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OPP FLAGS GAPS IN
JAL JEEVAN, WATER
CONTAMINATION IN LS



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NASA ASTRONAUTS
RETURN TO EARTH:
WHAT NEXT?

DALLEWAL DETAINED AS BREAKTHROUGH ELUSIVE

Punjab police clears Shambhu border for public

NEERAJ MOHAN & TARUNI GANDHI
CHANDIGARH

In a late-evening crack-down on the protesting farmers at Shambhu and Khanauri border points of Punjab and Haryana, the Punjab police have detained key farmer leader Jagjit Singh Dallewal and Sarvan Singh Pandher along with several others amid rising tensions over protest demands. They were detained in Mohali while returning from a meeting with government officials in Chandigarh.

Dallewal had been on hunger strike over 100 days now.

The police also removed temporary sheds of the farmers to open the high-ways for the general public.

Hundreds of cops with heavy machines and earth-movers reached both the borders and started removing the makeshift structures and used buses to transport the detained protesters away from the site. It is learnt that after removing temporary shelters from the Punjab side, Haryana police will also remove the barricades so that the traffic could be restored on both the key highways which were blocked since February 13 last year.

Patiala SSP Nanak Singh

P3



Punjab Police uses bulldozers to remove temporary structures erected by farmers at Punjab-Haryana Shambhu Border where they were sitting on a protest over various demands, on Wednesday. ANI

Central team studies legal MSP guarantee in detail

TARUNI GANDHI & NEERAJ MOHAN
CHANDIGARH

The third round of talks between Punjab farmers and the Central delegation concluded on Wednesday without a resolution, with discussions on a legal guarantee for Minimum Support Price (MSP) remaining inconclusive. The next meeting is scheduled for May 4.

Representatives from 28 farmer unions, including the Samyukt Kisan Morcha (Non-Political) and Kisan Mazdoor Morcha, partici-

pated in the discussions. The Central delegation comprised Union Agriculture Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan, Industry Minister Piyush Goyal, and Food and Consumer Affairs Minister Pralhad Joshi.

The meeting lasted four hours.

Puran Chand Krishan has been appointed as secretary to engage with all stakeholders regarding a legal guarantee for MSP. Punjab Finance Minister Harpal Cheema described

FRUITLESS

- The next meeting is scheduled for May 4.
- Representatives from 28 farmer unions participated in discussions.
- Legal MSP guarantee was extensively discussed
- Centre to review data submitted by unions on MSP across all crops

Gaza situation a concern, says MEA

TDG NETWORK
NEW DELHI

Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) released a statement on Wednesday on the recent strikes and the developing situation in Gaza.

The MEA said that it is concerned about the situation and stressed upon the importance of the release of the hostages.

MEA gave a call for the supply of humanitarian assistance to continue for the people of Gaza.

"We are concerned at the situation in Gaza. It is important that all hostages

P3

Aurangzeb is not relevant in today's times, says RSS

TDG NETWORK
HYDERABAD

Amid the demands made by the VHP and other organisations to remove Aurangzeb's tomb from Shambhaji Nagar, Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) spokesperson Sunil Ambekar on Wednesday said the Mughal emperor was "not relevant" in today's times while asserting that any form of violence was discouraged.

"Aurangzeb is not relevant today. No form of violence is encouraged," Ambekar said.

The RSS stand come at a time when tensions are high after violence broke out in Nagpur over the demand to remove Aurangzeb's tomb and various rumours connected to it.

Minority Democratic Party (MDP) leader Fahim Khan has been arrested for allegedly leading a protest outside a Nagpur police station on Monday

Fifty individuals have been detained, and a curfew remains in effect for the second consecutive day across ten police district areas in Nagpur following violent clashes that erupted on March 17, police said.

Meanwhile, Minority Democratic Party (MDP) leader

Fahim Khan has been arrested for allegedly leading a protest outside a Nagpur police station on Monday after VHP workers staged an agitation for the removal of Aurangzeb's tomb, which triggered violence.

Khan's name is mentioned in one of six FIRs registered so far along with 50 others in connection with the violent clashes that left several police personnel injured. Police are investigating whether Khan played any role in instigating riots, an official said on Wednesday. A group of 50 to 60 people led by Khan had unlawfully gathered outside Ganeshpeth police station on Monday and submitted a memorandum against Vishwa Hindu Parishad's protest to the police, the FIR stated.

Sops for small value UPI transactions

Small merchants will get incentives at the rate of 0.15% per transaction, value capped at Rs 2,000

TDG NETWORK
NEW DELHI

The government on Wednesday approved a Rs 1,500 crore incentive for the

promotion of small-value BHIM-UPI (P2M) transactions up to Rs 2,000, a move aimed at benefiting common people and small merchants.

The 'Incentive Scheme for promotion of low-value BHIM-UPI transactions Person to Merchant (P2M)' for the financial year 2024-25 was approved by the Cabinet chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Information and Broad-

casting Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw told reporters here.

In a post on social media platform X, the Prime Minister said, "The incentive scheme on promoting low-value UPI transactions, which has been approved by the Cabinet will encourage digital payments and further 'Ease of Living'."

The scheme will cover 55 per cent of the total merchant transactions, an of-

ficial release said.

An incentive at the rate of 0.15 per cent per transaction value will be provided for transactions up to Rs 2,000 pertaining to the category of small merchants. For all the quarters of the scheme, 80 per cent of the admitted claim amount by the acquiring banks will be disbursed without any conditions.

The reimbursement

P3



NASA astronaut Sunita Williams shows her thumb as she safely returned to Earth with her colleagues after an unexpected 286-day mission aboard the International Space Station (ISS), in Florida on Tuesday. NASA ASTRONAUTS/ANI

Ukraine: Ceasefire talks to start on Sunday

AGENCIES
NEW YORK

The United States expects Ukraine to support agreements reached during a recent phone conversation between Russian President Vladimir Putin and US President Donald Trump, as ceasefire talks are set to begin in Jeddah on Sunday, according to Trump's Special Envoy Steven Witkoff, TASS Russian News Agency reported.

In an interview with Fox News, Witkoff described his discussions with Putin, saying, "I had two meetings with President Putin. The first one was for somewhere close to three and a half hours, and the second one was close to four hours."

He continued, "They

were both compelling. I thought we accomplished quite a bit, and in the second meeting, we actually really narrowed the issues, certainly from the Russian standpoint, we were immediately in discussions on tangible, granular ways to move forward towards a ceasefire that included what you've heard about today, which is the ceasefire with regard to energy infrastructure from both sides, something they've been trying to put together for quite some time."

He also highlighted another key component of the negotiations, stating, "And secondly, what people colloquially refer to as the Black Sea, maritime aspect of a ceasefire. I think both of those are now agreed to by

the Russians. I am certainly hopeful that the Ukrainians will agree to it."

Witkoff confirmed that while progress had been made, there were still unresolved details that would be addressed during the upcoming talks, reported TASS.

"The sides have some details to work out, of course, but that will begin on Sunday in Jeddah."

He expressed confidence that discussions would advance further, explaining, "And beyond that, we'll move to a full ceasefire, and we had some very good conversation today on the ingredients to achieve that. So all in all, really positive results."

The US delegation to Jeddah

P3

Tharoor praises PM's stance on conflict

TDG NETWORK
NEW DELHI

Congress MP Shashi Tharoor praised Prime Minister Narendra Modi's stance on the Russia-Ukraine conflict, emphasizing the need for a diplomatic solution.

Tharoor noted that PM Modi has consistently advocated for diplomacy, citing his statement in Samarkand where he said, "This is not an era of war, and solutions have been found peacefully."

Senior Congress leader Shashi Tharoor said, "PM Modi has taken a consistent position that the solu-



P3

Jaishankar: Weaponisation of trade a concern

TDG NETWORK
NEW DELHI

External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar highlighted the changing landscape of business as increasingly people are factoring in national security as being more important than before, especially in the digital age. These changes, the minister argued, do not mean making alternative systems of telecom and other technologies, but rather ally with others who share the same goals as India.

"There are different ways of dealing with weaponisation, one is to stay at the right side of the weapon so you know, you don't get hit,



External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar speaks during a conversation on Politics, Business, and New World Order at Raisina Dialogue 2025, in New Delhi on Wednesday. ANI

others do. But here's the reality, the world today makes business decisions factoring in national security in a manner in which it did not do so before, especially in the digital era," Jaishankar said

while addressing the Raisina Dialogue being held in New Delhi.

The remarks were made by him at the third day of the Dialogue, at the "Com-misars and Capitalists:

Politics, Business and New World Order"

The world is witnessing "greater weaponisation" of tariffs, sanctions and export controls and India must navigate the challenge by working with partners who are trustworthy and present fewer risks, he said.

His remarks came amid growing global concerns over US President Donald Trump's threat of imposing reciprocal tariffs on its partners and other nations.

However, the external affairs minister made no mention of Trump's threat of tariffs.

"Tariffs, sanctions, export

P3

'Mehul Choksi is not in Antigua and Barbuda'

AGENCIES
NEW DELHI

Chet Greene, the Foreign Minister of Antigua and Barbuda, informed on Wednesday that Mehul Choksi, the fugitive Indian businessman, is not on the island.

Greene stated that Choksi had left the island for medical attention abroad while emphasising that Choksi remains a citizen of Antigua and Barbuda.

"Mehul Choksi is not on the island. I am told he left Antigua for medical attention abroad. He remains a



P3

Wife, lover kill husband, body sealed inside drum with cement

AGENCIES
MEERUT

A merchant navy officer was allegedly stabbed to death by his wife and her lover, his body dismembered and sealed inside a drum with cement, police said. His remains have been recovered and the two accused arrested. The incident took place in the Indira Nagar area here, police said on Tuesday.

The victim, Saurabh Rajput (29) from Brahmpuri's Indra Nagar Phase 2, went missing on March 4 and an investigation was launched after receiving information about the matter, Additional Superintendent of Police (ASP) Ayush Vikram Singh said.

On the basis of suspicion, police detained Rajput's wife Muskan (27) and her lover Sahil (25), he said.

During interrogation, the two confessed to having stabbed Rajput to death on March 4. The two then chopped up his body, put the remains inside a drum and sealed it with cement. They have been arrested, he added.



The remains have been sent for post-mortem and a case has been registered based on a complaint lodged by Rajput's family, police said. According to Rajput's family, Muskan attempted to mislead them by sending messages from his phone.

After committing the crime, Muskan and Sahil went on a vacation to a hill station, the ASP said.

Police said Rajput and Muskan, from Gauripura, had a love marriage in 2016.

Their families were unhappy with their relationship and the couple lived separately in a rented house in Indira Nagar Phase I with their three-year-old daughter, police said.

OPPOSITION IN LS FLAGS GAPS IN JAL JEEVAN, WATER CONTAMINATION

Niti Aayog report says 70 per cent of water supplied in country is contaminated: Cong MP

AGENCIES
NEW DELHI

Opposition members on Wednesday said there were gaps in the implementation of the government's various drinking water schemes and flagged concerns of water contamination in several parts of the country.

Participating in the discussion in Lok Sabha on the demands for grants of the Jal Shakti Ministry, opposition members also claimed under utilization of funds allocated to the ministry and said its assertions of the success of the Jal Jeevan Mission remained only on paper.

BJP and NDA members praised the government for providing piped water supply across remote corners of the country and questioned why opposition-ruled states of Jharkhand, Kerala, and West Bengal were lagging in providing clean drinking water to rural households.

Initiating the discussion, BJP member Jagdambika Pal also questioned the opposition's commitment to ensuring safe drinking wa-



ter for all.

According to official data, Kerala has the lowest coverage under the Jal Jeevan Mission at 54.41 per cent, followed by Jharkhand at 54.77 and West Bengal at 55.01 per cent.

BJP member Rajkumar Chahar from Uttar Pradesh said in the 16th century, Mughal emperor Akbar decided to shift the capital of his empire from Fatehpur Sikri to Delhi because of water scarcity.

"He shifted the capital from Fatehpur Sikri because of water shortage and high levels of salinity in water," he said.

Chahar said he was fortunate that he was elected



Congress MP Mohammad Jawed

as Lok Sabha member from Fatehpur Sikri in 2019 and the same year Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced the Jal Jeevan Mission from the ramparts of the Red Fort.

"A 440-year old problem was solved in 2019 when the people of Fatehpur Sikri, Agra district, Mathura and Firozabad were allotted funds from the Rs 4,000 crore scheme by the Prime Minister and work is on to supply Ganga water in every household," Chahar said.

Congress member Mohamed Jawed said a Niti Aayog report had claimed that nearly 70 per cent of water supplied in the coun-

try was contaminated.

"This index has 122 countries and India ranks 120th," Jawed claimed.

AIMIM leader Asaduddin Owaisi expressed concerns about the ministry's alleged "severe" under-utilisation of the allocated funds.

Arguing this to be part of a prevailing trend, Owaisi said the ministry utilised 74 per cent of their allocation in 2021, 72 per cent in 2022, 88 per cent in 2023 and 31.4 per cent in 2024-25.

"The programme may declare victory on paper, but the reality is different," he said.

Owaisi said reports from Solapur, Aurangand

and Palghar districts in Maharashtra reveal persistent water shortages. In drought-stricken Bundelkhand in Uttar Pradesh, people across multiple districts are still desperately searching for water.

DMK member T R Baalu urged the Centre to prioritise connecting northern and southern Indian rivers, highlighting the economic and logistical benefits of such initiatives.

He claimed that the government was moving slowly on the inter-state river-linking projects, particularly in peninsular India.

Baalu said despite promises made during the 2014 elections, substantial steps toward connecting water-surplus Himalayan rivers with water-deficient peninsular rivers remain unfilled.

"In 2014, Modi ji had promised to prioritise inter-state river connections, including Himalayan and Peninsular reservoirs. However, as far as peninsular rivers are concerned, not even a detailed project report (DPR) has been developed," he said.

Terrorists will either go to jail or to hell: MoS Home

TDG NETWORK
NEW DELHI

Union Minister of State (MoS) Home Affairs Nityanand Rai, on Wednesday, sent a strong message to terrorists in the Rajya Sabha, stating that they will either face jail time or meet their demise.

This assertion comes amid the government's zero-tolerance policy towards terrorism, which has led to a significant 71% decrease in terrorist activities.

Replying during the question hour in Rajya Sabha on the issue of terrorism, MoS Home Nityanand Rai said, "Earlier, the terrorists used to be glorified, they were even given great food. But now, under Prime Minister Narendra Modi and its zero tolerance towards terrorism, there have been zero terrorist incidents in the hinterland... Terrorists will either go to jail or hell."

"The Modi government has a policy of zero-tolerance towards terrorism. The government is taking all steps to end terrorism. As a result, there has been a 71 per cent decrease in terrorist activities," Rai added.

Since its inception, the NIA has registered 652 cases, charge-sheeted 516 cases, and arrested 4,232 accused, with 625 convictions.



Rai, in a written reply to Rajya Sabha, said that as of 12.03.2025, the NIA had registered 652 cases since its inception, and 516 cases had been charge-sheeted. The NIA has arrested 4232 accused so far, and 625 have been convicted. Out of a total of 157 decided cases, 150 have resulted in convictions.

Rai emphasised that the National Investigation Agency (NIA) has been instrumental in combating terrorism, with a conviction rate of 95.54% in cases investigated by the agency.

"The conviction rate of NIA investigated cases is 95.54 per cent. NIA has seized/attached a total of 551 (movable and immovable) properties under UA(P) Act, worth 116.27 crore rupees," Rai added.

The minister also highlighted the NIA's expanded reach, which includes 21 branch of-

fices across the country, its headquarters in New Delhi, and zonal offices in Guwahati and Jammu.

Prior to 2019, the NIA had eight branch offices. Since then, the Government has opened 13 branch offices and two zonal offices, out of which nine new branch offices and the two zonal offices have been sanctioned and made functional during the last three years only.

Over the last three years, the government has created 625 new posts in the NIA, including technical experts and senior officers.

"The NIA has a total of 1901 sanctioned posts at present, out of which 625 posts (including one post of ADG, six posts of IG rank officers and 105 posts of technical experts) have been created during the last three years," he added.

Amit Shah counters TMC member over CBI references in RS

TDG NETWORK
NEW DELHI

Home Minister Amit Shah on Wednesday hit out at Trinamool Congress member Saket Gokhale over remarks in the Rajya Sabha during a discussion on the working of his ministry and said that if the opposition member wants to expand the scope of discussion, everything will be answered.

Gokhale, who initiated the discussion, made references to CBI. Amit Shah said that CBI does not fall under his ministry, but if the scope of discussion is sought to be expanded, "there will be a reply for everything".

Gokhale claimed that as he began interpreting, the Home Minister "dar gaye" (got



scared). Amit Shah strongly countered him and said the question of getting scared does not arise. Amit Shah said he is not in Parliament due to anyone's favour and has won elections repeatedly.

He said the CBI is probing cases on directions of the High Court and spoke of post-poll violence in West Bengal and alleged "inaction" by the Trinamool Congress government. He said no spe-

cial CBI court had been set up in West Bengal.

Gokhale's personal observations against the Home Minister were expunged by Chairman Jagdeep Dhankhar after he refused to withdraw them.

Union Health Minister JP Nadda, who is the Leader of the House, said the Trinamool Congress member should withdraw his remarks and apologise. Parliamentary Affairs Minister Kiren Rijiju said Gokhale had lowered the dignity of the House and that the Trinamool Congress member had not given any constructive suggestion during the debate. Gokhale also made remarks pertaining to BJP, and Nadda urged the Chair to expunge the comments.

AGENCIES
NEW DELHI

A parliamentary panel has suggested that the Centre include "new and emerging" disasters, such as heatwaves, in its disaster management plans.

The Department-related Parliamentary Standing Committee on Home Affairs, in a report tabled in the Rajya Sabha last week, also recommended setting up a system to regularly review and update the official list of disasters.

"The committee recommends that the ministry may include new and emerging disasters in its disaster management plans, such as those caused by heatwaves etc. It further recommends establishing

a formal mechanism for the periodic review and update of the Notified Disasters list to ensure the Act remains relevant and responsive to emerging disaster risks through consultation with experts, stakeholders and affected communities," the report read.

The 31-member committee, headed by BJP's Rajya Sabha MP Radha Mohan Das Agrawal, also urged the ministry to study and plan for long-term disaster preparedness, considering climate change and the increasing frequency of disasters.

It recommended greater investment in disaster-resistant infrastructure, including hospitals, schools and transport systems, to reduce damage and speed

up recovery.

Amruta S Nair, Climate Campaigner at Greenpeace India, said the parliamentary committee's recommendation to include heatwaves in the notified disasters list is a welcome and long-overdue step that highlights the growing severity of the heat crisis.

"It ensures heatwaves are prioritized in disaster management and response, covering prevention, mitigation and recovery. However, for this move to be truly effective, we must ensure there are no gaps in the financial aspects and execution as well," she said.

Nair called for a dedicated "heat budget" for heat action plans, along with legally binding and time-bound goals for account-

ability.

She also recommended setting up a specialised body to oversee these efforts and ensure coordination across departments for a unified response. "We need a holistic approach from policy to action to make this move both effective and fruitful."

Currently, the notified list of disasters eligible for National Disaster Response Fund (NDRF) and State Disaster Response Fund (SDRF) assistance includes cyclones, droughts, earthquakes, fires, floods, tsunamis, hailstorms, landslides, avalanches, cloudbursts, pest attacks, frost and cold waves. However, state governments can use up to 10 per cent of their annual SDRF allocation, subject to

certain conditions, to provide immediate relief for natural disasters they consider significant within the local context, even if they are not included in the centrally notified list. States have previously requested the Centre to add incidents such as elephant attacks, lightning, heatwaves, river and coastal erosion, and public health emergencies like Japanese encephalitis, Nipah and the COVID-19 pandemic to the eligible list for SDRF and NDRF funding. Union Earth Sciences Minister Jitendra Singh recently told the Lok Sabha that the 15th Finance Commission had examined states' requests to expand the list of notified disasters to include heatwaves but did not find merit in it.

CULTURAL



President Droupadi Murmu in a group picture with MPs from Uttarakhand, Maharashtra, Punjab, Chandigarh, Ladakh, Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh and nominated MPs of Rajya Sabha during a breakfast hosted by the President at Rashtrapati Bhavan Cultural Centre, in New Delhi on Wednesday. ANI

Rahul's focus signals reshaping Bihar Cong

AJIT MAINDOLA
NEW DELHI

The congress party seems to have changed strategy ahead of Bihar elections. The Leader of Opposition in the Lok Sabha, Rahul Gandhi, has hinted at forming a new direction for the Congress party by focusing on new faces, especially before the upcoming Bihar elections. His recent decisions show

a shift towards offering significant responsibilities to individuals who were previously not in top positions. One example is Krishna Alavaru, who was appointed as the state in-charge for Bihar, replacing Mohan Prakash. Alavaru, who had worked with Rahul Gandhi's team for several years, was brought into politics from an administrative background and



was given the responsibility of managing a crucial state like Bihar. Similarly, Rajesh Kumar, an MLA from the

Dalit community, was made the state president of the Congress in Bihar. These decisions mirror the BJP's approach, where the party is increasingly empowering ordinary workers with big responsibilities. In addition to Alavaru and Kumar, Rahul Gandhi has also activated other young leaders in Bihar, such as Kanhaiya Kumar and Pappu Yadav.

Haryana farmers' debt: 27 lakh owe Rs 60,060 crore in loans

TDG NETWORK
CHANDIGARH

Nearly 27.71 lakh farmers of Haryana owe Rs 60,060 crore agricultural loan to the state cooperative banks for several years adding to the financial distress of the state.

The figures were provided by the Cooperation Minister Arvind Sharma in reply of a question by Indian National Lok Dal MLA Aditya Devi Lal.

As of December 31, 2024, the unpaid farm loans total Rs 60,060 crore, and 27.71 lakh farmers owe this money. As per the figures Sirsa district leading the tally with a total 2.07 lakh farmers owe Rs 6,102 crore followed by in Hisar where 2.68 lakh farmers owe Rs 5873 crore. Even in the urban areas like Gurugram and Faridabad, the amounts are smaller Rs 842 crore and Rs 533 crore, reads the reply of the Cooperation Minister. On what the government has done in the last 11 years to help farmers clear their debts and how many of the 27 lakh farmers have benefited from government

schemes, Chief Minister Nayab Singh Saini intervened and explained that farmers can take crop loans up to Rs 1.5 lakh from Haryana State Co-Operative Apex Bank (HARCO Bank) and other cooperative banks at a low interest rate of 7%. The Haryana government pays 4% of this interest, and the central government pays 3%, making it easier for farmers to borrow.

Saini said farmers regularly borrow money from banks for their needs and repay it on time. They use the loans to buy things like tractors, harvesters, and other farming tools, which they pay back through medium-term loans. The chief minister informed the house that besides the centre government's welfare schemes introduced for the farmers, the state government is also helping farmers in other ways and Under the 'Mera Pani Meri Virsa' scheme, farmers who switch from growing paddy to other crops will now get Rs 8,000 per acre, up from Rs 7,000 earlier, to encourage better farming practices.

Fair polls possible in Bengal only after Prez rule: Suwendu

SUPROTIM MUKHERJEE
KOLKATA

Suwendu Adhikari, the Bharatiya Janata Party's Leader of the Opposition in the West Bengal Assembly has asserted that free and fair elections can only be held in the State if President's rule is imposed.

He made the comments while leading protests in Baruaipur, on the outskirts of Kolkata, which is represented by Assembly Speaker Biman Banerjee. Adhikari led a group of BJP legislators who have been protesting against the Assembly Speaker Biman Banerjee, elected from Baruaipur West, over his "undemocratic behaviour" on the floor of the House.. "The Election Commission should take note without imposing President's rule, holding elections in Bengal is impossible," Adhikari remarked at South 24-Parganas Baruaipur where a convoy of BJP lawmakers led by Adhikari faced fierce resistance from the Trinamool workers.

On Wednesday afternoon Adhikari, who was suspended from attending the Budget session in the State Assem-



bly, went to Baruaipur with a group of party MLAs.

On Tuesday, the Speaker had disallowed a discussion on an adjournment motion brought by the BJP lawmakers, to condemn alleged incidents of violence in different parts of the State during Holi celebrations. The BJP legislators have been complaining that the Speaker, who is supposed to be neutral as per the Indian Constitution, was always favouring the Trinamool. "He only does what Mamata Banerjee tells him to do. No one can get justice from such a person," said one of the legislators who had gone to Baruaipur.

The BJP had planned a rally as a show of strength in Baruaipur which was met with force from the ruling party.

THE DAILY GUARDIAN SURVEY ON MOHALI MOMOS FACTORY CONTROVERSY

18% felt disgusted upon hearing about dog’s head being found in factory

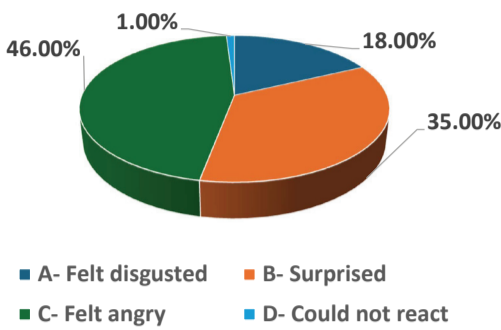
Authorities in Mohali launched a full-scale investigation after discovering a dog’s severed head in a refrigerator during a raid on a fast-food

factory in Mattaur. The crackdown targeted unhygienic food production, leading to the seizure of contaminated food. The factory, supply-

ing momos and spring rolls across Chandigarh, Panchkula, and Kalka, faced action after complaints of unsanitary practices surfaced online.

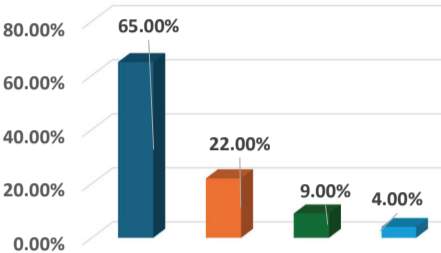
Q1.▶

What was your first reaction upon hearing the news of a dog’s head being found in a momo-making factory in Mohali?



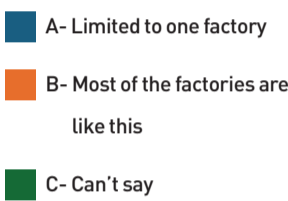
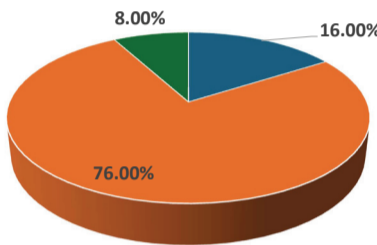
◀Q2.

After this incident, has your attitude towards eating momos changed?



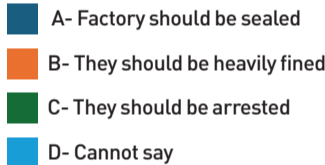
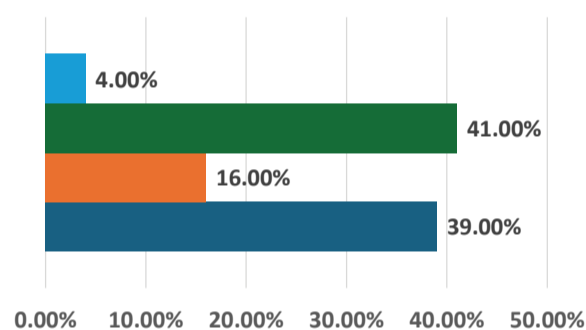
Q3.▶

Are such incidents limited to one factory, or could their scale be larger?



◀Q4.

What action should be taken against those who endanger people’s health?



THE DAILY GUARDIAN SURVEY ON PAKISTAN ARMY DISPUTE

75% Pakistan Army chief has realised consequences of terrorism

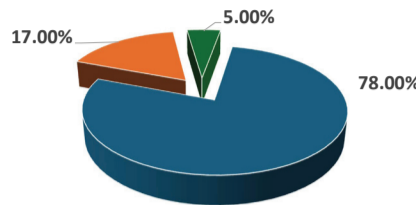
Pakistan Army Chief Gen Asim Munir, furious over the Baloch Liberation Army’s deadly train hijack, slammed

PM Shehbaz Sharif’s government for poor governance. At a high-level security meeting, Munir demanded

stricter measures to combat extremism, calling it a fight for Pakistan’s survival.

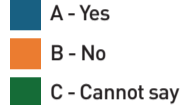
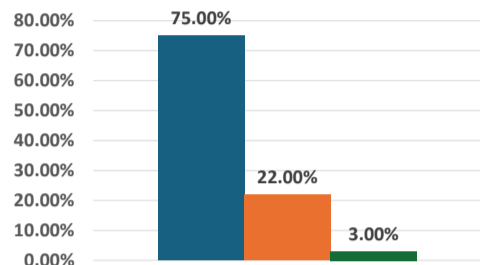
Q1.▶

Due to the government’s failures, how many more lives will be lost? Is this a direct warning to Pakistan’s PM Shehbaz by General Azeem Munir?



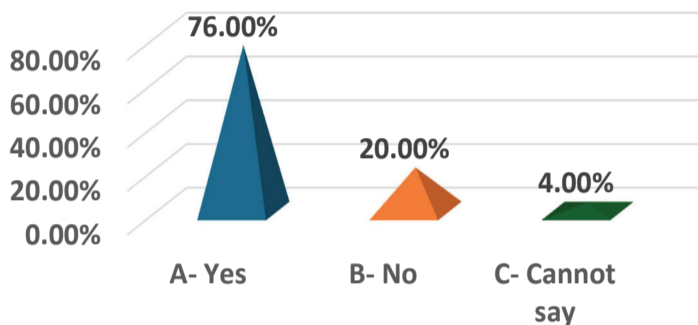
◀Q2.

Now that their soldiers are being killed, is Pakistan’s Army Chief realising the consequences of terrorism?



Q3.▶

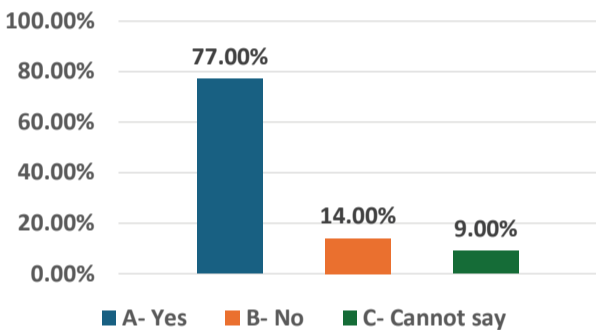
Has the military turmoil in Pakistan brought the Shehbaz Sharif government on edge?



◀Q4.

◀Q4.

Reports indicate that 2,500 Pakistani soldiers have left the army. Is this due to terrorism?



Central team studies legal MSP

CONTINUED FROM P1

the discussions as positive and said the data submitted by farmer unions on implementing MSP across all crops would be reviewed by the Centre. He also clarified that there were no plan to remove protesting farmers from the Khanauri and Shambhu borders.

Punjab ministers Lal Chand Kataruchak and Gur-

meet Singh Khudian also attended the meeting. During the previous round on February 22, farmers had suggested ways for the Centre to secure financial resources for ensuring MSP on all crops. The Centre had raised concerns over the validity of the data, prompting farmers to submit a detailed report with supporting sources.

Sarwan Singh Pandher, president of the Kisan Maz-

door Morcha, stated, “The ministers ‘claim that implementing an MSP law would create challenges, but we disagree. Neither consumers nor traders will be adversely affected if the MSP guarantee is provided.”

He added that while the Centre expressed willingness to continue dialogue, farmers expected concrete commitments in the next meeting.

Dallewal detained as breakthrough elusive

CONTINUED FROM P1

told the media persons that farmers protesting at the Shambhu Border were cleared by police in the presence of Duty Magistrates after proper warnings. He said that most of the farmers voluntarily agreed to leave and were sent to their homes by bus and the police teams were working to remove structures and vehicles to reopen the highway for traffic. The SSP said that now Haryana Police will also take action from their side to open the blockade and resume traffic.

Besides key farmer leaders, including Jagjit Singh

Dallewal, who has been on an indefinite hunger strike since November 26 and Kisan Mazdoor Morcha leader Sarwan Singh Pandher. Both the leaders were detained after their meeting with Union Ministers in Chandigarh.

The internal reports suggest that Dallewal, Pandher, and other leaders were detained at various locations, including Zirakpur and Mohali, before the crackdown began. The detained farmer leaders were taken to quila Bahadurgarh and a team of doctors also deputed to monitor health of fasting farmer leader Dallewal.

Following the police ac-

tion, Punjab Minister Harpal Singh Cheema defended the move, stating that the prolonged road blockades were affecting businesses and employment in Punjab. “The farmers’ demands are against the central government. They should protest in Delhi instead of blocking Punjab’s roads,” Cheema said.

The sudden action of Punjab government evoked sharp criticism from the opposition parties and farmer leaders who slammed the Bhagwant Mann led AAP government in Punjab for using force against the farmers who were protesting peacefully. The Sa-

myukta Kisan Morcha has slammed the police action saying that the AAP Government of Punjab has shown that it is totally committed to enforcing corporate and MNC framework in agriculture and it is for this that it is collaborating and cooperating with the RSS, BJP Govt at the Centre. It is rather sinister that this move has come after top AAP leaders had a meeting with industrialists on Tuesday, it alleged.

Farmer leader Rakesh Tikait slammed the police action “The government is holding talks with farmer organizations at the Punjab border while simultane-

ously arresting them. We strongly condemn the actions of the Punjab government, and all farmer organizations are prepared for every struggle”, he wrote a post in hindi on X.

On the other hand senior BJP leader and Union Minister Ravneet Singh Bittu and other opposition leaders linked the crackdown to the upcoming Ludhiana West byelection, accusing the AAP government of suppressing farmers for political gains. “We condemn this action of the Punjab government on farmers. Punjab CM Bhagwant Mann should be ashamed.

Ukraine: Ceasefire talks on Sunday

CONTINUED FROM P1

dah will be led by National Security Advisor Mike Waltz and Secretary of State Marco Rubio. Witkoff noted that recent discussions had successfully overcome obstacles that had previously hindered progress. “We’ve got to figure out the details. The point is that up until recently, we really didn’t have consensus around these two aspects, the energy and infrastructure cease-

fire and the Black Sea moratorium on firing. And today we got to that place, and I think it’s a relatively short distance to a full ceasefire from there,” he said.

Regarding Putin’s stance on the matter, Witkoff stated, “President Putin - and I would commend him for this - said that he agreed with the President’s posture on it all. He agreed with the approach. He didn’t want to see more people dying in the field.”

‘Weaponisation of trade a concern’

CONTINUED FROM P1

controls -- whether we like it or not, they are a reality, countries use them,” he said speaking at a session titled “Commisars and Capitalists: Politics, Business and New World Order.”

“If one looks at the last decade, we have seen a much greater weaponisation of pretty much any kind of capability or any kind of economic activity,” he said.

The external affairs minister also talked about ways to deal with the situation arising out of weaponisation of trade. Explaining, he said staying on the “right side” of the weapon so you don’t “get hit”, and finding partners who are more “trustworthy” and present fewer risks.

“The world today makes business decisions factoring in national security in a manner in which it did not

do so before, especially in the digital era,” he said.

“In the digital era, it’s not just about cost, it is about comfort and trust. If you are today looking at a strategic level, the business conversations you keep hearing (are about) resilience, reliability, trust, transparency.”

“You want to do business more and more with those with whom you are secure,” he added.

To a question on whether the Trump administration is aiming to create a new world order, Jaishankar said: “If your question is what the US is doing, you should ask the Americans, not me.”

“We should be doing many things, including engaging the Americans and engaging the Global South. Our effort is to maximise our options to increase our turnover, to improve our technology,” he noted.

Gaza situation a concern, says MEA

CONTINUED FROM P1

are released. We also call for supply of humanitarian assistance to the people of Gaza to be sustained”, the MEA said.

In the early hours of Tuesday, the Israel Defence Forces (IDF) had announced about conducting “extensive strikes on terror targets belonging to the Hamas” in the Gaza Strip. The IDF said, “In accordance with the political echelon, the IDF and ISA are currently conducting extensive strikes on terror targets belonging to the Hamas terrorist organization in the Gaza Strip.”

In a series of posts on X, the Israel Prime Minister’s Office explained that the strikes were conducted after the instructions from Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Defence Minister Israel Katz.

Sops for UPI payments

CONTINUED FROM P1

of the remaining 20 per cent of the admitted claim amount for each quarter will be contingent upon the fulfilment of certain conditions.

The incentive will enable small merchants to avail of UPI services at no additional cost.

“As small merchants are price-sensitive, incentives would encourage them to accept UPI payment,” the release said.

The promotion of digital payments is an integral part of the government’s strategy for financial inclusion and provides wide-ranging payment options to the common man.

Vaishnaw also informed that UPI services are also available in Singapore, France, UAE, Sri Lanka, Bhutan, Nepal and Mauritius.

UPI - Unified Payments Interface - is an instant real-time payment system developed by NPCI to facilitate inter-bank transactions through mobile phones.

During the last financial year, incentive payouts by the government for BHIM-UPI were Rs 3,268 crore.

The incentive is paid by the government to the acquiring bank (Merchant’s bank) and thereafter shared among other stakeholders: Issuer Bank (Customer’s Bank), Payment Service Provider Bank (facilitates onboarding of customers on UPI app / API integrations) and App Providers (TPAPs).

As per the RBI, MDR up to 0.90 per cent of transaction value is applicable across all card networks (for Debit cards).

According to NPCI, MDR up to 0.30 per cent of transaction value is applicable for UPI P2M transactions. Since January 2020, to promote digital transactions, MDR was made zero for RuPay Debit Cards and BHIM-UPI transactions through amendments in section 10A in the Payments and Settlement Systems Act, 2007 and section 269SU of the Income-tax Act, 1961.

Tharoor praises PM’s stance

CONTINUED FROM P1

tion to this conflict has to come through diplomacy. In fact, you may remember his statement in Samarkand in front of President Putin, where he said this is not an era of war and that solutions have been found peacefully. We do seem to be at the beginning of a peace process of some sort.”

Tharoor also highlighted the complexity of the peace process, stressing that it involves more than just two leaders talking. He emphasized the need for all parties, including Ukraine, to be involved in the negotiations.

“We know that President Trump and President Putin have spoken. We don’t know what the outcome is. A peace process is a more complicated issue than just two leaders talking. There would need to be, first of all, the parties have to be involved. The Ukrainians will have to have a seat at the table. The European Union and the European countries in the neighbourhood, which have been very actively involved in

ties, including Ukraine, to be involved in the negotiations.

“Your Government and my Government are working together on this matter. We have some traditions in democracy. We both respect the rule of law. The matter of Mehul Choksi has been subjected to legal review. Until such time it is reviewed and

the conflict, will demand and legitimately expect a seat at the table. There may be countries that will be invited to come in from outside to help maintain peace. That becomes the issue,” said the Congress leader.

He highlighted that several nuances may come up during these discussions, such as whether the talks are focussed on a ceasefire, a peace settlement, a long-drawn-out process that ends in a durable solution, or an immediate ceasefire with a stalemate on the ground.

‘Choksi not in Antigua and Barbuda’

citizen of Antigua and Barbuda,” Greene told ANI.

Mehul Choksi is a fugitive Indian businessman who holds the citizenship of Antigua & Barbuda. Choksi, along with his nephew Nirav Modi, is wanted by Indian authorities in the Punjab National Bank (PNB) scam. The duo is alleged to have defrauded the bank of more than Rs 14,000 crore.

Greene highlighted that

determined, there is nothing I can say, or any of us can say or do...,” said Greene.

Speaking about the bilateral ties between the two countries, Greene said, “The relations between Antigua and Barbuda and India has really grown by leaps and bounds. My own Prime Minister Gaston Brown and your Prime Minister Modi have built a strong platform of friendship.

FADNAVIS ASSURES PEACE AS PROBE UNDERWAY IN NAGPUR VIOLENCE

Curfew continues, 51 named in FIR, 19 remanded to police custody

TDG NETWORK
MUMBAI

Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis, speaking in the Maharashtra Assembly, stated that an investigation is underway into the recent violence in Nagpur. He assured that peace prevails in the city and emphasized that there had been no riots in the area for several years.

He alleged that misinformation was deliberately spread and reiterated the government's commitment to maintaining law and order.

"The investigation is underway in the Nagpur violence case... There is peace in the city at present. There have been no riots here in the past several years... Some people did all this deliberately... The rumour was deliberately spread... There are many challenges on the issue of law and order, and we will be able to meet them," he told in the

'SITUATION PEACEFUL IN CITY'

"The investigation is underway in the Nagpur violence case... There is peace in the city at present. There have been no riots here in the past several years... Some people did all this deliberately... The rumour was deliberately spread" said Maha CM.

Fadnavis also refuted claims that religious verses



were burned during the violence, stating, "This rumour was deliberately spread. No verses were written and burnt."

state assembly.

Meanwhile, fifty individuals have been detained, and a curfew remains in effect for the second consecutive day across ten police district areas in Nagpur. DCP Rahul Maknikar says, "The situation is under control. The investigation is underway. We have formed 10 teams. We have detained 50 people so far." The complaint has been filed by Police Inspector Jitendra Baburao Gadge and the FIR names 51 in-

dividuals, including several minors. The accused are primarily from Nagpur city, residing in areas like Jafar Nagar, Tajbagh, Mominpura, and Bhala-adapura.

According to the FIR, "The protest turned violent when the crowd began hurling stones and throwing petrol bombs at police officers. Police were reportedly attacked with deadly weapons like axes and iron rods. The crowd, despite repeated warnings from the police

to disperse, continued to engage in violent actions, threatening the safety of both police personnel and civilians."

Meanwhile, Judicial Magistrate First Class Court (JMFC) has remanded 19 accused in the Nagpur violence case to police custody till March 21. Yesterday, the Ganeshpeth police produced the accused before the court.

Maharashtra's Minister of State for Home, Yogesh Kadam, has condemned

the recent violence in Nagpur, stating that it is a very serious matter.

"The incident that happened in Nagpur is very serious. Strictest action will be taken. People having the audacity to raise their hands on DCP-level officers and police personnel will not be tolerated at all," Kadam remarked.

Additionally, Kadam said that ongoing actions against illegal Bangladeshi intruders in Maharashtra, will be intensified.

RSS to address persecution of Hindus in B'desh at annual meet in Bengaluru

ABHINANDAN MISHRA
NEW DELHI

As the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) marks its centenary, the organization has outlined an ambitious expansion plan, while also passing a resolution on the persecution of Hindus in Bangladesh at its annual Akhil Bharatiya Pratinidhi Sabha (ABPS). The three-day gathering, beginning on March 21 at the Janaseva Vidya Kendra in Channanahalli, will see key discussions on the Sangh's growth, its nationwide outreach programs, and pressing regional concerns.

The ABPS is the highest decision-making body of the RSS, convened annually to assess the organization's progress, discuss major socio-political developments, and set its future course. It brings together representatives from across the country, including functionaries from various Sangh-affiliated organizations. Resolutions passed at the ABPS are considered key indicators of the RSS's ideological and strategic priorities for the coming year. Its last meeting was held in Nagpur, Maha-

rashtra last year.

The Sangh leaders are meeting in Bengaluru at a crucial time, as the BJP is set to announce its next national president to replace the incumbent, Jagat Prakash Nadda. Additionally, a possible meeting between the RSS head and Prime Minister Narendra Modi is anticipated at the end of this month. The upcoming Bihar elections and the key issues that need to be addressed are also likely to be part of the discussions.

Speaking to the media, RSS 'Akhil Bharatiya Prachar Pramukh' Sunil Ambekar, along with 'Akhil Bharatiya Sah Prachar Pramukhs' Narendra Kumar and Pradeep Joshi, and N. Tippteswamy, 'Kshetra Karyavah' of 'Dakshin Madhya Kshetra', confirmed that RSS Sarasanghachalak Dr. Mohan Bhagwat and Sarakaryavah Dattatreya Hosabale would jointly inaugurate the ABPS. During the event, Hosabale will present a report on the status of Sangh activities across the country.

The centenary of the RSS, running from Vijayadashami 2025 to Vi-

jayadashami 2026, will see a major expansion of its work, with outreach programs designed to involve people from all walks of life. The organization's 'Panch Parivartan' initiative—covering social harmony, family awareness, environmental consciousness, self-reliance, and civic duties—will be a key focus. Extensive nationwide engagement will take place as part of the centenary events.

A significant resolution will be passed on the situation in Bangladesh, focusing on the persecution of Hindus and other minorities. The resolution will outline concerns regarding religious violence and propose a way forward. The RSS, which has historically raised issues related to Hindus abroad, is expected to take a firm stance on the matter.

Earlier this week, United States Intelligence chief Tulsi Gabbard, who was in Delhi, had raised serious concerns over religious persecution of Hindus in Bangladesh that has been happening since Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina was removed by protestors in August last year.

4 killed, 6 injured as minibus catches fire in Pune

TDG NETWORK
PUNE

Four people were killed and six others injured when a minibus they were travelling in caught fire in the Hinjewadi area of Pune on Wednesday, police said.

DCP Pimpri-Chinchwad Vishal Gaikwad said that preliminary evidence indicates the fire was caused by a short circuit in the minibus.

"A call was received on 112 around 7:30 in the morning that a minibus had caught on fire in the Hinjawadi PS area, in which a few passengers have died and others have been severely injured.

DMK holds protest outside Parliament over delimitation issue

TDG NETWORK
NEW DELHI

The Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) held a protest on the issue of delimitation in the Parliament House premises on Wednesday.

In the protest, DMK MPs Kanimozhi, T Siva, and Dayanidhi Maran, along with party MPs, were present while holding a banner written "Fair delimitation."

Tamil Nadu Chief Minister MK Stalin called for a united political front against the proposed delimitation exercise, urging various parties to join forces in opposing what he termed a "blatant assault on



federalism."

On March 8, Chief Minister Stalin wrote to the Chief Ministers of seven states, both from National Democratic Alliance (NDA) ruling states and otherwise, to join him in the "fight against this unfair exercise."

He has written to Kerala CM Pinarayi Vijayan, Telangana CM Revanth Reddy, Andhra Pradesh CM N

Chandrababu Naidu, West Bengal CM Mamata Banerjee, Odisha CM Mohan Charan Majhi, and heads of all political parties in those respective states to join him.

Congress has backed CM Stalin's stance on delimitation. However, the party has not yet confirmed whether they will join the Joint Action Committee meeting on March 22.

Six die in boat capsized in MP

TDG NETWORK
ASHOKNAGAR

The Madhya Pradesh police have recovered six bodies after a boat capsized in Shivpuri district.

Gwalior Inspector General Arvind Saxena said that they are searching for the body of a child.

"We have recovered six bodies, and we are searching for the body of a child. Four are women, while two are male children. Further investigation is underway," IG Saxena said.

The incident occurred late Tuesday evening, after which the rescue operations began.

Telangana Budget: State sets target of trillion-dollar economy in decade

TDG NETWORK
HYDERABAD

Telangana Deputy Chief Minister and Finance Minister Bhatti Vikramarka on Wednesday tabled the 2025-26 state budget in the ongoing assembly session, saying that the state government was focusing on advancement in technology, transport, infrastructure, and environment conservation.

He said that the state government has launched the Musi riverfront development, which would make Hyderabad a pollution-free city. Moreover, a master plan has been formulated to establish Telangana as a leader in clean energy and sustainable development.

"We are developing a master plan to transform Hyderabad

BETRAYAL OF TELANGANA: KTR SLAMS CONGRESS BUDGET

Hyderabad: Bharat Rashtra Samiti (BRS) Working President KTR on Wednesday slammed the Congress government's latest state budget, and called it a complete betrayal of Telangana's people who are left with "zero gains," as per a release.

He described it as a mirror reflecting Chief Minister Revanth Reddy's inefficiency, incompetence, and administrative failure and accused the government of drowning the hopes of four crore people who trusted and voted for them.

into a global city of international standards, focusing on technological advancement, transportation expansion, infrastructure development, and environmental conservation. As a part of this vision, we have launched the Musi Riverfront Development

Project to make Hyderabad a pollution-free city. To establish Telangana as a leader in modern technology, clean energy, and sustainable development, we have formulated the 'Mega Master Plan 2050,' Vikramarka said while addressing the assembly.

Combating cross-border drugs smuggling: Punjab conducts trial of anti-drone system

TARUNI GANDHI
TARN TARAN

In a decisive move to combat cross-border drug smuggling and narcoterrorism amidst the ongoing drive against drugs—"Yudh Nashian Virudh", Punjab Government on Wednesday conducted a trial of advanced anti-drone technology at ground zero in village Naushera Dhalla, located near the Indo-Pak border in Tarn Taran district. This demonstration, held in the Sarai Amanat Khan area—a hotspot for drone activity and cross-border smuggling over the past two years—marks a crucial step in strengthening Punjab's defence capabilities.

The trial, which was attended by Punjab Cabinet



Minister and the State President of Aam Aadmi Party Aman Arora and Jails Minister Laljit Singh Bhullar, along with senior Punjab Police officials, is a continuation of earlier demonstrations held at SAS Nagar, Mohali, on March 4 and 5, 2025.

While addressing the media on the sidelines of the trial, Aman Arora said that the event was aimed at

analysing cutting-edge anti-drone systems designed to counter the growing threat of drone-based smuggling of arms, explosives, and narcotics.

He emphasised the Bhagwant Singh Mann-led Punjab government has been taking concrete steps to eradicate the drug menace, a crisis that previous governments failed to address. "For years, the drug trade has

destroyed countless lives in Punjab, while previous governments turned a blind eye. Today, we are taking concrete steps to eliminate this scourge from the state," said Aman Arora.

The anti-drone systems demonstrated by a private company featured detection, identification, and neutralisation capabilities, forming part of a broader strategy to fortify Punjab's second line of defence. These systems are expected to play a pivotal role in preventing illegal activities by targeting drones that cross the border, a growing concern for law enforcement.

The trial was conducted in real-time scenarios to assess the effectiveness of the technology in challenging border conditions.

Siddaramaiah's chopper rides cost taxpayers over Rs 31 crore

AGENCIES
BENGALURU

Karnataka Chief Minister Siddaramaiah's love for helicopter travel has raised eyebrows. His chopper bills revealed a staggering expense of Rs 12.65 crore in 2023-24 and Rs 19.35 crore in 2024-25, up to January 15, 2025.

What's more surprising is that he opted for helicopter rides to nearby locations like

Mysuru, which is only a 1.5-hour drive from Bengaluru.

As per documents tabled by the government in the house, Rs10.85 lakh was spent on a chopper ride to Mysuru, which takes 1.5 hours by road.

In a question asked by the JDS MLC TN Javarayigowda in the legislative council to provide details on the jets and flights booked by the CM, the CMO stated Siddaramaiah took chopper to



One such instance was a charter flight to Delhi, which cost Rs 44.40 lakh, whereas a business class ticket for a round trip would have cost approximately Rs 70,000.

even locations like Mysuru, which is barely 1.5 hr from Bengaluru.

The documents tabled by the government in the house show that Sidda-

ramaiah booked charter flights to cities like Delhi and Chennai, which are well-connected by commercial airlines.

One such instance was

a charter flight to Delhi, which cost Rs 44.40 lakh, whereas a business class ticket for a round trip would have cost approximately Rs 70,000.

BJP leader Rajeev Chandrasekhar took a dig at CM Siddaramaiah and argued that the state's priorities are misplaced, with allegedly ample funds allocated for the Chief Minister's private jets and land acquisition, while development, farmer

welfare, and infrastructure projects face funding shortages.

"Wah @siddaramaiahavare wah! @RahulGandhi's 'paradigm change' governance in full flow in Karnataka - No money for development, No money for farmers, No money for Infra but plenty of money for CMs pvt jets and plenty of land to be grabbed," Chandrasekhar said in a post on X.

ONE HELD IN KOHAT ENCLAVE DOUBLE MURDER

Ravi, a former attendant, was arrested in connection with the case.

TDG NETWORK
NEW DELHI

One person has been arrested in connection with the murder of an elderly couple in northwest Delhi. However, the main accused is still at large, police said on Wednesday. Mohinder Singh (70) was strangled and his wife Diljeet Kaur badgered to death in their house in the Kohat Enclave area.

Their decomposing bodies were found in two different rooms on Tuesday, with their night attendant, who joined a few days ago, missing.

“We have arrested Ravi from Uttam Nagar. He worked as an attendant for the family earlier and had quit three months ago, a police source said.

He is the same person who had appointed the other attendant just one week ago, the source said, adding that a manhunt is on to arrest the main accused

We have received important clues about his whereabouts and he will

MODUS OPERANDI

- Ravi had appointed the new attendant a week before the crime occurred.
- He had quit his job three months ago but was involved in the case. Police believe he played a role in the murder.
- Ravi is considered a key suspect, with a manhunt ongoing for the main accused, who is still at large.
- Police found an attempt had been made to break into a locker in the house.
- CCTV footage revealed that the new attendant (and possibly the main suspect) left the house with a backpack two days prior to the discovery of the bodies.
- Mohinder Singh had been unwell for several months and was being looked after by the attendants.



be arrested soon,” said the source.

The couple lived alone. They have two sons, who live nearby, and a daughter. They hadn’t been to their parents’ house for the last three days and did not know about their deaths until they were told by a driver, the police said.

On Tuesday, a 70-year-old man was strangled and his wife badgered to death in the Kohat En-

clave area of northwest Delhi, with their night attendant, who joined three days ago, missing, police said. The victims were identified as Mohinder Singh, a readymade garment shop owner, and his wife Diljeet Kaur, an officer said. The bodies of the couple, who lived alone, were found in a decomposing state. Police sources said that Mohinder Singh had not been keeping well for the

last few months and was being taken care of by an attendant, Ravi.

Three days ago, Ravi, a resident of Uttam Nagar, proposed his replacement as he was taking leave. The man, who the family had never met, was hired as a fill-in.

“Singh was first strangled with an oxygen pipe and his wife was hit with an iron rod on her head,” a police source said.

Another officer said that

a PCR call was received on Tuesday at Subhash Place Police Station regarding a foul smell emanating from a house.

“Upon reaching House No 317 in Kohat Enclave, police found the bodies of the elderly couple lying in separate rooms on the third floor of the building,” the officer said.

The state of decomposition suggested they had been dead for about two or three days, he said. Mohinder Singh was last seen alive around 8 pm on Sunday. Police also discovered that an attempt had been made to break open a locker inside the house. While talking with mediapersons, Charanpreet Singh, a son of the couple, said that on Tuesday, their driver rang the bell of his parent’s house, but no one responded. “We live nearby. The driver informed us that my parents were not opening the door. My wife went there and saw my father’s body lying on the bed. My mother’s body was found in another room,” Charanpreet Singh said.

ACB books Satyendar Jain for corruption case

TDG NETWORK
NEW DELHI

The Delhi government’s Anti-Corruption Branch (ACB) has registered a case against former PWD minister and senior AAP leader Satyendar Jain over alleged corruption in a Rs 571-crore CCTV project, an official said on Wednesday. The FIR was registered on Tuesday after obtaining prior sanction under Section 17A of the Prevention of Corruption Act from the competent authority, said Joint Commissioner of Police (ACB) Madhur Verma.

“Jain is accused of arbitrarily waiving liquidated damages worth Rs 16 crore imposed on Bharat Electronics Limited (BEL) for delays in installing CCTV cameras across Delhi. The waiver was allegedly granted after receiving a Rs 7-crore bribe,” Verma said in a statement.

Multiple complaints have suggested that the project was executed in a shoddy manner, with several cameras found to be non-functional at the time of hand over, he said. According to the statement, the case



ATISHI SAYS ‘WITCH-HUNT’; BJP CLAIMS RS 7 CRORE BRIBE

NEW DELHI: A political tussle has erupted after the Anti-Corruption Branch (ACB) of Delhi government registered an FIR against former PWD minister and senior AAP leader Satyendar Jain over alleged corruption in a Rs 571 crore CCTV project. While senior AAP leader Atishi called it a case of “political witch-hunt”, Delhi BJP president Virendra Sachdeva accused Jain of accepting a bribe of Rs 7 crore. In a post on X, former Delhi chief minister Atishi said, “When investigating agencies leave their work and start political witch-hunting on the orders of the boss...” She also shared a document highlighting a reply by the BJP-led Centre in Parliament, which claimed that out of the 193 cases filed by the Enforcement Directorate (ED) against political leaders in the past 10 years, only two resulted in convictions.

is based on a news report which claimed that a bribe of Rs 7 crore was arranged for Jain, who was the nodal

officer for the CCTV project, in exchange for waiving penalties imposed on BEL and its contractors.

Govt to test artificial rain, launch multi-area anti-pollution drive

TDG NETWORK
NEW DELHI

The Delhi government plans to conduct artificial rain trials, a move hinging on the success of the upcoming water sample tests, alongside a series of large-scale anti-pollution projects designed to target multiple pollution hotspots across Delhi-NCR to ensure a widespread, lasting impact. In an interview with PTI, Environment Minister Manjinder Singh Sirsa said the government is actively working on reducing pollution, with visible improvements already seen and efforts accelerating to ensure better air quality

than in previous years.

Sirsa said that the government is considering a plan for artificial rain, and a study is underway. “We have asked for detailed reports to determine whether the chemicals used in artificial rain could have any harmful effects on the human body or skin.

“Based on the report, we will conduct a small-scale test in an outer Delhi area, and water samples will be analysed to ensure there are no adverse effects. If the tests are successful and the samples show no side-effects, we will move forward with the plan.”

Govt will leave no stone unturned to address waterlogging: CM

TIKAM SHARMA
NEW DELHI

Delhi Chief Minister Rekha Gupta asserted on Wednesday that the new government in the national capital will leave no stone unturned to ensure de-silting of all the drains and prevent waterlogging issues during the rainy season. Accompanied by Lieutenant Governor V K Saxena, PWD Minister Parvesh Verma and senior officers of various departments, the chief minister inspected the de-silting work at the Sunehri Pul drain.

Complaining that no desilting was undertaken in the tenure of the previous Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) regime



Delhi LG Saxena along with CM Rekha Gupta, BJP MP Bansuri Swaraj and PWD Minister Parvesh Verma inspect the covering work of Sunehri Pul Drain, in New Delhi. ANI

in Delhi, Gupta said the new Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) government has to start from “zero” and complete the work.

She also said the condition of the water pipelines and leakage is such that almost half of the city is getting water through tankers. “There

Councillors create ruckus in MCD

TDG NETWORK
NEW DELHI

A ruckus broke out soon after the Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD) House proceedings began on Wednesday, with both AAP and BJP councillors chanting slogans and climbing onto tables.

Ruckus erupted in MCD House as BJP and AAP councillors protested against each other. Councillors tore agenda papers, climbed onto tables, and chanted slogans.

Congress councillors also held protests, carrying posters that read, ‘The Constitution is our identity; stop killing the Constitution.’ The members were seen waving torn documents and shouting slogans, disrupting the



proceedings of the House.

The House proceedings were called today to finalise the budget for 2024-25 and the next financial year, 2025-26. A day earlier, chaos had also erupted in the MCD house proceedings.

Earlier on March 6, AAP MLA Gopal Rai said that the party’s top leader discussed with the AAP MCD councillors how to fulfil their

role in MCD amid the new atmosphere.

“Today, we held a meeting with councillors. We spoke to them and took their review. We discussed how we could fulfil our role in MCD amid the new atmosphere. People have elected them. They will continue their work in their respective wards; discussions were held on that,” Rai said.

MCD to issue notices to 1,900 waste generator violators

TDG NETWORK
NEW DELHI

The Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD) will issue show-cause notices to around 1,900 bulk waste generators (BWGs) who have not registered on its 311 App despite multiple directives and a recent public notice outlining the deadline. In a statement on Wednesday, the MCD said that only 1,075 BWGs have registered so far.

The MCD has instructed all zonal deputy commissioners to take action against 1,900 non-compliant BWGs, which include commercial establishments, hotels, schools,



and places of worship, it said.

“This move aims to promote responsible waste management and ensure compliance with Rule 4 of the Solid Waste Management (SWM) Rules, 2016,” the statement read.

The MCD mentioned that BWGs can still register through the MCD

311 App and adhere to the SWM Rules, 2016. For further details, they can visit the official MCD website.

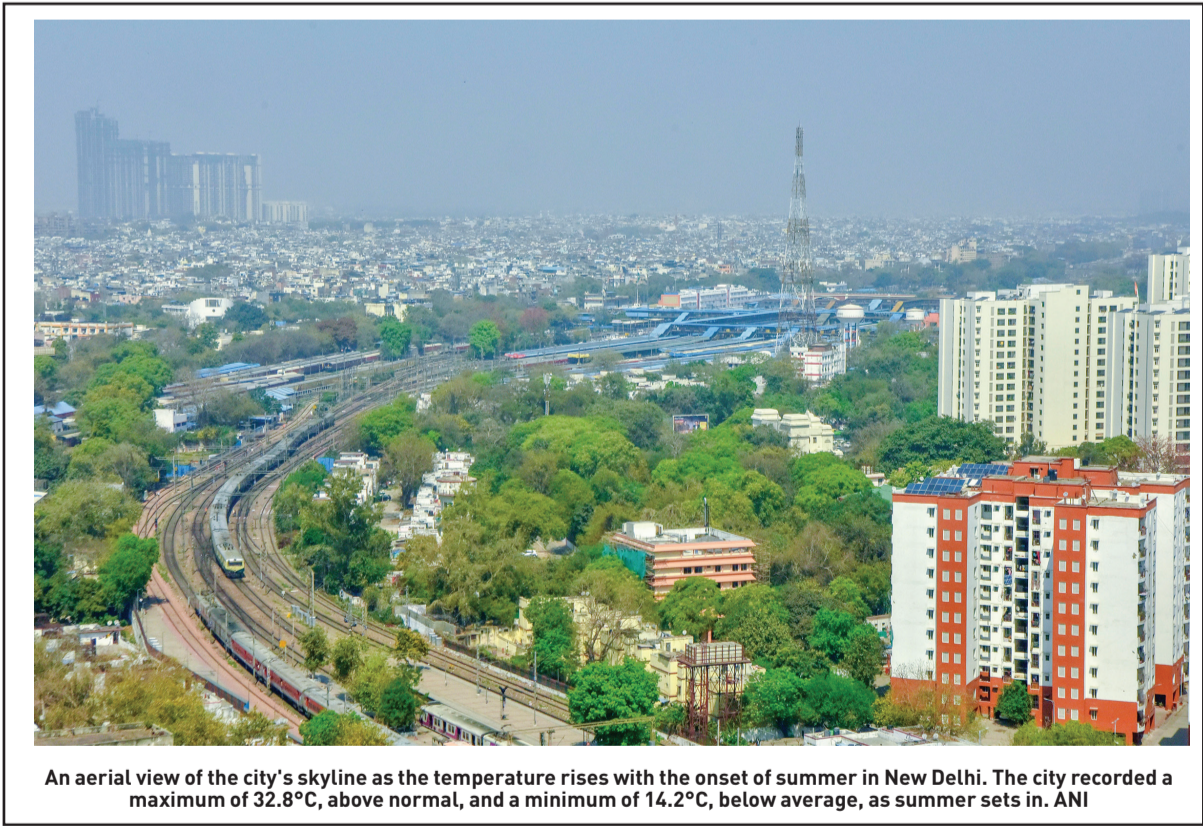
The department has urged all stakeholders to cooperate in fostering responsible waste management and maintaining a clean, healthy environment in Delhi, it added.

Woman's body found in pond

TDG NETWORK
NEW DELHI

A woman’s body was found floating in a Chhath Puja pond in Kanjhawala area of Delhi’s Rohini on Wednesday, an official said. According to police, a local resident alerted them about the body. Officers from Kanjhawala Police Station arrived at the scene. The deceased seems to be in her mid 30s.

No visible injury marks were found on the body, they said, adding that the crime and forensic teams have inspected the site. The body has been sent to Sanjay Gandhi Hospital for post-mortem. Efforts are underway to identify the deceased, they said.



An aerial view of the city’s skyline as the temperature rises with the onset of summer in New Delhi. The city recorded a maximum of 32.8°C, above normal, and a minimum of 14.2°C, below average, as summer sets in. ANI

Pankaj Singh reviews Phase 4 Metro expansion

TIKAM SHARMA
NEW DELHI

Delhi Transport Minister Dr. Pankaj Kumar Singh presided over a high-level review meeting to assess the progress of Phase 4 of the Delhi Metro expansion. The meeting aligned with the vision of Hon’ble Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi to enhance urban mobility and develop a sustainable transport infrastructure in the national capital. Senior officials from the Delhi Metro Rail Corporation (DMRC)



and the Transport Department attended the discussions. During the meeting, officials briefed the Minister

on the ongoing challenges and obstacles affecting the execution of Phase 4 of the Metro project. Key concerns

such as land acquisition issues, environmental clearances, and inter-agency coordination were deliberated upon in detail. Emphasizing the government’s commitment to the timely completion of the Metro expansion, Dr. Singh directed DMRC to meet its tree transplantation targets in strict compliance with environmental regulations. He reassured officials that all necessary support would be extended to facilitate pending approvals and administrative resolutions. Re-

affirming the government’s environmental commitments, the Minister assured that adequate land would be allocated for tree plantations, ensuring a balance between infrastructural development and ecological sustainability.

The discussions also focused on crucial infrastructural integrations, including the construction of double-decker flyovers along key high-priority corridors in collaboration with the Public Works Department (PWD).

Proclaimed offender nabbed in Rs 1 cr govt job scam

TDG NETWORK
NEW DELHI

A proclaimed offender has been arrested for his alleged involvement in a large-scale railway job scam, the Delhi Police said on Wednesday. The accused, Ranjan Paswan, was arrested from Tilak Bridge Railway Station. He has allegedly duped several people of over Rs 1 crore on the pretext of providing jobs in the Indian Railways, they said.

“Paswan, a resident of Mayur Vihar, had been absconding since the court declared him a proclaimed offender on January 14,” Deputy Commissioner of Police (Crime) Apoorva Gupta in a statement said. He was wanted

in multiple cases of cheating and FIRs were lodged against him at several police stations, including Sunlight Colony and Pandav Nagar, she said. According to the police, Paswan had worked as a driver with the National Agricultural Cooperative Marketing Federation of India (NAFED) in 2010. Exploiting his government job and official vehicle, he gained the trust of unsuspecting job seekers by posing as a well-connected official with links to railway authorities, they said. From the NAFED office in Ashram, New Delhi, he operated a fake recruitment racket, providing counterfeit medical certificates, training sessions, and appointment letters to make the scam appear authentic, the officer said.

NO SUBSTITUTE FOR BOOTS ON THE GROUND: CDS GEN CHAUHAN

TDG NETWORK
NEW DELHI

There is no substitute for “boots on the ground” as technology can only be an enabler which cannot replace people, Chief of Defence Staff Gen Anil Chauhan said on Wednesday, highlighting ways to deal with new-age conflicts. In an address at the Raisina Dialogue, India's flagship conference on geopolitics, Gen Chauhan described imparting appropriate training to military personnel to deal with hybrid warfare along with conventional war as a big challenge for the country.

For a multicultural, multi-religious and multi-ethnic country like India, disinformation and internal strife could be a major challenge, he observed.

Disinformation is a battle of minds or cognitive warfare and it could be a major challenge, he argued.

Gen Chauhan was speak-



ing at a session titled ‘Verses and Wars: Navigating Hybrid Theatres’.

The chief of defence staff also identified cyber space, disinformation, and economic coercion as essential elements of contemporary warfare.

I think the global security environment is marked by two challenges -- one is uncertainty and other is rapid amount of change, he said.

“The biggest challenge that we face is to train people for

hybrid kinds of wars as well as conventional war,” he said.

Elaborating on it, Gen Chauhan cited the rapid pace of technological advancement and said to train people on technology absorption is a challenge.

Delving into various national security challenges, the CDS said India has been facing the “asymmetric threat”. Though he did not name any adversary, his comments were seen as a

reference to Pakistan.

“We have always called it a sub conventional kind of a conflict. We invented this particular term much before the West invented terms like global war on terror or asymmetric warfare or fourth generation warfare or hyper conflicts,” he said.

“We have called it conflict below the threshold of conventional conflict and the lesson is that there is no substitute for boots on the ground,” he said.

Gen Chauhan said technology can only be an enabler but it cannot replace people. “I think that is very important.”

The CDS also talked about new-age combat zones.

“In conventional conflicts, you shape the battlefield with fire. Over here, we are looking at shaping the mindscape not the landscape. The battle of the mind becomes important as far as hybrid warfare is concerned,” he said.

EAM Jaishankar holds bilateral meetings

TDG NETWORK
NEW DELHI

External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar engaged in a series of high-level bilateral meetings on the sidelines of Raisina Dialogue 2025, discussing key areas of cooperation with counterparts from Liechtenstein, Cuba, Moldova, Norway, and Georgia.

During his meeting with Dominique Hasler, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Education & Sport of Liechtenstein, Jaishankar reviewed the progress of the Trade and Economic Partnership Agreement (TEPA), cooperation within the United Nations, and developments related to Ukraine.

“Discussed the progress of TEPA, our cooperation in the UN and the Ukraine situation,” Jaishankar posted on X (formerly Twitter).

On the sidelines of the conference, Jaishankar also met Cuban Deputy Prime Minister Eduardo Martínez Díaz, where they deliberated on development cooperation, particularly in healthcare and traditional medicine. “Raisina 2025 provided an



External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar meets Deputy Prime Minister of Cuba, Eduardo Martínez Díaz

opportunity to meet DPM Eduardo Martínez Díaz of Cuba. Discussed our development cooperation, especially in health and traditional medicine,” Jaishankar wrote on X.

Strengthening India-Moldova ties was also on the agenda, as Jaishankar met with Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Mihai Popsoi.

The two sides explored avenues to enhance bilateral and multilateral cooperation, culminating in the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on

agriculture. “A good meeting with Deputy PM & FM Mihai Popsoi of Moldova. Discussed the advancement of our bilateral and multilateral relations. Today's signing of the MoU on agriculture will further enhance our cooperation,” he posted.

Norway's Foreign Minister Espen Barth Eide also held discussions with Jaishankar, focusing on TEPA implementation, blue economy, and education collaboration, as well as Ukraine-related developments. “A warm meeting with FM Norway Espen

Barth Eide this afternoon. Discussed implementation of TEPA, blue economy & education cooperation and Ukraine-related developments,” Jaishankar wrote.

Additionally, Jaishankar met with Georgian Foreign Minister Maka Botchorishvili, where both sides explored ways to enhance political, trade, investment, tourism, and education cooperation. “Nice to meet FM Maka Botchorishvili on the sidelines of #Raisina2025. Explored opportunities for advancing our political, trade, investment, tourism and education cooperation,” he posted.

Upon meeting Slovakia Foreign Minister Juraj Blahar, Jaishankar shared on X: “Glad to meet FM Slovakia Juraj Blahar this evening. Spoke about trade, investment, mobility, education, infrastructure and culture. Appreciate receiving a Slovak translation of the Upanishad.”

Raisina Dialogue, India's premier conference on geopolitics and geo-economics, is organised by the Ministry of External Affairs.

RAISINA WRAP-UP



Norway Foreign Affairs Minister Espen Barth Eide



Slovakia Foreign Affairs Minister Juraj Blahar



Nepal Foreign Minister Dr. Arzu Rana Deuba in a group picture with Maldives Foreign Minister Abdulla Khaleel and others



Liechtenstein Foreign Affairs Minister Dominique Hasler

India believes in an inclusive, just order: Pabitra Margherita

TDG NETWORK
NEW DELHI

Union Minister of State for External Affairs, Pabitra Margherita highlighted India's willingness to pursue a “just and inclusive world order,” by forging strong partnerships especially with the Latin American and Caribbean countries (LAC).

“We in India believe that in order to build an inclusive and just order, it is imperative to forge strong partnerships. With the developing world. So naturally, countries of Latin America and the Caribbean, that is LAC, occupy a very significant position in our global outreach efforts,” the Union Minister of State said during his address at the Raisina Dialogue.

“We share similar aspirations, support a multipolar world order that caters to the needs of the global South. India has been proactively engaging with this dynamic region,” he said, just before the commencement of the Raisina Dialogue panel titled “Destiny or Destination: Culture, Connectivity and Tourism.”

Highlighting India's commitment to the LAC region, he mentioned Prime Min-



ister Narendra Modi visiting Guayana recently and attending the India-CARICOM summit, where he held discussions with the country's president, Irfaan Ali, who was also the host of the summit.

Our ties were infused with a renewed vigour last year when the Prime Minister Narendra Modi visit Guayana for the second India-CARICOM summit. He proposed cooperation in various sectors, including capacity building, agriculture and food security, renewable energy and climate change, innovation, technology and trade, among others,” the MoS said.

Mentioning his own travels to various countries such as Uruguay, Bahamas, Barbados, and Nicaragua, he mentioned the potential for boosting economic cooperation.

Cities are centres of growth, innovation: Amitabh Kant

TDG NETWORK
NEW DELHI

The former CEO of NITI Aayog and G20 Sherpa, Amitabh Kant highlighted the importance of building sustainable cities to urbanise the country, highlighting such projects as being centres of “growth and innovation,” while speaking at the Raisina dialogue being held in New Delhi on Wednesday.

“It's important to realise that cities are centres of growth, the centres of innovation. The centres of great prosperity, therefore if India is going to see 500 million people getting into the process of urbanisation in the next 5 decades, that means the challenge for India is to create two Americas in the next 5 decades. India will have to create a new Chicago every 5 years,” Kant said during a panel discussion on “Destiny or Destination: Culture, Connectivity and Tourism”

“You have to revitalise existing cities just to give you a perspective, the GDP of Mumbai today is more than the GDP of 18 Indian states, and the GDP of one city in UP, that's Gautam Buddha Nagar, Noida, and Greater Noida is 12 times more than the second biggest city of UP,



that's Kanpur. 12 times more. That's the kind of growth, that's the kind of GDP, that's the kind of innovation, that's the kind of job creation which new cities will create,” Kant added.

Mohamed Nasheed, former president of Maldives and currently secretary general of Climate Vulnerable Forum and V20 highlighted how countries only prosper if they focus on sustainability.

“I think firstly what we should all understand and believe is, it's not the little Maldives that is being impacted by climate change, (it is) everyone. What happens to the Maldives happens twice in size in bigger countries. So every country is vulnerable to climate change. Looking after nature must be developed countries, that is the idea of prosperity,” Nasheed said during the discussion.

Bill Gates praises India's innovation, sustainability at Future Forward Forum

TDG NETWORK
NEW DELHI

Bill Gates, Chair and Board Member of the Gates Foundation, praised India's transformative role in global innovation, health, and sustainability during his keynote address at the Future Forward forum held today at the PM Sangrahalaya, Teen Murti, New Delhi. The event, hosted by the Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) in collaboration with the Gates Foundation and the Women's Collective Forum, brought together global industry leaders, policymakers, and investors to explore India's growing influence in solving global challenges.

Gates highlighted India's advancements in affordable healthcare, AI-powered diagnostics, and digital public infrastructure, emphasizing that India is not only building solutions for itself but



also creating innovations with the potential to transform global health and development. “India is not just building for itself, it is creating solutions that have the potential to transform global health and development,” Gates said. He stressed the need to scale these solutions to address pressing challenges in emerging economies worldwide.

During the forum, Smriti Zubin Irani, Chairperson of

the Alliance for Global Good Gender Equity and Equality, commended Gates and the Gates Foundation for their impactful investments in social innovation, noting that such investments could “reshape societies.” She also highlighted India's success in developing low-cost, tech-enabled solutions addressing critical global issues such as health, nutrition, and food security.

Mr. Chandrajit Banerjee,

Director General of CII, reinforced India's leadership in digital public infrastructure, referring to it as a “blueprint for the Global South.” Banerjee described these technological breakthroughs as not only beneficial for India but as key contributions to shaping global solutions. “A Global Vision with Local Roots,” he said, pointing to India's pioneering role in driving scalable and sustainable innovations.

Sanjiv Puri, President of CII and Chairman & Managing Director of ITC Ltd., also addressed the forum, underscoring India's achievements in health programs like Ayushman Bharat, digital financial inclusion, and AI-powered agricultural solutions.

Puri emphasized that these initiatives show the power of aligning policy and technology to create sustainable solutions that can serve as global benchmarks.

Cabinet approves revised national programme for dairy development

TDG NETWORK
NEW DELHI

The Union Cabinet, chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, on Wednesday approved the Revised National Program for Dairy Development (NPDD), an official statement said.

The Revised NPDD, a Central Sector Scheme, has been enhanced with an additional Rs1000 crore, bringing the total budget to Rs 2790 crore for the 15th Finance Commission cycle (2021-22 to 2025-26).

This initiative focuses on modernizing and expanding dairy infrastructure, ensuring the sector's sustained growth and productivity, it said.

The revised NPDD will impetus the dairy sector by creating infrastructure for milk procurement, processing capacity, and better quality control.

It is intended to help farmers gain better access to markets, ensure better pricing through value addition, and improve the efficiency of the supply chain, leading to higher incomes and greater rural development.

The scheme consists of two key components: Component A is dedicated to improving essential dairy infrastructure, such as milk chilling plants, advanced milk testing laboratories, and certification systems.

It also supports the formation of new village dairy cooperative societies and strengthens milk procurement and processing in the North Eastern Region (NER), hilly regions, and Union Territories (UTs), especially in remote and backward areas. As per the statement, Component A also supports the formation of 2 Milk Producer Companies (MPCs) with dedicated grant support.

Component B, known as “Dairy through Cooperatives (DTC),” will continue to foster dairy development through cooperation with the Government of Japan and the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), as per the agreements signed.

The release said this component focuses on the sustainable development of dairy cooperatives and improving production, processing, and marketing infrastructure in the nine States (Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Punjab, Rajasthan, Telangana, Uttarakhand, Uttar Pradesh, and West Bengal). The implementation of NPDD has made a huge socio-economic impact. It has already benefitted over 18.74 lakh farmers, created over 30,000 direct and indirect jobs, and increased milk procurement capacity by an additional 100.95 lakh litres per day. The NPDD has also

supported the promotion of cutting-edge technology for better milk testing and quality control.

Over 51,777 village-level milk testing laboratories have been strengthened, while 5,123 bulk milk coolers with a combined capacity of 123.33 lakh litres have been installed. In addition, 169 labs have been upgraded with Fourier Transform Infrared (FTIR) milk analysers, and 232 dairy plants now have advanced systems for detecting adulteration, as per the statement. It further added that the Revised NPDD is expected to establish 10,000 new Dairy Cooperative Societies, processing in the NER, and the formation of 2 Milk Producer Companies (MPCs) with dedicated grant support in addition to the ongoing projects of NPDD, to generate an additional 3.2 lakh direct and indirect employment opportunities.

INDIA'S LEADERSHIP IN AI WILL DRIVE INNOVATION WORLDWIDE, SAYS BILL GATES

Gates said that AI will accelerate advancements in mRNA vaccines, and agricultural innovation.

TDG NETWORK
NEW DELHI

Microsoft's former CEO Bill Gates on Wednesday hailed India's achievements in the field of artificial intelligence (AI), adding that the country's leadership in AI will drive innovation worldwide. Addressing an event "Future Forward" -- an action-driven forum that brings together global industry leaders, policymakers, investors, and changemakers to drive real-world collaboration and impact, the Gates Foundation Chairman said, "Similar to how DPI (Digital Public Infrastructure) has garnered global attention, India's leadership in AI will drive innovation worldwide."

Gates said that he's spoken to Union Minister of Electronics and Information Technology Ashwini Vaishnaw to ensure the participation of India in the upcoming AI Summit to benefit countries, especially from the Global South. "I recently spoke with the Minister of Electronics and Information Technol-

TO SUM UP

■ Gates hails India's AI leadership :

He said India's AI progress will drive global innovation, like its Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI).

■ Push for AI Summit participation:


Gates urged India's involvement in the AI Summit to benefit the Global South.

■ AI to boost health and agriculture:

AI will advance mRNA vaccines, and agriculture, and fight malnutrition with targeted interventions.

■ India's vaccine edge:


Gates praised India's role in making affordable, high-quality vaccines through Serum Institute and Bharat Biotech.



Chair of the Board of Trustees at the Gates Foundation Bill Gates addresses the audience during the 'Future Forward: Shaping Global Futures with Indian Innovations' event at Prime Ministers' Museum & Library, in New Delhi on Wednesday. ANI

PM Modi, Bill Gates discuss tech, innovation

Prime Minister Narendra Modi held an "excellent meeting" with Bill Gates on Wednesday, discussing technology, innovation, and sustainability. They also talked about India's development, the path to Viksit Bharat 2047, and advancements in health, agriculture, and AI. External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar also met Gates on the sidelines of the Raisina Dialogue to discuss development challenges and innovation.



VietJet launches direct flights from India to Vietnam

TDG NETWORK
HYDERABAD

Hyderabad and Ho Chi Minh will now be directly connected via VietJet flight, reducing the time needed to fly between the Vietnamese city and the Indian city.

Other airlines operating on this route have connected flights with a layover.

The inaugural flight took off amid much excitement in the presence of senior officials from GMR Hyderabad International Airport Ltd (GHIAL), VietJet, and other key stakeholders.

The new service will operate twice a week on Tuesday and Saturday, with a flight time of about 4 hours and 35 minutes.

"This new route marks a significant milestone in strengthening air connec-

tivity between India and Vietnam, fostering tourism, business collaborations, and regional accessibility," Hyderabad Airport said in a statement.

Pradeep Panicker, CEO of GMR Hyderabad International Airport Ltd, said this new route will play a pivotal role in fostering tourism and trade between Hyderabad and international destinations.

"At GMR Hyderabad In-

ternational Airport, we are committed to transforming the airport into a world-class global hub by enhancing infrastructure, integrating cutting-edge technology, and fostering strategic partnerships. This development marks another step in our vision to position Hyderabad as a premier gateway for international travel, business and commerce," Panicker said.

"We are pleased to an-

nounce the launch of VietJet's direct service to Ho Chi Minh City, further strengthening Hyderabad's global presence," Panicker added.

VietJet Vice President Do Xuan Quang stated, "India is a key market for VietJet, and we are thrilled to launch this direct route between Hyderabad and Ho Chi Minh City. Hyderabad has been recognized as India's most livable city for six consecutive years and is also the country's fastest-growing city." "With RGIA serving as a major gateway to South India, this new route will enhance convenience for travellers while strengthening cultural, tourism, and economic ties between the two regions. Beyond offering affordable flights, VietJet takes pride in its extensive international network.

Cabinet approves Namrup Fertiliser Plant, BHIM-UPI incentive scheme

TDG NETWORK
NEW DELHI

The Union Cabinet, chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, on Wednesday, approved two key proposals: the establishment of a new brownfield ammonia-urea plant in Namrup, Assam, and an incentive scheme for promoting low-value BHIM-UPI transactions.

On February 1, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman proposed setting up a fertiliser plant in Namrup, Assam, in her Budget 2025 speech. The new plant will produce 12.7 lakh metric tonnes of urea annually and

Union Minister for Electronics and Information Technology Ashwini Vaishnaw briefs media on Cabinet Decisions, in New Delhi on Wednesday. ANI

will be built within the existing premises of Brahmaputra Valley Fertilizer Corporation Limited (BVFCL).

Under the New Investment Policy, 2012, the fer-

tiliser plant will have an estimated total project cost of Rs 10,601.40 crore and a Debt-Equity ratio of 70:30 through a Joint Venture (JV). Tentatively, the plant will be commissioned in 48 months.

Additionally, the Cabinet also approved National Fertilizers Limited (NFL)'s equity participation of 18 per cent by relaxing the limits prescribed in Department of Public Enterprises (DPE) guidelines and establishing an Inter-Ministerial Committee (IMC) to oversee the process of setting up the Namrup-IV Fertilizer Plant.

Gold touches new high for third consecutive day

TDG NETWORK
NEW DELHI

Gold prices inched higher on Wednesday, climbing to a new high. According to publicly available data, international gold prices stayed above the physiologically relevant USD 3,000 per ounce mark. At the time of filing this report, gold was being traded at USD 3,040 per ounce an all-time high. "... rising Middle East tensions and trade uncertainties due to U.S. President Donald Trump's tariff plans fueled demand for the safe-haven asset," said Manav Modi, Senior Analyst, Commodity Research at Motilal Oswal Financial Services.

Stock indices soar for third day after weeks of volatility

TDG NETWORK
NEW DELHI

Indian stock indices extended their gains for the third day. At the day's closing, Sensex and Nifty were 0.2 per cent up each.

Buying at lower levels seemed to have supported the indices, that were otherwise volatile due to Trump tariff concerns.

"The domestic market continued its positive momentum, as part of the recent correction was justified by valuation. The sustainability of the relief rally depends on a revival in fundamentals," said Vinod Nair, Head of Research, Geojit Financial Services.

Urban Cooperative Banks must be mindful of trust reposed by depositors: RBI

TDG NETWORK
MUMBAI

RBI Governor Sanjay Malhotra said urban cooperative banks (UCBs) need to be mindful of their responsibilities, particularly the trust reposed on them by depositors.

The Governor on Wednesday held a meeting with the Chairmen, Managing Director and Chief Executive Officers of select Urban Cooperative Banks (UCBs) across all Tiers operating in different parts of the country.

He stressed the importance of maintaining high

AI attacks made over 52% companies see steep losses in 2024: Report

TDG NETWORK
NEW DELHI

The advent of Artificial Intelligence (AI) has amplified fraud activities with over 52 per cent of companies in India seeing an increase in losses from fraud attacks in the past year, according to the data and technology firm Experian.

The report observes that about 85 per cent of businesses in India agree that because of the GenAI individual fraudsters have become highly organised fraud syndicates.

The report by the firm says that GenAI has also enabled the "industrialisation of fraud," where fraudsters create and deploy fake identities, deepfakes, and other fraud tactics on a large scale.

As a result, 50 per cent of businesses struggle to de-

tect the involvement of GenAI in fraud attacks and to assess its impact on losses.

To counter this, businesses must adopt advanced AI-driven fraud prevention tools, integrate multiple security solutions, and adopt smarter fraud orchestration strategies--ensuring better detection, stronger security, and reduced costs.

According to the report, in India, 77 per cent of fraud decision-makers acknowledge that partnering with external entities is essential for effective fraud prevention. Additionally, 61 per cent agree that sharing fraud data through a consortium is an effective strategy to identify emerging fraud trends.

Notably, 74 per cent of Indian businesses have reported a positive return on investment from participat-

ing in such consortia, highlighting the benefits of collaborative efforts.

The report highlights that about 48 Indian companies face challenges in implementing ML models due to insufficient training data, and 60 per cent report a lack of quality data.

According to Shail Deep, Chief Operating Officer (COO), Experian EMEA & APAC, as we look ahead, the integration of ML-based fraud prevention is a necessity for businesses to fight back against today's sophisticated fraud threat.

"Our research indicates that 85 per cent of Fraud experts believe the fraud landscape has been dramatically changed by Generative AI. As a result, over 52 per cent have seen an increase in losses from fraud attacks in the past year," she added.

Govt push will lead to municipal bond issuances to exceed Rs 1,500 crore: ICRA

TDG NETWORK
NEW DELHI

Municipal bond issuances in India are expected to raise more than Rs 1,500 crore in the Financial Year (FY) 2025-FY2026, primarily driven by the Government's push, according to a report by ICRA.

The report added that the share of Green/pooled bonds is also likely to increase, led by a growing focus on Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) initiatives and enhancement in the credit profile of Urban Local Bodies (ULBs).

The municipal bond market in India has gained significant traction in recent years, especially since FY2018, largely due to fiscal incentives introduced by the Government of India (GoI).

Since FY2018, the total amount raised in municipal bonds has exceeded Rs 2,600 crore, a substantial increase compared to the period between FY1998-FY2005 when less than Rs 1,000 crore was raised.

The growth in the Indian municipal bond market can largely be attributed to measures taken by the Government and regulators.

The municipal bond market in India has gained significant traction in recent years, especially since FY2018, largely due to fiscal incentives introduced by the Government of India.

In 2015, the Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) issued the "Issue and Listing of Debt Securities by Municipalities" Regulations, which defined the status of municipal bonds and garnered investor interest.

Furthermore, in FY2018, the GoI initiated an incentive scheme, offering approximately Rs 13 crore for every Rs 100 crore bond issuance, providing a strong impetus for Urban Local Bodies (ULBs) to use this financing mode.

The report added that despite the positive growth, there are several key challenges that continue to affect the municipal

bond market.

These include ULBs' high dependence on government grants, lack of adequate and timely financial disclosures, illiquidity, the absence of a secondary market for bonds, high compliance requirements, and relatively weak credit quality of ULBs in accessing capital markets.

All municipal bond issuances since FY2018 have been supported by strong structured payment mechanisms.

These mechanisms have been instrumental in enhancing the credit ratings of the bonds, with all issuances receiving an AA rating, despite the diverse credit profiles of the underlying issuer ULBs.

Moving forward, most of the upcoming issuances are expected to follow similar structures and terms, the report added.

Since FY2018, approximately 17 municipal bonds worth about Rs 2,600 crore have been issued, with an average size of Rs 150 crore, as per the report.

ICRA also highlights that persistent challenges, such as improving the ULBs' own credit quality and addressing the lack of adequate disclosure and information systems,

MeitY and DFI partner to launch drone innovation challenge

TDG NETWORK
MUMBAI

The Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY), in collaboration with the Drone Federation India (DFI), launched NIDAR--the National Innovation Challenge for Drone Application and Research--under the SwaYaan initiative.

The launch event was held at Electronics Niketan, MeitY, in the presence of government officials, industry experts, and students nation-

wide through video conferencing, a release added.

The challenge was formally inaugurated by S. Krishnan, Secretary, MeitY; Prof T G Sitharam, Chairman, AICTE; and Smit Shah, President, Drone Federation India (DFI), who unveiled the concept video, launched the competition website (<https://nidar.org.in>), and released the NIDAR Poster and Official Rulebook.

NIDAR is being organised under MeitY's SwaYaan Initiative, which aims to train as

many professionals as possible in the UAS sector by 2027 through 1500+ nationwide activities encompassing five major technical areas, the release added.

This initiative is part of the Government of India's vision to make India a global drone hub by 2030. The Drone Federation India (DFI), a premier industry body representing 550+ drone companies and 5500+ drone pilots nationwide, will support participating students by providing mentorship and industry

exposure.

Over 100 student teams from higher education colleges and technical institutions are expected to participate

in this competition, where teams will build two collaborative autonomous drones for solving object detection and autonomous delivery.

This year's problem statements are focused on disaster management for building "scout & delivery drones" and precision agriculture for building "scan & spray drones."

This year, NIDAR offers a total prize pool of Rs 40 lakhs in cash prizes and opportunities for students to participate in startup incubation programs, obtain cloud credits, and receive internship opportunities to work in India's best drone companies.

During the launch, Shri Krishnan emphasized the pivotal role of drones in transforming various sectors such as agriculture, disaster management, logistics, healthcare, and infrastructure and the need for taking the NIDAR program at a larger scale to contribute to India's vision of becoming a global drone hub by 2030.

Smit Shah, president of DFI, said that India's drone ecosystem is rapidly evolving, with homegrown innovations transforming

industries and addressing real-world challenges.

He added the recent floods in Vijayawada highlighted the potential of drones as they were used to deliver essential supplies to stranded communities, demonstrating their life-saving applications.

Shah stated that initiatives like the Nammo Drone Didi scheme are empowering rural women entrepreneurs by providing them with drone training and business opportunities, further strengthening India's drone ecosystem.

PM MODI'S STATESMANSHIP AND RESURGENT BHARAT

OPINION

RAGHAVENDRA P. TIWARI



Chanakya Niti says: प्रजासुखे सुखं राज्ञः प्रजानां च हितं हितम्। नात्मप्रियं हितं राज्ञः प्रजानां तु प्रियं हितम्। meaning that the happiness and welfare of people should be the King's happiness. It is king's utmost duty to look after progress and welfare of people of his country. After independence, India was in dire need of a leader who would be able to take tough decisions, initiate systemic reforms into the governance architecture for ensuring all-round development, creating inclusive society, and most importantly, fighting to safeguard territorial integrity, alongside creating brand image of Bharat. Rise of Narendra Modi in the political landscape of India is a turning point to fill this void. PM Modi has implemented several high impact initiatives for holistic development of Bharat. As a leader of the largest democracy, he is working relentlessly for creating inclusive society from digital, economic, financial, socio-cultural and environmental standpoint. Ideated by PM Modi, Atma Nirbhar Bharat, pillared at economy, infrastructure, system, vibrant demography and demand, has streamlined and powered the growth engine. His governance model is a blend of

soft and hard powers for improving living standard of Indians and creating a new image of India, globally. He leaves no stone unturned to protect the territorial integrity of nation, surgical strike is the case in point. Launched in 2015, Digital India is transforming country into a digitally empowered society, digital governance and digital economy. It has considerably improved the lives of citizens though digital delivery of services, economy and employment. It is redefining the socio-economic landscape, fostering a brighter and better-connected future for all. Indian Council for Research on International Economic Relations stated that India is third in terms of digitalisation of the economy. National Mission called Pradhan Mantri Jan-Dhan Yojana, initiated in August, 2014, is ensuring financial inclusion and has already benefitted 36.63 crores citizens. Direct Bank Transfer scheme, has considerably reduced leakages, increased efficiency, transparency and has empowered people. PM Modi's masterstrokes are GST and demonetization. Fructifying 'One Nation, One Tax' concept, GST has helped eliminate 'tax on tax', tax evasion, ensured ease of doing business, increased revenue collection and transparent tax regime, alongside reducing corruption. Christine Lagarde, MD of IMF says, GST will help create jobs and promote domestic manufacturing. Demonetization, has stripped black money from the economy, compelled people to pay taxes on the unaccounted cash, promoted cashless

economy, eliminated fake currency and dodgy funds and has curtailed funding of terrorism and drug trafficking. Liberalised foreign direct investment policies facilitated foreign investment. Designed to transform India into a global hub for design and manufacturing, PM Modi's "Make in India" initiative is central to nation-building efforts. This is facilitating investment, developing a robust manufacturing sector, encouraging innovation and developing world-class infrastructure and improving ease of doing business, creating job opportunities and firming up India's positions in the global manufacturing landscape. Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana, the world's largest government funded health insurance and assurance scheme is providing a cover of Rs. 5 lakhs per family per year for cashless access to health care services to twelve crore Indians. Ayushman Bharat Digital Mission launched in 2021 has transformed the healthcare management of over 73 crore Indians within three years. Swachh Bharat Mission has made significant strides in creating clean and hygienic environment. It has positively impacted public health, safety and dignity of women, promoted behavioural change and improved the overall quality of life in the countryside. Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana - Gramin and Rural have made unprecedented progress in transforming the living standards of millions of rural families by providing safe and secure housing. Water supply & electricity connections facility is reducing the health risks associated with unsafe water and irregular power supplies. Efficient solid & liquid waste management is ensuring better health and hygiene for citizens. Pradhan Mantri MUDRA Yojana, launched in 2015, played a pivotal role in em-

powering non-corporate, non-farm small and micro enterprises with loans up to Rs 10 lakh. Smart cities and smart villages scheme have transformed the urban and rural living standards by providing internet access, clean water, sanitation, and low-carbon energy ensuring healthy living. Citizen-centric smart city project utilizes both human and technological resources and provides solutions to specific problems, namely, inefficient waste management system, lack of civic amenities, traffic and congestion, etc. Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana envisions to distribute 50 million LPG connections to women of below poverty line families, 12,68,36,143 being already distributed. India is meeting commitments made in COPs with respect to climate change mitigation, and taking necessary steps to achieve net-zero emission. PM Modi's biggest gift to the nation is learner and Bharat-centric NEP-2020 for transforming education sector. The policy provides flexible learning options and emphasises on experiential learning, critical thinking, creativity, skill-development, entrepreneurship and ensures holistic development. It stresses on integrating Indian Knowledge System and Universal Human Values in the curricula and learning in mother tongue/regional languages. India's economic footprint has increased significantly during PM Modi's tenure. He built a formidable reputation as an efficient business-friendly administrator. S&P Global Ratings chief economist opined that India is the fastest growing major global economy. It has surpassed U.K. to occupy 5th place and is expected to overtake Japan and Germany to become third by 2027. India's growth is outpacing other major economies, her banks are strong, and the government's finances are stable despite pandemic.

India now has over 100 Unicorns worth over \$1 billion and ranks third globally after US and China. The soaring stock markets also have a trickle-down effect on the wealth of the middle class. As of 2024, India is the fourth largest stock market in the world. Jammu and Kashmir was infested with separatist insurgency for over three decades with halted social life, development and forceful and painful mass exodus of Kashmiri Pandits. Businesses and education sectors suffered immensely due to frequent strike calls, stone pelting and violence. Repealing of Article 370 including 35A has helped restore administrative control and normalcy considerably, with increasing foothold of domestic and foreign tourists. Investment projects worth nearly Rs. 25 thousand crores have been executed and over Rs. 80 thousand crores are in store. Citizenship Amendment Act is helping genuine citizens to have certificates and in confiscating foreign nationals. India became the first nation to soft land rocket near the Moon's South Pole. PM Modi launched an OSAT facility in Sanand and semiconductor fabrication facility at Dholera, Gujarat, and OSAT facility at Morigaon, Assam to boost India's position as a semiconductor powerhouse. India became the world's second-largest mobile phone manufacturer. India envisions to emerge as a global leader in respect of cutting-edge technologies like AI, quantum computing and space exploration. Anusandhan National Research Foundation is ensuring the access of quality research facilities in hub & spoke model. Focus of funding is on translational research and for strengthening Vocal for Local theme. Construction of Ram Mandir at Ayodhya, rebuilt of Kashi Vishwanath Temple and corridor, new Mahakaal

corridor, Kashi-Tamil Sangam and successful Mahakumbh at Prayagraj have added flavour and fervour to the cultural connect and spiritual landscape. Ending of triple talak has helped create a liberal society. COVID management, Vaccine distribution, scrapping of over 2000 rules and laws and replacement of IPC, CrPC and Indian Evidence Act with Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita, and Bharatiya Sakshya Adhiniyam are other landmark achievements of Modi regime. Through LiFE Style for Environment, Ek Ped Maa ke Naam and cleanliness drive, PM Modi's endeavour is to reconnect Indians with nature, for sustainability of both. The key elements of Modi's foreign policy include Act East policy, Neighbourhood first policy, Indian Ocean Outreach, Project Mausam, Cooperation with Pacific Islands, Fast-track Diplomacy, Para Diplomacy and strategic partnership with clear focus on nation first. India has successfully hosted G-20 summits. For making "Viksit Bharat by 2047" Modi government has laid a comprehensive plan aimed at empowering citizens through core elements of social welfare, manufacturing, inclusive economic pathways, quality inclusive education, skill development & entrepreneurship, health services, road, rail and air network, and restoration of basic traits of Bharatiya culture. India, under PM Modi, is poised to foster inclusive growth, encourage cutting-edge research and innovation and position itself at the forefront of technological advancements. Ultimate mission of PM Modi is to develop India as a confident, self-reliant and strong nation grounded in cultural moorings for serving humanity. Views are personal Raghavendra P. Tiwari, Vice Chancellor, Central University of Punjab, Bathinda

PERSPECTIVE RADICALISED

TULSI SPEAKS ON BANGLADESH, GIVES YUNUS A REALITY CHECK

US Director of National Intelligence (DNI), Tulsi Gabbard was categorical about Bangladesh during a media interview she gave while visiting India. She spoke of how the "long-time unfortunate persecution, killing, and abuse of religious minorities like Hindus, Buddhists, Christians, and others has been a major area of concern" for the United States. This was validation for the hundreds of thousands of Bangladeshi minorities, particularly Hindus, who have experienced the worst kind of violence unleashed against them by radical jihadi elements, with most of them belonging to the radical Jamaa-e-Islami, which has been ruling Bangladesh's streets ever since 5 August 2024, when Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina was forced to flee. It has been sheer mayhem in the last seven-odd months, where Hindus have faced the worst kind of persecution—from being murdered, raped, to being strung up on poles and tortured to death, their houses burnt to ashes, to their gods and temples razed to the ground. The only term that can be used for such jihadi "students", who have been roaming Bangladesh's streets and meting out instant justice, is death squad. And it is not just the minorities, Awami League leaders and cadre are also being hounded and killed, with their only crime being they belong to Sheikh Hasina's party. Moreover, when power goes to the radicals, they try to impose their ideology on society as a whole, so Bangladesh is witnessing an extreme form of moral policing as radical groups multiply and tighten their grip on the country. Bangladesh is descending into complete chaos, with Muhammad Yuns coming across as losing control of the situation, allowing the jihadis a free pass. At the most he is a figurehead. Just because he won a Nobel Prize does not make him the best person to govern Bangladesh. He was installed in his position because he is close to a particular section of the American political landscape, the reason why he got the Nobel Prize. Leaving that aside, the duty of the so-called caretaker of Bangladesh is to take care of the country, without any discrimination—a duty in which he has failed.



Yunus and the people surrounding him have been trying to paint all the pogrom and mayhem as Indian propaganda, as exaggeration, apart from stating that whatever little bit of violence has taken place is political in nature and not communal—as if that justifies the killing. But in reality, he is speaking untruths. Hindus are being targeted not just because they were seen as largely Awami supporters, but also because of their religion. Bangladesh has had a long history of persecuting Hindus, the reason why from around 30% at the time of Partition in 1947, when East Pakistan took birth, the population has dwindled to around 7-8%. Persecution took place even when Hasina was Prime Minister, it was just that she was willing to pay heed to India's concerns and take better care of the minorities. Yunus does not even pretend to do that, allowing the country to slide into complete lawlessness. Reacting to Gabbard's statement, Yunus said that his country was not going the ISIS way and that Bangladesh was inclusive and moderate—which is anything but the truth. The big mistake he has made is that he has aligned himself with a particular shade of western politics—specifically, the left-liberal sort, which has turned a blind eye to the happenings in Bangladesh ever since he has been installed as caretaker of the interim government. But times have changed, with senior US government personnel more willing to pay heed to other voices too. If he does not realise that, then all his boast about being an international player—he has been saying that—will remain just that, a boast. While no one is denying that Yunus is internationally connected, but he also needs to factor in India's views about him and his country. By trying to play the Pakistani tune, or by aligning himself with Pakistan, if he tries to bypass India's concerns, then he is making a mistake. He is forgetting that his is a puny country, surrounded by India on three sides and with an economy the size of one of India's larger states. He also seems to be forgetting that he is an unelected leader, who does not have the constitutional standing to be called even a head of government. Bangladesh needs a democratically elected government, so Yunus, instead of holding on to power with the help of the jihadis, should quickly facilitate the holding of elections and allow a democratic government to be installed. Meanwhile, he should stop acting as the front man of the jihadis and instead let the minorities live in peace.

JOYEETA BASU

Commodifying ranking & accreditation in higher education

OPINION

DR. SHADAB AHMED



Education has always remained the path to evolution and amelioration of society as a whole. In the contemporary competitive Indian job sector, education is what structures a student's career colossally. Parents nurture the silent desire to send their progeny to the best institutes, colleges and universities, aspiring to secure their bright future ambitiously. Hence, the reputation of a college, institute or university effectively determines the professional standing, code

of conduct, ethics and quality of education, objective and outcome of education, access to cross-disciplinary and inter-disciplinary internationalization, research opportunities, employment and career prospects. It is an unuttered act of faith in the education structure and quality. Education, thus, becomes priceless to acquire and attain. Therefore, the need arose to rank and accredit the colleges and universities across various spectrums of Indian higher education based on quality, competency, infrastructure, research, resource utilization, diversity and gender equality. But what if Rankings & Accreditations can be priced? What should the poor ambitious parent do if the very benchmark and standards that determines the quality and critical

competency of an institution/university is flawed and splintered? The recent National Assessment & Accreditation Council (NAAC) bribery and treacherous scandal has emphasized deep gaps and imperfections in an assumed perfect higher education accreditation system. Consequent to a high-level and high-profile inquiry conducted by the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI), India saw multiple arrests of leadership including Vice-Chancellors, Directors and Professors from both the private and public institutes and universities. Charges of graft and bribery were levelled against the Inspection Committee of NAAC to the tune of crores of rupees in exchange of a favourable accreditation rating to a prominent university of India. This raises several alarms both within and outside the Indian educational diaspora. If rankings & accreditations can be commoditized and bought at will, the entire purpose and governmental enterprise to promote substantial quality stands defeated. Parents, students and all stakeholders will have the right to question



the legitimacy of even ace institutions and universities. The buck does not stop here, even the foreign organizations collaborating with Indian universities across multi-disciplinary spheres will be right to doubt the legitimacy of Indian degrees, terminally affecting a students' career prospects abroad. As NAAC awaited contemplating reformatory action based on the Radhakrishnan Committee's report on reforming accreditation, it has found itself shamefully embroiled in a graft racket. The Government of India has to revamp the entire ranking & accreditation process across the higher education, for both the private and public

universities. Simply shaking off 800 experts off the panel would not be sufficient to recover a tainted reputation. NAAC's leadership should be more associated within different age and experience standards, more connected with better regulatory oversight to prevent any bias and conflict of interest. Data verification and validation for any university or institute must be handed out to industry personnel, not external agencies who often have a limited professional and tactical knowledge to make a fair and conceptual assessment. The assessment process must be more transparent and digitalized, objectified to weed out unethical practices and peer

visits. NAAC's inspection and monitoring results are to be critically evaluated by multiple stake-holders. A game changer would be to bring in Artificial Intelligence assisted Analysis Mechanism for ranking & accreditation on various revamped NAAC parameters. Periodic audits and snap inspections are a must to ensure compliance with academic and infrastructural standards. India's intellectual and conceptual growth depends on the integrity of her higher education. Financial superiority and interests should not and cannot take any precedence over academic excellence and innovation. The intense competitive rivalry among universities has seen its ramification in duplicitous institutional self-assessment reports and clandestine expert peer review visits. If education becomes another commodity, ranking and accreditation becomes purely transactional. Dr Shadab Ahmed is an Oral & Maxillofacial Surgeon, and has been involved in quality assurance programs of several institutions, including NAAC

WHY INDIA-NEW ZEALAND FTA COULD BE A GAME CHANGER

The FTA could unlock 10x trade growth, boost jobs, and strengthen India's Indo-Pacific influence.

The proposed Free Trade Agreement (FTA) between India and New Zealand isn't just another trade deal — it's a potential goldmine waiting to be unlocked. With bilateral trade standing at a modest \$1.7 billion, this agreement could explode that figure tenfold over the next decade. Imagine the scale of new opportunities: Indian pharmaceuticals in Kiwi hospitals, New Zealand's world-class dairy products in Indian households — the possibilities are endless.

WHAT'S IN IT FOR INDIA?

- **Tariff-Free Access** – Indian exporters will get a smoother ride into New Zealand's market, reducing costs and boosting profits.
- **Tech Power-Up** – New Zealand's expertise in renewable energy and agri-tech could fuel India's domestic production and exports.
- **New Jobs & Skills** – With relaxed visa rules, India's growing pool of STEM graduates could find new opportunities in New Zealand's booming tech and services sectors.

WHAT'S IN IT FOR NEW ZEALAND?

- **Access to 1.4 Billion Customers** – India's huge market is a golden opportunity for Kiwi agricultural and dairy producers.
- **Pharma and Machinery** – Indian pharma products and machinery are already gaining traction; this deal will accelerate that trend.
- **Stronger Political Ties** – The FTA is not just about trade; it's about deepening strategic ties in the Indo-Pacific, where both countries face growing pressure from China.

CURRENT TRADE STATUS

India and New Zealand have maintained relatively modest trade volumes despite the immense potential. As of the 2023-24 financial year, bilateral trade between India and New Zealand stood at approximately \$1.7 billion. India's exports to New Zealand totaled \$ 682 million in 2023, while New Zealand's exports to India



Prime Minister Narendra Modi and New Zealand Prime Minister Christopher Luxon arrive to pay obeisance at Gurdwara Rakab Ganj Sahib, in New Delhi on Monday. ANI

TDG EXPLAINER

amounted to \$369 million.

Notably, Indian exports to New Zealand have grown by 62% since 2019, with mineral fuels replacing pharmaceuticals as the top export item, accounting for 13% of total trade. But considering the size and diversity of both economies, this figure remains underwhelming. The proposed FTA is a chance to change that dynamic, opening up new opportunities in agriculture, manufacturing, pharmaceuticals, tourism, and technology.

POTENTIAL BENEFITS OF THE FTA

1. Enhanced Market Access and Trade Growth

- **Tariff Reduction** – The FTA is expected to eliminate or reduce tariffs, thereby increasing the competitiveness of Indian exports in New Zealand and vice versa.
- **Sectoral Opportunities** – Indian sectors such as pharmaceuticals, textiles, and in-

formation technology stand to gain from expanded market access. Conversely, New Zealand's dairy, agriculture, and horticulture industries could benefit from greater access to the Indian market, which has traditionally been protected by high tariffs.

2. Investment and Technology Transfer

- **Foreign Direct Investment (FDI)** – The agreement is likely to promote increased FDI in both countries, fostering joint ventures and facilitating technology transfer.
- **Agri-Tech and Renewable Energy** – Indian companies could benefit from New Zealand's expertise in agri-tech, renewable energy, and food processing.

3. Skill Mobility and Workforce Exchange

- **Professional Mobility** – Provisions facilitating the mobility of professionals and skilled workers will strengthen people-to-peo-

ple ties and boost the service sector.

- **STEM Talent Exchange** – Indian STEM graduates and IT professionals could find enhanced opportunities in New Zealand.

4. Strategic Collaboration in Critical Sectors

- **Renewable Energy and Critical Minerals** – Both countries have identified renewable energy and critical minerals as key areas for strategic cooperation.
- **Joint Ventures** – Joint ventures in solar, wind, and hydropower could accelerate India's transition to sustainable energy.

5. Diversification of Trade Partnerships

- **Economic Growth** – Strengthening ties with New Zealand will help India diversify its trade partnerships, reducing reliance on major partners like China and the United States.
- **Reduced Vulnerability** – Diversification reduces dependency on single-market exposure, enhancing economic resilience.

IMPACT ON KEY ECONOMIC SECTORS

1. Agriculture and Dairy

New Zealand is a major exporter of dairy products. India's high tariffs on dairy have been a contentious issue in past trade talks.

A phased reduction in tariffs, coupled with domestic safeguards for Indian farmers, could create a balanced outcome.

2. Pharmaceuticals and

4. Education and Tourism

New Zealand is a preferred destination for Indian students. Improved visa policies and exchange programs could increase student



Gavin Young [M] Consul General (Mumbai) and Trade Commissioner, New Zealand said NZ is very interested in promoting collaborations with Andhra Pradesh particularly sectors such as eco-friendly (green) technologies, leisure tourism, agriculture technology and health IT of particular interest to New Zealand. PIB

Healthcare

India's pharmaceutical industry, which is globally competitive, will benefit from better market access.

Regulatory harmonization and expedited approvals could further enhance growth prospects.

3. Renewable Energy and Critical Minerals

New Zealand's expertise in clean energy and India's growing demand for renewable energy infrastructure provide a natural synergy.

Joint ventures in solar, wind, and hydropower could accelerate India's transition to sustainable energy.

enrollment. Enhanced air connectivity and tourism promotion will contribute to the services trade.

5. Manufacturing and Technology

India's "Make in India" initiative could benefit from New Zealand's technological expertise. Lower input costs and supply chain efficiencies resulting from the FTA could enhance manufacturing competitiveness.

RISKS

1. Trade Imbalance and Market

Access India's trade deficit with New Zealand could widen if dairy and agricultural imports increase with-



A delegation led by the Commerce Secretary, Sunil Barthwal held several constructive and outcome-oriented meetings in New Zealand from 26-27 April 2024 to work on ways to deepen the existing bilateral relations. These meetings were held with the Minister for Trade of New Zealand Hon. Todd McClay, Acting Chief Executive and Secretary of Foreign Affairs and Trade of New Zealand, Brook Barrington, the India-New Zealand Business Council (INZBC) and the 11th India - New Zealand Joint Trade Committee (JTC) Meeting. PIB

out a corresponding rise in Indian exports. Sensitive sectors like dairy, agriculture, and wine could face resistance from domestic stakeholders.

2. Regulatory and Non-Tariff Barriers

Differences in standards, labeling requirements, and sanitary and phytosanitary measures could create friction. Streamlining regulatory frameworks will require political consensus and

LESSONS FROM RCEP AND OTHER FTAs

India's withdrawal from the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) underscores the importance of addressing trade deficits and protecting domestic industries. Similarly, India's approach to the New Zealand FTA will need to balance domestic interests with the strategic imperative of securing deeper market access.

Japan's experience with RCEP illustrates the value of inclusive institutional balancing—building trade partnerships while protecting core economic sectors.

STRATEGIC IMPORTANCE IN THE INDO-PACIFIC

1. Geopolitical Influence

Strengthening ties with New Zealand aligns with India's broader Indo-Pacific strategy. New Zealand's participation in the Indo-Pacific Oceans' Initiative reinforces regional maritime cooperation.

2. Soft Power and Cultural Exchange

People-to-people ties, including the Indian diaspora in New Zealand, provide a foundation for deeper cultural and economic ties.

Enhanced education and tourism exchanges will foster mutual understanding and cooperation.

3. Countering Chinese Influence

China's dominance in the Asia-Pacific trade landscape poses strategic risks. Strengthening economic ties with New Zealand enhances India's bargaining power and reduces dependency on China.

WHAT TO EXPECT?

The India-New Zealand FTA isn't just about trade — it's about securing long-term strategic alignment and economic resilience. If executed well, this agreement could set the stage for a future where both countries emerge as stronger, more connected players in the global economic order.

Compiled by
Ruchira Talapatra



India's External Affairs Minister Dr. Subrahmanyam Jaishankar met with then Prime Minister of New Zealand Jacinda Ardern in 2022. X / Dr SJaishankar



India-New Zealand ministers met to strengthen bilateral relations in agriculture seven months ago. ANI

SUPREME COURT ASKS HIGH COURTS/TRIBUNALS TO DIRECT TRANSFER OF COMPENSATION TO CLAIMANTS' BANK ACCOUNTS

TDG NETWORK
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court in the case *Parminder Singh Versus Honey Goyal And Others* observed and has emphasized the need for the direct transfer of motor accident claim compensation to claimants' bank accounts in order to minimize the delays and also for ensuring timely payments.

The bench comprising of Justice JK Maheshwari and Justice Rajesh Bindal was hearing the present matter. The bench in the case ob-

served that, 'The general practice which is followed by the insurance companies, where the compensation is not disputed, is to deposit the same before the Tribunal. However, a direction can always be issued to transfer the amount into the bank account(s) of the claimant(s) with intimation to the Tribunal.'

The bench in the case observed and has streamlined the process for the transfer of the claim amount to the claimant's bank account in relation to motor accident claim. The bench stated that the



claimants should provide bank account details at the initial stage of the claim process so that tribunals can issue directions for direct transfers after the passing of awards and for minors or cases which requires fixed deposits, the banks should

ensure compliance and report to the Tribunal.

The court observed that, 'For the said purpose, the Tribunals at the initial stage of pleadings or at the stage of leading evidence may require the claimant(s) in order to furnish their bank

account particulars to the Tribunal along with the requisite proof, so that at the stage of passing of the award the Tribunal may direct that the amount of compensation be transferred in the account of the claimant and if there are more than one then in their respective accounts. Therefore, if there being no bank account, then they should be required to open the bank account either individually or jointly with family members only. Thus, it should also be mandated that, in case there is any change in the bank account par-

ticulars of the claimant(s) during the pendency of the claim petition they should update the same before the Tribunal. The same needs to be ensured before passing of the final award. It may be ensured that the bank account should be in the name of the claimant(s) and if minor, through guardian(s) and in no case it should be a joint account with any person, who is not a family member. The transfer of the amount in the bank account, particulars of which have been furnished by the claimant(s), as mentioned in the award, shall be treated

as satisfaction of the award. Intimation of compliance should be furnished to the Tribunal.'

The court also urged all the High Courts and Tribunals to adopt the said practice in order to ensure timely and efficient disbursement of compensation.

The court directed the Registry to send the order copy to:

1. The Registrars General of all the High Courts for placing the same before the Chief Justice of the High Court for further circulation and compliance by the concerned Tribunals or

Courts; and

2. The Directors of the National Judicial Academy and the State Judicial Academies.

In the present matter, the court was hearing an appeal filed seeking enhancement of compensation for the 100% disability suffered by a claimant due to a motor vehicle accident in 2006, when the claimant was aged 21 years. The court while considering the facts and circumstances of the case stated that it needed to make certain observations in relation to the mode of payments.

Supreme Court asks Greater Noida Authority to cooperate with cheated homebuyers in reviving dead housing project

TDG NETWORK
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court in the case *Ravi Prakash Srivastava And Ors Versus The State Of Uttar Pradesh And Ors* observed and has directed the Greater Noida Industrial Development Authority to cooperate with homebuyers in reviving a housing project which was being abandoned by the builder.

The bench comprising of Justice Vikram Nath and Justice Sandeep Mehta was hearing the present matter.

The court in the case asked the Greater Noida Industrial Development

The bench comprising of Justice Vikram Nath and Justice Sandeep Mehta was hearing the present matter.

Authority to provide the details of the demand which the Authority would have raised in case the original builders had completed the project so that the proportional charges of each of the home buyers can be decided which depends upon the size of the apartments they are taking.

The court observed that the project got abandoned because the Cooperative Housing Society, which took the plot on lease from

the Authority failed to pay the lease dues despite taking money from home buyers. The bench observed that the said court is not happy that the Authority is not cooperating to revive the dead project.

The court stated that, 'This court is not happy with the fact that the Greater Noida Industrial Development Authority (hereafter referred to as 'Authority') is not cooperating in the entire exercise of reviving a dead

project where the home buyers have been cheated by the builder who has vanished decades ago and some of the home buyers have joined together in order to revive the entire project in part and also other home buyers are coming in for revival of the remaining part of the Project.'

The counsel, Senior Advocate Ravindra Kumar, appearing for the Authority, prayed before the court for a week for providing the details of the demand so that the proportional charges of each home buyer could be decided depending upon the size of the apartment.

In the present matter, the Society i.e., Golf Course Sahankari Awas Samiti Ltd had applied to the Authority for allotment of land, which was allotted in 2004 as Plot No. 7, Sector Pi-2, Greater Noida, Gautam Budh Nagar. It was alleged by the home buyers that the Society in connivance with financial institutions scammed the home buyers as after some time, no payment was made by the Society to the Authority.

The home buyers had taken a loan from the respondent banks for the purpose of purchasing flats offered by the Society.

Supreme Court to hear pleas challenging CEC (Appointment) Act on April 16

TDG NETWORK
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court in the case *Dr Jaya Thakur & Ors. v. Union of India & Anr.* and connected cases observed and has scheduled the hearing of petitions filed challenging the constitutionality of the Chief Election Commissioner and Other Election Commissioners (Appointment, Conditions of Service, and Term of Office) Act, 2023, for April 16.

The petition filed is listed before the bench comprising of Justice Surya Kant and Justice NK Singh for the removal of the Chief Justice of India, CJI from the selection panel responsible for appointing Election Commissioners, ECs.

It has been observed that, the Election Commissioners, ECs are to be selected by a panel comprising the Prime Minister, a Cabinet Minister and the Leader of the Opposition.

The counsel, Advocate Prashant Bhushan, appearing for the Association for Democratic Reforms, mentioned the present matter on March 19, 2025.

The counsel, Advocate Prashant Bhushan requested for a priority listing on another day since the matter - listed as item 38 today - was not likely to be taken up due to the Court's packed schedule.

The counsel, Advocate Prashant Bhushan stated that, 'The present matter



The counsel, Advocate Prashant Bhushan, appearing for the Association for Democratic Reforms, mentioned the present matter on March 19, 2025.

goes to the root of our democracy.'

Advocate Prashant Bhushan submitted before the court that, 'Your lordships may not be able to take it up today, but it may be next listed on top of the board.' The bench headed by Justice Surya Kant, in the case cautioned against frequent accommodations, wherein stating that, 'If we keep accommodating members of the Bar, then the entire traffic will...'

The counsel, Advocate Prashant Bhushan assured the court that the hearing would not take much time, seeking a 2-3 hours slot.

Adding to it, Bhushan stated that the case is largely covered by the Constitution Bench judgment (in the Anoop Baranwal case,

which stressed the need for an independent mechanism to appoint Election Commissioners, ECs).

The bench headed by Justice Kant noted that the court would ensure minimal urgent listings that day so the case could be heard at the start of proceedings.

He remarked that, 'The idea is that if we can start and finish [on the same day. I.]'

It has been stated that, the CEC Act, 2023, has been at the centre of a legal and political debate.

It has been argued that, the removal of the CJI from the selection panel undermines the independence of the Election Commission.

The enactment of the Election Commissioners' Act triggered a cascade of litigation, with Congress leader Jaya Thakur, the Association for Democratic Reforms, and others approaching the apex court.

Earlier, the court agreed to hear the matter before the appointment of the new CEC following the retirement of Rajiv Kumar and posted it to February 12.

The matter was not listed on February 12 and got posted to February 19.

The matter was not taken on February 19 and got adjourned to March 19.

The bench comprising of Justice Sanjiv Khanna (the present Chief Justice of India, CJI) and Justice Dipankar Datta refused to stay the CEC Act on March 2024.

Delhi High Court directs BCI to enrol South Korean citizen as advocate within two days

TDG NETWORK
NEW DELHI

The Delhi High Court in the case *Bar Council Of India Versus Deayoung Jung And Anr* observed and has directed the Bar Council of India to enrol a South Korean citizen- Daeyoung Jung as an advocate within two days.

The Division bench comprising of Justice Prathiba M Singh and Justice Rajneesh Kumar Gupta was hearing the present matter.

The bench in the case observed that withholding

the enrolment would not be permissible since there being no stay of a single judge order, wherein the court quashed decision of Bar Council of India, BCI of refusing to consider Jung as eligible for enrolment as an advocate.

The court stated that the enrolment shall be issued immediately to the Respondent No.1 within a period of two days.

In the present matter, the bench was hearing an appeal of Bar Council of India, BCI's challenging the order

of single judge dated May 30, 2023.

The Single judge order in the case directed the Bar Council of India, BCI to process the application of Jung forthwith in accordance with law.

After the order of single judge, the enrolment was issued and Jung had appeared in the All India Bar Examination.

The counsel appearing for Jung's informed the court that initially, the South Korean national was reflected as having passed

the AIBE examination, however, the portal reflected that his result had been withheld. The bench in its order stated that, 'This court is of the opinion that in the absence of any stay which has been granted by this Court against the Id.

Single Judge's judgment, withholding the enrolment of the Respondent No.1 would not be permissible.'

The Single judge in the case granted relief to Jung and has stated that the right of the citizens of India who hold the requisite

qualification to practice law in a foreign nation is preserved and no discriminatory measures are adopted in the foreign nation, the nationals of that country would clearly be entitled to seek enrolment in terms of the proviso to Section 24(1)(a) of the Advocates Act.

The court also stated that the Bar Council of India, BCI clearly lost sight of the fact that Jung was not a "foreign lawyer" claiming a right to establish his own legal practice in India.

Supreme Court: If parties attempt to obtain by trick, courts can impose cost for vexatious litigation

TDG NETWORK
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court in the case *Leelawati (Dead) Thr. Lrs. Versus State Of U.P. And Ors* criticized a litigant for filing multiple petitions filed before the High Court wherein the applicant hides the dismissal of an earlier petition.

The court in the case observed and has imposed of cost and increased the penalty for an amount to Rs 50,000, wherein the court emphasized that such measures are essential to deter frivolous and vexatious litigation.

The court stated that, 'If the parties misuse the process and attempt to obtain an order by 'trick and stratagem.'

The court observed that, 'The court would be justified in imposing the costs for igniting such vexatious litigation.'

The bench comprising of Justice JK Maheshwari and Justice Aravind Kumar was hearing the present matter.

The bench in the case was hearing the matter where the Appellant had preferred an appeal against the decision of Allahabad High Court,



The court stated that, 'If the parties misuse the process and attempt to obtain an order by 'trick and stratagem.'

wherein the court dismissed a petition filed by him with a cost of Rs. 20,000/- for filing a vexatious petition.

In the present matter, the Appellant filed an eviction suit against her tenant on bona fide need grounds, which was initially decreed in her favor but later the Appellant Court overturned it due to lack of ownership proof. Thus, she then challenged the same in the Allahabad High Court which issued an interim order in 2006 directing the tenant to pay an amount of 2,000 per month or face eviction.

In 2012, the court dismissed the petition, vacating

the interim order.

However, she also filed another petition seeking police assistance for eviction, the court dismissed the same with directions to authorities.

She filed another petitioner, when no action followed i.e., the third one which was dismissed with a cost of 20,000 for concealing the previous dismissal and misleading the court by relying on the expired 2006 interim order.

Aggrieved with the same, she approached the Supreme Court.

The court in the case noted that the appellant had mis-

used the judicial process by filing multiple petitions and concealing material facts.

The Court also observed that the interim order of 2006 had merged with the final order of dismissal and could no longer be relied upon to file another writ petition seeking a direction to the authorities for eviction with police assistance.

The court in the case reasoned that once the Petition in which the interim order of 2006 was passed was dismissed then another petition cannot be filed seeking compliance of the interim order because the interim order lacks enforceability after the dismissal of writ petition.

The court also held that the filing of third petition was not necessitated and was only a vexatious and frivolous litigation just to mislead the court to gain a favourable order upon suppressing material fact about the dismissal of the first Writ Petition.

It has been held by the court that such kind of conduct amounted to abuse of the judicial process and justified the imposition of exemplary costs. The court observed that, 'This court is

compelled to observe that, on dismissal of the writ petition, interim order if any, passed in the proceedings would merge with the final order. In other words, on dismissal of the writ petition on December 05, 2012, the interim order dated September 22, 2006 had merged in the final order and lost its efficacy. As such, the action of the appellant persuading the Court by filing the writ petition does not seem bona fide. The High Court, in our view, has 7 rightly deprecated the action of the appellant to approach High Court again and again for implementation of the interim order passed in the dismissed writ petition lacks bona fides of petitioner and imposition of cost is fully justified.'

The court while considering the facts and circumstances of the case stated that, 'It being necessary to observe that the proceedings initiated in the Court of law are initiated for adjudication of disputes and to provide justice to the parties, by which trust and confidence of the litigants reposed on this great institution can be maintained.

Delhi High Court declares 'Taj' as well-known trademark for services in hotel and hospitality industry

TDG NETWORK
NEW DELHI

The Delhi High Court in the case *The Indian Hotels Company Limited Versus Gaurav Roy Bhatt And Anr.* observed and has declared 'Taj' a well-known trademark in respect of hotels and other related services in the hospitality industry.

The bench headed by Justice Amit Bansal stated that, 'The long duration for which the TAJ marks have been in use by the plaintiff, wide geographical area of their use, their knowledge among the general public and their goodwill and reputation due to the extensive promotion, publicity and extensive revenue generated by the plaintiff, in India as well as other countries, the TAJ marks have achieved the status of well-known trademarks.'

The court stated that the

Indian Hotels Company Limited, which operates hotels under the name of 'Taj', fulfilled all the criteria as stated under Section 11(6) read with Section 11(7) of the Trademarks Act for declaring 'TAJ' marks as well-known trademarks.

In the present matter, the suit is filed by the Indian Hotels Company Limited, who being a part of TATA Group of Companies, against various individuals for allegedly infringing its registered trademarks as well as for copyright and passing off of their services.

The counsel appearing for the Indian Hotels Company Limited referred to various data and documents in order to satisfy the factors relevant in deciding whether the TAJ marks were eligible to be declared as well-known trademarks.

The court in the case

observed that the Hotels Company Limited established well beyond doubt that the TAJ marks have acquired the status of well-known trademarks which being within the meaning and scope of Section 2(1) (zg) of the Trademarks Act.

It has also been noted by the said court that another mark of the Indian Hotels Company Limited- VIVANTA, which is also used in relation to hotels, has already been declared as a well-known trade mark by a coordinate bench in September 2022.

The court while considering the facts and circumstances of the case stated that, 'In terms of prayer clause contained in paragraph no.79(vii) of the plaint, a decree of declaration is passed declaring the TAJ marks as well-known trademarks within the meaning of Section 2(1)(zg) of the Act.'

NASA ASTRONAUTS RETURN TO EARTH: WHAT NEXT?

On Tuesday, NASA astronauts Sunita Williams and Butch Wilmore returned to Earth after a 286-day mission aboard the International Space Station (ISS), along with astronauts Nick Hague and Aleksandr Gorbunov. Their mission was supposed to last only one week but ended up being extended due to technical delays. The crew, aboard SpaceX's Dragon Freedom capsule, safely splashed down off the coast of Tallahassee, Florida, marking the end of a lengthy and complex journey in space. As they returned, their physical and psychological health will now be under scrutiny due to the challenges astronauts face after prolonged space travel.



NASA astronaut Sunita Williams being helped out of a SpaceX Dragon spacecraft on board the SpaceX recovery ship MEGAN after she landed in the water off the coast of Tallahassee, Florida, on March 18, 2025. Source: NASA

THE RETURN JOURNEY AND SPLASHDOWN

The four astronauts began their return journey after a 17-hour trek back to Earth, starting at the International Space Station (ISS). The splashdown occurred on Tuesday, at 5:57 pm ET (3:27 am IST), off the coast of Tallahassee, in the Gulf of Mexico. After landing, the crew was taken out of their capsule and placed on reclining stretchers, immediately whisked away for routine medical checks.

While the splashdown was a major milestone, the health challenges faced by the astronauts as they re-adjust to Earth's gravity are far from over. Their return journey has sparked interest in both the challenges of long-duration spaceflight and the health implications for astronauts who spend extended periods in microgravity.

WHY WERE THEY CARRIED AWAY ON STRETCHERS?

After spending nearly nine months in space, Sunita Williams, Butch Wilmore, and

the other astronauts were carried away on stretchers, which immediately raised questions. The reason for this is tied to the physical toll of space travel. In microgravity, the human body undergoes significant changes due to the lack of gravitational forces. Astronauts often suffer from muscle atrophy, bone density loss, and fluid shifts during their time in space.

When astronauts return to Earth after such long missions, they face several challenges in readjusting to gravity. The body has to reorient itself to the gravitational pull, which can affect balance, muscle strength, and cardiovascular function. The stretching of muscles, the loss of calcium in bones, and the redistribution of bodily fluids (especially to the head) are common effects. As a result, astronauts are often assisted by medical professionals and monitored closely as they undergo the post-mission rehabilitation program designed to help them recover from these effects. The reclining stretchers are part of the health protocols to ensure

that astronauts are not put at risk due to possible dizziness, weakness, or other complications that can arise after spending long periods in space.

THE ROLE OF SPACEX AND NASA IN THE MISSION

This mission also underscored the growing collaboration between private companies like SpaceX and government agencies like NASA. The crew's extended stay was due to technical failures in Boeing's Starliner spacecraft, which had been meant to return them to Earth. With Starliner

capacity of private companies to participate in crew rescue operations, a task previously handled solely by government agencies.

The successful operation raised new questions about public-private partnerships in space travel, with many experts noting that such collaborations could be vital for future missions to the Moon and Mars.

HEALTH CONCERNS AFTER EXTENDED SPACE TRAVEL

Astronauts spend long durations in space, with some missions lasting over 200 days, such as this one.

astronauts must undergo a post-mission rehabilitation program designed by NASA to help their bodies readjust.

Muscle Atrophy: In the absence of gravity, astronauts do not use their muscles as much as they do on Earth. This results in muscle wasting, which can take time to correct once back on Earth.

Bone Density Loss: The absence of gravity also affects bone health, leading to a significant decrease in bone density. Astronauts on long missions are at increased risk of fractures and other bone-related issues after they return.

Fluid Shift: The redistribution of bodily fluids in microgravity can lead to fluid buildup in the upper body, especially in the head. This can increase intracranial pressure, which can alter the shape of the eyes and even lead to vision problems known as Spaceflight-Associated Neuro-Ocular Syndrome (SANS). Astronauts often experience mild-to-moderate vision impairments due to this condition.

Cardiovascular Effects:



Dolphins circled the SpaceX's Dragon Freedom capsule as divers readied it for hoisting onto the recovery ship. Agency

Spaceflight affects the cardiovascular system. Upon return, astronauts may experience orthostatic hypotension, a condition where the heart struggles to pump blood efficiently when standing. This can cause dizziness and fainting.

NASA'S 45-DAY REHABILITATION PROGRAM

NASA's post-mission rehabilitation program is designed to help astronauts recover from the physical effects of their missions. The 45-day program includes medical assessments, physical therapy, and other treatments aimed at restoring the astronauts' strength and balance. However, full recovery can take longer, especially in cases of bone density loss and other long-term effects of spaceflight.

Astronauts will undergo physical exams, including tests for muscle strength, bone health, and cardiovascular function. They will also receive support for psychological well-being, as long-duration space missions can take a toll on an astronaut's mental health due to the isolation, confinement, and psychological stress of space travel.

POST-MISSION HEALTH AND PSYCHO-



Sunita Williams and Butch Wilmore were stationed on the International Space Station. Agency

LOGICAL EFFECTS

While the physical challenges are significant, astronauts also face psychological issues after long-duration space missions. The isolation, uncertainty, and lack of natural environmental cues (such as the sun setting or rising) can lead to stress, anxiety, and depression. NASA addresses these issues by providing astronauts with regular communication with family members and psychologists, as well as entertainment such as films, books, and music to alleviate boredom.

In addition to these psychological concerns, astronauts face the risk of radiation exposure, which increases the likelihood of developing cardiovascular diseases and certain types of cancer. Post-mission health monitoring is crucial to ensure that the astronauts recover fully and mitigate any long-term risks

from their extended time in space.

CONCLUSION

The return of Sunita Williams, Butch Wilmore, and their colleagues marks the successful completion of a challenging and unexpected mission. Their resilience in space, despite facing unforeseen delays, showcases the strength and dedication required to explore space. As they begin their recovery process, their health will be carefully monitored, providing valuable data for future space missions, particularly those to the Moon and Mars. The collaboration between NASA and SpaceX, as well as the global recognition of their achievement, underscores the importance of continued investment in space exploration and the potential for further advancements in human spaceflight.

● TDG NETWORK

POLITICAL REACTIONS AND GLOBAL RECOGNITION

The successful return of the astronauts also had significant political and national implications.

PRIME MINISTER NARENDRA MODI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi of India also congratulated Sunita Williams, celebrating her as a symbol of perseverance and achievement, reflecting India's pride in her accomplishments. On X, the Indian Prime Minister said, "The achievement of Crew-9 astronauts shows us what perseverance truly means."

THE WHITE HOUSE

The White House tweeted that the rescue mission was a success thanks to President Trump's efforts, with a message on X (formerly Twitter) stating: "PROMISE MADE, PROMISE KEPT: President Trump pledged to rescue the astronauts stranded in space for nine months. Today, they safely splashed down in the Gulf of America, thanks to @ElonMusk, @SpaceX, and @NASA!"

ISRO

The return of Sunita Williams was celebrated by the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO), which expressed pride in her achievements and highlighted how her resilience continued to inspire space enthusiasts around the world. The agency shared a message that read: "Your safe return after an extended mission aboard the ISS is a remarkable achievement".

Putin maintains control in Ukraine peace talks, offering little to Trump

Though the White House hailed the agreement as a significant step forward, marking the first time in over three years of conflict that both sides agreed to scale back hostilities, it remains limited.

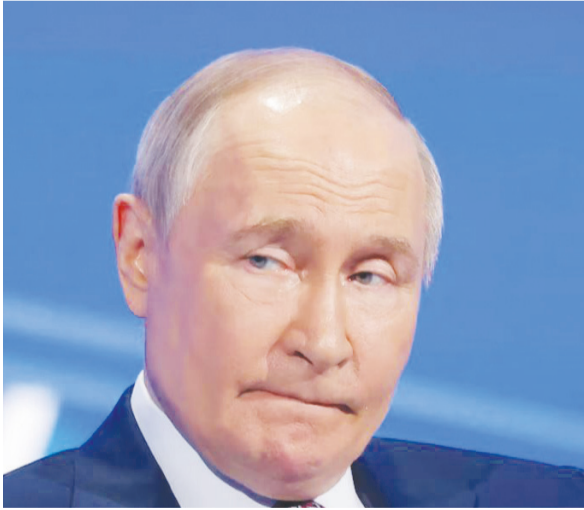
In a recent phone call with Donald Trump, Vladimir Putin furthered his strategic ambitions, edging closer to repairing Russia's relations with the U.S. while driving a wedge between Washington and Europe. However, analysts note that he offered minimal concessions regarding Trump's efforts to broker peace in Ukraine.

Ahead of the Tuesday conversation, the U.S. had proposed a 30-day ceasefire as

a preliminary step toward a broader peace agreement, with Ukraine in principle agreeing to the plan. Instead, Putin consented only to a narrow ceasefire focusing solely on halting attacks on energy infrastructure for a month.

Though the White House hailed the agreement as a significant step forward, marking the first time in over three years of conflict that both sides agreed to scale back hostilities, it remains limited. The ceasefire applies only to energy strikes and extends to the Black Sea, where discussions on a maritime ceasefire will also proceed. These measures would curtail Ukraine's ability to target Russia's oil infrastructure, a crucial funding source for the war, as well as constrain its naval operations.

Despite this, Russia continues its military offensive on



Russian President Vladimir Putin attends the Congress of the Russian Union of Industrialists and Entrepreneurs in Moscow, Russia March 18, 2025. Agency

pushing to expel Ukrainian forces that had seized Russian territory during a surprise incursion last August. Putin reiterated Russia's conditions for a broader ceasefire, stipulating

ize additional forces. Ukraine has firmly rejected these terms.

Nigel Gould-Davies, a Russia expert at the International Institute for Strategic Studies in London, argued that Putin's agreement to a limited ceasefire effectively undermines the prospect of a wider truce. "It's a 'no' by another name," he said, noting that Putin has laid down conditions that Ukraine and the U.S. are unlikely to accept.

Despite this, Trump's aides framed the phone call as a suc-



U.S. President Donald Trump's special envoy, Steve Witkoff, speaks to reporters at the White House in Washington, DC, U.S., March 19, 2025. Agency

cess, viewing it as an essential step toward a potential ceasefire. "Until recently, we didn't have consensus on these two aspects—the energy and infrastructure ceasefire and the Black Sea moratorium," said Steve Witkoff, Trump's envoy. "Today, we got to that place, and I think we're not far from a full ceasefire."

However, Andrei Kozyrev, a former Russian foreign minister and pro-Western figure, dismissed Trump's success, stating that Putin had nothing

to give. "Putin is determined to keep the war going, and Trump is being led along," he said.

While Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky expressed readiness to support a moratorium on energy strikes, both sides quickly accused each other of resuming attacks. Even if a limited ceasefire holds, analysts caution that it would not represent a meaningful concession by Putin. Halting strikes on Ukraine's energy grid would offer Russia relief from damaging drone attacks targeting its

oil refineries, which have significantly undermined its refining capacity.

Kozyrev suggested that the ceasefire's vague terms amounted to little more than a strategic maneuver by Putin to maintain leverage. "This selective ceasefire is far from what Trump had demanded—a comprehensive halt to hostilities," he said.

The Kremlin's official readout of the call highlighted that the two leaders agreed to continue bilateral efforts to end the war,

a diplomatic approach that has raised concerns among Ukraine and its European allies. They fear that Trump may seek a deal with Putin that excludes them, leaving them vulnerable in the long term.

Putin's goal appears to be to elevate Russia to an equal footing with the U.S. in global diplomacy, seeking to reverse years of isolation and sanctions. Political analyst Tatiana Stanovaya noted that the Russian president is working to sideline the Ukrainian conflict from direct U.S.-Russia relations, furthering his broader diplomatic agenda.

Gould-Davies added that Putin is using this engagement with the U.S. to drive a wedge between Washington and its NATO allies, potentially forcing Europe to act alone to strengthen its own defenses while attempting to limit the decoupling from the U.S.

In sum, while Putin's calculated moves continue to chip away at U.S.-European unity, his offers toward Trump remain cautiously limited and strategically self-serving.

● TDG NETWORK

‘WE’RE VERY MUCH ON TRACK’: TRUMP SAYS AFTER ZELENSKY’S CALL

AGENCIES
WASHINGTON

US President Donald Trump on Wednesday said that he had a “very good call” with Ukrainian counterpart Volodymyr Zelenskyy, adding that he sought to “align both Russia and Ukraine in terms of their requests and needs.”

“Just completed a very good telephone call with President Zelenskyy of Ukraine. It lasted approximately one hour. Much of the discussion was based on the call made yesterday with President Putin in order to align both Russia and Ukraine in terms of their requests and needs,” Trump said.

He added, “We are very much on track, and I will ask Secretary of State Marco Rubio, and National Security Advisor Michael Waltz, to give an accurate description of the points discussed.”

Kyiv said Zelenskyy was

THE CALL

- Ceasefire Agreement: Putin agreed to a 30-day halt on strikes.
- Trump-Putin Meeting: Likely to meet soon, says US envoy.
- Riyadh Talks: Next ceasefire negotiations in Riyadh.
- Zelenskyy’s Response: Criticized Russia, urged continued aid.
- Drone Attack: Ukraine destroyed 72 drones, Russia downed 57.



US President Donald Trump and Ukraine President Volodymyr Zelenskyy

being briefed about Tuesday’s 90-minute call between Trump and Putin that saw the Kremlin leader agree to a limited 30-day halt on strikes against Ukraine’s power grid.

This was the first interaction between the two leaders after the White House fiasco where Trump and his vice president JD Vance blasted on the Ukrainian leader over his conduct of handling the

conflict.

Putin agreed to pause strikes on Ukrainian energy facilities for 30 days following a call with Trump on Tuesday, having turned down the US president’s earlier proposal of halting all hostilities.

Trump-Putin ‘likely’ to meet

Meanwhile, US envoy Steve Witkoff told Bloomberg that

Trump is “likely” to meet Putin in the near future.

“You know, I can’t speak for them, but my best bet would be that it’s likely to happen. They have a great rapport together. They had a great rapport in the first Trump administration,” he said.

He added, “It was on display yesterday. This was really a very positive, very proactive, outcome ori-

India celebrates 111 years of film industry in Dhaka

AGENCIES
DHAKA

An exhibition celebrating 111 years of Indian cinema is currently underway in Dhaka. The event in the capital’s upscale Gulshan area highlights various aspects of Indian cinema.

“Indian cinema has gone through many transitions over the past 111 years. From stills to motion, silent era and then sound added,” Ann Mary George, First Secretary (Culture) of the Indian High Commission in Dhaka, told reporters while showing the exhibition.

Indian cinema, celebrating its 111th year in 2025, has a rich history, starting with the Lumiere brothers’ first film show in Mumbai in 1896 and evolving through silent films, talkies, and various cinematic eras.

She also reflected on the silent era of filmmaking.

was eventually able to uncover and correct problems that might have previously gone unnoticed, the fact that they occurred more than a decade into his tenure and implicated his own appointees signaled that the system remained flawed: senior leaders were not intimidated, control mechanisms did not prevent scandals from affecting key departments...”

Xi’s perceptions of the parlous state of the PLA’s obedience were evident at the Two Sessions of the National People’s Congress (NPC) held in Beijing from 5-10 March.

(CCP).

Joel Wuthnow, Senior Research Fellow at the USA’s National Defense University, assessed: “Xi Jinping still looms large in the PLA, but his power is finite.” Yes, there have been results “in terms of greater confidence in regional disputes, new capabilities and stronger preparations for war against Taiwan and the United States,” but Wuthnow believes “Xi’s success in cleaning up the PLA has been partial at best”.

Wuthnow added: “While the purges indicate that Xi



Xi struggles to rein in China’s military establishment

AGENCIES
HONG KONG

As well as splashing out ever-increasing amounts of cash on the People’s Liberation Army (PLA), Chairman Xi Jinping is hauling on its reins to keep China’s military -which has a history of doing things its own way - in check. However, even after more than twelve years in control, his efforts are proving only partially successful.

On 5 March, China announced its defense budget for 2025. The sum of CNY1.784665 trillion - or USD249 billion - rose 7.2% compared to the year before. China’s defense expenditure has been pegged to single-digit percentage increases for the past decade.

As much as rising funds are welcome to the PLA, Xi is more concerned about the rot of corruption and the PLA’s political loyalty to the Chinese Communist Party

Istanbul mayor arrested in move deemed ‘coup’ by opposition

AGENCIES
ISTANBUL

Turkey detained Istanbul mayor Ekrem Imamoglu, the main rival of President Tayyip Erdogan, on charges of corruption and aiding a terrorist group in what the main opposition party on Wednesday called “a coup against our next president”.

The move against the popular two-term mayor caps a months-long legal crackdown on opposition figures across the country which has been criticised as a politicised attempt to hurt their electoral prospects and silence dissent.

Turkey’s lira currency

The move against the popular two-term mayor caps a months-long legal crackdown on opposition figures across the country which has been criticised as a politicised attempt to hurt their electoral prospects and silence dissent.

crashed as much as 12% to an all-time low, opens new tab of 42 to the dollar in response, underscoring worries over the eroding rule of law in the major emerging market and NATO member country that Erdogan has run for 22 years.

Imamoglu, 54, who leads Erdogan in some opinion polls, was to be named his

Republican People’s Party’s (CHP) official presidential candidate within days. He now faces two separate investigations that also include charges of leading a crime organisation, bribery and tender rigging.

In a handwritten letter shared on social media, the detained mayor said Turks

would respond to the “lies, plots and traps” against him. Earlier, before leaving home for the police station, he said he would not give up in the face of pressure.

Justice Minister Yilmaz Tunc warned against linking Erdogan to Imamoglu’s detention or other legal processes, using words like “coup” to describe it, and also against street protests.

Though authorities temporarily banned protests and police shut down some city streets, some hundreds of people gathered at the police station and chanted: “The day will come when (Erdogan’s) AK Party is called to account”.



Serbian Prime Minister Milos Vucevic takes part in a leaders’ panel during the 2024 edition of the Bled Strategic Forum in Slovenia, September 2, 2024. File Photo

Serbia’s parliament accepts PM Vucevic’s resignation

AGENCIES
BELGRADE

Serbia’s parliament formally accepted the resignation of the Prime Minister Milos Vucevic on Wednesday, triggering a 30-day deadline for the formation of a new government or the calling of a snap election.

Vucevic, the head of the ruling Serbian Progressive Party (SNS) and an ally of the populist President Alek-

sandar Vucic, resigned on January 28 amid protests sparked by the collapse of an awning at a train station in the northern city of Novi Sad last November in which 15 people died.

More than 100,000 protesters descended on Belgrade on Saturday for one of the largest rallies in decades. The protesters say the train disaster was a symptom of widespread corruption and mismanagement, which the

ented call, and that’s who President Trump is. He’s there to get to the goalline. And we did a we went a long way yesterday to doing that.”

Riyadh talks 2.0
US Security Adviser Mike Waltz has said that the next round of negotiations on Ukraine war ceasefire in Riyadh will happen soon.

He said, “I spoke today with my Russian counterpart Yuri Ushakov about President Trump’s efforts to end the war in Ukraine. We agreed our technical teams would meet in Riyadh in the coming days to focus on implementing and expanding the partial ceasefire President Trump secured from Russia.”

Zelenskyy said the attack, which the air force said involved 145 drones, showed “Putin’s words are very different from reality” and called for sustained Western military aid to Ukraine.

Lanka court rejects Rajapaksa plea for restoring personal protection

AGENCIES
COLOMBO

The Supreme Court on Wednesday dismissed without a hearing the former president Mahinda Rajapaksa’s plea for restoring his security contingent.

Rajapaksa, in January, had filed the fundamental rights petition seeking court intervention after the government slashed his security from over 350 personnel to just 60 in December last year.

In his petition, Rajapaksa claimed his life was under threat as a result of his action to end the three-decade-long armed campaign by the LTTE (Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam) for a separate Tamil homeland.

He had cited Prime Minister Harini Amarasuriya, the Cabinet and the defence establishment as respondents.

The legal step by the 80-year-old came in the

Israeli opposition to Netanyahu finds voice as war returns to Gaza

AGENCIES
JERUSALEM

A coalition of hostage families and protesters against Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu’s moves against the judiciary and parts of the security establishment is coming together again after war returned this week to Gaza.

The prime minister’s decision to resume the war and bombard the Palestinian enclave, with 59 hostages - around 24 of whom are believed to be alive - still held in Gaza has added fresh fuel to the anger of protesters, who accuse the government of continuing the war for political reasons.

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Tens of thousands demonstrated on Tuesday night



Police officers stand behind metal barriers, as people attend a rally, against the Israeli government and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, and demanding the release of all hostages from Gaza in Jerusalem, March 19, 2025. AGENCY

and more protests were taking place on Wednesday after Netanyahu announced at the weekend that he had lost confidence in Ronen Bar, the head of the Shin Bet domestic intelligence agency, and had decided to sack him.

“This is no longer a war that is about something that is important, it is all about the survival of this government, the survival of Benjamin Netanyahu,”

said Koren Offer, a protester in Jerusalem.

Protest groups have ranged from the Defensive Shield Forum, a group representing former defence and security officials, and the Movement for Quality Government in Israel, an anti-corruption group that was active in a bitter battle in 2023 over curbing the power of the Supreme Court, alongside families of the hostages in Gaza.



Rajapaksa, in January, had filed the fundamental rights petition seeking court intervention after the government slashed his security from over 350 personnel to just 60 in December last year.

midst of action by the government to remove him from his official residence.

Rajapaksa served as the President of Sri Lanka from 2005 to 2015. The LTTE, which led a separatist war

for a separate Tamil homeland, was crushed by the Lankan military in 2009 with the death of its supremo Velupillai Prabhakaran.

The government has also initiated steps to evict Ra-

japaksa from his official residence - he has not vacated his official residence yet despite pressure from the government -- citing its policy of reducing public expenditure and curbing the privileges of former presidents.

While the government insists the measures are part of broader cost-cutting efforts, the opposition has criticised the actions as politically motivated, arguing that former presidents are legally entitled to certain privileges. Mahinda Rajapaksa is a Sri Lankan politician. He served as the sixth President of Sri Lanka from 2005 to 2015; the Prime Minister of Sri Lanka from 2004 to 2005, 2018, and 2019 to 2022; the Leader of the Opposition from 2002 to 2004 and 2018 to 2019, and the Minister of Finance from 2005 to 2015 and 2019 to 2021.

Caribbean leaders seek clarity as US mulls sweeping travel bans

AGENCIES
WASHINGTON

Leaders from across the Caribbean are seeking clarity after a draft of a U.S. government list of over 40 countries which could face sweeping travel restrictions was made public, a move which could mark the latest in President Donald Trump’s crackdown on migration.

U.S. State Department spokesperson Tammy Bruce disavowed the list on Monday, but stipulated “there is a review through the president’s executive order for us to look at the nature of what’s going on to keep America safer and dealing with the issue of visas



People walk through the Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta International Airport, in Atlanta, Georgia, U.S., November 27, 2024. File Photo

and who’s allowed into the country.”

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President Trump’s administration has vowed mass deportations of migrants in the U.S. illegally. Half of the countries on the list in circulation are African, while seven more are located around the Caribbean.

Japanese General highlights complex maritime threats in Indo-Pacific

AGENCIES
NEW DELHI

General Yoshihide Yoshida, Chief of Staff, Joint Staff, Japan Self-Defense Forces, on Wednesday highlighted the complex maritime threats in the Indo-Pacific region, emphasizing the need to protect the waters. Speaking at the Raisina Dialogue 2025 session

on the theme “Deepwater Perils: Securing Trade Through Red Zones,” General Yoshida noted that the region can be divided into sub-regions, each facing unique threats. Speaking to ANI, General Yoshida said, “I think there are various threats in maritime domains. For example, the Indo-Pacific region is bigger and can be separated into some sub-regions.”

He said that each sub-region has a different threat and cited examples of the same.

General Yoshida said, “The Indian Ocean has the competition to access... in the Pacific Islands is law enforcement fields such as IUU fishing, so there are various threats in the maritime domain, and the common threat is how to protect the sea lanes and the submarine cables.”

PICTURE PERFECT



Deepika Padukone captivates in her latest photoshoot for a magazine, donning a stunning golden ensemble that exudes elegance and luxury in Abu Dhabi. Instagram

AKSHAY KUMAR JOINS CO-STAR VEER PAHARIYA FOR VIRAL ‘LANGDI’ STEP

TDG NETWORK
MUMBAI

Bollywood star Akshay Kumar has given the internet another reason to go crazy as the actor joined his ‘Sky Force’ co-star Veer Pahariya to re-create the newcomer’s ‘langdi’ hook step from their song “Rang,” which had already become fodder for memes ever since its release.

Prime Video shared the fun clip on Instagram, where Veer and his mentor, Akshay Kumar, can be seen performing the hook step of the viral song. The video, which had no background music, featured the text “You can hear the reel.”

The clip was released to announce that the action-thriller will be available for



streaming on Prime Video starting March 21.

The caption of the post read, “You know what’s landing #SkyForceOnPrime, March 21.”

Take a look

Soon after the video was shared, fans chimed in the comments section to react to the collab.

One fan wrote, “The collab we never knew we needed,” while another shared, “We

are loving it.”

Directed by Sandeep Kewlani and Abhishek Kapur, the action-packed drama is produced by Dinesh Vijan, Jyoti Deshpande, and Amar Kaushik under Maddock Films and Jio Studios. The film stars Akshay Kumar and Veer Pahariya in lead roles, along with Nimrat Kaur and Sara Ali Khan in key supporting roles.

Inspired by true events, Sky Force revolves around the story of one of India’s first and deadliest airstrikes on Pakistan. The film follows a hero lost in action and his comrade’s determined quest for the truth. Packed with intense aerial sequences, emotional moments, and themes of bravery, the movie is a tribute to the courage and resilience of the Indian Air Force.

Selena, Benny put wedding plans on hold to focus on music

AGENCIES
WASHINGTON

Selena Gomez and her fiancé, Benny Blanco, are taking a break from planning their wedding to focus on their upcoming album, ‘I Said I Love You First,’ set to be released on March 21.

According to E! News, in a recent interview, Blanco revealed that Gomez is constantly coming up with new ideas for their wedding, saying, “I think every day she’s planned a new wedding in her head.”

However, the couple has decided to put their wed-



ding plans on hold for now.

Instead, they are focusing on their music collaboration, which Gomez describes as a “special time” to create music together and put their love on display.

“I genuinely feel like this is such a special time

that we get to apply it to this album and really just pour our heart into it, and completely translate what we feel and bring it to the world,” Gomez said, as per E! News.

Blanco, 37, added that they are still taking in the excitement of their engagement and are not rushing

into wedding planning.

“We’re very much ‘take it one day at a time’-type of people. We’re still not over this moment,” he said.

The couple’s engagement was announced in December after Blanco proposed to Gomez at a romantic Taco Bell picnic.

They have been working on their album together in their in-home recording studio, which Gomez described as “the most intimate” recording experience she’s ever had.

Their album, ‘I Said I Love You First,’ is a personal and intimate project that combines their stories and experiences.

Rakesh Roshan shares fears of being killed by his security guards

TDG NETWORK
MUMBAI

Veteran actor-director Rakesh Roshan, who directed the debut film of his son, the blockbuster ‘Kaho Naa... Pyaar Hai’ (2000) recently shared a terrifying experience from his past that he describes as a “bad dream.” Shortly after the release of the film, he was shot by assailants, an incident that left his family shaken.

While speaking to the media, the actor shared that soon after the attack, he was assigned armed security guards for protection. However, instead of feeling safe, Roshan was constantly scared that the guards themselves might “harm” him and accidentally shoot him.

“No matter how many security personnel are around you, you are still an open target. If someone wants to harm you, security personnel won’t be able to do anything. If someone wants to do something, these security guards can’t help you,” said Rakesh.

“After this incident, I was assigned two armed se-



“After this incident, I was assigned two armed security guards. I would sit in the front seat of the car while they sat in the back. That made me even more scared.”

curity guards. I would sit in the front seat of the car while they sat in the back. That made me even more scared.”

“Voh do peeche baithe hain bandook ke saath. Kabhi kuch ho jaye voh peeche se na mujhe maar de (Those two are sitting behind me with a gun. In case something happens, they can kill me),” Rakesh added.

Roshan also mentioned that the constant security started making him feel “very claustrophobic.” Even

during his walks on the beach, the guards followed him closely, making him feel trapped. This unusual lifestyle took a toll on him, and he eventually asked for the security detail to be removed.

He said, “When I would go for a walk on the beach, those two security guards would be with me. I was like, ‘What is happening?’ So, I requested them to take away my security cover. I am okay just as I am. We will see what happens.”

BRAIN PICKING



I think a woman should be wholesome, voluptuous and sizzling!

— VIDYA BALAN
(Indian Actress)

Prabhu Deva visits Tirumala Temple, receives blessings from priests

TDG NETWORK
TIRUMALA

Filmmaker and choreographer Prabhu Deva visited the Sri Venkateswara Temple in Tirumala to offer prayers and seek blessings from the priests.

The temple, dedicated to Lord Venkateswara, an incarnation of Lord Vishnu, is one of the most visited religious sites in India, attracting millions of devotees annually.

The choreographer, dressed in a simple white outfit, was seen on Tuesday greeting shutterbugs stationed outside the temple. Prabhu Deva was also seen clicking selfies with fans.

In February earlier this



year, Prabhu Deva introduced his son, Rishii Ragvendar Deva, through an energetic dance video.

The legendary dancer took to his Instagram account on Tuesday to share a video of the father-son duo performing together. The video showed Prabhu Deva and his son dancing

on stage, with fans cheering them on.

Prabhu Deva is one of India’s most celebrated choreographers, directors, and actors. Often called India’s Michael Jackson, he has choreographed multiple hit songs and has won two National Awards for Best Choreography.

Phoebe Dynevor joins Joseph Gordon-Levitt in thriller ‘Pendulum’

AGENCIES
WASHINGTON

‘Bridgerton’ star Phoebe Dynevor has been cast opposite Joseph Gordon-Levitt in the upcoming thriller ‘Pendulum’, directed by Mark Heyman and produced by Darren Aronofsky.

The film, described as a “terrifying new genre film”, follows a young couple, Patrick (Gordon-Levitt) and Abigail (Dynevor), as they embark on a journey to a new-age retreat in New Mexico.

The couple is drawn to



the retreat by the promise of healing after a traumatic event, but Patrick soon becomes distrustful of the retreat’s enigmatic leader, even as Abigail falls under her spell, according to Deadline.

As tensions build, the couple must determine whether the group’s unconventional spiritual practices offer genuine healing or mask a terrifying truth that threatens to consume them both.

Dynevor, best known for her starring role in the hit Netflix series ‘Bridgerton’ and her acclaimed perfor-

mance in ‘Fair Play’, is set to have a busy year ahead.

She has several projects in the works, including the thriller ‘Beneath the Storm’, set to be released later this year, and A24’s dark comedy ‘Famous’, in which she stars opposite Zac Efron.

Meanwhile, production on ‘Pendulum’ is set to begin this month in New Mexico, with Black Bear handling international rights and UTA Independent Film Group, CAA Media Finance, and WME Independent holding domestic rights.



Gwyneth Paltrow opens up about working with Timothee Chalamet

AGENCIES
WASHINGTON

Actor Gwyneth Paltrow has shared her thoughts on working with an intimacy coordinator during the filming of her upcoming movie ‘Marty Supreme’, alongside Timothee Chalamet.

According to Deadline, in a recent interview, Paltrow revealed that an intimacy coordinator approached her to discuss a physical scene, but she felt that it was unnecessary.

“I was like, ‘Girl, I’m from the era where you get naked, you get in bed, the camera’s on’,” Paltrow said.

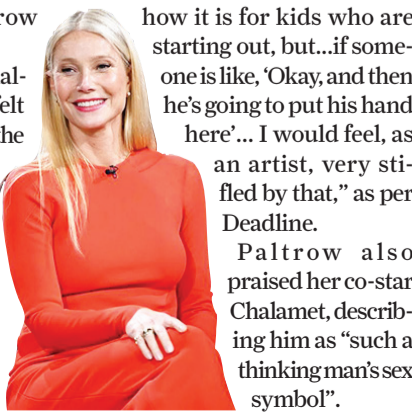
Paltrow and Chalamet reportedly felt comfortable with the scenes they had to perform and told the intimacy coordinator to “step a little bit back.”

Paltrow expressed her concerns about the

potential limitations of having an intimacy coordinator on set, saying, “I don’t know how it is for kids who are starting out, but...if someone is like, ‘Okay, and then he’s going to put his hand here’... I would feel, as

an artist, very stifled by that,” as per Deadline.

Paltrow also praised her co-star Chalamet, describing him as “such a thinking man’s sex symbol.”



2025 VOLVO XC90 B5 AWD REVIEW | FIRST DRIVE

SYED SHIRAZ SHAH

Volvo launched the latest iteration of their flagship SUV, the XC90, in India just a couple of weeks ago at the Embassy of Sweden. It was a gala event, completely befitting a vehicle that costs Rs 1,02,89,000, ex-showroom. However, thankfully, they didn't choose the usual method of first drives for the new XC90 where auto journalists are flown to another city and given just a few hours to drive the vehicle. Instead, they

XC90 was one such vehicle. It looked perfect and, honestly, it didn't need any changes in its design. However, Volvo said at the launch that they wanted to bring it closer to the EX90's design to bring a sense of familiarity throughout the range. I disagree despite knowing the company's commitment of going fully electric sooner than all others. In my opinion, the XC90 and EX90 are two different vehicles, and as

your money wisely. The material quality, fit-and-finish, and ergonomics are absolutely faultless. However, I am not a fan of the way the new, bigger, screen has been accommodated. I still prefer the more cohesive, flush-in-the-dashboard, integration in the outgoing XC90. Again, I am nitpicking here, and I won't be surprised that the majority prefers the new one more. In fact, the screen's size, interface, and even the

“...some say Volvos are so safe that when Euro NCAP, ANCAP, etc., crash test a Volvo, VOLVO gives them a rating... Some also say that during COVID, Volvo owners were exempt from taking vaccines...”

up is the absolute best. If you're a rich audiophile, you might just buy this Volvo for its magical sound system itself. Yes, it's that good.

acted upon by the near-perfect eight-speed gearbox helping you slingshot past the traffic without any planning whatsoever. But what's even more impressive is this vehicle's cruising ability. At 100 km/h in top gear, its crank is spinning at just 1,500 rpm

and precise making you totally forget that you're driving a 3-bhk apartment on wheels. The ride quality is as sublime as earlier and that air suspension is certainly worth its weight in gold on our roads. At slow speeds, you would fall in love with the way it absorbs the road imperfections and you will also be impressed by how beautifully it alienates you from them at higher speeds. THAT and good handling don't usually go together, that too in a full size SUV that's not even pretending to be a “sporty” one, but they do in this Volvo.

SAFETY & VERDICT

Do you really



chose the much more sensible route of providing the vehicle to us at our home turf so that we not only get more quality time with the vehicle, but also get to test it on roads (and no roads) that are familiar. Good job, Volvo India Comms. and PR; please follow this model for all subsequent first drives.

Also, please note that it's not an all-new vehicle but a facelift, and while I had tested the previous model a couple of years ago, I certainly wouldn't pass the opportunity to test the new one as well, right? Moreover, as always, I won't get into the trivialities of what's new and what's old as that's something you can ascertain yourself from the press release. Instead, I would tell the things that you can't assess from the press release or a brochure. But I will still have to dedicate a few lines to the design first and you'll know why shortly.

DESIGN

They say, “don't fix something that's not broken.” The previous

such they should have distinct identities. Thankfully, they still do though in spite of the former's new grille that undoubtedly is more in line with the company's aforementioned commitment than following the subtly butch demeanour of the outgoing SUV.

Also, no matter which side you're on, you just can't deny the fact that the XC90 still looks handsome. In fact, I think it could now appeal to more people globally because the overall design has become even more sophisticated now. That said, in India we want our full size SUVs to be at least a bit intimidating, if not all out monsters, and the previous XC90 had that trait just in the right amount. The new one looks “friendlier” in comparison...

INTERIORS

It's almost the same story on the inside, which isn't a bad thing. The cabin is still properly plush, luxurious, and will always silently reiterate that you did spend

colours are better than the last one's, so, yes, it's definitely worth it.

Everything else remains top notch and this is still one of the most comfortable SUVs you can buy at this price. Also, before I move on to the next section, I must again say something which I have said in every Volvo review—music sounds best in a Volvo, and even among all the Volvos, this XC90's 19-speaker 1410 W Bowers & Wilkins set-

PERFORMANCE, RIDE QUALITY AND HANDLING

What's also good is the performance. In my customary 0-100 km/h run, the Volvo XC90 posted a time of just 7.9 seconds, and that too on GPS. More importantly, overtaking is also a cinch in this one. Every dab of the throttle pedal is instantly recognized and

and you're wonderfully cooed from the outside world at this speed. Of course, you do hear a wee bit of road noise, but that's primarily due to the low profile rubber on those gorgeous 20-inch alloys the XC90 rides on. The best part is that even that tiny bit of road noise doesn't increase exponentially as the speeds rise. The XC90 is a fantastic highway tourer, ladies and gentlemen, and you would love long journeys in this one.

Surprisingly, it turned out to be a great city vehicle as well. I say that because the last time I drove the XC90, I clearly remember that while it wasn't a boat, it didn't handle like a sporty hatchback either. Of course, you can't expect a massive SUV to handle like that, but the new XC90 certainly has better handling than before. Volvo do claim that they have improved the suspension, and I am happy to report that it shows in this vehicle's handling. It feels much more agile



want me to tell you about the safety equipment and features of a Volvo, the company that invented the three-point seatbelt and left the patent free for all as it prioritized saving lives over earning obnoxious amounts of money from the patent? No, I won't. Please check their website and/or brochure, and you'll find those details there. Meanwhile, I would share what some say about Volvo's safety.

Well, some say Volvos are so safe that when Euro NCAP, ANCAP, etc., crash test a Volvo, VOLVO gives them a rating... Some also say that during COVID, Volvo owners were exempt from taking vaccines... Some also add that cops do not fine Volvo drivers as they never exhibit unsafe driving behaviour... I shall save a few more of these gems for the next Volvo I review. In the meantime, here is the verdict—the new Volvo XC90 is the best seven-seat SUV in the segment, and you shouldn't be thinking twice before getting one.



Photos: SYED SHIRAZ SHAH

TRAVELLING THROUGH TIME: THE SPARROW'S VANISHING SONG



Prakash Chandra Sharma

The charming chirping of sparrows, a melody ingrained in our childhood memories, has been slowly fading from our lives. For years, these small, social birds filled our mornings with their delightful songs, hopping from branch to parapet. Their presence was an essential part of our everyday experience, so much so that sparrows were often associated with childhood lullabies and the soft, welcoming chirping that woke us from sleep each morning.

However, this serene picture of sparrows, often found flitting about our gardens and rooftops, is becoming increasingly rare. Today, sparrows are on the verge of extinction, and this dramatic decline is a cause for concern. What once was an abundant species in cities, towns, and villages across the globe is now a distant memory for many. The rapid disappearance of sparrows can be traced to various human-induced factors, particularly the increasing urbanization, environmental changes, and the detrimental effects of pesticide use.

THE ROLE OF SPARROWS IN NATURE

Sparrows, once a common sight in human settlements, play an essential role in the

ecosystem. These birds are not just pleasant to watch and listen to but also vital for maintaining natural harmony. They contribute significantly to pest control by feeding on insects that damage crops. Sparrows are particularly effective in reducing the number of harmful insects such as caterpillars, aphids, and beetles, all of which pose a severe threat to agricultural production. In a world where chemical pesticides have become the norm for protecting crops, sparrows naturally fulfill an important ecological role, keeping harmful pests in check without causing damage to the environment.

The house sparrow (*Passer domesticus*), in particular, is one of the most common bird species globally. Originally spread by Europeans, it has become a ubiquitous presence across Asia, Europe, and even parts of North America, New Zealand, and Australia. Despite its widespread presence, the sparrow's habitat and population have been severely impacted by human activity, especially the agricultural practices that once kept their numbers stable.

FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO THE DECLINE OF SPARROWS

Pesticide Use and Environmental Pollution
The indiscriminate use of pesticides is one of the primary factors behind the decline of sparrows. Over the years, the excessive spraying of harmful chemicals on crops has not only damaged the environment but also drastically affected bird populations. Sparrows, which feed on insects and

seeds, often ingest these chemicals, leading to poisoning and death. Furthermore, the pesticides that are harmful to birds also pose serious health risks to humans, creating a toxic cycle of damage to both wildlife and human populations.

Urbanization and Habitat Loss

As cities expand and rural areas become more urbanized, sparrows are losing their natural habitats. The once-abundant trees and open spaces that provided shelter and food for these birds are rapidly disappearing, replaced by concrete jungles. Sparrows typically build their nests in trees, hollowed-out spaces, or the rooftops of homes, but the widespread deforestation and development of residential and commercial properties have significantly reduced their available nesting sites.

Noise Pollution

Sparrows, like many other bird species, rely on their songs for communication, especially during mating seasons. However, the growing noise pollution in urban areas has interfered with their ability to communicate effectively. The loud sounds of traffic, construction, and industrial activity have made it difficult for sparrows to sing and communicate with one another, thus affecting their social behaviors and reproduction patterns.

Climate Change and Global Warming

Changes in the climate also pose a significant threat to sparrows. Global warming has led to alterations in the birds' migration



patterns, food availability, and breeding cycles. Sparrows, like many species, are highly sensitive to changes in temperature and weather conditions. As the climate warms, the delicate balance of ecosystems is disrupted, making it harder for sparrows to find food and suitable nesting locations.

WORLD SPARROW DAY: RAISING AWARENESS FOR CONSERVATION

To address the declining sparrow population and raise awareness about the importance of conserving this iconic bird, World Sparrow Day is celebrated every year on March 20th. The idea of creating a day dedicated to the sparrow was first proposed by The Nature Forever Society of India and the Eco-SIS Action Foundation of France. The inaugural World Sparrow Day took place in 2010, with the primary goal of raising global awareness about the plight of sparrows and the urgent need to protect them.

The day serves as a reminder of how human actions have negatively impacted wildlife, particularly sparrows, and how individuals and communities can come together to reverse these trends. By raising awareness and encouraging the implementation of conservation measures, World Sparrow Day hopes to inspire people to take action and ensure the survival of sparrows for future generations.

THE IMPORTANCE OF SPARROWS IN HUMAN SETTLEMENTS

Sparrows are not only important for their ecological role but also for their cultural and social significance. These small, agile birds have long been associated with human settlements and have inspired countless poems, songs, and stories. In the past, they were a common feature of rural life and urban areas alike, often found in gardens, homes, and public spaces.

Their chirping was a famil-

iar sound, waking children in the morning and creating a sense of harmony between humans and nature. Today, the absence of sparrows is felt acutely, especially in urban environments where their decline is more noticeable. While sparrows once brought joy to children and adults alike, their extinction now signifies the broader environmental issues facing our planet.

CONSERVATION EFFORTS AND WHAT CAN BE DONE

The decline of sparrows is not an irreversible trend. Through concerted conservation efforts, it is still possible to reverse the damage and protect these beautiful birds. Here are some actions that can help protect sparrows:

Reducing Pesticide Use: One of the most effective ways to protect sparrows and other wildlife is by reducing the use of harmful pesticides. Farmers and gardeners can adopt organic farming practices and use natural pest control

methods, such as introducing predators that feed on harmful insects.

Creating Safe Habitats: Urban planning should take into account the needs of wildlife, including sparrows. Planting trees, creating green spaces, and leaving areas for birds to nest can help create a more conducive environment for sparrows. People can also create safe spaces for sparrows by placing birdhouses or nesting boxes on their properties.

Raising Awareness: World Sparrow Day is an excellent opportunity to raise awareness about the importance of sparrows and the need for their conservation. Schools, communities, and environmental organizations can engage in activities like birdwatching, educational programs, and campaigns to spread knowledge about the challenges sparrows face and what people can do to help.

Supporting Conservation Projects: There are various organizations working towards the conservation of

sparrows and other endangered species. Supporting these organizations, either through donations or participation in their programs, can have a significant impact on protecting sparrows.

A CALL FOR ACTION

Sparrows, once a ubiquitous presence in human settlements, are now on the brink of extinction. This decline is not just a loss for nature but a wake-up call for humanity. As we continue to destroy habitats, use harmful chemicals, and pollute the environment, the delicate balance of nature is being disrupted, leading to the loss of species like the sparrow.

The decline of sparrows is a symptom of larger environmental problems that need to be addressed urgently. By celebrating World Sparrow Day, we not only raise awareness about the plight of sparrows but also highlight the broader need for conservation and sustainable practices in our everyday lives. It is up to all of us to ensure that the song of the sparrow continues to fill our mornings and that future generations can enjoy the beauty of these small but important birds.

As individuals, we can make a difference by supporting conservation efforts, reducing our ecological footprint, and working towards creating environments that are more welcoming to wildlife. The survival of sparrows and other species depends on the actions we take today. Let's ensure that we don't let their chirping fade away into silence.

The author is a senior freelance journalist

Where Has the Pride of Our Homes Gone... The Little Bird?



Dr. Kamlesh Sharma

The little bird that once chirped and hopped around in the courtyards of our homes was more than just a creature; it was the pride of every household. The sight of sparrows building their nests from straw between the tiles of kutchha houses, in the cracks of walls, behind pictures, in the corners of girders, under tin roofs, and even in water pipes on the roof, was common in every home. Even abandoned homes, left empty for years, were given a new life and a sense of warmth because of their chirping. From small children to the elderly, everyone was happy to take care of these little creatures, feeding them and offering them water.

The sparrow, a symbol of culture, freedom, joy, and tradition, has been a part of our lives for centuries. Unfortunately, in today's world, it seems as if this beloved bird is on the brink of extinction. With the rapid development of our cities and villages, the once-vibrant natural spaces where sparrows thrived have been replaced with concrete jungles. Electricity towers and mobile phone towers have replaced trees, causing a dramatic decline in the sparrow population.

THE SPARROW: A FRIEND OF FARMERS

Sparrows are small-sized birds with grey or black wings and a length of about 14-18 cm. Their round heads, small tails, and pyramid-shaped beaks make them easily recognizable. Sparrows prefer nesting in cavities, such as those found in trees, rocks, buildings, and even the nooks and crannies of houses. They usually breed from April to August, but nests have been observed throughout the year. A typical sparrow nest contains 4-5 eggs, which are white or light-colored. The incubation period lasts between 11-14 days, and after 14-16 days, the chicks are ready to take their first flight.

Sparrows have long been considered a friend of farmers. These birds are insectivores, meaning they feed on pests such as insects, flies, mosquitoes, spiders, and caterpillars. For centuries, sparrows have helped maintain ecological balance by controlling the insect population, particularly those that damage crops. They also feed their chicks on these pests, making them valuable allies in agricultural ecosystems. In this way, sparrows play an important role as bio-indicators of a healthy environment.

WHY ARE SPARROWS DISAPPEARING?

Despite the important role they play, sparrows are increasingly disappearing from our homes and fields. Several factors contribute to their declining numbers. The most significant issue is the rapid urbanization and



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the construction of concrete housing, which has left sparrows with fewer places to nest. Traditional tiled roofs, which once provided perfect nesting sites, have been replaced by cemented roofs that offer no nesting opportunities. Similarly, with the installation of nets on windows and ventilators, sparrows no longer have easy access to the interior of houses, which was once a popular place for them to make their homes.

Additionally, the reckless cutting down of trees and bushes has destroyed the

natural habitats of sparrows, leaving them with fewer places to breed. Furthermore, the widespread use of pesticides in agriculture has severely impacted the insect population, which is the primary food source for sparrows. The lack of insects has led to a decline in the sparrow population, as they struggle to find enough food to survive. Some studies also suggest that mobile phone tower radiation may be affecting sparrow reproductive capabilities, further exacerbating their decline.

However, there is a glimmer of hope. With growing awareness about the importance of sparrow conservation, many people are now building artificial nests out of wood and cardboard in their homes. These artificial nests have proven to be helpful in providing safe breeding grounds for sparrows, and in some areas, this has helped to stabilize the population.

SPARROWS: A



GLOBAL SYMBOL OF PRIDE

Sparrows are found across the world, from Europe to Asia, Africa, and parts of Myanmar and Indonesia. Their presence is cherished in various cultures and regions, and they have even been honored in the form of postage stamps. More than 20 countries, including India, have issued stamps featuring sparrows. The first postage stamp on sparrows was issued by Yugoslavia in 1982, and India followed suit by issuing a Rs. 5 denomination postage stamp in 2010, which featured a male and female sparrow.

A BIRD WITH MANY NAMES

The sparrow, known by different names in various regions and dialects, has become a symbol in many parts of the world. Here are a few of the names it is known by across India:

- Urdu: Chirya
- Sindhi: Jhirki
- Punjab: Chiri
- Jammu and Kashmir: Cher
- West Bengal: Charai

- Pakhi
- Orissa: Ghara Chhatia
- Gujarat: Chakli
- Maharashtra: Chimni
- Telugu: Pichhuka
- Kannada: Gubachchi
- Tamil Nadu and Kerala: Kuruvi

THE NEED FOR SPARROW CONSERVATION

The sparrow is not just a symbol of culture but an essential part of our ecosystem. Sparrows help control insect populations and, in doing so, contribute to the overall health of our agricultural lands and gardens. As urbanization continues and the natural environment shrinks, sparrows are finding it increasingly difficult to survive. Their disappearance signals a broader problem of biodiversity loss and environmental degradation.

It is important for us to remember that sparrows are not just a part of our past; they are still a valuable part of our future. As we continue to develop and grow, we must make conscious efforts to ensure that spar-

rows and other birds can continue to thrive alongside us. Simple actions such as planting trees, reducing the use of pesticides, and creating bird-friendly spaces in urban areas can make a significant difference.

Moreover, it is essential to recognize that sparrows are not just another species; they are a part of our cultural heritage. From being the subject of poems and stories to gracing our homes and courtyards, sparrows have been a cherished presence in our lives. Now, as their numbers decline, it is our responsibility to protect and conserve them for future generations. The little sparrow, which was once the pride of our homes, deserves to be preserved and protected.

The sparrow has been a constant companion in our lives, embodying the simple joys and natural beauty of our homes and surroundings. However, due to urbanization, environmental degradation, and the indiscriminate use of pesticides, this little bird is now facing the threat of extinction. While there is growing awareness about sparrow conservation, much more needs to be done to reverse the damage caused by human activity.

On this World Sparrow Day, let us reflect on our responsibility to protect these small yet significant creatures. By taking simple steps to create bird-friendly environments and reduce our ecological footprint, we can help ensure that the sparrow remains a symbol of pride and joy for generations to come.

BFI PRESIDENT SUSPENDS SECRETARY GENERAL, TREASURER OVER FINANCIAL IRREGULARITIES

BFI suspends Secretary General Hemanta Kumar Kalita and Treasurer Digvijay Singh over financial mismanagement following an independent inquiry.

AGENCIES
NEW DELHI

In a significant development, the President of the Boxing Federation of India (BFI), Ajay Singh, has suspended Secretary General Hemanta Kumar Kalita and Treasurer Digvijay Singh following an independent investigation into financial mismanagement. The decision follows a complaint from the Sports Authority of India (SAI) regarding alleged financial irregularities within the federation. In response, BFI appointed retired Delhi High Court judge, Justice Sudhir Kumar Jain, to conduct an independent inquiry into the matter. Justice Jain's report found Kalita and Singh guilty of serious financial



BFI president Ajay Singh

irregularities and mismanagement of funds, marking a clear breach of their fiduciary responsibilities. As a result, they were immediately suspended from their respective positions in BFI. "In light of the gravity of the findings and to ensure the integrity and transparency of

the Federation's operations, it has been decided to suspend you both from your respective positions as Secretary General and Treasurer of the Boxing Federation of India with immediate effect. You are hereby restrained from perform-

ing any duties or exercising any authority in these capacities," the official suspension letter stated. Furthermore, the report has been forwarded to the Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports for further action. This move underscores BFI's commitment to maintaining transparency and accountability in the administration of Indian boxing. Earlier, in a development, 300 of India's top women boxers will compete for national glory at the 8th Elite Women's National Boxing Championship, taking place at Gautam Buddha University, Greater Noida, from March 21 to 27. Organised in association with the UP Boxing Association (UPBA), the prestigious tournament returns to the venue that

hosted its last edition in 2023 with resounding success, a release said. Held under the World Boxing and Boxing Federation of India (BFI) competition guidelines, the championship is open to boxers born between January 1, 1984, and December 31, 2005. Each state unit can field a maximum of 10 boxers, with entries by numbers closing on March 10 and final name confirmations due by March 15, the release said. The action officially begins on March 20 with the arrivals, draw, and technical meeting. The opening rounds will take place from March 21 to 24, followed by the quarter-finals on March 25 and the semi-finals on March 26, leading up to the highly anticipated finals on March 27.

Haryana, Odisha, MP emerge victorious on Day 1 Finals of NWHL

AGENCIES
RANCHI

As we begin the Final phase of the National Women's Hockey League 2024-2025 here in Ranchi, Hockey Haryana, Hockey Association of Odisha, and Hockey Madhya Pradesh had a successful outing, winning their respective matches, as per Hockey India press release. In the first match of the day, Hockey Haryana defeated Manipur Hockey 7-1 in Pool A. Saavi (32', 37') and Kirti (45', 56') scored a brace each for Hockey Haryana. Khasa Shashi (11'), Supriya (54') and Kirty (58') also scored one goal each for their side. In response, Deena Devi Naoram (2') scored the consolation goal for Manipur Hockey. In the next match, the Hockey Association of Odisha defeated Hockey Bengal 1-0 in a closely contested game. Dipika Barwa (3') scored for Hockey Bengal in the first quarter of the match.



On Wednesday at National Women's Hockey League 2024-2025, Haryana defeated Manipur Hockey 7-1 in Pool A. Saavi (32', 37') and Kirti (45', 56') scored a brace each for Hockey Haryana.

In the third match, Hockey Madhya Pradesh defeated Hockey Maharashtra 2-0 in Pool A. Bhumiksha Sahu (4'), and Captain Soniya Kumre (58') scored for Hockey Madhya Pradesh in the first and final quarter of the game to take the game away from Hockey Maharashtra. The opening ceremony for the National Women's Hockey League 2025 (Final Phase) also took place on Tuesday at 06:00 pm at the

Marang Gomke Jaipal Singh AstroTurf Hockey Stadium. After the ceremony, Hockey Jharkhand locked horns with Hockey Mizoram in Pool A. The teams participating are Hockey Haryana, Hockey Maharashtra, Hockey Jharkhand, Hockey Madhya Pradesh, Hockey Bengal, Hockey Mizoram, Manipur Hockey, and Hockey Association of Odisha. The tournament will be played in a single pool with each team facing the other once. The winner of each match will be awarded three points, while draws will secure a single point. The team standing on top of the points table at the end of the league matches will be crowned champions of the elite domestic tournament. In Phase 1, played last year, Hockey Haryana finished first with 16 points in seven matches, followed by Hockey Jharkhand and Hockey Association of Odisha, just one point behind in second and third place, respectively.

'He has been an amazing leader': Venkatesh on Rahane leading KKR

AGENCIES
KOLKATA

As Kolkata Knight Riders (KKR) gear up for the upcoming Indian Premier League (IPL) season, vice-captain Venkatesh Iyer is excited to play under the leadership of Ajinkya Rahane. With Shreyas Iyer moving to Punjab Kings (PBKS), Rahane will take charge of the side, and according to Venkatesh, his influence is already being felt in the squad. "So far, he has been an amazing leader of the group. He has taken the initiative to make conversations with all of us and try to gel with the team. We are talking about someone who has led India across formats and captained IPL teams before. He has a great head on his shoulders, remains composed under pressure, and has been a stalwart of the game. He has scored runs everywhere. For me, it's going to be a great learning experience, and I am quite excited to play under him," Iyer told ANI. Venkatesh, who has been a part of KKR for a few years, now steps into the role of vice-captain. When asked about his preparation for the added responsibility, he said, "There is no specific preparation for it. I have always carried myself as a leader, so it's not entirely new to me. I have put in the hard yards in both batting and bowling. More than anything, it's about



mindset--if you have accepted the role and are willing to take on the responsibility, half the job is already done. Our preparation has been good, and we have a strong group of players. I'm really excited and looking forward to the season." Despite stepping into a leadership role, Venkatesh revealed that he hasn't had specific conversations with former KKR captain Shreyas Iyer or mentor Gautam Gambhir about guiding the team. "I haven't spoken to them directly about it. Last season, when I was with the team, they were around, but I have always believed that I can contribute as a leader beyond just batting and bowling. The management has trusted me with the role, and I hope to do justice to it," Iyer noted.

Tanmay Srivastava set to become first cricketer to play and umpire in IPL

AGENCIES
NEW DELHI

The IPL is scheduled to commence its 18th edition in 2025, featuring a game between the Royal Challengers Bengaluru (RCB) and Kolkata Knight Riders (KKR) at Eden Gardens in Kolkata. Tanmay Srivastava, who was an essential part of the India U-19 team led by Virat Kohli that claimed the World Cup in 2008, has been officially named as an umpire for IPL 2025, as per a report by Wisden. Srivastava also played in the IPL during 2008 and 2009 for Punjab Kings,

playing three innings and accumulating only eight runs. Therefore, he became the first individual globally to play and umpire in the IPL. On Tuesday, March 18, his state board, the Uttar Pradesh Cricket Association (UPCA), confirmed that Srivastava would be one of the umpires for IPL 2025. UPCA posted on their X handle with the caption, "A true player never leaves the field--just changes the game. Wishing Tanmay Srivastava the best as he dons a new hat with the same passion!" Srivastava played for Uttar Pradesh in the domes-



tic circuit. His first season with UP was not great, but he kept doing well for India Under-19. He scored a century in the 2007 Ranji Trophy final against Delhi.

Srivastava played for Uttar Pradesh in the domestic circuit. His first season with UP was not great, but he kept doing well for India Under-19.

In the U-19 World Cup in Malaysia the same year, he finished the tournament's top-scorer with 262 runs, including a vital 43 in In-

dia's victory in the final against South Africa. After the 2007 domestic season, Srivastava followed up with a strong first-class season next year, ending as UP's leading run-getter in 2008-09. He was contracted by Kings XI Punjab for the IPL. Srivastava was later picked by Deccan Chargers and Kochi Tuskers Kerala in different seasons but didn't play any matches. Srivastava played 90 first-class matches, scoring 4918 runs with an average of 34.39. He scored ten centuries and 27 fifties; he retired from all formats of the game in 2020.

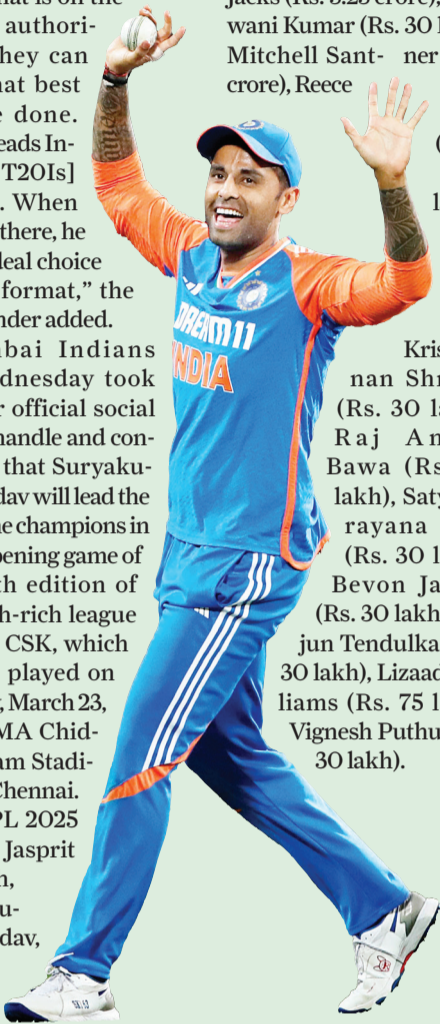
IPL 2025: Suryakumar Yadav to lead MI in their opener against CSK

AGENCIES
MUMBAI

India's T20I skipper Suryakumar Yadav will lead the Mumbai Indians (MI) side in the franchise's opening clash of the Indian Premier League (IPL) 2025 campaign against the five-time champions Chennai Super Kings on Sunday in the absence of regular skipper Hardik Pandya. Hardik received a one-match ban after the team's last encounter in IPL 2024 against the Lucknow Super Giants (LSG) for maintaining a slow over-rate. This was the third time in the league that the 31-year-old player had been penalised with a one-match ban and a fine of Rs. 30 lakh. Speaking at the press conference in Mumbai, the T20 World Cup winner said that he knew that the last over bowled was delayed by almost two minutes. He went on to say that bowling over at times is not his hands. "That is out of my control. Last year what occurred is part of the sport. We bowled the last over one-and-a-half or two minutes late. At that point, I didn't know the consequences," the Gujarat-born cricketer said as quoted by ESPNcricinfo. Further, the Champions Trophy winner said that

in his absence, right-hand batter Suryakumar Yadav is the "ideal choice" to lead the team. "It is unfortunate, but the rules say it. I will have to go with the process. Next season, if they continue or not continue [with this rule], I think that is on the higher authorities. They can see what best can be done. Surya leads India [in T20Is] as well. When I'm not there, he is the ideal choice in this format," the all-rounder added. Mumbai Indians on Wednesday took to their official social media handle and confirmed that Suryakumar Yadav will lead the five-time champions in their opening game of the 18th edition of the cash-rich league against CSK, which will be played on Sunday, March 23, at the MA Chidambaram Stadium in Chennai. MI IPL 2025 Squad: Jasprit Bumrah, Suryakumar Yadav, Hardik Pan-

dya, Rohit Sharma, Tilak Varma, Trent Boult (Rs. 12.50 crore), Naman Dhir (Rs. 5.25 crore), Robin Minz (Rs. 65 lakh), Karn Sharma (Rs. 50 lakh), Ryan Rickelton (Rs. 1 crore), Deepak Chahar (Rs. 9.25 crore), Mujib Ur Rehman, Will Jacks (Rs. 5.25 crore), Ashwani Kumar (Rs. 30 lakh), Mitchell Santner (Rs. 2 crore), Reece Topley (Rs. 75 lakh), Krishnan Shrijith (Rs. 30 lakh), Raj Angad Bawa (Rs. 30 lakh), Satyanarayana Raju (Rs. 30 lakh), Bevon Jacobs (Rs. 30 lakh), Arjun Tendulkar (Rs. 30 lakh), Lizaad Williams (Rs. 75 lakh), Vignesh Puthur (Rs. 30 lakh).



DSC's Table Tennis Tournament kicks off

AGENCIES
CHENNAI

The Dream Sports Championship U15 Table Tennis Tournament kicked off on March 17, and Day 1 was filled with impressive displays of skill and technique. The day commenced with an inspiring orientation session led by Table Tennis legend Sharath Kamal, Dream Sports Foundation's Sr. Program Director Navin Fernandes, and Deepak Malik, Co-founder and COO of Stupa Analytics, who addressed the young athletes and set the stage for an exciting competition, according to the Dream Sports Foundation press release. On Day 1, K Akshay Bhushan and Chakraborty Shrestho delivered stand-out performances in the U15 boys' category, while Dhar Shreya and Jitnada Unjit dominated the girls competition. Akshay delivered the most dominant performance of



the day. In his match against Bhiwandkar Param, Bhushan secured a commanding 3-0 victory with scores of 11-1, 12-10, and 11-8. Chakraborty Shrestho engaged in a marathon five-game thriller against Dhariwal Siddhanth. Shrestho faced fierce resistance, ultimately prevailing 3-2 with scores of 11-2, 10-12, 11-6, 15-17, and 13-11. Dhar Shreya delivered the most clinical performance of the day against Dhimahi Kabrawala, gaining a comprehensive 3-0 win, posting impressive scores of

11-4, 11-8, and 11-1. Jitnada Unjit starred in her match against Singhal Akanksha, securing a convincing 3-0 win with scores of 11-2, 11-9, and 11-5. The Dream Sports Championship U15 Table Tennis Tournament kicked off on March 17, 2025, with Day 1 filled with impressive displays of skill and technique. K Akshay Bhushan and Chakraborty Shrestho delivered standout performances in the U15 boys' category, while Dhar Shreya and Jitnada Unjit dominated the girls competition.

CHHETRI'S COMEBACK GOAL SEALS INDIA'S VICTORY OVER MALDIVES



Indian captain Sunil Chhetri celebrates after scoring on his return, helping India secure their first win in 489 days with a 2-0 victory over Maldives in an international friendly. ANI