noida airport, so check-in was smooth. The airport is significantly improving the travel experience for people in Noida and Greater Noida." NIA expects to have the infrastructure for international flights, like customs and immigration, ready by the end of this year. The carrier, meanwhile, introduced IndiGo Lite Fare, a new entry-level economy option for passengers travelling with only cabin baggage up to 7 kg and with an auto-assigned seat at no additional cost. The fare excludes free checked baggage, allowing customers to pay only for the services they use.

Missing GPS to broken emergency exits: School bus checks on after safety lapses found

Gurgaon.(Agency)

With schools set to reopen after summer break from next week, the district administration has ordered a fresh round of inspections of school buses in July after recent audits found serious safety lapses that could put thousands of children at risk.

The authorities had inspected 325 school buses between Jan 1 and May 26 this year and issued 56 challans for violations of the Surakshit School Vahan Policy. This prompted the district road safety committee (DRSC) to carry out another audit before the new term gathers pace.

The earlier audit had found an alarming number of buses operating without GPS tracking systems. Many had non-functional or missing CCTV cameras, no horizontal safety grilles and broken emergency exit doors. In some buses, officials found illegal tinted glass windows, batteries installed without protective covers to prevent leaking of fumes, expired medicines in first-aid kits and no identification of the school for which they were plying. Some schools also



failed to show police verification for the drivers and helpers on the buses. The authorities also found mandatory documents in several vehicles were out of order. Now, the road safety committee has directed the regional transport authority to circulate the safe schoolbus compliance checklist among every school through the

district education officer and ensure that all institutions rectify the shortcomings before inspections begin again in July. The checklist has already been sent to all schools. Sub-divisional magistrate Sanjeev Singla said those found not following the rules will face strict action. "Along with the challan, we will also start registering

FIRs against the schools and their transport agencies for violating norms," he said. The safety drive extends beyond buses. Taking note of the fact that children remain vulnerable outside school gates, the committee has also instructed all road-owning agencies, including GMDA, MCG, NHAI and PWD, to upgrade road infrastructure round educational institutions. Officials have been asked to ensure warning signboards, zebra crossings, speed breakers or rumble strips, and road markings to create safer school zones and reduce the risk of accidents involving children. "SDMs have been directed to coordinate with the concerned agencies and monitor compliance in their respective jurisdictions," said an official.

The initiative is part of the district's broader road safety strategy, which has become even more important after Gurgaon recorded 1,118 road crashes in 2025 — a 9% increase over the previous year. Pedestrians and two-wheeler users were found to be among the most vulnerable.

Principles Compromised or a Multi-Crore Scam?

Akshay Patel's 'Defection' History and the Massive Exposure of Royalty Theft in Sand-Soil Mining!

Mahanagar Metro Desk

Pawan Makan

Chhota Udepur. In a democracy, voters cast their ballots with sacred hope. However, when a leader fragments that public mandate for personal greed, the citizens feel utterly betrayed. The political history of Akshay Patel (Akshaykumar Ishwarbhai Patel), the MLA from Karjan assembly constituency, reflects not an ideal leader of the masses, but a politician revolving around power, switching political parties, and ruthlessly exploiting the natural resources of his own constituency. Today, the residents of Karjan are filled with outrage witnessing his unfulfilled promises and this game of corruption. **Betrayal of Trust: Stabbing the Mandate in the Back** In the 2017 Gujarat Assembly elections, the voters of Karjan expressed their anger against the ruling government by electing Akshay Patel on a Congress ticket. The public hoped he would serve as a strong opposition voice to raise their concerns. However, ahead of the Rajya Sabha elections in June 2020, his political loyalty wavered. Overnight, he resigned from the Congress party and his MLA post to join the BJP. This was not an ideological shift, but a sheer desire to enjoy the perks of power, which ultimately imposed the financial burden of an unnecessary by-election on the taxpayers of Karjan. **Stripping the Rivers: The Destructive Game of Illegal Sand and Soil Mining** Under the alleged patronage of Akshay Patel, the biggest illegal trade is currently thriving in the Karjan region—illegal sand and soil mining. According to serious allegations leveled by locals, the sacred rivers



and government lands of Karjan are being plundered day and night under the direct protection of the MLA. Illegally operated heavy excavators (Hitachi machines) and overloaded dumpers are ruthlessly swallowing the natural wealth. This destruction is not only damaging the ecosystem but has also posed a severe threat to the very existence of villages situated along the riverbanks. **Plundering the State Exchequer: The Multi-Crore Royalty Theft Syndicate** Behind this illegal mining lies not just a violation of rules, but a massive loss to the state exchequer. A full-fledged syndicate of 'royalty theft' is being operated on a large scale by completely bypassing official approvals and keeping regulatory laws at bay. By keeping government records in the dark, crores of rupees are funneling directly into private pockets without paying taxes or

अक्षय पटेल
विधायक करजन

royalties. The revenue that should have been utilized for public development, schools, and hospitals is instead reaching the kingpins of the syndicate. Despite such a massive scam, the local administration has turned a blind eye, the primary reason being the MLA's alleged political backing. **Deception of Farmers and Local Youth** Although Akshay Patel projects himself as a 'farmer leader', the ground reality is that farmers in the Karjan-Por region are still struggling for irrigation water. Due to indiscriminate illegal mining, the groundwater table is rapidly depleting, destroying agriculture. Furthermore, the mandatory rule to provide 85% of industrial jobs to local unemployed youth remains confined

Section of Aravali hillock flattened in Mangar

Ghaziabad.(Agency)

A section of an Aravali hillock has been flattened in Mangar, one of the most ecologically sensitive zones of the ranges and home to the eponymous Mangar Bani grove. The cleared patch measures around an acre. Local residents reported activities at the hillock around 7pm on Tuesday and alerted police, who found an earthmover abandoned at the site. No FIR has been filed so far. The forest department also inspected the area. "It looks like some part of the hill was damaged. We are investigating," said Jhalkar Uyake, Faridabad divisional forest officer.

Fresh earth cuts were visible on Wednesday along the edges of the cleared patch, with the natural hill slope rising immediately behind it. A damaged mesh fence was also found at the site.

The land is classified in revenue records as 'magda' — rainfed agricultural land — even though it is partly hilly. According to environmentalist S S Oberoi, repeated attempts have been made to alter the natural landscape here — trees and shrubs have been cut in the past before this attempt to level it with an earthmover. Construction and mining have done large-scale damage to the Aravalis. In Rajasthan, entire tracts of the hills have been flattened. In south



Haryana districts like Gurgaon, Faridabad and Nuh, despite a ban on mining and laws restricting construction in the Aravalis, hills continue to sustain damage. In Dec 2024, a hillock in Nuh's Rava was blown to pieces by stone miners. In its Mangar order, National Green Tribunal had recorded the Haryana govt's own submission that there had been past instances of gair mumkin pahar (rocky, hilly or uncultivable wasteland) being wrongly labelled as agricultural land in revenue records by a patwari. The tribunal's order directed state authorities to act against "unauthorised

cutting of trees or breaking of the land or any non-forest activity in the forest, including gair mumkin pahar," which it recognised as deemed forest under notifications issued under Punjab Land Preservation Act (PLPA) and Supreme Court's declarations.

Mangar is no ordinary tract of land. Spread across 4,262 acres, including around 3,810 acres of gair mumkin pahar, it is among the richest biodiversity pockets of the Aravalis in NCR. Within it lies Mangar Bani, spread over 677 acres, regarded as NCR's last surviving grove and possibly its only remaining patch of primary forest. Of

Mangar's hill area, 1,132 acres are protected under sections 4 and 5 of Punjab Land Preservation Act and required to be treated as forest. Conservationists have long argued that the remaining forested acres should also be recognised as deemed forest under Supreme Court's 1996 T N Godavarma Thirumulpad judgment, which held that "forest" includes any area meeting the dictionary definition or recorded as such in government records, regardless of ownership. Despite meeting these criteria, large parts of Mangar remain unclassified by the Haryana govt. This has always been forest land. Every few years someone tries to change its character. Villagers have repeatedly objected because once the hills are cut, they cannot be restored," said Ram Singh, a Mangar resident.

In 2013, NGT restrained fencing, fragmentation and land-use change in Mangar. The matter resurfaced in 2014 when realtor M3M claimed parts of the land were agricultural. In 2016, NGT rejected this after a joint Forest Survey of India-Haryana forest department survey found the land densely vegetated. That June, Haryana declared Mangar Bani and a 500-metre buffer a no-construction zone.

Bhagwant Mann leaves for Bengaluru for detox programme amid Akal Takht row

Punjab CM Bhagwant Mann has been under scrutiny following the Akal Takht's decision to declare him a 'Guru dokhi' (anti-Guru) and 'Khalsa panth virodhi' (anti-Khalsa community).

Shimla. (Agency)
Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann left for Bengaluru on Thursday morning for a four-day detox programme at a private wellness institute, days after facing censure from the Akal Takht over the controversy surrounding his video message responding to the Sikh temporal body's criticism. Sources said Mann boarded a flight at around 7.30 am and is expected to return after four days. "He is likely to come back on Monday. But he may extend his trip," a source added. Mann's Bengaluru visit comes a day after he launched the Mawan Dhiyan Satkar Yojana from his home constituency of Dhuri, where the state government

credited financial assistance to around 36 lakh women beneficiaries under its flagship welfare scheme. The timing of the visit is significant as the chief minister has been under political and religious scrutiny following the Akal Takht's decision to declare him a "Guru dokhi" (anti-Guru) and "Khalsa panth virodhi" (anti-Khalsa community). The censure came after a video in which Mann criticised the Akal Takht for its directions to Punjab legislators to amend the state's anti-sacrilege law. The issue has since dominated Punjab's political discourse, with Opposition parties stepping up attacks on the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) government.



In 2022, a similar trip. This is not the first time Mann has gone for a detox programme. In October 2022, a few months after assuming office as chief minister, he had travelled to a private wellness facility in

Bengaluru for a similar programme. The visit had come amid persistent speculation over his health and drinking habits after videos showing him appearing unwell during public engagements had triggered political attacks. AAP had then maintained that the chief minister was undergoing a routine health check-up and detox programme. Mann later resumed official duties after returning and subsequently said publicly that he had given up alcohol. Government sources maintained that the chief minister's Bengaluru visit had been scheduled in advance and was unrelated to the political controversy.

Short news

Haryana ranked third in SGST collections, after Gujarat and Andhra Pradesh

Panchkula. (Agency)
Haryana celebrated the ninth anniversary of the successful implementation of the Goods and Services Tax (GST) with a state-level function in Panchkula on Wednesday, highlighting the state's remarkable revenue growth and its emergence as one of the country's top-performing GST administrations. The function was presided over by Ashima Brar, Commissioner and Secretary, Excise & Taxation Department, and attended by Vinay Pratap Singh, Excise & Taxation Commissioner, senior departmental officers, members of the tax bar, chartered accountants, tax practitioners, and representatives of trade and industry. Delivering the keynote address, Ashima Brar traced Haryana's GST journey over the past nine years and highlighted the state's success in overcoming implementation challenges while building a robust and transparent tax ecosystem. She noted that the state's GST revenue has more than doubled between 2018-19 and 2024-25, reflecting sustained economic growth and improved tax compliance. Despite accounting for only 1.34 per cent of India's geographical area and 2.2 per cent of its population, Haryana contributes nearly 7.4 per cent of the country's total GST collections, underlining its strong industrial and commercial base.

Brar also highlighted the landmark GST reforms introduced in September 2025, which simplified the earlier multi-tier tax structure into a practically two-rate regime. The reforms also eliminated the inverted duty structure in most sectors, rationalised tax rates, placed all merit goods in the 5 per cent slab and standard consumer goods under the 18 per cent rate, thereby reducing the tax burden on consumers while making the GST framework simpler and more efficient.

Haryana Governor calls for time-bound, transparent delivery of welfare schemes to every eligible beneficiary

Panchkula. (Agency)
Emphasising that the quality of governance is measured by the timely delivery of benefits to citizens, Haryana Governor Prof. Ashim Kumar Ghosh on Wednesday called for the transparent, effective and time-bound implementation of all welfare schemes so that every eligible beneficiary receives the intended benefits without delay. The Governor made these observations during a courtesy meeting with Haryana Chief Secretary Anurag Rastogi at Haryana Raj Bhavan. During the meeting, Prof. Ghosh reviewed the progress of key public welfare programmes and sought a detailed briefing on various issues concerning the state's governance and development. Stressing the importance of accountability and efficient administration, he said that welfare schemes must translate into tangible benefits for people at the grassroots and should be implemented with complete transparency and within stipulated timelines. The Governor observed that sustained development and good governance depend on the effective execution of government programmes. He underlined the need for continuous monitoring and coordinated administrative efforts to ensure that public welfare initiatives achieve their intended outcomes and reach the maximum number of eligible beneficiaries.

Maharashtra introduces bill to recognise women farmers

The definition of farmer in the Maharashtra Women Farmers Empowerment Bill, 2026, says that any woman resident of Maharashtra engaged in agriculture, irrespective of the nature of the land.

Mumbai. (Agency)
Maharashtra government on Wednesday introduced a bill to recognise women farmers and issuance of woman farmer certificates in order to enable their access to various welfare policies, programmes, scheme and credit. The definition of farmer in the Maharashtra Women Farmers Empowerment Bill, 2026, says that any woman resident of Maharashtra engaged in agriculture, irrespective of the nature of the land.

It further stated that it contribute to any type of innovation, conservation, preservation or propagation of diverse agricultural varieties of seeds, any type of farm animals and fish, cultivation methods for climate resilience, practice of integrated farming system; add value to primary produce or

raw agricultural and animal produce by engaging in primary processing. "The agricultural policies, schemes, and extension systems are largely gender-



neutral. However, the requirement of land ownership as a precondition for access to most agricultural schemes and underlying entitlements has rendered such schemes inaccessible to many women farmers,

since only a very small percentage of these women own agricultural land," said the statement of objects and reasons for the bill. It added that women who cultivate family or community land without holding formal titles to the land are often counted as agricultural labourers rather than farmers.

"Similarly, women who are engaged in allied non-cultivation-based activities such as fishing, collection of minor forest produce, poultry, animal husbandry, etc., are also not recognised as farmers. This systemic non-recognition of women farmers and their agricultural labour is significant and leads to other forms of exclusion, including, but not limited to discrimination in access to schemes, credit and markets," it said.

Ayodhya row heats up, UP weighs option to send probe to Central agency

Lucknow. (Agency)
Amid the clamour for a speedy probe into the alleged theft and embezzlement of funds and valuables donated to the Ram temple in Ayodhya, the Uttar Pradesh government is actively considering the option of turning over the investigation of the case to the CBI or another Central agency. The Indian Express has learnt. Sources said since the matter constitutes an economic offence which requires deep investigation, the option of handing over the case to the CBI or another Central agency is being looked at. The state SIT, which submitted a

preliminary report on its findings, was Wednesday granted time until July 15 to complete its probe. It will be revisiting Ayodhya Thursday to conduct further inquiries.

Sources said a parallel probe by the Ayodhya police has only uncovered cash allegedly stolen in recent months — eight persons have been arrested and are currently in judicial custody — and an extensive investigation is required to trace movable and immovable assets acquired by the accused

who were involved in the work of counting cash and valuables. Ever since it submitted its preliminary report to the office



of the Chief Minister on June 23, the SIT has not visited Ayodhya. The local police, which registered an FIR on June 25, have conducted

searches in Ayodhya and the adjoining districts of Pratapgarh, Gonda and Basti. Police have so far recovered Rs 79.80 lakh from the eight accused.

The SIT, sources said, has already questioned all trustees of the Shri Ram Janmabhoomi Teerth Kshetra Trust including top office-bearers Champat Rai, Anil Mishra and Gopal Rao. Details obtained from the trustees, sources said, were related to their role and involvement in the management of the cash and valuables dropped by devotees in the temple's donation boxes.

Haryana: Panchkula police launches month-long drive to protect senior citizens living alone

Panchkula (Haryana). (Agency)
In a proactive step to strengthen the safety net for elderly residents, Panchkula police have launched a month-long special campaign to ensure the security and well-being of senior citizens living alone. The initiative, launched under the direction of Police Commissioner Pankaj Nain, combines regular police outreach, cybercrime awareness and emergency response mechanisms to safeguard vulnerable citizens. Police Commissioner Pankaj Nain said the campaign aims to provide senior citizens with a secure environment by maintaining close police contact and protecting them from crimes such as cyber fraud, digital arrest scams, online financial cheating and other criminal activities. He said Panchkula Police is committed to ensuring that elderly residents receive immediate assistance whenever required. During the first week of the campaign, police teams led by DCP Panchkula Srishti Gupta visited 78 senior citizens living alone across the district to assess their security requirements. The exercise is being expanded to identify and reach all such senior citizens so that no vulnerable person is left out.

As part of the drive, police are conducting a detailed survey and creating an online database of senior citizens to facilitate prompt assistance during emergencies. Verification of domestic helpers, drivers, cooks, gardeners and other household staff is also being undertaken to strengthen residential security. Police teams are encouraging senior citizens to install CCTV cameras and are sensitising them about cyber fraud, digital arrest scams, suspicious visitors and safe online practices. To ensure quick access to police assistance, contact details of the concerned Station House Officer or Police Post In-charge have been shared with every senior citizen. Panchkula Police has also activated a dedicated helpline, 9115777026, for senior citizens and their family members. Beat officers and local police personnel will make regular visits to monitor their well-being and address their concerns.

Woman raped, filmed: 11 arrested, 3 minors nabbed as video circulates on social media

All the 11 accused are under 30 years of age and worked as labourers, an official from Fatepur police station said. They were produced before a local court on Tuesday and sent to police custody till July 4, Saturday.

Mumbai. (Agency)
NEARLY a month after a 40-year-old woman was sexually assaulted by two men, while other accomplices took a video, the Jalgaon police arrested 11 persons and apprehended three minors after the video began circulating on social media. On June 2, the accused were visiting a forest area in Jamner taluka to collect firewood, when they saw the woman with a 38-year-old male friend. They were known to each other and began threatening her. Two of the men raped the woman, while others filmed the act. While initially the woman did not file a complaint due to the threats by the accused, the video subsequently began circulating on social media around June 25. A complaint was filed by the Fatepur police on Monday, which names 15

persons in all — 14 including the two who assaulted her have been apprehended, an official said. The accused also threatened the male accompanying the victim. The Fatepur police has filed a complaint under Section 70 (1) (gangrape) and Section 77 (voyeurism) of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita and relevant sections of the Information Technology Act for the circulation of the video. Police officials said that a probe was on to identify the role played by each of the arrested, and those behind the circulation of the video. All the 11 accused are under 30 years of age and worked as labourers, an official from Fatepur police station said. They were produced before a local court on Tuesday and sent to police custody till July 4, Saturday.



Storms in World Cup, XL edition

Samindra Kunti

This is the XL World Cup, much in the image of the main co-host, the United States, where everything is supersized—from food portions to the NFL stadiums where most of the matches have been played. According to FIFA president Gianni Infantino, this World Cup is bigger and better than ever. Indeed, his expansionism will allow him to channel ever-more revenue to the 211 member associations and consolidate his power. But the first 48-team tournament—played in three countries, another first—is simply too bloated. At every match, from Mexico City to Vancouver and from San Francisco to Boston, FIFA welcomes spectators to “The greatest show on Earth”. But the progress of that show has been slow and meandering. It took 72 matches to eliminate 16 teams from the group phase. Yet, the stage offered some dramatic moments—like when Folarin Balogun, a player of Nigerian descent, scored a brace for the US in the opening match, when Morocco’s 18-year-old Ayyoub Bouaddi orchestrated the midfield against Brazil, and when Lionel Messi and Ousmane Dembélé scored hat-tricks against Algeria and Norway.

Every World Cup stages David-and-Goliath battles, too. In 2026, Cape Verde are playing David with aplomb. Alongside Iceland and Curaçao, the island nation ranks among the minnows of World Cup history. But manager Bubi, goalkeeper Vozinha and centre-back Pico have become household names, engineering Cape Verde’s progress from the group stage with three hard-fought draws, including holding mighty Spain in their opening match. However, that fairy tale has been somewhat tainted after accusations of rape against team captain Ryan Mendes. Cape Verde is part of the story of Africa, the continent that has benefited most from the tournament’s expansion, as nine of its 10 teams—double the number represented at previous World Cups—advanced to the knockout stages. The only disappointment was Tunisia, who dismissed their manager halfway and exited early with a goal difference of -10.

The North Africans belonged to a class of teams that perhaps had little business being at the World Cup. Scotland, Czech Republic, Türkiye, New Zealand, Qatar, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Curaçao, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Uzbekistan, Jordan and Panama, too, demonstrated large gaps in quality. It brings us back to the point that FIFA’s World Cup expansion was always about generating revenue, with the 2023-26 cycle projected to bring in \$13 billion. The sport’s global governing body can achieve its mission—to develop football around the world—without diluting the quality of its main tournament. After all, under Infantino, FIFA has already distributed more than \$5 billion in development money. But this isn’t all. The South American nations, spearheaded by regional confederation Conmebol’s boss Alejandro Dominguez, have been advocating for a 64-team World Cup in 2030 as a centenary celebration of the tournament, whose first edition was held in Uruguay in 1930. It’s perhaps a leverage to stage more group matches, but other confederations have opposed the idea. Ghana manager Carlos Queiroz summed up the format controversy: “The number of teams that qualify for this competition can turn it into something vulgar and ordinary. When so many teams can qualify, is the value still rare? That would seem debatable to me, but it’s only my opinion. For now, the smaller nations will have to survive the round of 32 to back up their credentials. Meanwhile, Asian powerhouse Japan showcased their development under manager Hajime Moriyasu’s possession-based game.

The Moroccans benefited from both the diaspora and talent developed at home. They went against five-time winners Brazil and three-time finalists Netherlands, who have industrialised talent development. Brazil resemble Carlo Ancelotti’s Real Madrid: disjointed but with flashes of genius that are often delivered by Vinicius Júnior. At a deeper level, they have fallen behind Europe.”

An invoice for Netanyahu

He might appreciate that Kasol therapy restores Israeli youth’s capacity to be recalled for battle

Krishna Kumar



THE late Narindar Singh taught economics, but his economics was of a different kind. He wrote just two books and both were unique. In his 1976 book, *Economics and the Crisis of Ecology*, he suggested new ways to calculate the cost of the harm done to the environment by the pursuit of profit and economic growth. He was among the rare few in the field of economics who questioned the established procedure of estimating the value of a tree by measuring its timber. He asked us to look at the wider canvas, which includes the future. A tree provides many services during its lifetime. It holds the soil and does not allow erosion; it provides a habitat for birds and insects; if it is a fruit tree, its value for humans goes beyond the shade it provides and its aesthetic presence. All these would go when the tree is cut down. These days, contractors offer to relocate it: they are reasonably sure that no one will recall its new home, let alone inspect it. Narindar Singh’s formula would have given the State far bigger revenue in projects involving shaking down forest-covered hills for the construction of new highways that shorten the second book, *The Keynesian Fallout* (1996), cut a deep hole in the compensatory employment theory by distinguishing sensible from harmful work. If a rave party offers employment in garbage collection—including bottles of alcohol—it can hardly be called meaningful work.

I was reminded of Narindar Singh’s work when I read Sonali Gupta’s article, ‘High in Kasol’ in *The Tribune* (June 21). It introduces us to the scale and range of problems faced by nature and society in Kullu’s Parvati valley. The village of Kasol serves as a comfort and renewal site for young, mentally exhausted people from other countries, especially Israel, living time to distant tourist spots from polluted cities. Israel has a tough conscription policy under which every 18-year-old must devote 32 months to military service. I have known for many years the role Dharamsala played as a recovery site for these young men and women. Kasol is a different kind of refuge. In Dharamsala, the Dalai Lama’s presence gave the agitated mind a sense of calm and purpose. Kasol offers rave parties. Kasol plays its therapeutic role with the help of DJs, loud electronic music, strobe lights, alcohol and drugs. Gupta portrays a frightening picture of Kasol. Her concern has been testified by a court order against senior police officers for negligence in controlling the ravages of Kasol’s rave culture.

Conscription is not unique to Israel, but its meaning and social impact there is special. Over two decades ago, I had the occasion to visit a few Israeli schools. By any routine standards, these were good schools, with hardworking

teachers and a system that cares for every child, except that in Israel, “every” means Jewish. The complex history—and even more complex geography—of Jewish-Palestinian relations makes childhood a deeply politicised concept in Israel. The education system is also sharply divided in terms of curriculum, textbooks and opportunities. It is not easy for other nations to make sense of Israel. A new book by Omer Bartov, *Israel: What Went Wrong?* (Penguin, 2026) explains its current convulsion. Bartov starts by introducing the reader to its short history which began in 1948 with the violent displacement of a long-settled Palestinian society. Israel’s perpetual war is nothing less than fate. Many Israelis recognise that reconciliation and justice for the Palestinians is the only way to erase collective guilt and fear of revenge, but this recognition has no political value. Only war and territorial expansion have. All three schools that I visited had an honour list painted in the foyer near the national flag. This list showed the names of former students killed in various wars Israel has fought. The history taught in schools ignores the brutal nakba (catastrophe in Arabic) that the Palestinians had to suffer when Israel was created after World War II as a kind of compensation for the Holocaust that the Jews had suffered under Hitler.

This short discussion of a complicated inheritance that shapes childhood and adolescence in Israel is hardly sufficient to grasp why Israeli youth crave for radical unwinding after their conscription years. Rave parties in the Parvati valley seem to have become a favoured mass therapy resource. The arrival of rave culture—and its economy—marks yet another chapter in the wild growth

of tourism in Himachal Pradesh. Every year, the monsoon brings Himachal’s renowned tourist spots back into disaster news. Bridges and highways are washed away. Buildings tumble, tourists are stranded, but everything eventually fades out like the violent part of a movie. Work on new projects resumes along with repair work at sites of devastation. The state’s commitment to maintaining its fame as a destination for the pleasure seeker survives the rainy season. If you thought some lessons would be learnt, you would feel sorry for yourself. Now, if rave parties in Kasol are exacerbating the environmental crisis and bringing drugs into the social ethos, it is not going to ring alarm bells. Let us, for our own benefit, apply the Narindar Singh formula to measure the consequences of rave culture financially. If the stressed Israeli youth were to seek psychological therapy in their own country, they would pay a high professional fee. Himachal should mention that fee in an imaginary invoice for Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

Given his commitment to Israel’s ideology of perpetual war, he might appreciate that Kasol therapy restores his youth’s capacity to be recalled for battle. For the brute valour they would show, their unwinding in Kasol becomes a State responsibility. The invoice from Himachal will indicate that they were given a good opportunity to feel restored after their tough years of conscription. If Netanyahu doesn’t like the invoice, it will still serve a purpose. Future generations of Himachal’s devastated landscape and drug-poisoned social ethos will treat the invoice as a reference point to figure out what began at Kasol.

Chanda chori’ charge : Temple donations must inspire trust

The controversy highlights the dangers of reducing sensitive religious issues to political ammunition

THE controversy over the alleged misappropriation of donations meant for the Ram Mandir is a reminder that faith and accountability must go hand in hand. The row stems from allegations that some individuals collected money in the temple’s name through unauthorised means and diverted it for personal gain. A petition seeking an investigation into the alleged “chanda chori” (donation theft) reached the Supreme Court, though the court declined to entertain it directly and asked the petitioner to pursue the appropriate legal remedy. But the issue has quickly spiralled into a political slugfest, with the BJP and the Opposition trading accusations instead of allowing institutions to ascertain the facts. Religious institutions occupy a unique place in public life. Donations made to them are acts of trust and carry emotional and spiritual significance. That trust must be



protected through transparent financial management, regular audits and prompt disclosure whenever questions arise. Accountability is not an affront to faith;

it is the strongest guarantee of its integrity. The larger and more revered the institution, the greater its responsibility to demonstrate that every contribution is being used for its intended purpose.

The controversy also highlights the dangers of reducing sensitive religious issues to political ammunition. Opposition parties have accused the BJP of failing to prevent “donation theft” and demanded strict action against those responsible. The BJP has countered by accusing its rivals of exploiting a sacred issue for political gain. The distinction between questioning financial management and questioning faith itself must never be blurred. The way forward is an impartial and lawful inquiry. If the allegations are baseless, transparency will restore confidence. If irregularities are found, those responsible must face the law, regardless of their position.

How science is shaping art of war

Military reforms are about developing leaders capable of navigating the intersection of warfare, technology and organisational change

Lt Gen Karanbir Singh Brar Retd

THE debate on military reforms and theatreisation has rightly highlighted an important reality: military transformation cannot be the responsibility of a single individual, institution or appointment. While the creation of the Chief of Defence Staff (CDS) and the efforts toward jointness and theatre commands are significant milestones, they represent only one part of a much larger transformation that the forces must undertake. The central challenge facing militaries worldwide today is adaptation to a rapidly changing character of warfare. The nature of war may remain constant, but the means through which military power is generated, exercised and sustained are undergoing a profound change. Consequently, military reform must be viewed not only through the lens of structures and command arrangements but also through the lenses of technology, human capital, doctrine and national capability. The future battlefield is increasingly defined by technologies that transcend traditional service boundaries. Multi-domain operations (MDO), integrated intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance (ISR), net-centric warfare, sensor-to-shooter architectures, AI-enabled decision support, cyber warfare, electronic warfare, autonomous systems, drones, robotics and space-based capabilities are redefining how military power is applied. In such an environment, military effectiveness will depend less on the number of platforms a nation possesses and more on how effectively it connects sensors, decision-makers and effectors across all domains. The decisive military advantage of the future will not come merely from possessing tanks, aircraft, ships or missiles. It will come from achieving decision superiority—the ability to observe, orient, decide and act faster and more accurately than an adversary. This requires integrated systems, common operational pictures, secure communications, data fusion, AI-enabled

analytics and resilient networks. Theatreisation can facilitate such integration, but it cannot create it by itself. A theatre command without integrated data architecture may simply become three services operating under a common headquarters. True transformation demands much more. If future military capability is tech-driven, then military reforms and technological self-reliance become inseparable. India’s pursuit of Atmanirbharta in defence must therefore extend beyond manufacturing platforms. Indigenous production of equipment is important, but the future battlespace will increasingly be shaped by control over software, algorithms, data, communications, cyber capabilities, sensors, semiconductors, autonomy, and artificial intelligence.

Dependence on external sources for critical technologies may create vulnerabilities far more significant than dependence on traditional military hardware. AI models, data repositories, operating systems, communication networks, cyber tools and digital infrastructure are becoming strategic assets. Technology-driven military reforms therefore require technology-driven Atmanirbharta. This demands a national effort involving the armed forces, academia, startups, industry, research institutions and policymakers. Defence capability can no longer be viewed solely as the output of military organisations. It is increasingly the product of an entire national innovation ecosystem.

Much of the military leadership architecture of today was designed for the industrial-age military. The challenges of the future are different. The AI age requires leaders who can operate simultaneously in the physical, informational, cyber, cognitive and technological domains. It requires institutions capable of rapid adaptation. It requires closer

integration between military organisations and national innovation ecosystems. Most importantly, it requires recognition that military reforms extend far beyond headquarters’ reorganisation. Theatreisation, jointness, and organisational restructuring are necessary. But they are only part of the solution.

The larger challenge is creating a force capable of



achieving decision dominance in an era characterised by data abundance, algorithmic warfare, autonomous systems, cyber contestation, and persistent surveillance. The discussion often evokes an important counterpoint—that while technology continues to advance at an unprecedented pace, the enduring principles of warfare remain unchanged. Leadership, judgment, initiative, courage, strategic foresight and operational art will

always lie at the heart of military success. The art of war therefore retains its relevance and primacy.

However, the challenge before modern militaries is not one of choosing between the art and the science of war. It is about understanding how the science of war is increasingly shaping the manner in which the art of war is conceived and executed. Historically, technological change certainly influenced warfare, but its impact on operational decision-making and battlefield outcomes was often limited by the pace of information flow and the relative simplicity of military systems. Today, the relationship has fundamentally changed. Artificial intelligence, integrated ISR networks, cyber warfare, electronic warfare, space-based capabilities, autonomous systems and sensor-to-shooter architectures are no longer peripheral enablers. They increasingly determine how commanders perceive the battlefield, generate situational awareness, make decisions and apply combat power. They are becoming central instruments through which military commanders achieve operational effects.

A commander who lacks technological understanding may struggle to exploit emerging capabilities effectively. Equally, technologists who lack understanding of warfighting realities risk creating solutions in search of problems. The art of war and the science of war can therefore no longer be viewed as separate domains. Modern operational art is increasingly exercised through technological systems. A commander may still rely on intuition, experience and judgment, but these are now informed by data, algorithms, networks and machine-assisted decision support. The commander remains central, but the tools through which command is exercised are undergoing profound transformation.

Learn the lingo

Baby talk



Babbling and cooing are a baby's way of making small talk. A primer on important developmental milestones, and how to track them.

Baby buddy

Babies are interested and fascinated by other babies well before they are a year old, but they don't know to 'play' yet. By 18-24 months, they take part in parallel play where they may play next to each other but not with each other. Interactive play starts after two years of age. "A quiet, passive child in the first few months is a cause for concern. No big smiles or warm expressions by six months or thereafter, no babbling after a year, or no use of gestures like pointing, showing or waving, no meaningful words by 16 to 18 months are all red flags. This means that development is not proceeding as expected," explains Deshpande. A child who is not responding to his name by 10 months will also need to consult a specialist.

Parent playmate

Early exposure to the television has a proven impact on language development, attention and concentration skills and social skill development. "When a mother is singing to the baby, social and interactional skills develop as against when the same song is being played through a DVD," says Deshpande.

Doctors suggest no TV-time until the child is two and not more than an hour thereafter. "Lack of interaction and stimulation at home is one of the most important environmental factors, which delay speech and language skills," says Srinivasan. Instead, she suggests reading to children from infancy and speaking to the child while bathing, feeding and changing.

Don't be afraid to speak in different languages, multilingualism doesn't cause speech and language delay.

Children are impressionable long before parents realise it. They learn by imitating actions and body language. Hence, arguments or aggression confuses and scares them. If it goes on and becomes a way of life, it can also impact future relationships, says Deshpande.

Red flags

- Does not babble or coo by 12 months of age
- Does not gesture (point, wave, grasp) by 12 months of age
- Does not say single words by 16 months of age
- Avoids eye contact and wants to be alone
- Does not share interests with others
- Does not say two-word phrases on his or her own (rather than just repeating what someone says to him or her) by 24 months of age

It's every parent's impression that their tot must be some kind of genius when he begins to smile, talk or walk before time. "Occasionally babies may skip milestones like crawling and directly begin walking," explains developmental paediatrician, Ashokumar mundetiya. Developmental milestones are a set of functional skills or tasks that most children can do at a certain age. For example, at eight to 12 months, children begin crawling. By 13 to 24 months, they take their first wobbly steps. Certain delays could be a warning sign that a child may need special attention. However, factors like nutrition, genetics and environment play a role in when a child reaches those milestones. Children who are born premature, with a low birth weight or with medical complications, are more vulnerable to developmental difficulties. Paediatricians rue that there's more to tracking your baby's development than logging height, weight and gross motor skills, which are comparatively easy to notice. Social and language skills are equally important and tricky to detect during an occasional doctor's visit. Child specialists suggest that parents, who spend maximum time with the child, keep an eye out for the

signs.

"A child with speech delays or difficulties with play skills could find it harder to socially engage," explains Dr Roopa Srinivasan, developmental paediatrician at Ummeed Child Development Centre. In serious cases, it could be diagnosed as developmental difficulties like speech delays, intellectual disability, cerebral palsy, autism and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder.

Toothless talk

Decoding baby talk begins with understanding that crying, garbled sounds or facial expressions are the first signs of communication, explains Deshpande.

Language development includes speaking and understanding. So responsiveness like reacting to a mother's words, smiling back and cooing starts in the second month. "Identifying isolated hearing loss and addressing it in the first six months of life could ensure that a child has normal speech in future," says Srinivasan.

Repetitive babbling starts in month six and goes on till the 12th. Here, nonverbal ways of communication like smiling responsively, shaking the head and knowing to wave back when saying 'bye' begins in the first year.

By six-eight weeks, they have already started to show interest in their surroundings. Interactive games like peek-a-boo will stimulate this behavior



4 ways to save Money when single

Are you among those who desperately wait for their salaries to get credited, so that they don't have to struggle to manage their daily expenses?



Many people have a tough time during the month end, not because they don't earn enough. It happens mostly because people don't manage their finances well. Here are a few simple steps to put into practice, especially if you are single.

1. Start a recurring deposit account:

The right time to start a recurring account is when you open a salary account. The agreed amount automatically gets transferred from your salary. Also, you won't be able to withdraw money from this account midway. So, once the amount matures, you will have a bulk sum at your disposal.

2. Write down your expenses:

When you don't have any idea about the expenses, you tend to splurge. Therefore, you end up spending more than what you earn. Once you make a note of the expenses for the month, you can prioritize and later, adjust the budget depending on how much you earn.

3. Have small parties at home:

Instead of heading out to a hotel or a pub to celebrate your birthday or any other special occasion, invite friends home. Apart from cutting down on food expenses, it also assures great fun as one can indulge in activities like cooking together, setting the table or a game of cards after the meal. These may not be possible if you go out.

4. Follow the 30 day rule:

Haven't heard about that? It's simple. If you feel that you are in need of something, wait for 30 days and reconsider your decision to buy it. If you manage without that for the first 30 days, you may even decide not to buy it at all as your urge to possess it would have passed.

A novel way to spot dyslexia in kids

There could soon be a tool to spot kids at risk of developing reading difficulties before they experience the challenges as researchers have found that white matter volume in the brain is key to development of reading abilities.



development during a critical period in a child's life, when they start school and learn to read for the very first time, predicts how well the child ends up reading," said Fumiko Hoeft, a senior author and an associate professor at the University of California, San Francisco in the US. Doctors commonly use behavioural measures of reading readiness for assessments of ability.

Other measures such as cognitive ability, early linguistic skills, measures of the environment such as socioeconomic status and whether there is a family member with reading problems or dyslexia are

all common early factors used to assess risk of developing reading difficulties.

"What was intriguing in this study was that brain development in regions important to reading predicted above and beyond all of these measures," Hoeft added.

In the study, researchers examined brain scans of 38 kindergarteners as they were learning to read formally at school and tracked their white matter development until third grade.

Left hemisphere white matter in the temporo-parietal region just behind and above the left ear - thought to be important for language, reading and speech - was highly predictive of reading acquisition, the researchers found.



Parents can benefit by looking at themselves as coaches who build life skills. In an extract from her book, a family therapist and psychologist prescribes a gentler approach.

We measure our worth according to how well the children fit into those dreams. If they fall short, we feel cheated, angry, depressed and wonder 'Why me?' We feel inadequate and, in our anxiety, react by cranking up our resentment towards our children. We become judgemental, critical and comparative. And, therefore, get stuck in a spiral of negativity. Before we know it, unhealthy patterns of a lifetime get carved out. A long time back I came across this book titled, Stop Parenting, Start Coaching and I really loved the title. It resonated so deeply with my belief that our role as parents is to help our children build life skills. Here are seven steps to highly effective coaching.

CLEAR GOAL

'What is the one skill I want to nurture in my child which will help her become a more healthy, responsible, independent and happy human being?' Depending on the age of the child, it could range from eating well, sleeping on her own, staying fit, doing less screen, being more organised, managing time better, being financially savvy, getting better grades, being more communicative, articulate, confident, happy, sociable, respectful, emotionally balanced, focused and so on and so forth. We would all like that in our children. It makes our work easier as parents and feels good to boot. However, just start with one or two skills. Make it very specific. Rather than making good habits a goal as it is too vague, be more specific and narrow it down to one or, maybe, two activities. For example, clear up the bathroom after using it or go and play in the park every day.

Rate it on a scale of 0 to 10 where 5 is in the middle

'Where is my child right now in that skill?'
'Where does he need to be?'

'What is the one step he needs to take that will help him move one point up in that scale?'
'What would I need to do to help him move one step further?'

These are extremely important questions as they help you clarify the goal and establish the next step forward, for you and for your child. For example, you want your child to get better grades. You might identify that on the scale he is at 3 where the goal is 8. I would always suggest that you stay away from making 10 as a goal as it will then make you seek perfection (which I think is a huge problem) and establish extremely high expectations (for a child who is at 3 right now). The next step that you might think would work in helping him move to 4 would be to make him sit down and study for an extra half hour every day. You might want to keep yourself free around that time so that you could provide him some level of 'scaffolding' till he is ready to sit and work on his own.

ASK INSTEAD OF TELLING

We are constantly telling children what they need to do and not ask them as much as is required what they would want to do. So, you could sit down with your child and ask, 'Are you happy with your grades right now? Do you think you are putting in enough time? How can I help you in this?' Make sure you ask without sounding sarcastic or angry.

DRAW UP A PLAN

For any change to happen you would have to get down and draw up a clear plan. So you might want to first make sure that your connect with your child is solid and strong. Then you might want to sit with him and ask him a few questions regarding how he feels about his grades. Initially, he might show a bit of his rebellious child (I hate studying, it is so boring); listen to him, empathise with it (I



7 effective ways to coach

Your Kids



know it can be a drag sometimes. I remember feeling like that), but bring him back to the issue (I can understand you find it boring but we still need to do it). After being listened to and understanding your point of view, he might agree that he needs to work on his grades too. That's when you need to gently work out a plan of action. Make sure you don't make it too overwhelming and remember he is at 3 and we just want him to move up to 4 and not 8. Work out when he could take out that hour for studying, where he would like to study, with whom, how, etc.

RHYTHMS AND ROUTINES

When we lived in England, I heard a very experienced nanny say once, 'There is nothing like a bad child, there are just bad routines!' It sounds a bit drastic but there is a lot of truth in that statement. I do believe that if children follow a clear routine then you have already won half the battle. Routines give a rhythm and flow to the day. If a child knows that after school she can relax for an hour followed by homework time at 4 p.m., playtime from 5 to 7 p.m. and then bath, dinner, reading in bed and

lights off at 9 p.m., then chances of her following it every day without much protest are higher. However, if there is no clear routine and the homework can be done anytime she chooses or dinner time changes every day, then she might push things around as she deems fit and everything might turn into a battle ground. It could vary during the holidays when you make it more flexible with timings that can be stretched a little like 'get ready and finish breakfast by 10 a.m.' or 'finish homework before going to the park in the evening'. Teenagers can be given a choice in making their own time schedule with some basic expectations outlined by you. I would also like to point out that it is most important that as parents we also need to follow a routine before we start advocating it to our children. Do remember that children have very sensitive hypocrisy radars.

RECOGNITIONS

Recognitions are a very powerful tool in parenting. They are about acknowledging and celebrating the child in front of you. It is about building in the child a sense of

and 'careful with her things'. We have to water the wholesome seeds rather than just the negativity seeds of lack, deficit and what's wrong.

EXTERNALISATION

However, you might want to address the 'problem' sometimes, but how can you do that without the child feeling attacked. In Narrative Therapy, we use an approach pioneered by the late Michael White called

Externalisation. Through this approach, we place the problem outside the child rather than within him and give it a name. So, for example, if the child is struggling with anger we might call the problem Anger and talk to the child as if the Anger was separate from him. So the questions statements might go as, 'Did you see how Anger was controlling you yesterday?' (It is best to do this when the child is calm and more receptive.) I think Anger is really troubling you nowadays in the evening.' 'Can you make out when Anger is coming close?' It might seem a little bizarre but children take to this slight change in language and approach very well. Personifying feelings, difficulties, imaginations and fantasies come very easily to them.

Do remember you have to be consistent in this approach otherwise you might end up confusing the child. If you feel unsure about it or after trying it you feel it does not work, just drop it. It needs practice and a way of thinking (the problem is the problem, the child is not the problem) that does not come easily to most of us. The best part of externalisation is that it can be tried with so many issues - anger, tantrums, crankiness, bed-wetting, soiling, laziness, procrastination, etc. I remember when my daughter was little she was going through a phase when she would become a little whiny at times when she was tired or hungry.

We would playfully call that mood 'Chimpu' and there was much talk about how 'Chimpu' was troubling Anya and what we needed to do to make it run away and leave Anya alone. This was a sure way to get her giggling and in her usual bubbly, happy mood soon.

worthiness that is authentic and genuine. It is not about praising and making them feel good about themselves but about recognising and valuing every trait and skill that you want to nurture in them. The former makes them feel they have to please, perform and be perfect in order to get appreciation, whereas the latter builds a solid sense of 'I am valued for who I am right now'. So let's see how recognitions can be used as a coaching tool too. Take an example of a child who is being trained to be more organised.

On a scale of 0 to 10, she is on 3 and needs to reach 6:

- Through active recognitions you could highlight the child every time you see her put her things in the proper place: 'I see you have put the books in your school bag.'

- By giving value recognitions you could focus on the skills you want to help build in your child: 'I saw you put the toothbrush and toothpaste back in the mug. I see that your organisational muscles are becoming stronger.'

- Proactive recognitions could be used to highlight the exceptions: 'I did notice that rather than throwing the towel on the floor, you hung it back on the peg. I think the towel looks really happy!'

- Finally, creative recognitions to showcase little opportunities for success. So, after baking a cake, both of you could clear up the kitchen together and you could tell others how your little one 'was so helpful in cleaning up and putting everything back where it belonged'.

Therefore, through recognitions, the child is able to see and build another side to her identity, which is just not 'messy', 'disorganised', 'chaotic' but also 'organised'

What are you buying your pet this Puja?

Maa Durga and her beloved pet lion are all set to pay us their mandatory annual visit. Soon, the sounds of dhaks and cymbals will fill the air and we'll pull out our brand new clothes and accessories to accessories to dress up for our reunion with the goddess.

But have we forgotten someone here, like those furry lit the bundles of love who welcome us with excited barks or purrs every time we return home? Not really, says Subhjit Saha, owner of Pet Palace. "Earlier, people would only buy clothes for their pets, but now they've become a little more thoughtful. Fancy steel bowls, chew toys, combs, flyer disks, slicker brush, colourful leashes and collars are among the bestselling gift items this season. The sale goes up during the Pujas and it's heartening to see that people are buying new stuff for their pets in the festive season," he says. From clothes like smart jackets and dainty frocks to accessories like cosy beds, colourful bows, pet owners in the city have been smitten by this adorable new trend.

They are thronging pet stores to buy their furry friends a whole new wardrobe for Puja. Shaswati Basu, who works with a travel and tourism company, is busy shopping for



herself and her precious spitz, Diamond. "I've bought satin ribbons of various colours for Diamond as well as a new belt so that he feels fancy. I will dress him up in ribbons of different hues on each of the four days of Puja. I want him to look his best. I've also bought special treats for him," she says. Professional contemporary dancer Dipshikha

Ghosh has also been busy shopping for her babies - Stuart, a two-and-half-year-old spitz and Scooby, a four-month-old golden retriever. "I have a 12-year-old son and when I went out to shop for him, I couldn't stop myself from shopping for my fur babies too. So, I got them collars and am also planning to buy them quirky T-shirts and toys for Puja. Pets are like our own children and they should not be dispossessed of gifts during the festive season and I'm really looking forward to take them out during the festival in their new collars and tees," she says.

Snehashish Sawoo, owner of the pet store, Zoo o Pet, feels, unlike last year, there has been a steep rise in pet shopping this season. "Earlier, there was demand for new collars and bowls, but this season, there has been a considerable rise in the sale of other accessories. I have had customers coming in to order dog bags, T-shirts and shoes. Some have even ordered customized shoes for their cats," he says.

Things you should never say to a mom with a colicky baby

- Have you tried... (insert cliché parenting advice)?

You mean I'm supposed to feed him when he's hungry?!? Come on, people. We're tired, but we're not that tired!

- I only got six hours of sleep.

Really? I can't remember the last time I slept more than an hour straight. Six hours of sleep sounds like a luxurious vacation.

- Did you see the latest episode last night?

The only thing we use our television for anymore is watching videos of Liza Minnelli on repeat, because it's the only thing that keeps the baby quiet.

- Are you feeling okay?

If you ever ask this question of a new mother, you should probably run and hope she's too exhausted and anemic to catch you.

- When is the last time you showered? I'm pretty sure it was a Tuesday, but what month?

- Cherish these times, they're only young once.

If you have never had the privilege of spending an extended amount of time with a colicky baby, then here's some help — never utter these lines to mums of such infants!

Would you like to babysit?

- Tried cutting gluten?

I'm pretty sure those are the only things keeping me sane. Don't take away my cookies.

- My kids never cried like that. No? But you might if you ever say that again!

- Thank God those days are behind me. I'm not sure you've rubbed enough salt in my wound. Here's some

lemon juice.

- Why don't you post more photos online? Because who doesn't love babies with puffy eyes, red, blotchy faces, and snot bubbles oozing out of their noses?

- Weird, he never cries when I'm watching him. Then he's all yours!



Delhi CM Rekha Gupta offers: Can cut House term for simultaneous polls

New Delhi.(Agency)

Describing the concept of One Nation One Election as "the need of the hour", Delhi Chief Minister Rekha Gupta Wednesday told the Joint Committee of Parliament on Bills relating to simultaneous elections that her government would be willing to consider adjusting the tenure of the Delhi Assembly to align with that of the Lok Sabha. She pointed to cutting short the Assembly's term which currently ends eight months after that of Lok Sabha.

The committee, chaired by BJP MP P P Chaudhary, conducted a study visit in the Capital, meeting the Chief Minister at the Delhi Secretariat, Speaker Vijender Gupta and representatives of parties at the Assembly and Lieutenant Governor Taranjit Singh Sandhu at Lok

Niwas.

In a statement, the Chief Minister's Office said: "Referring to Delhi, she (Gupta) pointed out that elections in the national capital are held roughly a year apart from the Lok Sabha elections. If aligning election schedules at the national level requires a suitable adjustment in Delhi's tenure, the Delhi Government is willing to consider it with a positive approach. If required in the national interest, she said, Delhi could be among the leading states to extend such cooperation." The next Lok Sabha elections are likely in April-June 2029, as the term of the House ends on June 23, 2029, while the Delhi Assembly's term ends on February 23,

2030. Since its formation in December 2024, the committee has held consultations with stakeholders in Delhi

impact of frequent elections on different sectors like education and labour," he said.

While the Bills in their current form provide for the first simultaneous elections in 2034 by cutting short the terms of all Assemblies elected after the Lok Sabha elections of 2029, Chaudhary, speaking at the Idea Exchange programme of The Indian Express recently, that if some states want, they can curtail the terms of their Assemblies to align with the 2029 elections too.

According to the CMO statement, the Chief Minister said One Nation One Election was the need of the hour. A statement from the Assembly Secretariat said Speaker Vijender Gupta made suggestions to the committee

during their meeting, including conducting a "comprehensive examination of issues relating to the synchronisation of electoral cycles, constructive votes of no-confidence, premature dissolution of legislatures, harmonisation of electoral rolls, strengthening the logistical preparedness of the Election Commission, and institutional mechanisms to ensure political stability while preserving India's democratic and federal character." It is learnt that during the meeting with the Speaker and MLAs, it was suggested to create a national forum with representation from each Legislative Assembly of the country to discuss the way forward and the need to extend the provisions of One Nation One Election to Rajya Sabha and municipal body elections.



and visited several states.

Reached for comment, Chaudhary said the meetings Wednesday were productive. "We have asked the Chief Secretary to prepare a report on the

Stone pelting during Hanuman Chalisa recital in Southwest Delhi

New Delhi.(Agency)

Days after local residents alleged that flags similar to that of Pakistan were hoisted during a Muharram procession in Southwest Delhi's Sagarpur last Friday, fresh friction erupted in the area when stones were allegedly thrown during a Hanuman Chalisa recital organised by Bajrang Dal members on Tuesday, police said. Following the incident, a case has been registered under sections relating to voluntarily causing hurt and wrongful restraint against unknown persons.

According to police, the incident took place between 7 pm and 8 pm at a DDA park behind the jhuggi cluster in Gali 8 under the jurisdiction of Sagarpur police station.

"A brief confrontation broke out at a DDA park after members of Bajrang Dal gathered to recite the Hanuman Chalisa and some nearby residents objected to the event," DCP Amit Goel said.

According to another officer, "There were reports that a group of women started objecting to the recital of Hanuman Chalisa. Amid the commotion, some stones were thrown at those reciting the Hanuman Chalisa."

Police said tension in the locality had been simmering since Friday's Muharram procession that passed through the area. "Some residents claimed that during the procession, they spotted Pakistani flags being hoisted. However, it was found later that they were religious flags not pertaining to any country," said a source in the police.

Purported videos of the incident showed a group of women standing a few metres away from the DDA park, raising slogans. Another video from the Muharram procession showed a child waving a green-and-white flag in the same locality. While the police intervened and dispersed the two groups peacefully, the incident prompted the deployment of more than 100 police personnel in the area to keep a check on the law and order situation. Police said both groups were counselled and no injuries or damage to property were reported.

Delhi government approves annual fellowship programmes in archives and archaeology

New Delhi.(Agency)

The Delhi government has approved two new annual research fellowship programmes, in archives and archaeology, aimed at strengthening documentation, conservation and academic research on the national capital's heritage. The 'Research Fellowship in Archives' and 'Research Fellowship in Archaeology' schemes will be implemented by the departments of Delhi Archives and Archaeology, respectively.

Under the archives fellowship, the government will engage 15 researchers every year for a one-year term — 10 Senior Research Fellows (SRFs), who will receive a monthly stipend of Rs 50,000, and five Junior Research Fellows (JRFs) who will get Rs 25,000 a month.

The archives fellowship will include research in seven areas: records management, conservation and preservation of archival material, digitisation of records, dissemination of information and data, micro-filming and reprography, research and publication, and oriental languages, particularly Urdu and Persian. Fellows will use rare manuscripts, maps, photographs and administrative records to study themes, ranging from Delhi's institutional history and urban expansion to environmental history, festivals, cinema and social life. The archaeology fellowship will support 12 researchers annually — three SRFs each in archaeology and conservation, and three JRFs in both disciplines. Senior fellows will receive a stipend of Rs 50,000 a month, while junior fellows will get Rs 25,000 a month. Research under the archaeology scheme will cover topics such as the earliest settlements in the Delhi Ridge and Yamuna basin, the Painted Grey Ware and Northern Black Polished Ware cultures, early historic Delhi, trade routes, archaeology of the Yamuna floodplain, conservation of Delhi monuments, digital conservation, heritage conservation and climate change, public archaeology and community engagement, and encroachment and heritage preservation.

Processing capacity gap galore, Delhi stinks

New Delhi.(Agency)

The first part of this series examined how mixed waste, weak enforcement and inconsistent collection practices undermine the city's waste management system at its very first step. But even if every household and commercial establishment segregated its garbage perfectly, the national capital would still face another structural challenge; it does not have enough infrastructure to process all the waste it generates each day, though authorities are working to expand capacity.

The Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD) is working towards an ambitious roadmap to expand the national capital's waste-processing capacity by 13,550 tonnes per day (TPD) with the help of new waste-to-energy (WTE) plants, expansion of existing facilities and fresh waste-processing projects. This move is aimed at bridging the widening gap between waste being

generated and the one being processed.

According to official data accessed by this newspaper, the proposed projects, expected to be completed in phases between 2026 and 2028, would increase Delhi's waste-processing capacity from the existing 7,841 TPD to over 21,000 TPD.



This comes at a time when Delhi generates nearly 14,000 metric tonnes of municipal solid waste every day. The MCD, the primary agency responsible for waste management across most of the city, currently has an installed processing capacity of only 7,841 TPD. Considering that the civic body is responsible for

managing waste in nearly 90-95% of the capital, the numbers indicate that the city may still be facing a processing shortfall of 6,000 tonnes daily, thereby putting continued pressure on the city's landfill sites.

According to the MCD's plans, 7,650 TPD of additional capacity will be created through new and expanded

WTE and compressed biogas (CBG) facilities. This will include a 3,000 TPD WTE plant at Narela-Barwana, a 2,000 TPD WTE plant at Ghazipur, expansion of the Okhla and Tehkhand WTE plants by 1,000 TPD each, along with

new CBG facilities proposed at Okhla and Ghazipur.

Apart from that, the civic body also has five new waste-processing facilities in the pipeline with a combined capacity of 5,900 TPD at Bhalswa, Shinghola, Okhla, Bawana and Ghazipur.

Vehicle, construction curbs, work from home: Delhi moves to combat winter haze

New Delhi.(Agency)

In a move to combat air pollution during the winter months, the Delhi government has notified a series of restrictions that will come into force from November 1 to February 28 every year — from curbs on vehicles and construction activities, to staggered office timings and work from home.

Until now, the practice was to impose various stages of the Graded Response Action Plan (GRAP), depending on the air quality index (AQI), during these months. The implementation of GRAP — a framework mechanism under which the governments in Delhi and the National Capital Region (NCR) must take specific sets of actions — is overseen by the Commission for Air Quality Management (CAQM).

But with the new restrictions, notified on June 23 and made public on Wednesday, many of the measures will mandatorily come into force during this period. These restrictions are set to operate alongside GRAP.



This could tackle two key concerns. The move seeks to reduce disruptions to workplaces, educational institutions and transport through advance planning while addressing long-standing criticism that

pollution-control restrictions under GRAP are largely reactive as they are implemented as air quality deteriorates.

The notification said the framework was based on an analysis of air quality trends over the past three winter seasons, which showed that Delhi's air quality consistently deteriorated between November 1 and February 15. During these months in 2023-24, 2024-25, and 2025-26, the city's median AQI ranged between 312 and 342 ('very poor'), while the peak AQI ranged between 461 and 494 ('severe+'). According to the new restrictions, motor vehicles registered outside Delhi and below BS-VI emission standards will not be allowed to ply in the national capital from November 1 to January 31 every year.

Tunnel to link Dwarka E-way with Vasant Kunj approved

8.1-km tunnel to link Dwarka Expressway with south Delhi; 117.7-km greenfield highway to halve Kanpur-Kabrai travel time as Centre targets smoother urban mobility and freight movement.

New Delhi.(Agency)

NEW DELHI: From Delhi's gridlocked roads to the freight routes linking Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh, commuters and businesses got a Rs 14,114.81-crore infrastructure boost on Wednesday. The Union Cabinet approved a six-lane tunnel connecting the Dwarka Expressway with south Delhi and a new access-controlled highway linking industrial Kanpur with mineral-rich Kabrai. Together, the projects promise faster travel, smoother logistics and stronger regional connectivity. The projects were cleared by the Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs (CCEA), chaired by PM Narendra Modi. Briefing reporters after the meeting, I&B Minister Ashwini

Vaishnav said the projects are aimed at easing congestion, improving logistics and accelerating regional economic growth. Delhi's share of the package is a '6,969.67-crore project to build an 8.1-km six-lane tunnel on NH-148AE. It will connect the Shivmurti Interchange on the Dwarka Expressway (NH-248BB) with Nelson Mandela Marg in Vasant Kunj. The project will be implemented under the Hybrid Annuity Model (HAM). The tunnel is expected to provide seamless connectivity for commuters travelling from Gurugram, Dwarka, IGIA and west Delhi to south Delhi. It will also integrate with the proposed elevated AIIMS-Mahipalpur

corridor, creating a direct link to the Barapullah elevated road and improving access to east Delhi, Ghaziabad and Noida. To minimise the environmental



impact, the tunnel will pass beneath the ecologically sensitive Southern Ridge Forest using tunnel boring machines

(TBMs), avoiding large-scale surface disruption. The project includes a 3.14-km underground tunnel, approach ramps, elevated stretches and at-grade roads. It provides for a 1.8-km elevated road along Nelson Mandela Marg, a new flyover towards Mahipalpur and an elevated U-turn to decongest the busy Mahipalpur-Chhatarpur junction. It is estimated that the project will generate about 7.54 lakh man-days of direct employment and nearly 9.8 lakh man-days of indirect employment. The Cabinet also approved a Rs 7,145.14-crore project to build a 117.7-km four-lane access-controlled greenfield highway between Kanpur and Kabrai.

Lamborghini Urus SE Performante revealed: 812 HP, 1,000 Nm and 0-100 kmph in 3.3 seconds

New Delhi.(Agency)

Lamborghini has brought back the high-performance version of the Urus with the new Urus SE Performante. The original non-hybrid Performante was discontinued in 2024, and this new version picks up where it left off, but with significantly more firepower. It's currently the most powerful SUV Lamborghini makes, and it gets meaningful upgrades over the standard Urus SE.

Power and performance

The Urus SE Performante uses the same 4.0-litre twin-turbo V8 from the standard SE, paired with an electric motor. It gets an 8-speed automatic transmission, which sends power to all four wheels (AWD). The 25.9 kWh lithium-ion battery sits under the rear cargo floor. Combined output comes in at 812 hp and 1,000 Nm of torque, up 12 hp and 50 Nm over the standard SE, and a massive 146 hp and 150 Nm more than the old non-hybrid Performante. Lamborghini claims a 0 to 100 kmph time of 3.3 seconds and 0 to 200 kmph in 10.8 seconds, both 0.1 seconds and 0.4 seconds quicker than the standard model respectively. Top speed remains electronically limited to 312 kmph, the same as the regular SE. Despite all the extra power, the Urus SE Performante still offers 60 km of all-electric range.

Lamborghini has also recalibrated the transmission and updated the engine management software to reduce response times and cut down on torque lag. A new Rally driving mode has been added, specifically tuned for loose surfaces. This joins the existing Strada, Sport, Corsa, and EV modes.

Wheels and tyres

The Performante rides on 22 or 23-inch alloy wheels fitted with Pirelli P Zero tyres as standard. Buyers can also opt for Pirelli Scorpion Winter 2 snow tyres or Bridgestone Potenza Race semi-slick tyres for track use, both available as accessories.

Capgemini temporarily closes Bengaluru daycare after alleged child abuse

MUMBAI.(Agency)

Capgemini has announced temporary closure of its on-campus daycare facility in Bengaluru after allegations of child abuse at the centre surfaced, the company said in a statement. The company further added that it is cooperating fully with the relevant authorities and assisting them in their efforts to establish the facts.

"As a precautionary measure, we are temporarily closing the Bengaluru on-campus daycare facility," the statement said. Moreover, reports claim that an FIR has been registered against five women caregivers under relevant provisions of the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act. The daycare facility is located at the IT company's HAL campus in Brookfield, Bengaluru. Police said the alleged incidents came to light after videos purportedly showing abuse inside the childcare centre circulated on WhatsApp. According to the FIR, which was registered on June 29 at the HAL police station based on a complaint filed by a district child protection unit official, five caregivers have been named in the case. The complaint alleged that the caregivers physically mistreated and threatened toddlers when they cried. The children involved are believed to be between two and three years old. The FIR further alleged that some children were sprayed with water in their mouths using a toilet jet spray, locked inside bathrooms, made to sit on western-style toilets and placed inside a front-loading washing machine. Meanwhile, police are investigating the allegations. Earlier in January, Capgemini announced to cut up to 2,400 jobs in France, representing about 6 per cent of its workforce in the country as the IT services company grapples with weak demand in key sectors in its home market, according to a report.

Sensex, Nifty trade higher as falling crude, strong auto sales lift sentiment

MUMBAI.(Agency)

The rupee fell 19 paise to 94.75 against the American currency in early trade on Wednesday, weighed down by the strength of the American currency in the overseas market. Forex traders said whenever fresh foreign inflows enter the country, the central bank is likely to use the opportunity to rebuild its reserve position rather than allowing the rupee to strengthen too much. Moreover, unSectorally, IT emerged as top gainer, with Nifty IT index jumping over 3 per cent, followed by Nifty MidSmall IT & Telecom, Nifty Consumer Durables, Nifty Metal and Nifty Realty. Nifty PSU Bank and Nifty Media edged lower. Meanwhile, NTPC, Power Grid Corporation, Bajaj Finance, ONGC and Bharti Airtel were among the top Nifty losers, falling up to 1 per cent. According to market experts, several factors are supporting the market in the near term. They said the sharp decline in crude oil prices is strengthening India's macroeconomic fundamentals by supporting growth while keeping inflation in check. They also pointed to robust June auto sales -- particularly a 24.1 per cent rise in passenger vehicle sales -- as a sign that domestic demand remains resilient. Experts added that banking stocks and digital platform companies are likely to remain strong on expectations of healthy first-quarter earnings. However, they cautioned that the sustainability of the market's outperformance will depend largely on the progress of the monsoon, which has remained below expectations. International oil benchmark Brent crude declined more than 1 per cent to \$70.65 per barrel. Similarly, US West Texas Intermediate (WTI) crude slipped 1.47 per cent to remain below \$68. Asian markets showed a mixed trend. Japan's Nikkei traded over 1 per cent lower, while South Korea's KOSPI fell more than 4 per cent. In contrast, Hong Kong's Hang Seng jumped 1 per cent.

EPFO new rules: PF contribution capped at Rs 1,800; what it means for you

The updated rules are expected to make the EPF system simpler, more digital and easier to use for nearly 8 crore active EPFO subscribers. The new scheme came into effect on June 29 after it was published in the Gazette, replacing the long-standing EPF Scheme, 1952.

New Delhi.(Agency)

If you're a salaried employee, there's an important update you should know about. The Centre has notified the new Employees' Provident Fund (EPF) Scheme, 2026, replacing the EPF Scheme, 1952. While your PF contribution rate has not changed, the new scheme clearly explains

how much contribution is compulsory and what happens if you want to contribute more. The updated rules are expected to make the EPF system simpler, more digital and easier to use for nearly 8 crore active EPFO subscribers. The new scheme came into effect on June 29 after it was published in the Gazette, replacing the long-standing EPF Scheme, 1952.

WHAT HAS CHANGED FOR PF CONTRIBUTIONS?

One of the biggest changes is that the new scheme clearly states that the mandatory employee contribution applies only up to the statutory wage ceiling, which is currently Rs 15,000 a month. This means the compulsory EPF contribution remains 12% of Rs 15,000, which works out to Rs 1,800 a month. Employers will continue to make a matching contribution as required under the law. Earlier, many employees contributed on higher salaries based on company policies or mutual agreements.

The new rules now clearly distinguish between mandatory and voluntary contributions. However, if you wish to



contribute more towards your retirement savings, you can still do so. However, any amount above the mandatory Rs 1,800 will now be treated as a voluntary contribution. Importantly, employers are not required to match these additional voluntary contributions unless they have agreed to do so under an employment contract or company policy.

CONTRIBUTION RATES REMAIN

THE SAME

The new scheme does not change the existing EPF contribution rates. Employees and employers will continue to contribute 12% of wages each. However, establishments that are already eligible for the reduced 10% contribution rate under existing government notifications will continue to follow that lower rate.

WITHDRAWAL RULES HAVE ALSO BEEN SIMPLIFIED

The EPF Scheme, 2026, also brings changes to partial withdrawals. These changes had already been approved by the EPFO's Central Board of Trustees last year and are now part of the new scheme.

Instead of several different categories, withdrawal rules have been simplified into three broad groups. Members can withdraw funds for essential needs such as illness, education and marriage, for housing-related purposes, and for certain special circumstances, subject to the prescribed conditions and minimum balance requirements.

Mehli Mistry steps down from Ratan Tata's family office

Mistry's resignation from RNT Associates comes months after he was removed from Tata Trusts in November 2025.

New Delhi.(Agency)

Mehli Mistry, one of the late Ratan Tata's closest associates, has resigned from the board of RNT Associates Pvt Ltd, the family office that managed Ratan Tata's personal investments. His resignation comes a little over three years after he joined the board and follows his exit from Tata Trusts last year.

According to reports, Mistry submitted his resignation on June 30 and stepped down as a director on July 1. He reportedly said he was leaving due to "preoccupation with my other commitments". Mistry's resignation from RNT Associates comes months after he was removed from Tata Trusts in

November 2025. Tata Trusts are the charitable organisations that own Tata Sons, the holding company of the Tata Group. His latest decision marks another step away from the Tata Group and organisations linked to it. However, Mistry continues to serve as a



board member of Tata Education and Development Trust, one of the largest affiliates of Tata Trusts. Following Mistry's exit, RNT Associates has four directors on its board. They are Ratan Tata's sisters, Shireen Jejeebhoy and Deanna Jejeebhoy, along with Jamsheed

Poncha, a senior executive at Tata Sons, and Tata Sons General Counsel Sidharth Sharma.

What is RNT Associates?

RNT Associates was set up in 2009 as the main investment office for Ratan Tata's personal investments. Through this platform, the veteran industrialist invested in several promising startups across different sectors. Over the years, RNT Associates has backed many well-known Indian companies, including BlueStone, Ola Electric, CarDekho, Moglix, Urban Company, Lenskart, Cure.fit, CashKaro and FirstCry.

The investment office played a key role in building Ratan Tata's personal startup portfolio, reflecting his strong interest in supporting young entrepreneurs and new-age businesses. With Mehli Mistry's departure, the family office sees another important leadership change following the passing of Ratan Tata.

HSBC Bengaluru campus: New 1.2 million sq ft office planned on Outer Ring Road

Bengaluru.(Agency)

HSBC has signed a Letter of Intent with Prestige Group to develop a new integrated campus in Bengaluru, in a move that puts India's tech and services talent market back in the spotlight. The proposed campus, named Prestige JRC Signature Towers, will come up on Outer Ring Road and span over 1.2 million sq ft. The bank said the new campus will bring together employees who are currently working from multiple locations in Bengaluru. For a city where office travel can feel like a daily exam, one large campus may make internal coordination easier for teams spread across the bank's operations.

Why HSBC is betting big on Bengaluru

HSBC said the new campus will be among the largest in the country once completed. The move signals the bank's long-term focus on India, where its Global Service and Technology Centres already employ more than 40,000 people. Georges Elhedery, Group CEO, HSBC, said, "India is one of the most important talent centres in the world and continues to be a key market for HSBC."

He added that bringing colleagues together on one campus would help the bank "move faster, collaborate more closely, and continue developing expertise and talent to provide the best support for our customers."

What the new campus will offer

The campus is being planned as a modern workplace with collaboration areas, workplace infrastructure, accessibility features, sustainability focus and employee well-being spaces.

Suzy White, Group Chief Operating Officer, HSBC, said, "The campus is being designed to support the future of work at HSBC, bringing together modern workplace design, accessibility, sustainability and colleague well-being. Our ambition is to create a high-quality environment that supports HSBC's customers and businesses."

Why this matters for India's office market

Bengaluru's Outer Ring Road remains one of India's busiest corporate corridors. A large campus by a global bank adds another signal that India continues to be central to global technology, operations and financial services work.

HSBC said its India centres support global businesses, customers and operations. These teams work across technology, operations, risk management, financial crime compliance, data, analytics, digital transformation and enterprise-wide innovation.

Unable to withdraw PF or file claims? EPFO services unavailable for 7 days

NEW DELHI.(Agency)

The Employees' Provident Fund Organisation (EPFO) has temporarily suspended several online services to carry out a planned database consolidation and software upgrade aimed at improving the speed, reliability and security of its claims processing system. According to an official notice displayed on website, the migration exercise is "to enhance service delivery, improve processing efficiency, and provide a better user experience."

"As part of the upgrade, EPFO is consolidating its database and upgrading software applications used for claims processing. The outage began at 12 am on June 26 and was said to continue until 11:59 pm on July 1, with services expected to be restored from 12 am on July 2. However, the website still shows the "Scheduled System Migration & Temporary Service Unavailability" message on Thursday

morning. Few people complained on social media about the issue asking for updates. "The scheduled downtime has already passed, but the EPFO portal remains inaccessible.

Thousands of users are affected. Please communicate the reason for the delay and when services will be restored," said one X user. During this 'down time', members and employers cannot log in to the Member Interface or Employer Interface, making all online services through these portals unavailable. This includes submission of new EPF claims, claim processing, e-passbook access, Electronic Challan-cum-Return (ECR) filing, UAN linking for new employees and other digital services. Claims submitted before the migration window will be processed after services resume. Centre notifies new EPF Scheme, 2026 with digital-first reforms. While, the outage continues separately, the Centre has notified the Employees' Provident

Fund (EPF) Scheme, 2026, replacing the 1952 framework with immediate effect. The new scheme retains the mandatory 12 per cent contribution by both employers and employees while introducing a more digital and compliance-focused framework to support the implementation of the labour codes.

Among the key changes are simplified rules for partial withdrawals for illness, education, marriage and housing, mandatory submission of Aadhaar, PAN and Aadhaar-linked bank account details for digital processing, and enhanced compliance requirements for employers, including electronic filings and ownership disclosures. The scheme also introduces three initiatives—Employees' Enrolment Campaign 2026, VISHWAS 2026 and AMNESTY 2026—to help regularise past compliance gaps and resolve legacy issues.

Ship breaking: India targets recycling 16,000 vessels in 10 years with \$8-bn commitment

India's shares in the ship recycling industry rose from 30.1% in 2024 to 35.4% in 2025, which indicates that more and more vessels are being sent to India for dismantling. The country recycled 2.99 million gross tons of ships in 2025, marking almost 60% surge compared to 1.86 million tons recycled in 2024.

Kolkata.(Agency)

India is breaking more ships than ever before and the ship recycling industry is poised for a jump in the next few years, Union shipping minister Sarbananda Sonowal has said. The target is to recycle about 16,000 ships in the next 10 years and the government has announced a commitment of \$8 billion to support the growth of the shipbuilding and ship recycling sectors, according to the minister. The announcement came against the backdrop of India and the European Union



reaffirming their commitment to strengthening cooperation in sustainable ship recycling. Work is progressing on the inclusion of India under the European Union Ship Recycling Regulation. During the discussions that featured Sonowal and Jessika Roswall, the European Commissioner for Environment, Water Resilience and a Competitive Circular Economy, the two parties reviewed the audit and compliance process for Indian ship recycling yards.

Joint working group to be set up

The European Commissioner proposed establishing a joint working group with representatives from the Ministry of Environment and other relevant ministries and organisations with the objective of facilitating coordination and support the next phase of the process. A statement after the meeting flagged the importance of rigorous standards of compliance, transparency and accountability. Roswall also said that the issue will be discussed with EU states before any final decision is

taken. Roswall also wanted to visit Indian ship recycling facilities after the consultation and assessment process goes through.

Rising share of India

Estimates by UNCTAD (UN Conference on Trade & Development) show that India's share in global ship recycling went up from 30.1% in 2024 to 35.4% in 2025. About 2.99 million gross tonnes of ships were dismantled in 2025, which marked a 60% growth over 1.86 million GT recycled in 2024. Sonowal said that the Centre is catalysing the process of listing of Indian ship recycling yards through a process of audits, inspections and regulatory compliance.

The minister said that the Indian ship recycling facilities are assisted by environmental infrastructure and worker welfare measures, including effluent treatment plants, scientific waste management systems, multi-speciality healthcare facilities. The process is important since there are concerns about the health and environment in the ship recycling or ship breaking industry.

Short news

Subsidised urea diversion: Punjab Police books MILKFED officials, private company owners

Srinagar.(Agency)

The Khanna Police have booked MILKFED officials, including the General Manager, and owners of two private firms for allegedly "diverting the subsidised neem-coated urea supplied by the Government of India (GoI) for farmers". The persons booked have been allegedly passing off subsidised urea as technical-grade urea for "personal profit-making" and "causing loss to the state exchequer".

An FIR has been registered against the General Manager (GM) and other officials of MILKFED's cattle feed plant located on GT Road, Khanna; and the owners of two private companies — Muktsar-based M/S Indo Organics and Delhi-based M/S Manisha Trading Company.

Punjab government-owned milk cooperative MILKFED owns the popular milk product brand "Verka" in Punjab. It runs two plants, one at Bhattian village, Khanna, and the other in Gurdaspur.

The FIR was filed based on a complaint by Gurbuneet Kaur, an agriculture development officer. Kaur claimed that the neem-coated subsidised urea meant for farmers was "filled in the white bags and passed off as technical-grade urea". "The subsidy provided to farmers by the GoI was misused for personal profiteering; and a loss has been caused to the state exchequer," the FIR said.

Panchkula police's 'Op Maidan 2.0' campaign: 404 drug traffickers on bail put under surveillance, 22 drug hotspots identified

VISAKHAPATNAM.(Agency)

Panchkula police said that 404 drug traffickers currently out on bail had been put under continuous surveillance, and that they identified 22 drug hotspots across the district during their month-long anti-narcotics "Operation Maidan 2.0" campaign in a bid to prevent repeat offences and dismantle drug networks. Police said during the campaign, they seized narcotics worth Rs 6.3 crore and arrested 34 drug traffickers in 21 cases registered under the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (NDPS) Act.

During the month-long drive, police teams conducted 253 raids with the assistance of dog squads, searched 719 suspicious vehicles, and intensified surveillance at vulnerable locations. A total of 23 CCTV cameras are monitoring the identified hotspots, while 41 previously defunct cameras have been repaired and made operational, according to police.

Launched on May 28 under the leadership of Police Commissioner Pankaj Nain, the campaign focused on dismantling supply chains rather than merely arresting street-level peddlers.

Police seized 2.787 kg of heroin, 11.757 kg of opium, 931 grams of charas, 1.045 kg of ganja and 67 grams of cocaine, with the total value of the recovered contraband estimated at around Rs 6.30 crore. Investigations are continuing to trace the supply network and identify key suppliers.

Court dismisses notice of motion filed by journalist expelled for press club

Mumbai.(Agency)

The Mumbai City Civil court on Wednesday dismissed a notice of motion filed by senior journalist Gurbir Singh, who had sought a stay on his six-year expulsion from the Mumbai Press Club till a suit filed by him is decided.

Singh and two others were expelled for six years from its membership, over an informal meeting held at the club's terrace on January 19, with some of the Elgaar Parishad accused in attendance.

While the civil court had in May stayed the expulsion and issued notices to the press club and others to seek their response, the current office-bearers had approached the Bombay High Court. The high court had on May 22, stayed the civil court's order stating that it did not assign any reason or basis to arrive at the conclusion to grant Singh a stay and also permit him to contest elections of the club.

The High Court had also later directed the court to decide the notice of motion by June 20, setting aside the previous relief. City Judge A H Baig said in the order on Wednesday that Singh had failed to make a prima facie case for interim relief, and dismissed it with costs.

It said that the club's action was according to its rules, with no malafides on its part. Singh had said in his plea that the club's inquiry committee's inquiry based on which the suspension was ordered was not conducted as per procedure. The club's office-bearers opposing this contention said that Article 11 of the Club's bylaws which deals with disciplinary action, was followed.

"After going through all the documents, prima facie it appears to me that the Club has substantially followed the procedure before taking disciplinary action against the plaintiff (Singh) and other two members.

Rajkot demolitions: Rs 27 lakh food bill rejected; tenders issued since 2023 'under review'

Mayor says food procurement done without tender; SIT to probe bills worth Rs 3 crore for irregularities.

Rajkot.(Agency)

In response to allegations of misappropriation of public funds and lack of tender processes followed for the demolitions carried out in Jangleshwar here in February, Rajkot Municipal Corporation (RMC) on Wednesday rejected a bill amounting to Rs 27.20 lakh. The amount was spent on food expenses of its officials that month. The bill was put up for review by RMC's standing committee, which also placed all tenders issued by the civic body since 2023 "under review".

Also, the has learnt that a special investigation team (SIT) chaired by a deputy municipal commissioner will probe the allegations of financial irregularities in bills worth almost Rs 3 crore. Shortly after the standing committee's meeting, Mayor Nehal C Shukla said, "The standing committee has rejected the food bill as it was not in line with the regulations of the state finance department since no tender had

been issued for it. This is the only bill that was put forth before RMC for consideration." On the reason why the food procurement had been done without a tender, even when eviction notices were issued two months



prior, Shukla said: "That's because there was an urgency. While notices had been issued earlier, the scale of the demolitions and their timing were decided only shortly before they were carried out."

However, a senior corporation official, on the

condition of anonymity, said, "A food tender was floated earlier, but the lowest bidder had proposed to charge Rs 240 per plate, which was why it was rejected. We then approached a voluntary organisation, which supplied food at Rs 110 per plate and buttermilk for Rs 20 per bottle."

The Wednesday meeting was presided over by Paresh Pipaliya, the committee chairman. Speaking to The Indian Express, he said, "The food bill of Rs 27.20 lakh presented for approval was rejected. It was even put forth in the first meeting, but more information was sought on the expenditure. We rejected the bill today because the tender process had not been carried out."

When asked if the vendor would now have to bear the loss, Pipaliya said: "Officers will deal with that issue." However, administrative officials said the food bill could be put up for approval again on the basis of the SIT's findings.

Air Marshal PV Shivanand takes over as South Western Air Command chief



Rajkot.(Agency)

AIR MARSHAL P V Shivanand assumed charge as Air Officer Commanding-in-Chief, South Western Air Command (SWAC), headquartered in Gandhinagar, Gujarat, on Wednesday. Commissioned into the Fighter stream of the Indian Air Force in December 1988, Shivanand was previously the Senior

Air Staff Officer at HQ Central Air Command, a statement said. Air Marshal Shivanand has a cumulative flying experience of 2,800 hours on MiG-21 and the IL-76 AWACS. He has spearheaded the operationalisation of key platforms and several Air Defence initiatives. The SWAC operates over the entire western region across

Gujarat Rajasthan and parts of Maharashtra.

The AOC-in-C of SWAC, a three-star rank officer, is the seniormost military commander stationed in Gujarat. The Army and Navy have two-star officers, a Major General and Rear Admiral, stationed in Gujarat. Meanwhile, his predecessor at SWAC, Air Marshal Tejinder Singh, took over as the Chief of Integrated Defence Staff to the Chairman Chiefs of Staff Committee (CISC), said the statement. Singh's appointment as head of the Integrated Defence Staff broke a streak of SWAC chiefs going on to be appointed Vice Chiefs of Air Staff (VCAS) of the Indian Air Force (IAF).

Singh's immediate predecessor at SWAC, Air Marshal Nagesh Kapoor had been the second consecutive SWAC chief to be appointed Vice Chief of Air Staff (VCAS) — the 50th — in January 2026. Kapoor's immediate predecessor at SWAC, Air Marshal Narmadeshwar Tiwari, also went on to serve as the 49th Vice Chief of the IAF.

Supreme Court stays trial against officer accused of secretly filming ex-Anand collector

Ketki Vyas was accused of secretly filming then Anand collector D.S. Gadhvi's private moments and using the footage to force him into clearing official files.

Vadodara.(Agency)

The Supreme Court on Tuesday stayed criminal proceedings against Ketki Vyas, a Class-I Gujarat Administrative Service officer and former resident additional collector of Anand, in the 2023 alleged case of spy-camera blackmail. Vyas was accused of secretly filming then Anand collector D.S. Gadhvi's private moments and using the footage to force him into clearing official files.

A Supreme Court bench of Justice MM Sundresh and Justice Sheel Nagu issued notice on Vyas's special leave petition, filed through advocate Aum Kotwal, challenging the Gujarat High Court order that rejected the application seeking her discharge from the case. The SC ordered that, pending further consideration, the criminal trial against her would remain halted. The Supreme Court's interim

order dated June 30 stated, "Issue notice, returnable on 24.08.2026. In the meantime, there shall be an order of stay on further proceedings qua the petitioner arising out of (the criminal



case)." The SC also condoned the delay in filing the petition and allowed Vyas's applications seeking exemption from filing the certified copy of the impugned judgment and official translations, besides permitting additional documents to be placed on record. Vyas was arrested,

along with deputy mamlatdar Jayesh Patel and advocate Hareesh Chavda, in August 2023 in a case that sent shockwaves through Gujarat's bureaucracy.

According to investigators, the trio procured and installed hidden cameras in the Anand collector's chamber to secretly record Gadhvi's meetings with a woman visitor and later used the footage to compel him to clear disputed land files and other official matters. The prosecution alleged that Patel carried a laptop containing the footage to Gadhvi's office and threatened to release the videos and initiate criminal proceedings through the woman unless the files were cleared. The charge sheet further alleged that copies of the videos were stored on flash drives and later shared with media organisations.

Cabinet approves Rs 579 crore Jaydev Vihar-Nandankanan road corridor

BHUBANESWAR.(Agency)

In what would be one of the most ambitious urban infrastructure project in the capital city, the state cabinet chaired by Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi on Wednesday cleared the 9.5-km Jaydev Vihar-Nandankanan road, which will transform connectivity between Bhubaneswar and Cuttack.

Briefing mediapersons after the cabinet meeting at Lok Seva Bhawan, chief secretary Anu Garg said the project will be executed on a turnkey basis by Dineshchandra R Agrawal Infracon Pvt Ltd, the lowest bidder at '579 crore. The project is targeted for completion within 24 months.

The Works department had earlier accorded administrative approval for the project at an estimated cost of '949.35 crore in January this year. The corridor, stretching from Kalinga Stadium (Gate No. 4) to Raghunathpur bridge, will be widened from six lanes to an eight-lane carriageway with service roads and modern traffic infrastructure.

A key feature of the project is the construction of four flyovers at Jaydev Vihar (cable-stayed bridge), Kalinga Hospital Square, Damana Square and KIIT Square along with improvements at Kalarahanga Junction. The project also includes service roads, slip roads, pedestrian subways, underground parking, drainage systems, bridges, roundabouts, road safety measures, lighting, landscaping and avenue plantation.

Anxiety amongst Muslims as SIR begins in Pune, many reach out to BLOs

A BLO from the Kondhwa Khurd region said that he had received five calls from Muslim families on July 1. During the pre-SIR mapping process, the BLO said he received around 40 to 50 calls, 90 per cent of which were from Muslim families.

Pune.(Agency)

Block Level Officer (BLO) Jyotsna Shinde was seated at a resident's house in Marketyard, Pune, helping him fill out the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) Enumeration Form. While she was in conversation with the resident, her phone buzzed.

"Ma'am, where are you? I will come give you my family's documents," said Mushraf Ali Peerzada, the voice on the other side. Even though Shinde assured him that she would visit his residence to collect his information, Peerzada insisted on getting his family's enumeration process started. Within a few minutes, he arrived at the location and provided necessary identity

documents like passport-sized photos of his family members to the BLO.

"I have gotten at least six to seven such calls since the morning. They are all from Muslim families. They are anxious and insist that they will come and deliver their documents to us even if we tell them we will be visiting their house over the next few days," said Swati Owhal, another BLO working in the same region.

"The SIR is currently being conducted by the Election Commission of India in various states. The door-to-door distribution of enumeration forms commenced in Maharashtra on June 30 and will continue till July 29. The controversial SIR in West Bengal left over 27 lakh people

out of the voter rolls "under adjudication" state over "logical discrepancies". These people



were not allowed to vote in the 2026 assembly election, in which the BJP emerged victorious for the first time in the

A BLO from the Kondhwa Khurd region said that he had received five calls from Muslim families on July 1. During the pre-SIR mapping process, the BLO said he received around 40 to 50 calls, 90 per cent of which were from Muslim families.

Anjum Inamdar, President of the Muslim Moolnivasi Manch, told The Indian Express, "There is a fear of deletion of names amongst the Muslim community. We saw what happened in West Bengal. Various organisations including us have tried to spread awareness amongst our community about the importance of the SIR.

NEWS BOX

Sooryavanshi's wait for India debut will put him under more pressure: Gavaskar

New Delhi, (Agency)

Vaibhav Sooryavanshi's wait for his senior India debut continued on Wednesday after the 15-year-old was once again left out of the playing XI for the opening T20I against England in Chester-le-Street.

While the Indian team management has continued to back its World Cup-winning top order of Sanju Samson, Abhishek Sharma and Ishan Kishan, batting great Sunil Gavaskar believes delaying the teenager's debut will only increase the pressure on him when he eventually gets his chance. Sooryavanshi, who earned his maiden India call-up after a record-breaking IPL season, had also remained on the bench for both T20Is against Ireland. With anticipation around the youngster continuing to grow, Gavaskar said the longer the wait, the greater the expectations will be when he finally makes his India debut.

"It will put him (Sooryavanshi) under more pressure whenever he gets an opportunity," Gavaskar said on Sony Sports. "But at 15 years of age, you don't think too much about pressure. He knows that if he gets the opportunity in the second or third game, he will have to deliver almost immediately. That's there." The former India captain, however, believes



Sooryavanshi's age could work in his favour and said the teenager would be making the most of the opportunity to learn from some of the country's best players. "But he is happy to be around. This Indian team is full of lovely, tremendous players, and it is just fantastic for him to be learning from them," Gavaskar added. India's decision to persist with their established opening combination came despite their surprise T20I series defeat in Ireland. The management once again showed faith in the trio of Samson, Abhishek and Kishan, leaving Sooryavanshi to wait for another opportunity. The opening T20I against England, however, ended in frustration after rain forced the match to be abandoned without a ball being bowled in England's chase. India had recovered well from a disastrous start to post 189 for 7 after being reduced to 6 for 2 inside the opening two overs. Sanju Samson departed after Tom Banton pulled off a superb catch at backward point off Saqib Mahmood, while Ishan Kishan was run out following a mix-up with Abhishek Sharma.

DR Congo coach learns of father's death in press conference after England loss

New York, (Agency)

The Democratic Republic of the Congo's FIFA World Cup campaign ended on a deeply emotional note after head coach Sebastien Desabre was informed of his father's death during the team's post-match press conference following the 2-1 defeat to England on Wednesday. Desabre had just overseen DR Congo's exit from the tournament after Harry Kane scored twice in the closing stages to complete England's comeback and send Thomas Tuchel's side into the Round of 16. Moments later, as the French coach answered questions from reporters, the team's media



officer interrupted the press conference with a solemn announcement. Thank you, but we are announcing that the coach has lost his father. Our sincere condolences," the media officer said in French. Desabre appeared stunned by the news. After quietly responding, "Merçi," he left the press conference, which was immediately brought to an end. The incident, broadcast live, drew an outpouring of support from football fans and members of the football community. The tragic moment overshadowed what had been a landmark tournament for DR Congo. Playing at their first World Cup since 1974, the Leopards exceeded expectations by reaching the knockout stage for the first time in the nation's history. Under Desabre, they also scored their first World Cup goals and registered their maiden victory at the tournament, marking one of the standout stories of the 2026 edition. Their historic run ended after England recovered from a goal down in the Round of 32. DR Congo held a deserved 1-0 lead until the 75th minute before Harry Kane equalised. The England captain struck again in the 86th minute to seal a 2-1 victory and set up a Round of 16 meeting with Mexico. Despite the defeat, DR Congo earned widespread praise for pushing one of the tournament favourites to the limit.

England out to break South Africa curse with Nat Sciver-Brunt boost for semis

Women's T20 World Cup, ENG vs SA: England have lost their last two knockout matches against South Africa and will be eager to snap that streak when the two sides meet in the second semi-final at The Kennington Oval in London on Thursday.

New Delhi, (Agency)

England and South Africa will once again find themselves on familiar territory when they clash in the second semi-final of the Women's T20 World Cup at The Kennington Oval in London on Thursday, July 2. It is a rivalry England may not look back on fondly, having stumbled against the Proteas in recent knockout encounters. For the unbeaten hosts, the contest presents an opportunity to finally erase the scars of semi-final defeats to South Africa in the 2023 T20 World Cup and the 2025 ODI World Cup. The Proteas, however, have developed a reputation for thriving when the stakes are at their highest and will be eager to derail England's title ambitions once again.

With Australia already waiting in Sunday's final at Lord's, another high-stakes showdown promises to deliver plenty of drama. Charlotte Edwards' side head into the knockout clash unbeaten and brimming with confidence after topping Group B with five wins from as many matches. South Africa, meanwhile, recovered impressively from an inconsistent start to secure another semi-final berth and will be hoping to pull off yet another upset against the hosts.

SCIVER-BRUNT HANDED TIMELY FITNESS BOOST

England have received the perfect boost ahead of the knockout clash with captain Nat Sciver-Brunt declared fit after recovering from a calf injury. The all-rounder had retired hurt against Ireland before missing England's final two group matches, raising fears that she could miss the semi-final. However, Sciver-Brunt returned to full training earlier this week and confirmed she is available for selection. England's medical staff accelerated her rehabilitation with intensive recovery work, while the skipper said the team had "thrown everything" at ensuring she would be fit. Her return restores balance to England's XI, providing a world-class batter and a

valuable seam-bowling option. England hardly looked weakened during her



absence, comfortably beating Scotland, West Indies and defending champions New Zealand under stand-in captain Charlie Dean. Yet Sciver-Brunt's presence adds invaluable experience and leadership as England chase their first Women's T20 World Cup title since 2009.

ENGLAND'S BATTING DEPTH MEETS SOUTH AFRICA'S FIGHTING SPIRIT

England have been the standout team of the Women's T20 World Cup, combining explosive batting with a disciplined bowling attack. Their totals of 164, 186 and a tournament-best 219 reflect the depth in the

line-up, with Danni Wyatt-Hodge leading from the front and Sophia Dunkley making the most of her opportunity during Nat Sciver-Brunt's absence. Heather Knight has added stability in the middle order, while Charlie Dean, Lauren Bell and Freya Kemp have impressed with the ball. England also underlined their credentials by crushing defending champions New Zealand by nine wickets to complete an unbeaten group-stage campaign.

South Africa, meanwhile, have once again demonstrated their ability to rise to the occasion. After recovering from a group-stage defeat to India, the Proteas enter the semi-finals with renewed confidence. Captain Laura Wolvaardt has anchored the batting, Tazmin Brits has provided brisk starts, while Marizanne Kapp remains the side's premier all-rounder. Chloe Tryon offers power and spin, with Sinalo Jafta contributing valuable lower-order runs. South Africa's bowling attack, featuring Ayabonga Khaka, Nonkululeko Mlaba and Nadine de Klerk, will need to strike early against England's formidable batting line-up if they are to repeat their memorable semi-final victory over the hosts in 2023.

10-man USA keep World Cup dream alive, send Bosnia packing to reach last 16

Malik Tillman spared the United States an anxious finish with a sublime late free-kick as the co-hosts defeated Bosnia and Herzegovina 2-0 on Wednesday to reach the World Cup Round of 16, despite playing the final stages with 10 men after Folarin Balogun's dismissal.

New Delhi, (Agency)

The United States kept their World Cup dream alive with a spirited 2-0 victory over Bosnia and Herzegovina on Wednesday, booking a place in the round of 16 despite playing the closing stages with 10 men. Folarin Balogun gave the co-hosts the lead before being sent off, but Malik Tillman put the result beyond doubt with a superb late free-kick as the Americans showed grit to see the game out. The victory sends the Americans into the Round of 16, where Belgium await in Seattle on July 6, and keeps alive hopes of matching or even bettering their memorable run to the quarter-finals in 2002.

USA vs Bosnia & Herzegovina, FIFA World Cup: HIGHLIGHTS

The United States earned their first World



Cup knockout victory since 2002, but it was far from straightforward after Balogun, who broke the deadlock just before half-time, was shown a straight red card in the 64th minute. Matt Freese made three saves to record his second clean sheet of the tournament as the home crowd roared the co-hosts over the line. Bosnia and Herzegovina were playing in the World Cup knockout stage for the first time and started brightly. Freese was forced into back-to-back saves from Ermedin Demirovic and Kerim

Alajbegovic after an early corner as the visitors threatened to take the lead. The Americans gradually settled into the contest and began to dominate possession. Christian Pulisic thought he had broken the deadlock in the 78th minute, but the effort was ruled out for offside. Before that, the hosts had finally made their pressure count in first-half stoppage time. A defensive mix-up saw the ball ricochet off Tarik Muharemovic into Balogun's path, and the striker reacted quickest, stopping, turning onto his left foot and calmly sliding the ball through the goalkeeper's legs for his third goal of the tournament.

Balogun almost doubled the advantage moments later when he crashed Sergino Dest's pass against the crossbar. The game turned in the 64th minute when Balogun was sent off following a challenge on Muharemovic. Referee Raphael Claus initially allowed play to continue but was called to the pitchside monitor, where he upgraded the decision to a straight red card after seeing Balogun's studs catch the defender high on the ankle.

Thomas Tuchel urges parents to let children stay up for England's clash with Mexico

New Delhi, (Agency)

England manager Thomas Tuchel has urged parents to let their children stay up to watch the Three Lions' blockbuster FIFA World Cup last-16 clash against Mexico, insisting the tournament is a rare occasion worth sacrificing a few hours of sleep. England booked their place in the Round of 16 after Harry Kane struck twice in the final 15 minutes to inspire a dramatic 2-1 comeback win over DR Congo. They will now face tournament co-hosts Mexico at the iconic Azteca Stadium on Sunday, with kick-off scheduled for 1am BST on Monday. The late start presents a dilemma for families in England, with children facing school the following morning. Tuchel, however, had a simple message for parents. "Let them watch football," he said after England's victory. There's so much school to go to, but the World Cup is every four years. There will be a big, big match on in four days. We need the support of everyone, and

especially of the children."
TUCHEL MISSED MEXICO'S WIN OVER ECUADOR



Ironically, Tuchel did not watch England's next opponents secure their place in the knockout stage. Mexico's 2-0 victory over Ecuador was delayed by an hour because of adverse weather around Mexico City, prompting the England manager to stick to his unusually early World Cup routine. "I was happy to watch the first half and then it

wasn't on, and I slept at 10 o'clock," Tuchel said. Very unusual for me, but I have somehow a crazy early bedtime during this World Cup and I didn't see it. I saw the result, of course, and I saw that they didn't concede, and it will be a tough one."

England's coaching staff have since begun analysing Mexico ahead of what promises to be one of the biggest ties of the tournament.

PROUD OF ENGLAND'S FIGHTING SPIRIT

Tuchel was particularly pleased with the way England responded after falling behind against DR Congo, with Kane scoring in the 75th and 86th minutes to complete the turnaround. "Things stayed difficult but this team today did not accept a defeat as an outcome," Tuchel said. "They just didn't accept it, and that makes me very proud because they did what was necessary." The going got tough, and they showed up, and we got a deserved win, even if it was a late one.

Novak Djokovic defends Serena Williams's Wimbledon return: Just enjoy her greatness

New Delhi, (Agency)

Novak Djokovic has thrown his support behind Serena Williams following her first-round exit at Wimbledon, urging critics to stop judging the 44-year-old's comeback and instead appreciate what her return means for the sport. Speaking after his straight-sets victory over Stefanos Tsitsipas on Wednesday, the seven-time Wimbledon champion said Williams's presence at the All England Club was far more significant than the result of a single match. "What she's doing is incredible, it's epic," Djokovic said. "I've always been a fan of Serena." He acknowledged that a champion of Williams's stature would never be satisfied with simply making an appearance. "Knowing how competitive she is, with the mind of a champion, she's not happy just showing up," he said. "She wants to win." Djokovic, however, questioned the criticism directed at Williams after her defeat, pointing to the challenges of returning to the highest level after years away from competitive



tennis. "She's 44, she has two children, and she hasn't played a match in so many years," he said. "It's normal that she's still not at her best in terms of movement. People need to cool off a little with the judgment and the criticism." The Serbian said expectations remained unrealistically high because fans had grown accustomed to seeing Williams dominate the sport for nearly two decades. "People are used to seeing us at our best because they've watched us dominate the sport for so many years," he said. Djokovic urged fans to look beyond the scoreboard and recognise the significance of Williams's return. "Just enjoy the greatness of who she is and what she represents to the sport," he said. "You have the greatest ever coming to play, bringing more attention to your sport. I don't understand that kind of thinking and judgment." Calling her comeback "an incredible gift for our sport," Djokovic said tennis should celebrate, rather than scrutinise, one of its greatest champions.

Balogun did not deserve a red card: USA coach questions referee's decision

United States coach Mauricio Pochettino launched a passionate defence of Folarin Balogun after the striker's controversial sending-off in the 2-0 World Cup round-of-32 victory over Bosnia and Herzegovina on Wednesday.

LOS ANGELES, (Agency)

United States coach Mauricio Pochettino strongly defended Folarin Balogun after the striker's controversial sending-off in the 2-0 win over Bosnia and Herzegovina, insisting the forward "never" deserved a red card despite the hosts booking their place in the World Cup last 16 on Wednesday. The victory secured the United States' first World Cup knockout win since 2002 and set up a last-16 clash against Belgium, but celebrations were tempered by the dismissal of Balogun, who

will miss the tie after receiving an automatic one-match suspension. Balogun had fired the Americans ahead just before half-time with his third goal of the tournament before being shown a straight red card in the 64th minute.

The striker was initially booked after his foot landed on the ankle of Bosnia defender Tarik Muharemovic while challenging for the ball, but the decision was upgraded to a dismissal following a VAR review. Pochettino was left furious, arguing the incident was accidental and should never have warranted a red card. "For me, it was never a red card," the Argentine said after the match. "There was never any intention to step on the player. It was a normal action in football when you are fighting for the ball. Maybe in slow motion it looks worse, but it was never intentional."

Bosnia coach Sergej Barbarez backed the referee's decision, but Pochettino remained unconvinced. "He is very disappointed because it was an unintentional action."

Pochettino said of Balogun. But he's also happy because we qualified. These things happen in football. I hope we go through to the next round because then he will be available to help us again. Christian Pulisic also came to his



teammate's defence, saying Balogun "didn't deserve the red card" and describing the decision as "unfortunate". USA DIG DEEP TO REACH LAST 16

The sending-off could have derailed the hosts, but they responded with one of their most disciplined displays of the tournament to shut out Bosnia and seal a memorable victory.

Malik Tillman put the result beyond doubt with a superb free-kick after Balogun's dismissal, capping another influential display from the midfielder. It was amazing," Pochettino said of Tillman. "Malik is an amazing player, full of talent. We knew he had the quality to score from that free-kick. I'm so happy for him." Pochettino reserved his biggest praise for his team's resilience, saying their composure reflected the progress they had made over the course of the tournament.

"It's difficult to describe our feeling because the players were amazing," he said.

"There are no easy games at the World Cup. The maturity of this team and the way we have grown over the last five or six weeks has been incredible."

Kriti Sanon

Shares Cosy Moment With Kabir Bahia Days After His Photo With Another Woman Went Viral

Kriti Sanon seems to have put recent breakup speculation to rest with her latest Instagram post. Days after a viral photo of businessman Kabir Bahia with another woman fuelled rumours that the two had parted ways, the actor shared a candid picture featuring Kabir, suggesting they are still very much together. On Tuesday, Kriti dropped a carousel of unseen moments from the past few months. She captioned it, "Half yearly dump! Some moments that never made it to the gram.. ♡ (And some never

making its way across other social media platforms. The image led many users to assume that Kabir and Kriti had broken up, with some even claiming he had moved on with the woman in the photo.

Earlier, a source close to Kabir dismissed the rumours and clarified that the viral image has been misunderstood. "The image being circulated online of Kabir with a girl has been completely misconstrued. She's his family friend whom he considers like a sister. It's unfortunate how quickly people jump to conclusions and spread false narratives," the source told The Times of India.

Kriti's latest post, however, led to different reactions from fans. One user commented, "Finally she is shutting up trolls." Another wrote, "Rumours put to rest." A third added, "They are together."

Kriti Sanon and



will..)." Among the photos was a candid moment with Kabir Bahia. The two were seen watching a live performance with their arms around each other. While Kabir was dressed in an embroidered ivory sherwani, Kriti kept it casual in a black hoodie with the words, "Emotionally Invested, Financially Broke," printed on the back. The post quickly caught fans' attention, especially because it dropped soon after social media was flooded with speculation about their relationship. Last week, a picture of Kabir with another woman at a wedding surfaced on Reddit before

Kabir Bahia have been linked for several months, although neither has publicly confirmed or denied dating rumours. Speculation intensified when the two arrived together in the same car ahead of Kriti's sister Nupur Sanon's wedding to singer Stebin Ben in Udaipur. Kabir was also seen at the intimate celebrations, attended by close friends and family. While Kriti has remained private about her personal life, she had earlier dropped a subtle hint during an appearance on Twinkle Khanna and Kajol's show Two Much. When asked about her crush, the actor admitted it was "not from the industry."

Raveena Tandon

On Why She Introduced Herself As Rasha's Mom At An Event: 'Young Kids May Not Recognise Us'

Raveena Tandon is one of Bollywood's most celebrated actresses, with an extensive body of work spanning over three decades. Recently, at a school event in Mumbai, Raveena surprised many by introducing herself to students as "Rasha's mom," acknowledging that the younger generation may know her through her daughter.

Notably, Rasha Thadani made her Bollywood

debut in 2025 with the period action drama Azaad. She gained significant popularity among Gen Z audiences, particularly after the viral success of the song Uyi Amma.



When asked what made her introduce herself as "Rasha's mom," Raveena proudly expressed, "There's definitely a lot of motherly love. But these young kids, the younger generation, may not recognise (us) today. They have their own songs and their own favourite actors, and they're fans of

the younger generation of stars. So it's always better to introduce yourself in a way that people can identify with you." Meanwhile, Raveena is being lauded for her performance in 'Welcome To The Jungle'.

Speaking with ANI, Raveena said she was thrilled that audiences were appreciating not just the film's comedy but also the performances of the cast. "I think it's superb that in such a comedy where everybody is working hard, people are acknowledging the performance, which I think is terrific. What a great day," she said.

Describing the film as an entertaining comedy, she added, "I can describe this as a good thing for me. I was just thinking about doing a fun comedy and Welcome to the Jungle came my way. It was a lot of fun."

"The 'Mohra' actor also reflected on the strong bond she shares with her co-stars, many of whom she has known for decades. "We have known each other for so many years. Akshay Kumar, Suniel Shetty, Farida Ji, and Kiran Kumar, who played my uncle in my first film. Farida Ji played my mother in 'Ziddi' and 'Salaakhen', and many other movies. Then there is Paresh Rawal. Paresh has played the villain in so many of my films," Raveena fondly recalled.



Diljit Dosanjh Recalls Growing Up In Poverty, Wanted To Be 'Rich, Famous': 'Couldn't Afford To Go To Doctor'



While Diljit Dosanjh is now a popular and successful artist, filling stadiums and headlining concerts around the world, his journey to success has not been easy. The singer-actor recently opened up about growing up in poverty, revealing that his family often couldn't even afford to visit a doctor. Speaking during an interview on Q with Tom Power, Diljit recalled how financial struggles shaped his outlook on life and pushed him to work relentlessly. Recalling his childhood, he said there were times when falling sick wasn't an option because his family simply didn't have the money for medical care.

Diljit Dosanjh Recalls Performing At Weddings, Parties

After releasing his debut album in 2002, Diljit discovered that live performances would become his main source of income. Although he was initially reluctant to perform at birthday parties and weddings, he eventually embraced every opportunity that came his way. "It's amazing. There's so much money in that field," he said.

Recalling how he started taking up gigs, he shared, "My album came in 2002 and 4-5 people came to my company and said we want to book this guy for a birthday party." While he wasn't interested in singing at birthday parties, he was under contract, so he accepted the bookings. Soon, he realized that album sales alone wouldn't provide him financial stability. "So when they gave me the money, I thought this was the path," he said.

"I didn't say no to anybody. If someone offered Rs 5,000, Rs 10,000, Rs 15,000, I said yes. I didn't say no to anybody. I went everywhere day and night," he added.

The singer explained that his determination was driven by his childhood experiences. Growing up in a financially struggling household, he dreamt of becoming both "rich and famous" because he understood the value of financial security from an early age. Diljit also revealed why he eventually stopped performing at weddings. According to him, some senior artists in the Punjabi music industry looked down at his wedding performances and suggested he was only fit for that circuit. Instead of letting the criticism affect him, he decided to chart a new path by focusing on organising his own concerts.

National Award-Winning Choreographer Bosco Martis Hospitalised In Mumbai With Chest Congestion



National Award-winning choreographer Bosco Leslie Martis has been admitted to Mumbai's Breach Candy Hospital after experiencing chest congestion and discomfort. According to a report by India Today, the choreographer has been under medical observation for the past week and is expected to be discharged in the next couple of days if his condition continues to improve.

Bosco was admitted to the hospital on June 27 after feeling unwell following an intense work schedule. Sources close to the development told the publication that he initially sought medical advice, after which doctors recommended hospitalisation as a precaution.

Doctors Continue To Monitor His Condition

According to the report, Bosco's initial test results have come back normal. However, doctors have decided to keep him under observation while conducting additional tests before taking a call on his discharge. The report further stated that the choreographer had been juggling a hectic workload in the weeks leading up to his hospitalisation. After experiencing persistent chest congestion and uneasiness, he decided to seek medical attention. Neither Bosco nor his family has issued an official statement about his health.

Bosco Martis songs

Bosco is best known as one half of the popular choreographer duo Bosco-Caesar alongside Caesar Gonsalves.

Over the years, the duo has choreographed several hit songs and worked with some of Bollywood's biggest stars, including Shah Rukh Khan, Hrithik Roshan, Salman Khan, Ranbir Kapoor and Ranveer Singh. Apart from his work with Caesar, Bosco has also established himself as a successful solo choreographer.

Busy With Priyanka Chopra's Comeback Film
Bosco and Priyanka Chopra recently reunited for her much-awaited return to Indian cinema with Varanasi.

A recent picture of Bosco with filmmaker SS Rajamouli from the sets of Mahesh Babu's Varanasi had also gone viral.

NEWS BOX

'Positive progress' in US-Iran indirect talks in Doha: Qatar spokesman

DOHA.(Agency) US and Iran negotiators made "positive progress" during indirect talks in Doha, with the next round expected after the late Iranian supreme leader's funeral, Qatar's foreign ministry spokesman said. "Qatar & Pakistan mediators concluded separate meetings with the US & Iranian negotiators in Doha today, with positive progress made on issues related to the Islamabad Memorandum of Understanding, building on the outcomes of the Lake Lucerne Summit," foreign ministry spokesman Majed Al Ansari said Wednesday on X. "The parties agreed to continue discussions over the coming period, with the next meeting to be scheduled at the earliest possible time following the funeral processions of the former Iranian Supreme Leader." Earlier, US President Donald Trump hailed the progress of indirect talks between the United States and Iran in Qatar, as the sides aimed to push forward negotiations and quell tensions following exchanges of fire. The US leader said there had been "very good meetings" in Doha after an early dispute over the format threatened to overshadow discussions.

No Land For Expectant Moms? After Court Setback, Trump's Birthright Plan B

Washington.(Agency) After the begrudging defeat from the Supreme Court in the birthright citizenship case, US President Donald Trump's aides and his MAGA (Make America Great Again) allies are reportedly pivoting to their Plan B: targeting the so-called 'birth tourism' by blocking pregnant foreign women from entering America. By definition, birth tourism occurs when visitors come to America specifically to give birth to ensure their child receives US citizenship. After the Supreme Court verdict, White House spokesperson Abigail Jackson, in a statement to Axios, said, "President Trump remains totally committed to protecting the value of natural-born American citizenship, which is why, following yesterday's ruling, he directed Congress to take immediate action to address this." Jackson emphasised that the Department of Justice will also prioritise investigations of birth tourism schemes, adding that the Trump administration has many tools to safeguard American citizenship. The Policy Options This was followed by a discussion about the many policy options among White House aides and allies, who noted that the next course of action could include prosecuting organisations or individuals involved in "birth tourism schemes" or women already in the country for fraud or barring the entry of pregnant women entirely, Politico reported, citing two administration officials and several others close to the administration. MAGA figures like Federalist founder Sean Davis also came forward and demanded that the Trump administration bar pregnant foreign women from entering the country. While talking to Fox News, Trump's immigration policy advisor Stephen Miller also claimed that America must "think very carefully about who you let into your country, even on a temporary basis", because, according to him, children born to non-Americans can become US citizens and get an opportunity to access the social safety net.

US Man Named Santa Claus, 75, Arrested In Child Sex Sting

world.(Agency) A US man who legally changed his name to 'Santa Claus' has been arrested after an undercover sting operation exposed him as a paedophile. Claus, 75, formerly known as George Quigley, was taken into custody in the New Orleans suburb of Kenner after



allegedly arranging an in-person meeting with a detective posing as a 15-year-old boy. As per the official statement by Kenner police, apart from arranging the meeting, Claus also sent explicit photographs of himself to the undercover officer during their digital interactions. After he arrived at the meeting spot, the investigators confronted him, and he surrendered without any resistance. Claus' physical appearance mirrored the traditional Christmas figure, with the police finding images of the 75-year-old posing as Santa Claus for photo opportunities. "All these defendants are a danger to our youth and society, we preach daily about the vulnerability of our children on social media and gaming platforms and now we have arrested a person who dresses up as Santa Clause inviting parents to drop their young children in his lap for photo ops, this is a cautionary tale to parents and guardians," said Kenner Police Chief Keith A. Conley. Claus is now facing counts of illegal computer-aided solicitation of a minor as well as indecent behaviour with a juvenile. He lived in Texas before moving to New Orleans where he was caught. Claus was among 11 suspects who were arrested during the sting operation. The agency said its cybercrimes division had also obtained warrants to arrest another 10 suspects who were not immediately captured. "Anyone who uses the anonymity of the internet to exploit children should understand one thing, we are there too. Our investigators will continue to identify these predators, build strong cases, and bring them to justice before they have the opportunity to victimise a child," said Conley.

Russian missiles and drones kill eight and cause damage across Kyiv

Many residents took shelter at metro stations after Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy and other authorities issued the first warnings of the attack.

KYIV.(Agency) Russia launched a large-scale attack on Ukraine's capital overnight into Thursday that killed at least eight people and injured dozens as loud explosions shook Kyiv for hours. The attack with ballistic and cruise missiles and drones damaged buildings and civilian infrastructure across the city. Many residents took shelter at metro stations after Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy and other authorities

issued the first warnings of the attack. The attack killed eight people, said Tymur Tkachenko, head of the Kyiv City Military Administration. Damage was recorded in 28 locations across the city, mainly residential buildings and civilian infrastructure, he added. Mayor Vitali Klitschko said 34 people were injured. Russia has intensified its attacks on Kyiv in recent weeks, even as Ukraine's own long-range drone campaign against Russian military sites and energy facilities has caused fuel shortages and disrupted supply lines inside Russia. Klitschko urged residents to remain in shelters, describing an ongoing "furious enemy attack" on the capital. He said five people were injured in the Shevchenkivskiy district and one of the injured, a paramedic, was in extremely critical condition. Ukraine's Emergency Service says a hotel and two five-story residential buildings were damaged in the

district. In the Desnianskyi district, people were trapped inside a damaged nine-story



residential building and rescuers headed to the scene, Klitschko said. In the Holosiivskiy district, a fire broke out on the roof of a 16-story building, according to the Emergency Service. In the Sviatoshynskiy district, fire broke out

in two private residences, the Emergency Service said. Debris trapped people in one of them, according to the mayor. In the Darnytskyi district, six levels of a nine-story building collapsed after a Russian strike and another five-story residential building was damaged, Klitschko said. The Emergency Service said a 16-story building and private residences were damaged in the area. Tkachenko said the attack partially destroyed a residential building in the Desnianskyi district, sparked fires near residential buildings at two locations in the Pecherskyi district, and ignited a fire near an administrative building in the Solomianskyi district. He said authorities were also recording damage in the Obolonskyi and Podilskyi districts. The head of the Kyiv Regional Administration, Mykola Kalashnyk, said damage occurred in five regional districts. There were no immediate reports of casualties in the region.

Rescue of trapped Venezuelan underway one week after quakes

CATIA LA MAR.(Agency) Hundreds of rescuers were working late Wednesday to save a 43-year-old Venezuelan man who has survived for a week under the ruins of a seven-story building, an AFP reporter witnessed. Hernan Gil, a 43-year-old security guard, is trapped inside his booth under the building where he worked in Catia La Mar, a coastal area almost entirely razed to the ground in the June 24 twin earthquakes, magnitude 7.2 and 7.5. Rescue teams from seven countries -- Venezuela, Chile, the United States, Portugal, Costa Rica, El Salvador, and Mexico -- have been working around-the-clock over the past three days to reach him. By late Wednesday they were almost one meter from his position, rescuers told AFP. Chile's fire service published an Instagram video of Gil inside his chamber, moving his head to look at the camera. He was wearing a face mask and his right eye was

bloodshot. "This is truly a miracle," Gil's wife Gusbimar Gonzalez told AFP. "I'm completely amazed because it's the first time I've seen so many countries come together like this to save



a single person," she said. News of the rescue bid came at the end of a day in which hope of finding more survivors had faded, seven days after the catastrophic earthquakes, which killed almost 2,300 people and have left thousands more unaccounted for.

As firefighters drew near him, others were monitoring the movements of a neighboring building, which is in danger of collapsing. Working since Monday, the rescuers shored up the building's foundations with wood and iron to prevent the listing structure from completely collapsing further. Throughout the operation, they gave Gil water to keep him hydrated and installed a tube through which they supplied him with air. The men advanced along two routes simultaneously to reach Gil. "This is a rather complicated structure to access," Cristian Vera, the leader of the Chilean rescue team told AFP. He said that the existence of "very large pillars" meant "it wasn't easy to reach the exact spot where the victim was located." An initial plan to construct a 60-by-60-centimeter tunnel was discarded on Tuesday when the building shifted slightly. "We had to develop a new work plan to try to enter through a different route than the one we had used until last night," Vera explained.

Retrofitted Qatari jet takes flight as Air Force One for Trump's trip to North Dakota

WASHINGTON.(Agency) President Donald Trump on Wednesday took his maiden voyage on a new Air Force One — a retrofitted Boeing 747-800 worth \$400 million gifted by Qatar that embeds his personality more deeply into the institution of the American presidency. Gone is the trademark light blue hull that helped Air Force One blend into the sky. The refurbished jet is painted in Trump's preferred color scheme: a navy-blue belly with red and gold stripes. It has the luxury features that the president believes a commander-in-chief's entourage should have — plush carpets, lie-flat seats, wood paneling and a presidential seal on the seat belts, according to reported tours of the plane. Trump told reporters that he was proud of the luxurious plane. "You can do two things: You can low-key it, or you can show it," he said. The retrofitted Qatari jet is intended to serve as a "bridge" between the aging Boeing jets that have served as Air Force One for the last 36

years and two new aircraft, which are years behind schedule and expected to be delivered in 2028 at the earliest. Trump toured the new jet just weeks after returning to the White House last year and directed that it be prepared for his use for the bulk of his remaining time in office. The compressed timetable set by the president limited the modifications to the plane. Images of the jet captured since its unveiling and analyzed by the Associated Press show that it is not equipped with at least some of the same missile detection and countermeasure systems as the outgoing Cold War-era jets. The Air Force has said that it did little to change the cabin layout of the plane and that it spent less than \$400 million on security upgrades. Jeremiah Gertler, a senior analyst for Teal Group, an aviation and defense consulting firm, said that this absence, as well as a seemingly smaller number of communications antennas, suggested that the Qatari jet is better suited to only work as a domestic

aircraft. If you're going on a long trip, you take the big fancy car, but if you're just buzzing around town, you'll settle for something less. Right? And this looks like it's a domestic-only model," Gertler said, speaking of the new jet. "If the idea was to do it as quickly and inexpensively as possible, it would seem to lead to the notion that there's less content" in the jet's modifications, Gertler said. Trump has said he plans to use the new plane next week when he travels to attend the NATO summit in Turkey. The Air Force argued that the rapid conversion of the jet was done "without accepting any risk regarding security, safety, or secure communications," but added that "several highly complex engineering modifications required for the final (Air Force One aircraft) were intentionally excluded from the Bridge aircraft." The service acknowledged that it did not widen the doors leading out of the aircraft or include multiple stairs built into the hull of the plane.

Trump upbeat as US, Iran hold 'very good' indirect talks in Qatar

World.(Agency) US President Donald Trump hailed the progress on Wednesday of indirect talks between the United States and Iran in Qatar, as the sides aimed to push forward negotiations and quell tensions following exchanges of fire. The US leader said there had been "very good meetings" in Doha after an early dispute over the format threatened to overshadow discussions. Iran insisted there would be no direct negotiations between the sides in the Qatari capital on the two parties' memorandum of understanding aimed at ending the Middle East war, which broke out with US-Israeli strikes on Iran in late February. "As far as things are going, the denuclearisation of Iran is moving along well," Trump told reporters as he prepared to board his Qatar-gifted Air Force One plane, which the wealthy Gulf emirate donated last year. "We hit them very hard... but we're getting along very well." The memorandum of understanding, brokered by Qatar and Pakistan, culminated in a summit last month in Lucerne, Switzerland. It includes a 60-day ceasefire pausing the war, the reopening of the blockaded Strait of Hormuz and a timeframe for a final deal to permanently end the conflict and reach an agreement on Iran's nuclear programme. Earlier a diplomat, speaking on condition of anonymity to discuss the sensitive talks, confirmed negotiations were underway in Doha with Qatari and Pakistani mediators. Different public messages? The discussions, being held at a lower level and focused on the details of the MOU, were to "build on the progress made at the Lake Lucerne Summit", the diplomat told AFP. Tehran denied an earlier claim by Trump that there would be direct talks in Doha. Iranian foreign ministry spokesman Esmail Baqaei said the Iranian delegation would be led by Deputy Foreign Minister Kazem Gharibabadi, but added the officials "have no plans for negotiations with the American side at any level over the coming days". US envoys Jared Kushner and Steve Witkoff were not taking part in the technical talks, the anonymous diplomat told AFP, after they met with Qatar's Prime Minister Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman Al Thani on Tuesday. Qatar's foreign ministry said the trio discussed "the ongoing talks" between the US and Iran "within the framework of the memorandum of understanding", as well as developments in Lebanon. On Wednesday, the office of Qatar's emir also said the two US envoys had met with Qatari ruler Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani. Anna Jacobs, non-resident fellow at the Arab Gulf States Institute, told AFP it was "very early in the negotiation process and battles are being fought privately and publicly". The overall positive message is that they are continuing to engage after the clashes last week," she said. HA Hellyer, an analyst at the Royal United Services Institute in London, said there was a "lack of transparency" surrounding the talks with both sides "sending very different public messages".

Climber couple arrested after scaling Empire State Building antenna for apparent marriage proposal

Dressed in black and wearing masks but not tethers, the two balanced on a narrow ledge and appeared to kiss atop the New York skyscraper's antenna, news helicopter video showed.

NEW YORK.(Agency) A daredevil couple scaled the Empire State Building's antenna Wednesday and unfurled a banner about "the power of love" and peace, apparently as part of an audacious, high-altitude marriage proposal, soon followed by their arrest. The Russian climbers, who go by Angela Nikolau and Ivan Beerkus, were the subject of the 2024 Netflix documentary "Skywalkers: A Love Story" about their "rooftopping" exploits and budding romance. Dressed in black and wearing masks but not tethers, the two balanced on a narrow ledge and appeared to

kiss atop the New York skyscraper's antenna, news helicopter video showed. The banner, reading "when the power of love beats the love of power the world knows peace," waved from the structure, which rises 1,454 feet (443 meters) above midtown Manhattan. After lingering for a time, the two collected the banner and began to climb down, picking their way along the latticework of metal to a wider ledge, where one seemed to set up a piece of photography equipment and got down on one knee. After the two kissed again and hugged, the other person took selfies with an outstretched left hand, as if examining a ring. Police Emergency Services Unit officers started ascending a ladder in the spindly structure to intercept them. Police body camera video showed an officer calling out a greeting and explaining, "Well, you can't be up here." An off-camera voice replied with what sounded like, "We are engaged." A few seconds later, officers reached a landing within the antenna and

met the couple, who were coming down a ladder and calmly spoke with police, the video showed.



Nikolau posted images of the escapade on her social media accounts, including a photo that modeled an engagement-style ring above a bird's-eye view of Manhattan. The two climbers, whom police identified by their formal names, Angelina Nikolau and Ivan Kuznetsov were arrested on burglary, reckless endangerment and other

charges. It wasn't immediately clear whether they had attorneys who could speak to the allegations. Messages seeking comment were sent to the couple. Skywalkers: A Love Story" follows Beerkus and Nikolau as they make often unauthorized ascents of tall structures, sometimes posing as construction workers to sneak in. It wasn't clear how the pair gained access to the Empire State Building's antenna, which rises well above public areas of the 102-story building. Building management said in a statement that the episode was "unauthorized" and didn't endanger anyone in the skyscraper. The management didn't answer questions about how the two reached the antenna and what interactions, if any, they had with security workers. Empire State Building visitors are screened and told not to bring large packages, sports equipment, costumes or masks, among other items.