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KERALA ASSEMBLY PASSES
PRIVATE UNIVERSITY BILL
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TALKS WITH US: WHAT'S
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PUNJAB KINGS
OVERCOME GUJARAT
TITANAS BY 11 RUNS

RS ONE LAKH CRORE DELHI BUDGET HAS WOMEN AT CENTRE

- Digital travel cards for women to replace pink tickets.
- Rs 5,100 crore for women’s economic empowerment.
- Rs 696 crore allocated for development in slum clusters.
- Rs 100 crore set aside for opening 100 Atal Canteens across Delhi.
- Rs 21,000 allowance to expecting mothers.

TDG NETWORK
NEW DELHI

Delhi Chief Minister Rekha Gupta on Tuesday presented Rs one lakh crore FY26 Budget with ten focus areas, including Yamuna cleaning, economic empowerment of women, infrastructure, water, and connectivity, asserting that it is a roadmap for making the national capital self-reliant.

In her 138-minute speech, Gupta, who also holds the finance portfolio, called the maiden Budget of the BJP-led Delhi government “historic”, emphasising that the era of “corruption and inefficiency” was over.

This is the first Budget presented by a BJP-led government in Delhi in over 26 years, following the party’s victory over the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) in last month’s Assembly elections.

Highlighting the focus



Delhi CM Rekha Gupta, who holds Finance portfolio, at her office ahead of budget presentation.

on infrastructure development in the city, the chief minister announced that the government has doubled capital expenditure to Rs 28,000 crore in its 2025-26 Budget.

The total Budget out-

lay for fiscal year 2025-26 marks a 31.5 per cent increase from the previous year.

To combat pollution in Delhi, Rs 300 crore has been set aside by the BJP government.

Taking a dig at the AAP which ruled the city for over 10 years, CM Gupta recited lines of renowned poet Bashir Badr, “Dil ki basti puraani dilli hai, jo bhi guzra hai usne lootaa hai” (The locality of my

heart is old Delhi, whoever has passed through it has looted it).

Gupta said that the Budget is the first step to develop the national capital.

“Delhi went down in every aspect of development in the past decade. The previous government ruined the economic health of the national capital like termites,” she said.

A major focus of the Budget is the cleaning and rejuvenation of the Yamuna River, inspired by the Sabarmati river-front project.

The government has allocated Rs 500 crore for Yamuna cleaning, ensuring that only treated water enters the river through the decentralization of 40 sewage treatment plants (STPs).

Additionally, Rs 500 crore has been earmarked for the repair and upgradation of STPs, and Rs 250 crore for replacing

■ P5

SECTOR		AMOUNT IN CR	SECTOR		AMOUNT IN CR
	Capital Expenditure	Rs 2800		NCR transport connectivity	Rs 1000
	Yamuna River Rejuvenation	Rs 500		Support for Small-Scale Industries	Rs 50
	Sewage treatment plants upgrade	Rs 500		Cultural Initiatives	Rs 30
	Replacing old sewer lines	Rs 250		‘CM SHRI Schools’	Rs 100
	Drinking water and sanitation projects	Rs 9000		Free laptops	Rs 7.5
	Combating pollution	Rs 300		Narela education hub	Rs 100
	Healthcare	Rs 6874		Overhead power lines	Rs 100
	Nutrient kits	Rs 210		MCD	Rs 6897
	Transport	Rs 12952		Cow shelters	Rs 40



Delhi Chief Minister Rekha Gupta with Delhi Cabinet Ministers Kapil Mishra, Ashish Sood, Parvesh Verma, Manjinder Singh Sirsa and Ravinder Indraj Singh show the victory signs during a press conference after presenting the Budget 2025-26 ANI

Parliament approves changes in Disaster Management Act

TDG NETWORK
NEW DELHI

Parliament on Tuesday passed amendments to the Disaster Management Act, 2004, with Home Minister Amit Shah asserting that there will be no centralisation of powers or discrimination with states in handling disasters.

Replying to the debate on the bill in the Rajya Sabha, Shah launched a sharp attack on the Congress party’s past management of the Prime Minister’s Relief Fund, alleging a lack of accountability and transparency during the previous UPA regime.

“This bill ensures transparency, trust credibility and accountability,” he said and asserted that the amendments to the Act take forward the fight against disaster from a “reactive approach to proactive and innovative approach”.

Listing various initiatives, he said that India is now well regarded in handling disasters and the world is recognising its capabilities.

The amendment bill, which was passed in the Lok Sabha in December 2024, was cleared by voice vote in the Rajya Sabha, with several opposition-moved amendments being negated by the Upper House. About 24 members participated in the debate on the amendment bill.

Shah assured the Upper House and the state governments that there would not

CLEAN-UP ACT

- NDMA and SDMA will become “more effective.”
- National and state database will be created
- States can set up Urban Disaster Management Authorities and State Disaster Response Forces
- In the present PM-CARE Fund no political party president is involved in its management

be “centralisation of power”.

“Our fight against disasters cannot be done without strengthening the institutions. Unless the institutions are made more accountable and responsible. If one looks at the bill, you will find we have done both things,” he said.

The amendments were needed to tackle the new kinds of disasters emerging in the wake of global warming and climate change, he said.

■ P5

LOK SABHA APPROVES
FINANCE BILL 2025

P2

BOILERS BILL PASSED IN LS,
ONE NATION ONE POLL JPC
TENURE EXTENDED

P2



Union Home Minister Amit Shah speaks in the Rajya Sabha during the Budget Session of the Parliament, in New Delhi on Tuesday. (ANI Photo/Sansad TV)

3 Hurriyat constituents sever ties with separatists; Shah hails decision

TDG NETWORK
NEW DELHI/SRINAGAR

Two Hurriyat Conference constituents -- the Jammu and Kashmir People’s Movement (JKPM) and the J&K Democratic Political Movement (JKDPM) -- have said that they are severing their ties with separatists, Union Home Minister Amit Shah said Tuesday, asserting it will strengthen India’s unity.

Another group, the Jammu-based J&K Freedom Movement headed by Mohd Sharief Sartaj, also ended its long association with the

separatist amalgam and announced disbanding of the group with immediate effect.

The Home Minister called it a “significant victory” for Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s vision of a peaceful and united India.

Shah’s reaction came soon after the significant development came to the fore with the two organizations affiliated with the Hurriyat Conference made the announcement about their decision to sever ties with separatism in Jammu and Kashmir.

■ P5

Kamra refuses to apologise, summoned by Mumbai police

TDG NETWORK
MUMBAI

Maharashtra’s Khar Police has sent a summons to standup artist Kunal Kamra, asking him to appear before the investigating officer at 11 am today.

As per Mumbai police, Kunal is not in Mumbai right now.

MIDC police had registered an FIR against Kunal Kamra for his remarks during a stand-up comedy show, which was transferred to Khar police for further investigation.

This comes after Kunal Kamra allegedly made disparaging remarks against Maharashtra Deputy Chief Minister Eknath Shinde, in his latest standup com-

■ P5

No conclusion in meet called by RS chair on judicial accountability



Vice-President and Chairman, Rajya Sabha, Jagdeep Dhankhar meets Floor Leaders of various political parties at Parliament House on Tuesday.

AGENCIES
NEW DELHI

No conclusion was reached in a meeting convened by Rajya Sabha Chairman Jagdeep Dhankhar on Tuesday on judicial accountability in the wake of allegations of recovery of cash from the residence of a high court

judge, Shiv Sena (UBT) MP Priyanka Chaturvedi said.

Talking to the media in the Parliament complex after the meeting, she also said that the House may discuss the issue next week.

“No conclusion was reached in the meeting today... The issue may be dis-

■ P5

Congress plans major reshuffling in Haryana

CHANDIGARH: Reeling under the leadership crisis in Haryana, the faction ridden Congress party plans to revamp its structuring as high command has now deputed party’s newly appointed state in-charge BK Hariprasad and co-in-charge Jitendra Bhagel to complete the task. Both have started having discussions with leaders.

DETAILS ■ P4

RBI cautions banks against excessive fees

NEW DELHI: The RBI has said banks cannot impose excessive charges under the priority sector lending category. No loan-related and ad hoc service charges or inspection fee shall be levied on priority sector loans up to Rs 50,000, RBI said.

DETAILS ■ P7

B’desh Army refutes reports of ‘coup’

DHAKA: The Bangladesh Army Tuesday dismissed a report published by an Indian media outlet, saying the article claiming an emergency meeting of top army brass was based on “false and fabricated” information. Claims of an “impending coup” are “entirely deceitful, it said.

DETAILS ■ P12

Army seeks transparent probe in assault of Colonel

TARUNI GANDHI
CHANDIGARH

The Indian Army has demanded a fair and time-bound investigation into the alleged assault on Colonel Pushpinder Singh Bath by Punjab Police personnel in Patiala.

Lt Gen Mohit Wadhwa, Chief of Staff, Army Western Command Headquarters, Chandimandir, and Punjab DGP Gaurav Yadav held a joint media

briefing on Tuesday regarding the incident.

However, the Army maintained a one-way communication, with officials not taking any questions from the media.

Colonel Bath has accused 12 Punjab Police personnel of assaulting him and his son over a parking dispute on the intervening night of March 13-14. He has filed a plea in the Punjab and Haryana High Court,

seeking the transfer of the probe to the CBI or another independent agency, alleging that a fair investigation under the Punjab Police is not possible.

Lt Gen Wadhwa emphasized the need for a transparent probe to ensure justice and maintain trust in the system. “The guilty must be punished in a timely and exemplary manner so that such incidents do

■ P5

BUDGET AIMS TO PROVIDE TAX CERTAINTY: FM

LS passes Finance Bill 2025 with 35 amendments as Sitharaman announces reduction in tariff slabs from 21 to just eight

TDG NETWORK
NEW DELHI

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman, on Tuesday, underscored the Union government's commitment to providing tax certainty and streamlining business regulations as part of the broader vision to build a Viksit Bharat by 2047.

"The Budget aims to do reforms to build Viksit Bharat by 2047. It aims to provide tax certainty, reforms on ease of doing business also we will have a new Income Tax Bill which is currently with a special Committee. This Bill is not brought as part of Finance Bill," Sitharaman stated speaking at the discussion on Finance Bill 2025.

The lower house on Tuesday passed the Finance Bill, 2025 with 35 government amendments.

Elaborating on tax reforms, she announced a reduction in customs tariff rates on industrial goods,



Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman speaks in the Lok Sabha during the Budget Session of the Parliament, in New Delhi on Tuesday. ANI

cutting the number of tariff slabs from 21 to just eight. Additionally, she clarified that either cess or surcharge--not both--can be levied on an item under direct tax provisions.

"We have removed seven custom tariff rates on industrial goods, reducing tariff from 21 to 8 per cent. We have ensured that no one item is cess and a sur-

charge can be applied. Only one can be levied," says FM Sitharaman while speaking on direct taxes.

"Time given to exporters who import some components to produce goods to export has been increased from six months to one year," she added.

Addressing concerns over indirect taxation, the Finance Minister assured that

prasadam from temples, mosques, churches, and gurudwaras would remain exempt from GST.

She also mentioned that a Group of Ministers (GoM) is evaluating GST reductions on ingredients used in preparing these prasadam. Furthermore, she announced that imported drugs for rare diseases--whether by individual

patients or research organisations--have been exempted from Integrated GST (IGST).

In a move to support exporters, Sitharaman declared that businesses importing components for export production will now have one year instead of six months to use those inputs, providing them greater flexibility.

On the issue of GST compensation, Sitharaman categorically stated that no pending dues remain for states.

"When states submitted auditor-certified claims, all payments were made. The law clearly states that GST compensation cess ended on June 30, 2022," she affirmed.

Clarifying the ongoing collection of cess, she explained that the government is currently repaying loans taken during the COVID-19 pandemic and that this repayment process will conclude by early 2026.

Boilers Bill passed in LS, ONOE JPC tenure extended

TDG NETWORK
NEW DELHI

The Boilers Bill, 2024, was also passed in the Lok Sabha. This bill emphasises Ease of Doing Business (EoDB) and seeks to benefit boiler users, including those in the MSME sector.

Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal moved for its passage, as the bill had earlier been passed in the Rajya Sabha.

The Boilers Act, 1923, was comprehensively amended in 2007 by the Indian Boilers (Amendment) Act, 2007, wherein inspection and certification by independent third-party inspecting authorities was introduced.

However, on further examination of the existing Act, a need was felt for its review and incorporation of the decriminalised provisions in accordance with the Jan Vishwas (Amendment of Provisions) Act, 2023.

Accordingly, the existing Act has been reviewed, with obsolete provisions omitted and certain substantive en-

abling provisions made for the rules and regulations that were not earlier provided.

Certain new definitions have also been incorporated, and a few existing definitions have been amended to clarify the provisions of the Bill.

For Ease of Doing Business (EoDB), the Bill will benefit boiler users, including those in the MSME sector, as provisions related to the decriminalisation have been incorporated into the bill.

Out of the seven offences, criminal penalties are retained for four major offences that may result in loss of life and property to ensure the safety of boilers and personnel dealing with boilers. Provision has been made for fiscal penalties for other offences.

For all non-criminal offences, 'fine' has been converted into 'penalty' to be levied through executive mechanism instead of courts as existed earlier. The bill seeks to enhance safety,

as specific provisions have been made to ensure the safety of persons working inside a boiler and provide that boiler repair is undertaken by qualified and competent persons.

The Lok Sabha also approved the motion to extend the tenure of the JPC on 'One Nation, One Election' up to the first day of the last week of the Monsoon Session, 2025.

Chairman of the Joint Parliamentary Committee (JPC), PP Chaudhary, had moved the motion in the Lok Sabha on Tuesday regarding an extension of time for presenting the report on the "One Nation, One Election" Bills ('Constitution (One Hundred and Twenty-Ninth Amendment) Bill, 2024 and the Union Territories Laws (Amendment) Bill, 2024').

The bills under consideration include the Constitution (One Hundred and Twenty-Ninth Amendment) Bill, 2024, and the Union Territories Laws (Amendment) Bill, 2024.

Centre committed to strengthening, modernisation of border security: MHA to LS

TDG NETWORK
NEW DELHI

The government of India is committed to the construction and modernization of critical border infrastructure, such as fencing, border outposts, floodlights and roads, to enhance security along international borders, the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) informed the Lok Sabha on Tuesday.

Union Minister of State (MoS) for Home Nityanand Rai shared this information in a written reply, to questions on border security.

The question asked was, "Whether the Government

faces delays in constructing critical border infrastructure like fencing, outposts and reads due to funding shortages and inter-agency disputes. If so, the steps being taken to expedite these projects, especially along sensitive borders like India-Pakistan and India-Bangladesh."

The MoS in his reply stated, "The government of India is committed to the construction and modernization of critical border infrastructure, such as fencing, border outposts, floodlights and roads, to enhance security along international borders. The Ministry conducts regu-

lar reviews with executing agencies and State Governments/UT Administrations to ensure timely completion of border infrastructure projects."

He further added, "Additionally, dedicated State-Level Steering Committees periodically review the progress of border works along the India-Pakistan and India-Bangladesh borders to facilitate smooth execution."

A second question posed to the MoS Home asked, "The manner in which the Ministry plans to address these vulnerabilities which compromise national security?"

In his written reply the MoS

stated, "A comprehensive and multi-pronged approach has been adopted to strengthen border security and address potential challenges. This includes detailed vulnerability mapping, deployment of additional manpower, and the use of specialized surveillance equipment which have been installed at strategic locations."

"Apart from the above, measures such as round-the-clock patrolling, anti-tunneling exercises, and installation of border floodlights and security fences ensure robust security mechanisms at international borders," the MoS further stated.

Manish Tewari files motion to discuss alleged aberrations in judiciary in LS

TDG NETWORK
NEW DELHI

Congress MP Manish Tewari has submitted an Adjournment Motion in the Lok Sabha on Tuesday, seeking to suspend the regular business of the House to discuss urgent concerns regarding alleged aberrations in the higher judiciary.

In his notice, Tewari emphasized the importance of addressing the matter of national significance. He pointed out that the executive, legislature, judiciary, and a free press are the four pillars supporting India's democracy. The alleged aberrations in the judiciary, according to Tewari, have



raised concerns within the legal community and among citizens across the country.

"The recent reports of alleged aberrations in the judiciary have disturbed the legal fraternity and other citizens across the country. Parliament, being the supreme legislative body that

exercises oversight on both the executive and even an independent judiciary, must rise to the occasion," Tewari stated in his motion.

The Congress MP called on the government to provide a comprehensive statement on the floor of the House regarding the incidents in question, as they have raised

concerns about the integrity, impartiality, and fairness of the judicial system. Tewari sought the permission of the Chair to raise this matter urgently, highlighting its importance in ensuring the continued trust and confidence of the public in India's judicial processes. Meanwhile, Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha on Monday witnessed adjournments as treasury benches sought to corner Congress over purported remarks of Karnataka Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar relating to the Constitution with Parliamentary Affairs Minister Kiren Rijiju and Union Health Minister JP Nadda leading the BJP's attack.

Priyanka, Tharoor with other Kerala MPs protest outside Parliament over MNREGA issue

TDG NETWORK
NEW DELHI

Opposition MPs from Kerala, including Congress leader Priyanka Gandhi Vadra staged a protest over the MNREGA issue outside the premises of Parliament on Tuesday.

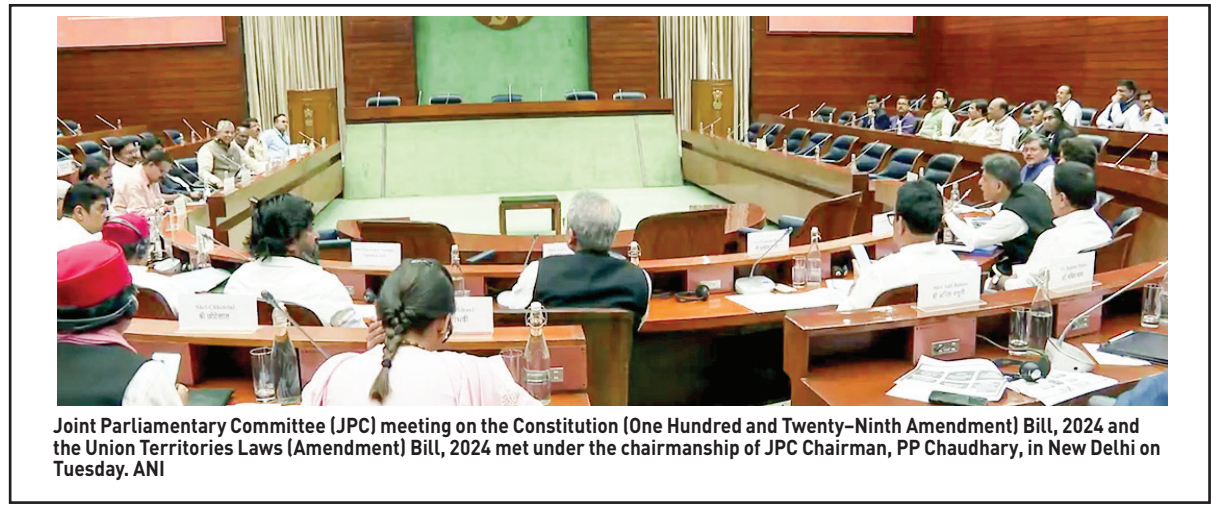
Congress MP and Leader of Opposition in Lok Sabha, Rahul Gandhi also joined the protest for a short peri-



od of time. Congress MP KC Venugopal said, "As per the provisions of the MGNRE Act, if the wages of the works

have been delayed for more than 15 days, then there should be a provision of interest to be given to them.

Unfortunately, MNREGA workers do not receive their salaries in all areas of Kerala. There is no concrete answer from the central minister on this. The central government is trying to finish this scheme." Venugopal highlighted that under the MGNREGA Act, if wages of the workers were delayed for more than 15 days, they should receive interest on the delayed payments.



Joint Parliamentary Committee (JPC) meeting on the Constitution (One Hundred and Twenty-Ninth Amendment) Bill, 2024 and the Union Territories Laws (Amendment) Bill, 2024 met under the chairmanship of JPC Chairman, PP Chaudhary, in New Delhi on Tuesday. ANI

GLIMPSES FROM PARLIAMENT



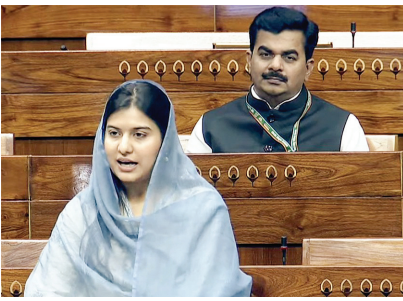
Union Minister for Electronics and Information Technology Ashwini Vaishnaw. ANI



Trinamool Congress (TMC) MP Saayoni Ghosh speaks in the Lok Sabha. ANI



Samajwadi Party (SP) MP Dimple Yadav along with party MPs Jaya Bachchan and others at Parliament on Tuesday. ANI



Samajwadi Party (SP) MP Iqra Choudhary speaks in the Lok Sabha during the Budget Session of the Parliament, in New Delhi on Tuesday. ANI

Consumer protection, empowerment being ensured with progressive legislations: MoS

TDG NETWORK
NEW DELHI

The Minister of State for Consumer Affairs, Food and Public Distribution BL Verma said that the department of consumer affairs said is continuously working for consumer protection and empowerment of consumers by enactment of progressive legislations.

The Minister informed the House in reply to the question by Rajya Sabha MP Kartikeya Sharma that with a view to modernise the framework governing the consumer protection in the new era of globalization, technologies, ecommerce markets Consumer Protection Act, 1986 was repealed and Consumer Protection Act, 2019 was enacted.

The Consumer Protection Act, 2019 provides for a three tier quasi-judicial machinery at District, State and Central levels com-



monly known as "Consumer Commissions" for protection of the rights of consumers and to provide simple and speedy redressal of consumer disputes including those related with unfair trade practices.

The Consumer Commissions are empowered to give relief of a specific nature and award compensation to consumers, wherever appropriate. The National Consumer Helpline (NCH) adminis-

tered by the Department of Consumer Affairs has emerged as a single point of access to consumers across the country for their grievance redressal at a pre-litigation stage.

To safeguard the interests of consumers from unfair trade practices in e-commerce, the Department of Consumer Affairs has notified the Consumer Protection (E-commerce) Rules, 2020 under the provisions of the Consumer Protection Act, 2019.

No proposal to integrate AI, IoT into PDS: MoS to Rajya Sabha

TDG NETWORK
NEW DELHI

Minister of State for Consumer Affairs, Food & Public Distribution Nimuben Jayantibhai Bambhaniya said that at present there is no proposal to integrate Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Internet of Things (IoT) into Public Distribution System (PDS).

In a reply to the question raised in the Rajya Sabha by MP Kartikeya Sharma, the Minister further informed the House, the government is implementing 'Scheme for Modernization and Reforms through Technology in Public Distribution System (SMART-PDS)' for the development and implementation of advanced integrated supply chain software in States/UTs. She said that art present, the SMART-PDS is in development phase. She said that SMART-PDS was started by NIC from October



2024 and the application is expected to be launched in phases from April 2025 onwards

The SMART-PDS scheme envisages to strengthen the technology infrastructure in Public Distribution System (PDS) in order to enable technology driven reforms and transformative changes in the entire PDS ecosystem covering NFSA and State schemes.

THE DAILY GUARDIAN SURVEY ON MUHAMMAD YUNUS CHINA VISIT

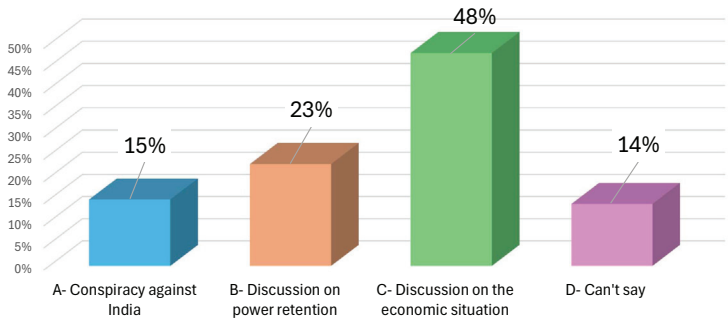
69% believe China is using Bangladesh on pretext of providing aid

Bangladesh's Interim leader, Muhammad Yunus, will visit Beijing on March 26 for his first State visit, attending the Boao Forum for Asia. This marks his highest-level bilateral engagement, following meet-

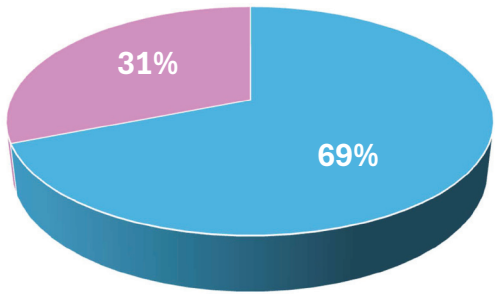
ings with leaders like Joe Biden and Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. Yunus rose to power after mass protests ousted former PM Sheikh Hasina, forcing her to flee on August 5, 2024.

Q1.▶

Muhammad Yunus is soon going on a China visit. What do you think he will discuss with Xi Jinping?



A- Yes
B- No

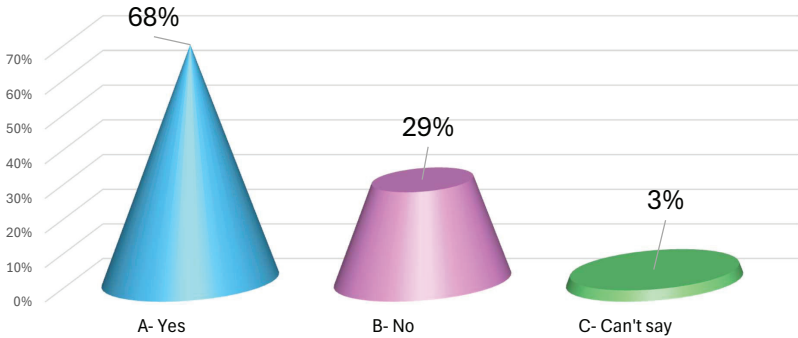
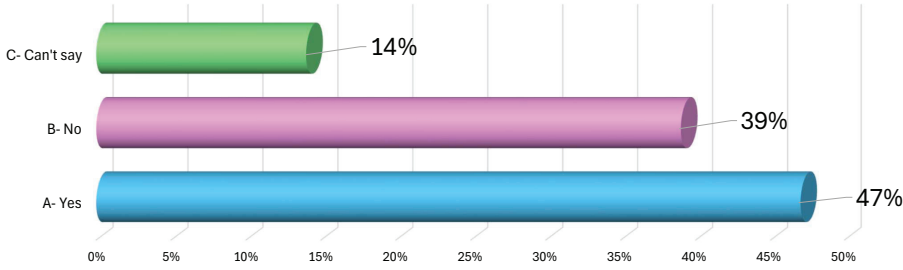


Q2.◀

Is China using Bangladesh on the pretext of providing aid?

Q3.▶

Muhammad Yunus is facing continuous opposition in Bangladesh. Do you think China will help him retain power?



Q4.◀

By trapping Bangladesh in a debt trap, will China also make Bangladesh a pauper like Pakistan?

THE DAILY GUARDIAN SURVEY ON BANGLADESH TERROR ATTACK

26% believe political instability to be reason for terror threats in B'desh

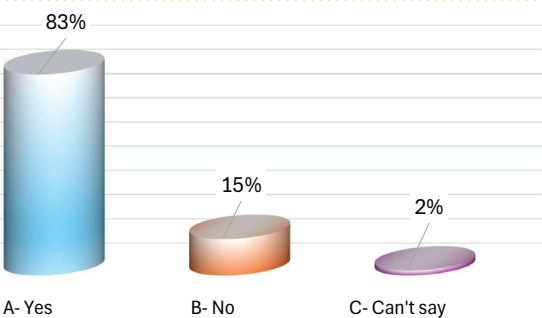
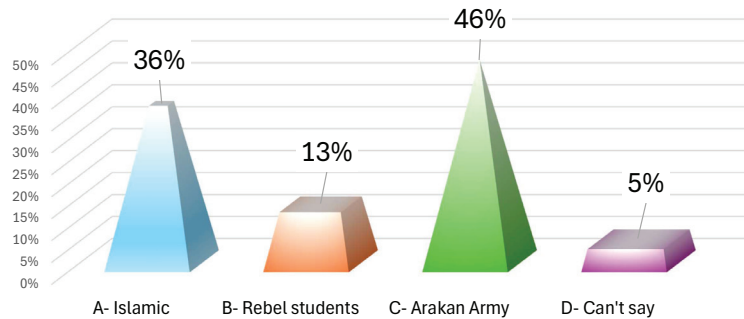
Bangladesh's Army Chief, General Waker-Uz-Zaman, has warned of potential terror attacks within the next month, urging increased

vigilance. Speaking to senior commanders in Dhaka, he cited intelligence of a possible strike within a week. During a meeting with U.S.

senators, he raised concerns over rising extremism following growing Islamist violence since Sheikh Hasina's ouster in August 2024.

Q1.▶

Bangladesh's Army Chief has warned of a terror attack threat. Who is the threat from?

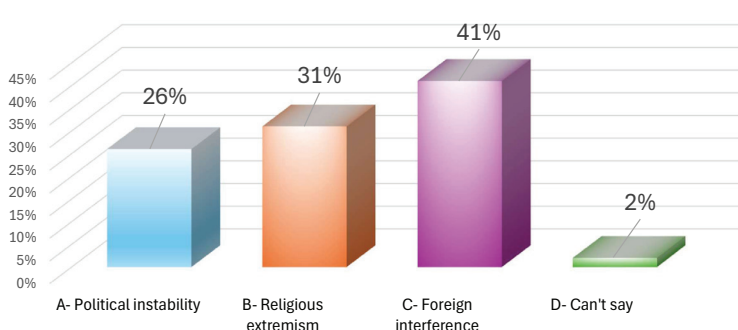


Q2.◀

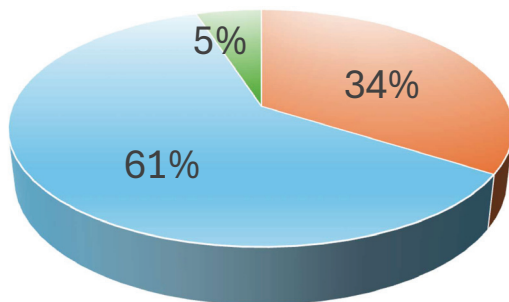
Is terrorism spreading in Bangladesh due to Yunus' growing friendship with Pakistan?

Q3.▶

What could be the main reason behind the threat of terror attack in Bangladesh?



A- Imprisonment
B- Execution
C- Can't say



Q4.◀

What action should be taken against extremists promoting terrorism in Bangladesh?

Rs one lakh crore Delhi budget

CONTINUED FROM P1

old sewer lines. A major focus has also been placed on clean drinking water and sanitation, with Rs 9,000 crore allocated for related projects.

The health sector has been allocated Rs 6,874 crore, with a focus on setting up health and wellness centres and expanding the Ayushman Arogya Mandir initiative. The Delhi government has also allocated Rs 210 crore for providing nutrient kits and an allowance of Rs 21,000 to expecting mothers.

The Delhi government has allocated Rs 1,000 crore for improved transport links connecting NCR and a total of Rs 12,952 crore for the transport sector.

To curb corruption in the free-bus ride scheme for women, the government will replace pink tickets with cards.

For women's welfare, Rs 5,100 crore has been earmarked to provide Rs 2,500 per month to eligible women. Additionally, the government will install 50,000 CCTV cameras across the city to enhance

women's safety.

Gupta announced that the government aims to make Delhi an investment- and innovation-friendly city. To achieve this, a new industrial policy and a new warehouse policy will be introduced. A Traders' Welfare Board will also be established.

Furthermore, Delhi will host its first-ever 'Global Investment Summit', which will be held every two years. To support small-scale industries, Rs 50 crore has been earmarked for skill development programs, including bee-keeping.

In a major cultural initiative, the Delhi government will host an 'International Film Festival' with a budget allocation of Rs 30 crore.

The government has also allocated Rs 696 crore for the development in slum clusters and Rs 100 crore has been set aside for opening 100 Atal Canteens across the national capital.

"There is a lot of difference between us and them (AAP). You (AAP) made 'Sheesh Mahal' for yourself, we will build houses for the poor. You installed pot toilets worth lakhs, we

will make toilets for the people in slum areas," she said.

On education, Gupta attacked the previous AAP government, accusing it of misleading people about the quality of education. "The AAP government has failed many students in 9th and 11th standard so that their 10th and 12th results appear better," she alleged.

To reform the education system, the government will set up 'CM SHRI Schools', inspired by 'PM SHRI Schools' and aligned with the New Education Policy 2020. The FY26 Budget has allocated Rs 100 crore for these schools.

Additionally, the Delhi government will provide free laptops to 1,200 students passing class 10th and has allocated Rs 7.5 crore for this.

CM Gupta also announced a new education hub in the Narela area. The government has allocated Rs 100 crore for a pilot project to remove overhead electrical lines and shift high-tension power lines.

The environment and forest department will receive Rs 506 crore.

Disaster Management Act

CONTINUED FROM P1

said. "Due to climate change, the nature and scale of disasters have changed. With that, we have to change the way we tackle them. ... To address these problems in an effective manner, we have to make our institutions accountable and provide powers also."

The amendments have been discussed with all stakeholders and the government accepted 89 per cent of the suggestions it received and incorporated them in the bill, he added.

Highlighting key amendments, Shah said both National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) and State Disaster Management Authorities (SDMAs) will become "more effective", bringing more clarity and convergence among stakeholders working in the field of disaster management.

A national and state database will be created, state will be empowered

to establish Urban Disaster Management Authorities (UDMAs) and State Disaster Response Forces (SDRFs), he said.

"This bill ensures transparency, trust credibility and accountability," he said.

The minister said Section 13 of the bill removes the unnecessary provisions for the sake of transparency. "Certain members asked why Section 13 has been removed. Since Section 12 has been added, the section 13 becomes unnecessary."

He further said that sections 6 and 10 have been included through which the responsibility of NDMA has been fixed. Sections 18 and 22 also fix the responsibility of the state executive committees, while Section 6 talks about disciplinary action if there is a case of negligence and Section 68 specifies the penalty for non-compliance.

The funds will be released as per

the 15th Finance Commission, he added.

Addressing concerns about fund utilisation, Shah criticised the previous Congress regime's management of the Prime Minister's Relief Fund.

"Under the Congress regime, only one family had control over the Prime Minister's Relief Fund. The Congress party president used to be a member of the Prime Minister's Relief Fund," he alleged. He contrasted this with the current PM-CARE Fund, pointing out that five top ministers, including finance and defence ministers, are trustees, and no political party president is involved in its management.

"People will decide who has more accountability," the minister said, challenging the Congress party to explain its previous fund management practices.

On financial assistance, Shah highlighted significant increases in

disaster management funds.

SDRF budget rose from Rs 38,000 crore (2004-14) to Rs 1.24 lakh crore (2014-24), while NDRF budget increased from Rs 28,000 crore to Rs 79,000 crore in the same period

Overall, the central funds to states tripled from Rs 66,000 crore to Rs 2 lakh crore, he added.

Listing out new initiatives, Shah said the Modi government has created the first national disaster plan, the Subhas Chandra Bose Disaster Management Award, and National Cyclone Mitigation (Phase-I) in Odisha and Andhra Pradesh.

Shah said that inter-ministerial consultation now submits reports much faster compared to the previous regime. He also noted that 16 battalions of the National Disaster Response Force (NDRF) are now operational and have conducted relief operations in countries like Nepal, Turkey, and Vietnam.

Kamra refuses to apologise

CONTINUED FROM P1

edy special.

Following this, the Shiv Sena workers vandalised the Mumbai venue after Kamra's remarks about Eknath Shinde on Sunday.

Meanwhile, standup artiste Kunal Kamra released a statement on his official social media handle and stated that he would not "apologise" for his act.

Reacting to the ongoing tussle due to his remarks about Eknath Shinde in

his latest YouTube video, Kamra stated that an entertainment venue is merely a platform and is not "responsible" for his comedy.

"An entertainment venue is merely a platform. A space for all sorts of shows. Habitat (or any other venue) is not responsible for my comedy, nor does it have any power or control over what I say or do. Neither does any political party. Attacking a venue for a comedian's words is as senseless as

overturning a lorry carrying tomatoes because you didn't like the butter chicken you were served," Kamra's statement read.

The standup artiste emphasised that he is 'willing' to cooperate with police officials and authorities for any lawful actions taken against him. However, he also questioned whether 'the law will be fairly and equally deployed against those who have decided that vandalism is the appropriate response to being offended by a joke.'

Army seeks transparent probe

CONTINUED FROM P1

not strain the long-standing bonhomie between Punjab Police and serving or retired Army personnel," he said. He also assured that the Army remains committed to pursuing the case to its logical conclusion.

Punjab DGP Gaurav Yadav reaffirmed the police force's highest respect for the Indian Army and as-

sured strict action against those responsible. He stated that a high-level Special Investigation Team (SIT), led by a senior Punjab Police officer, has been constituted to ensure a fair and expeditious inquiry. The 12 accused personnel have been suspended, and departmental proceedings for major punishment have been initiated against them. The Punjab Police have

also registered a fresh FIR based on Colonel Bath's statement. DGP Yadav assured that the SIT has been directed to conclude the investigation swiftly so that justice is delivered without delay.

Lt Gen Wadhwa urged calm among all sections of society, cautioning against any attempts to exploit the situation for ulterior motives.

No conclusion in meet called by RS chair on judicial accountability

CONTINUED FROM P1

cussed in the House in the coming week," Chaturvedi said.

The Rajya Sabha Chairman called for a meeting with Floor Leaders on Tuesday to discuss issues pertaining to the Judiciary.

Rajya Sabha Chairman speaking in Parliament said, "I have scheduled a meeting after seeking convenience at 4.30 p.m. today with the Floor Leaders as suggested by the Leader of the Opposition and agreed to by the Leader of the House..."

"I am sure we will have very fruitful interaction and find a way out because legislation and judiciary perform optimally, then they perform best in the respective realm with the expedition," he added.

The Rajya Sabha Chair-

The Rajya Sabha Chairman further said that he will discuss "certain constraints generated by judicial orders on state action".

man further said that he will discuss "certain constraints generated by judicial orders on state action".

"The entire material available with the Supreme Court has been shared with the people at large. We will discuss when we will meet with floor leaders the certain constraints generated by judicial orders on state action," he added.

KERALA ASSEMBLY PASSES PRIVATE UNIVERSITY BILL AMID DIN IN HOUSE


Progressive step for Kerala’s education sector, restriction will be in place to meet standards, says State Higher Education Minister

TDG NETWORK
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

The Kerala Legislative Assembly on Tuesday passed the Private Universities Bill, paving the way for private universities to operate in the state. The Bill, which underwent scrutiny by the Subject Committee, was met with heated debates and strong opposition concerns before being passed. State Higher Education Minister R Bindu defended the Bill, stating that it was a progressive step for Kerala’s education sector. She assured that strict regulations would be in place to maintain academic standards in private universities. However, several amendments and concerns were raised by opposition parties, particularly regarding fee structures and admission policies. Though the opposition did not reject

OPPOSITION EXPRESSES CONCERNS

- Several amendments and concerns were raised by opposition parties, particularly regarding fee structures and admission policies. Though the opposition did not reject the Bill in principle, they expressed serious reservations
- Leader of Opposition (LoP) VD Satheesan pointed out concerns over how private universities would impact



public universities and colleges.

Senior Congress leader Ramesh Chennithala raised concerns about

student migration from Kerala, questioning whether the new law would help curb this trend.

the Bill in principle, they expressed serious reservations. Leader of Opposition (LoP) VD Satheesan pointed out concerns over how private universities would impact public universities and colleges.

“We do not oppose the Bill entirely, but we must analyse how it will affect public universities. The government must ensure that corporate education agencies, which have played a crucial role in Kerala’s education sector, get the opportunity to establish private universities. At the same time, the state should prioritize public universities and ensure that private institutions do not operate without accountability,” Satheesan stated. Senior Congress leader

Farmers resume protest at Dallewal’s village

TDG NETWORK
CHANDIGARH

A week after Punjab Police had dismantled protest camps at the Shambhu a group of farmers started an indefinite protest at farmer leader Jagjit Singh Dallewal’s native village. On Tuesday, the Bhartiya Kisan Union (Ekta Sidhupur) set up a permanent protest camp against the state government’s actions. Farmers are demanding the release of detained leaders and a resolution to their pending demands. Heavy police deployment has been reported at the protest site. Dallewal’s son, Gurpinder Singh in a video message, alleged that the health of his father was deteriorating as he was continuing his hun-

ger strike and did not take a drop of water in the past one week. The farmer leaders and family members also alleged that they were not allowing the family to meet him. Gurpinder said that the Punjab and central governments would be responsible for any harm to his father. On Sunday morning, Dallewal was shifted under tight security from a guest house in Jalandhar’s army cantonment area to a private hospital in Patiala. He had previously been kept at the Commando Training Centre in Patiala. Though Punjab government officials have not provided a clear reason for his transfer, sources in the health department confirmed that he is under medical observa-



Kisan Union (Doaba) vice-president Gurmukh Singh, who is also associated with the Samyukta Kisan Morcha (Non-Political) and the Kisan Mazdoor Morcha (KMM), the government told the Punjab and Haryana High Court that Dallewal was hospitalized for health reasons and is “free to leave.” Dallewal, along with hundreds of farmers, was detained on March 19 during a police crackdown on the protests at the Shambhu and Khanauri border points. The farmers had been agitating since February 13 last year after their march to Delhi, demanding legal guarantees for the minimum support price (MSP), was halted by security forces.

IB officer found dead on railway track in Kerala

TDG NETWORK
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

A 24-year-old Intelligence Bureau (IB) officer, Megha, was found dead on the railway tracks near Pettah railway station on Monday morning. As per Pettah Police, Megha was a native of Koodal in Pathanamthitta, staying near Pettah as a paying guest. It is a suspected suicide case. The loco pilot of a train told the police that he saw a woman jumping onto the railway tracks. Her body was handed over to the family after the post-mortem. Pettah police are investigating the case.

Congress plans major reshuffling in Haryana

State in-charge, co-in-charge meet Haryana leaders

NEERAJ MOHAN
CHANDIGARH



Reeling under the leadership crisis in Haryana, the faction ridden Congress party is planning to revamp its structuring as the party high command has now deputed party’s newly appointed state in-charge BK Hariprasad and co-in-charge Jitendra Bhagel to complete the task. On a two-day tour at Chandigarh, both the leaders started having one to one discussion with several party leaders. Notably the deliberations coincide with the ongoing budget session of Haryana Assembly as the Congress has also failed to appoint a leader of opposition in the state assembly for the past more than six months of the formation of the government. The meeting comes days after a meeting of the party’s top leaders held at Delhi and senior leader Kumari Selja also attended the meeting.

According to media reports, both the leaders were seeking feedback from candidates who faced defeat in the Lok Sabha and Assembly elections to find out the reasons of party’s poor show. The Haryana Congress has been functioning without a full-fledged organization for the past 11 years. So far, the central leadership has only appointed a state president and four working presidents. On Wednesday, the party leaders are scheduled to meet Congress MLAs. Congress leader Rao Dan Singh who lost from Bhiwani-Mahendergarh constituency also attended the meeting and said that having no-

organization at district and block level was one of the key factors behind party’s debacle in the state. As per the sources Congress President Mallikarjun Kharge and Leader of Opposition in the Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi have instructed BK Hariprasad to finalize the state organization within two months. A Congress spokesperson confirmed that BK Hariprasad’s visit to Chandigarh has begun and that he will remain in the city until Wednesday. The Budget Session of the Assembly will resume on March 26. Mallikarjun Kharge and Rahul Gandhi have given clear instructions to BK Hariprasad to establish the Haryana Congress organization within two months. While the party is yet to decide on the Leader of Opposition in the Haryana Assembly, the primary focus of both the Congress high command and the in-charge remains on setting up a robust party organization.

High Court questions delay in FIR on Colonel Bath’s assault

NEERAJ MOHAN
CHANDIGARH



The Punjab and Haryana High Court has directed the Punjab government to submit a reply by March 28- explaining reasons behind the delay in registering the First Information Report in the alleged assault case of Colonel Pushpinder Singh Bath and his son. The court also raised serious questions about why the police took eight days to act on the complaint despite medical reports of the army officer and his son being available. Terming the allegations made against senior officials, the court also issued a notice to the Punjab government and the Central Bureau of Investigation. The High Court Bench of Justice Sandeep Moudgil asked the Punjab government for a detailed report, including the names of officers who were informed about the incident but did not register an FIR. The court also questioned why the FIR was delayed. Colonel Pushpinder Singh Bath, who is currently posted at the Army headquarters in New Delhi, has alleged that on the intervening night of March 13-14, around 12 Punjab police personnel, in-

Terming the allegations made against senior officials the court also issued a notice to the Punjab government and CBI.

cluding four inspectors, over a parking dispute. The colonel has accused the officers of brutally assaulting him, snatching his ID card and phone, and even threatening him with a “fake encounter”—all in public view and under CCTV surveillance. Colonel Bath had initially approached the police with his complaint, but instead of acting on it, the police reportedly registered a separate FIR under “affray” based on a complaint from an unrelated third party. It was only after multiple appeals to senior officers and even the Punjab Governor

that a proper FIR was finally registered on March 22—eight days after the incident. Colonel Bath has now filed a petition in the High Court seeking the transfer of the case to the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) or an independent agency, arguing that a fair probe is impossible under the Punjab Police. His counsel, Deepinder Singh Virk, stated that the court has specifically asked the Punjab government to answer key questions, including, name of officers present at the scene of the incident, who received the first complaint from Colonel Bath’s family, and why no FIR was registered immediately. Even a video of the incident has been submitted as evidence in court. The petition alleges that despite distress calls made to senior officials on the night of the attack, the local police ignored the case and delayed action. With the High Court now closely monitoring the case, all eyes are on the Punjab government’s response, which must be submitted by March 28. The next hearing will be crucial in determining whether the case remains with the Punjab Police or is transferred to the CBI.

No complaint registered so far: K’taka on honey trap row

TDG NETWORK
BENGALURU

Karnataka Home Minister G Parameshwara on Tuesday said that no complaint had been registered in connection with the alleged honey trapping controversy. “So far, no complaint has been registered yet,” Parameshwara told reporters. Further, on the issue of phone tapping, the Karnataka Home Minister said

that he has verified with the concerned department but no complaint has been registered. “No one has filed a complaint with me so far. Leader of the Opposition, R. Ashoka, has also made a statement. I have verified with the concerned department that no complaint has been registered yet,” he said. Reacting to Karnataka Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar’s recent state-



ment on the Constitution, Parameshwara said, “Shivakumar has already clarified that his statement has been twisted.” Karnataka Minister KN Rajanna claimed he was a

victim of a honey trap attempt and said, “Today, I am going to file a complaint by meeting the Home Minister in person.” On Monday, the Supreme Court agreed to hear a PIL seeking an independent probe by the CBI or SIT into the alleged honey trapping of legislators, public servants, and judges in Karnataka. The plea filed by a Jharkhand resident, Binay Kumar Singh, sought an

independent probe by the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) or a Special Investigation Team (SIT) comprising police officers who are not subject to the control or influence of the State of Karnataka. The petition, filed through advocate Barun Sinha, urged the apex court to monitor the investigation either by the apex court or by a monitoring committee headed by a retired Supreme Court judge.

BJP to give out ‘Saugat-e-Modi’ kits to 32 lakh poor Muslims

TDG NETWORK
NEW DELHI

The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) Minority Morcha is set to launch its “Saugat-e-Modi” campaign, aiming to distribute special kits to 32 lakh underprivileged Muslims across the country ahead of Eid. The initiative, kicking off from Nizamuddin in Delhi on Tuesday under the guidance of BJP National President JP Nadda, seeks to ensure that poor Muslim families can celebrate the festival without any hardship. As part of the campaign, 32,000 Minority Morcha workers will collaborate with 32,000 mosques nationwide to reach the needy.

Tunnel collapse: Rescue teams find another body



TDG NETWORK
HYDERABAD

The rescue teams traced another body of a worker in the early hours of Tuesday from the Srisailem Left Bank Canal (SLBC) tunnel in Nagarkurnool which collapsed on February 22 entrapping eight workers. The body is stuck in a difficult position, and the teams are currently making efforts to retrieve it. According to rescue teams, “Today, in the early morning hours, we found another dead body stuck in a position, and we

are currently working to retrieve it.” The SLBC tunnel accident took place on February 22. Eight workers were trapped in the accident. One of the bodies of trapped workers - Gurpreet Singh was recovered on March 9. The Chief Minister of Telangana Revanth Reddy had announced an ex-gratia of Rs 25 lakhs for the kins of the deceased. CM Revanth Reddy reviewed the progress of the ongoing rescue operations in the SLBC tunnel on Monday at Assembly Hall.

Rabri leads RJD protest for 65% OBC reservations in Bihar

TDG NETWORK
PATNA

Former Bihar Chief Minister and RJD leader, Rabri Devi, along with other RJD leaders, staged a protest outside the Bihar Vidhan Sabha on Tuesday, demanding

65% reservations for OBCs in the state. The protestors raised slogans, including calling Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar an “Aarakshan Chor,” as they pressed for their demands. Speaking to the media,

Rabri Devi explained the reason for the protest, saying, “We are doing this protest for reservation. Nitish Kumar has passed this through the cabinet. We are seeking to include it in the Scheduled Castes list. This is why we are making a de-

mand.” Earlier, posters targeting Chief Minister Nitish Kumar’s stand on the Waqf Amendment bill and NRC were spotted outside the residence of former CM and RJD leader Rabri Devi on Tuesday.

Chennai turns out in force to celebrate CISF Coastal Cyclothon



Beach, the enthusiasm was palpable, with crowds gathering to cheer on the cyclists and participate in awareness campaigns. The energy surrounding the event reflected the growing recognition of the importance of commu-

nity involvement in national security efforts. The cyclists, divided into two teams covering India’s eastern and western coasts, have traversed diverse landscapes, engaging with coastal communities at every step. Schools, colleges, hospitals, and fishermen’s associations have played host to interactive sessions, where discussions centered on vigilance, security, and the vital role of local residents as “Tat Prahari,” or coastal sentinels. These engagements have reinforced the importance

of collaborative efforts between security agencies and the people they protect. The cyclothon’s appeal has extended beyond security awareness, embracing India’s rich cultural diversity. At various stopovers, traditional performances and cultural events have brought communities together, adding vibrancy to the campaign. Young cyclists, inspired by the movement, have eagerly joined the teams for short stretches, demonstrating their commitment to the cause.



Delhi Chief Minister Rekha Gupta presents the Budget 2025-26 in Delhi Assembly on Tuesday.

REKHA GUTPA HAS SOMETHING FOR EVERYONE

Thrust on women's welfare schemes

TDG NETWORK
NEW DELHI

In a bid to empower women and enhance their safety, the Delhi government has announced a host of welfare schemes, including a monthly honorarium of Rs 2,500, installation of 50,000 CCTV cameras, introduction of Pink PCR (all-female police assistance) units and a financial aid of Rs 21,000 for expecting mothers. Chief Minister Rekha Gupta said that the government would launch the Mahila Samridhi Yojana (MSY) with an allocation of Rs 5,100 crore.

The scheme aims to recog-

Under this scheme, one lakh beneficiaries will receive financial assistance of up to Rs 21,000 along with six nutrition kits.

nise and support women's unpaid domestic labour, enhance their financial independence, decision-making power, and self-esteem, she said.

However, Gupta did not specify a launch date for the MSY Scheme.

To support pregnant

women and newborns, the Mukhyamantri Matru Vandana Yojana (MMMVY) will be introduced alongside the central government's Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana.

Under this scheme, one lakh beneficiaries will receive financial assistance of up to Rs 21,000 along with six nutrition kits. A budget of Rs 210 crore has been allocated for this initiative.

In an effort to strengthen women's safety, the government plans to install 50,000 new CCTV cameras in addition to the existing 2.8 lakh cameras across the city, Gupta said.



Healthcare priority too, gets Rs 12,893 crore

TDG NETWORK
NEW DELHI

The Delhi government on Tuesday allocated Rs 12,893 crore for the health sector in the 2025-26 budget to support flagship schemes like Ayushman Bharat - Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana, set up two new medical colleges, and add 16,186 beds in government hospitals. Delhi Chief Minister Rekha Gupta presented the 2025-26 budget in the Assembly, announcing a significant push to strengthen the capital's healthcare infrastructure.

A major portion of the budget will support flagship schemes like Ayushman Bharat - Pradhan Mantri Jan

The Budget includes an allocation of Rs 320 crore for setting up 400 health and wellness centres, along with "Ayushman Arogya Mandirs"



Arogya Yojana (AB-PMJAY), aimed at providing financial protection and affordable healthcare to more families in the capital.

The Budget includes an allocation of Rs 320 crore for setting up 400 health and wellness centres, along with "Ayushman Arogya Mandirs"

to improve access to primary healthcare services.

In her budget speech, Gupta said the government is committed to transforming Delhi's healthcare system by strengthening critical care services, expanding primary healthcare facilities, and modernizing medical infrastructure. The budget earmarks Rs 1,666.66 crore under the Pradhan Mantri - Ayushman Bharat Health Infrastructure Mission (PM-ABHIM) to boost critical care blocks and diagnostics, alongside Rs 320 crore for setting up 400 Health and Wellness Centres (HWC), also known as Ayushman Arogya Mandirs (AAM).

Education budget hiked by over 17%

TDG NETWORK
NEW DELHI

The newly-formed BJP government in Delhi on Tuesday allocated Rs 19,291 crore for the education sector in the next financial year, over 17 per cent higher than last year, and announced a slew of initiatives, including CM Shri schools, language laboratories, modern computer labs, and startup support centres. The previous AAP government which boast-

The overall budget outlay of Rs 1 lakh crore for the financial year 2025-26 is 31.5 per cent higher from the previous fiscal.



ed its various reform measures in the field of education during the recent assembly polls had earmarked Rs 16,396 crore for education related expenditure in FY25.

Rs 3,847 cr for power, Rs 12,952 cr for transport

TDG NETWORK
NEW DELHI

Delhi Chief Minister Rekha Gupta announced an allocation of Rs 100 crore for a pilot project of shifting overhead electricity cables in the 2025-26 budget, even as she emphasised on making the national capital self-reliant in terms of energy. In her maiden budget presentation in the Delhi Assembly, Gupta, who also holds the finance portfolio, allocated Rs 3,847 crore for the city government's power department.

The govt will introduce travel cards for women to avail free bus rides, replacing the existing pink ticket system to curb corruption.



During her budget speech, Gupta stressed on how overhead electricity wires not only deface the beauty of the city but are also risky from the security point of view.

"My government has pro-

posed 'shifting of HT/LT transmission lines' scheme, for which a budget of Rs 100 crore has been allocated.

"Under this scheme, all overhead cables will be laid underground, making Delhi more secure, cleaner and modern city," she said.

Gupta said the Delhi government is committed to providing uninterrupted and affordable electricity to every citizen of the capital.

Meanwhile, The Delhi government will introduce travel cards for women to avail free bus rides, replacing the exist-

ing pink ticket system to curb corruption, Chief Minister Rekha Gupta announced on Tuesday. Presenting the 2025-26 Budget, Gupta, who also holds the finance portfolio, announced that Rs 12,952 crore has been earmarked for the transport sector to improve public transportation and urban mobility in the capital.

To ensure a smoother, corruption-free experience for women using free bus services, Gupta said a new digital travel card will replace the existing pink tickets.

Focus on infra, social welfare

TDG NETWORK
NEW DELHI

Delhi Chief Minister Rekha Gupta on Tuesday presented a comprehensive Rs 1 lakh crore budget for FY26, outlining a bold roadmap for the city's infrastructure, social welfare, and modernisation. This historic budget focuses on improving the city's infrastructure, empowering women, enhancing public services, and ensuring social security for all.

The budget places a significant emphasis on urban development, with key investments in the Delhi Fire Services (DFS). A Rs 125 crore

Rs 110 cr will be dedicated to modernising fire services, improving emergency response capabilities, and safety measures.



allocation will be used for the multi-storey, hi-tech upgrade of the DFS headquarters. In addition, Rs 110 crore will be dedicated to modernising fire services, improving emergency response capabilities, and enhancing fire safety measures, including

the deployment of small fire engines and two-wheelers as first-response vehicles in congested areas. The budget also addresses drainage and flood control issues, with a Rs 150 crore allocation for remodelling city drains to increase water carrying capacity and prevent waterlogging during the rainy season. In another major infrastructure move, the budget sets aside Rs 10 crore for a survey and consultancy services related to the relocation of Tihar Jail. This initiative is aimed at decongesting the overcrowded prison complex, which currently houses more inmates than it was designed to accommodate.

Yamuna and pollution clean-up get Rs 1,500 crore

TDG NETWORK
NEW DELHI

Chief Minister Rekha Gupta on Tuesday announced a comprehensive Rs 1,500-crore plan to clean the Yamuna River and improve Delhi's sewage infrastructure, marking an ambitious river rejuvenation effort in the national capital. The plan includes the construction of 40 decentralised sewage treatment plants (STPs), modernisation of existing STPs, and investment in advanced machinery to tackle waste and pollution.

In a bid to ensure that untreated sewage does not flow

"Cleaning Yamuna is an important part of our manifesto and remains a top priority in this budget"

into the Yamuna, the Delhi government will build 40 decentralised STPs at a cost of Rs 500 crore. These plants will treat wastewater at the source before it enters major drains, reducing pollution levels in the river. Additionally, the govern-

ment has committed to upgrading existing STPs to enhance their operational capacity.

"The Yamuna is not just a river; it is our cultural and historical heritage. Cleaning Yamuna is an important part of our manifesto and remains a top priority in this budget," CM Gupta said during her budget speech.

The government has earmarked Rs 500 crore for repairing and developing sewage treatment plants, Rs 250 crore for replacing old sewer lines, and another Rs 250 crore for improving water treatment plants across the city.

'Hawa hawai', baseless and unrealistic budget, says Atishi

TDG NETWORK
NEW DELHI

Leader of Opposition Atishi on Tuesday slammed the Delhi budget, calling it a 'hawa hawai budget' and labelling it "baseless and unrealistic". Atishi alleged that the BJP government deliberately avoided presenting the Economic Survey before the budget, saying, 'If the government truly had Rs one lakh crore in revenue, they wouldn't have hesitated to present the Economic Survey in the Assembly. They hid it because the numbers would expose the truth behind this hollow budget.'

She accused the BJP of slashing key allocations to essential sectors like education, health, and municipal services, saying the budget reveals the government's "intent to weaken public services".

"For the first time in 10 years, the education budget has fallen below 20 per cent, showing their agenda to destroy government schools. Health spending has also been cut to 13 per cent the lowest in a decade" to dismantle free treatment services for the poor," she said.

Delhi Chief Minister Rekha Gupta on Tuesday presented Rs one lakh crore FY26 Budget with ten focus areas, including Yamuna cleaning, economic empowerment of women, infrastructure, water, and connectivity, asserting that it is a roadmap for making the national capital self-reliant.

In her 138-minute speech, Gupta, who also holds the finance portfolio, called the maiden budget of the BJP government "historic", emphasising that the era of "corruption and inefficiency" was over.

This is the first budget presented by a BJP government in Delhi in over 26 years, following the party's victory



"For the first time in 10 years, the education budget has fallen below 20 per cent, showing their agenda to destroy government schools."

over the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) in last month's Assembly elections.

Atishi further criticised the reduced Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD) budget, pointing out that the Rs 8423 crore allocation from 2024-25 has been slashed to Rs 6897 crore this year, calling it an attempt to cripple the city's cleaning system.

She also accused Gupta of using the budget speech to target AAP and Arvind Kejriwal rather than focus on Delhi's development.

"Rekha Gupta ji spent 1.5 hours of her two-hour speech just attacking AAP. The elections are over it's time to work for Delhi, not to abuse us," adding, "This budget makes one thing clear: less work, more slogans. Five years of just insults that's the BJP's real agenda."

Calling the budget a 'jumbala,' she challenged the BJP to release the Economic Survey and present the real figures on revenue and tax collections to prove the budget's credibility.

Development agenda is a mere eye wash: Cong

TDG NETWORK
NEW DELHI

The Congress on Tuesday said that with the then Congress government in 2013-2014 allocated 34.3 percent for capital expenditure in the total Budget and carried out unprecedented all-round developments, but 12 years later, the BJP Government's budget has reduced the Capital expenditure to 28 per cent, which shows that the development agenda is a mere eye wash. The Delhi Congress chief Devender Yadav said, CM Rekha Gupta, being a woman, instead of helping the women, betrays them by reducing the budget allocation for schemes of girl child, anganwadi workers and helpers, beti padhao-beti bachao, sahelii samavay, Central Government's women empowerment, mission scheme, kishori



and free travel for rural students.

Mr Yadav said, with only Rs 5100 crore Budget allocation to fulfil the monthly honorarium of Rs 2500 promise to every woman, it was too little to fulfil the expectation of nearly 44 lakh women voters in the Capital. The budget is a bundle of lies and betrayal for the people of Delhi, who elected the BJP to power with great expectations after suffering the terrible misrule of the Kejriwal Government for 11 years.

SC urges govt to regulate heavy vehicle in city

TDG NETWORK
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Tuesday asked the Delhi government to take steps for regulating the movement of heavy vehicles in the national capital.

A bench of Justice Surya Kant and Justice N Kotiswar Singh passed the direction while disposing of an appeal against a 2006 Delhi High Court order imposing a 24-hour ban on plying of trucks



inside the Outer Ring Road for loading and unloading of

goods.

"The SLP (Special Leave

Petition) is disposed of. However, this does not mean that the NCT of Delhi will not take necessary measures for regulating the movement of heavy vehicles in the city. In this regard, if no regulatory measures have been taken so far, the state government will take appropriate decisions..." the bench said.

It noted that the top court had stayed the operation of the high court order imposing the ban on the entry of trucks

in 2006 itself on a plea of The Delhi Goods Transporters' Association.

The association contended before the apex court that trade activities in the city had come to a standstill due to the ban.

The top court noted that it was the interlocutory order of the high court that was challenged by the association and the main petition was disposed of by Delhi High Court in 2009.

Court gives man life term for raping daughter: 'Real threat to society'

TDG NETWORK
NEW DELHI

A court here has sentenced a man to life imprisonment for raping and impregnating his 17-year-old daughter in 2021, saying he is a "real threat to society". Additional Sessions Judge Amit Sahrawat was hearing the arguments on sentencing against the man who was earlier convicted under Section 6 (aggravated

penetrative sexual assault) of the POCSO Act and the penal provision of rape.

In an order dated March 21, the court said, "The offence committed by convict is one of the most heinous offences. It is totally unacceptable for society that a father has committed rape with his real daughter and also made his daughter carry the pregnancy for about six months."

It said that the convict's act

had shocked society's conscience and if he could commit the offence with his daughter, he could commit a similar crime with other children.

"Thus convict is a real threat to society. The offence is a monstrous act and it does not deserve any kind of leniency and it becomes the duty of this court to safeguard society and to keep the convict out of society for the time as long as possible.

66 CR DEVOTEES IN 45 DAYS AT MAHA KUMBH, GOAL ACHIEVED: CM YOGI ADITYANATH

TDG NETWORK
GORAKHPUR

Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath on Tuesday asserted that they succeeded in their goal of organizing the Maha-kumbh in Prayagraj with 66 crore devotees in 45 days in a temporary city. CM Yogi attended the inaugural ceremony of the two-day national seminar on ‘Contribution of Yogiraj Baba Gambhirnath of Indian Yoga tradition’ organized at Deen Dayal Upadhyaya Gorakhpur University.

“I held the first meeting regarding the Maha Kumbh in November 2022. It took a year to finalize everything and then to implement it on the ground. If a good team isn’t selected, the situation will be similar to what happened during the Commonwealth Games in Delhi. The CWG had ended, but the stadiums were still being built. Some people started criticizing the Maha Kumbh. I knew that the 7000 crore Rs we were spending was the hard-earned money of the people of Uttar Pradesh, but in return, we would give Uttar Pradesh a three lakh crore Rs return and show the world that faith can become a cause of prosperity. We had not understood its strength,” CM Yogi said.



The Uttar Pradesh CM also highlighted that India’s Upanishads are the greatest treasures not only in this physical world but also if one wants to understand the mysteries of the universe.

“We succeeded in our goal. The Maha Kumbh was magnificent and divine. The world was amazed to see the spiritual and cultural organization of India, with 66 crore devotees in just 45 days in a temporary city,” he said. He further emphasized that 66 crore devotees coming to Prayagraj, where they

bathe in Maa Ganga and take a sip of water shows the spiritual strength of India. “The power of spirituality cannot be bound by the limitations of the physical world,” he pointed out. The Uttar Pradesh CM also highlighted that India’s Upanishads are the greatest treasures not only

‘INDI ALLIANCE USED SOROS’ MONEY TO INFLUENCE LS POLLS’

LUCKNOW : In a big charge, Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath has alleged that Congress and its allies in the INDIA bloc used billionaire George Soros’s money to influence the 2024 Lok Sabha elections. Sharpening his attacks, the Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister even called this alleged involvement an act by a “traitor.” CM Adityanath said, “They did propaganda and they had not only spread propaganda, but foreign money was also involved in it. George Soros had long ago announced it... I am saying that foreign money was involved in the Lok Sabha elections throughout the country in which Congress and other parties of the INDIA bloc were directly indirectly involved, and through that, they tried to influence the elections. This falls in the category of deshdroh [treason].” The Uttar Pradesh CM

also opened up on the recent controversy surrounding stand-up artist Kunal Kamra. Criticising him, the Chief Minister said that some people have treated freedom speech as their birthright to divide the country further. “The freedom of expression cannot be used to attack. It is unfortunate that some people considered the freedom of speech as their birthright to divide the country and further deepen divisions,” Adityanath said. The Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister also unleashed a fierce critique of the Congress party over the four per cent Minority reservation quota bill, stating that the reservation on the basis of religion by the Congress-led Karnataka government is an insult to Babasaheb Bhimrao Ambedkar’s Constitution. He said, “The reservation on the basis of religion by Karnataka government

is an insult to Babasaheb Bhimrao Ambedkar’s Constitution. What all wrong did they not do to the Constitution in 1976?.” “DK Shivakumar is saying exactly what he has inherited from Congress’s legacy,” he said. Asked about his “dabang” style of governance, the chief minister said, “This lathi not only safeguards our sisters, daughters, businessmen but also deals with mafia and goons. Ye humara Dabang style nahi, yeh humari sharafat ka style hai.” The ANI Podcast with Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath sees him in a freewheeling chat where he gives his take on various issues and controversies. The podcast will be simulcast to ANI subscribers at 10 am on Wednesday while the ANI Wire subscribers will receive a text feed of the podcast at 9 am on the ANI Wire Portal.

NHRC takes cognisance of SC student assault in Tamil Nadu

TDG NETWORK
NEW DELHI,



The National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) India has taken a ‘suo motu’ cognisance of a media report where a class IX student belonging from a Schedule Caste was assaulted by some upper caste boys from his locality in Tamil Nadu’s Thoothukudi district, said an official press release by NHRC on Tuesday. According to an official release, the incident took place when the victim onboard a bus, was traveling with his father for his exam, where perpetrators attacked him by the perpetrators, who dragged him out of the bus and assaulted him with a sickle. The left hand fingers

four weeks, the press release said. The commission has observed that if the content of the news is true, then it raises a serious issue of human rights violation of the victim student. The Press release from

The commission has observed that if the content of the news is true, then it raises a serious issue of human rights violation of the victim student.

of the victim were severely injured in this attack, and the father of the victim was also assaulted when he tried to save his son, the release added. The National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) India has issued notices to the Director General of Police, and the District Collector, Thoothukudi, Tamil Nadu calling for a detailed report in the matter within

NHRC also mentioned, that according to a media report carried on 12th March, 2025, the attackers managed to escape from the scene of the incident and the victim boy was admitted to the Tirunelveli Government Hospital. After a seven hour-long surgery, a team of doctors managed to re-attach the fingers of the boy, the press release added.

Tharoor optimistic for constructive India-US trade talks

TDG NETWORK
NEW DELHI

Congress MP Shashi Tharoor has expressed optimism ahead of the visit of an American delegation which will hold talks on the contours of a proposed bilateral agreement on the India-US trade ties.

Speaking to mediapersons here on Tuesday, Tharoor said he hoped for a constructive discussion to emerge out of talks wherein Indian trade is not seriously affected. “Americans have sent a delegation and we are expecting them to spend four days talking to the Commerce ministry people on our side. The problem is that US President Donald Trump has taken a very strong stand that from April 2, a reciprocal tariff will apply,” Tharoor said. “And because India does apply tariff lines to a number of American exports to India, if you strictly understand what reciprocal means, it would mean that our exports to America will also be affected. So I’m hoping that in the talks they’ll find some sensible out-



come” he said. Highlighting the trade surplus India has with the US, the Congress MP said, “You know we have a 45 billion dollar trade surplus of America. Some of it will certainly be reduced now, but we don’t want it to seriously affect our exports and our economy and our trade balance. So I’m hoping there’ll be a good constructive discussion and we’ll be able to find some sensible outcomes.” Commenting on the various new developments which the Trump 2.0 administration has brought forward, the Congress MP said that the world has to “be conscious, react and if necessary, negotiate a different solution”.

Speaking to mediapersons here on Tuesday, Tharoor said he hoped for a constructive discussion to emerge out of talks wherein Indian trade is not seriously affected.

US President Donald Trump has put April 2 as the deadline for imposition of reciprocal tariffs. US Trade Representative for South and Central Asia Brendan Lynch, is on a India visit beginning today till March 29 along with a delegation of US government officials, US embassy spokesperson said. As per the US Embassy spokesperson the delegation will be in India from March 25-29 for meetings with Indian interlocutors as part of ongoing bilateral trade discussions.

AgustaWestland PMLA case: HC issues notice on Christian Michel bail

TDG NETWORK
NEW DELHI,

The Delhi High Court on Tuesday issued a notice to Enforcement Directorate (ED) on a petition filed by British Citizen Christian James Michel, seeking Modification to the bail conditions in the money laundering case linked to the AgustaWestland helicopter deal.

The bench of Justice Swarana Kanta Sharma issued the notice to the Enforcement Directorate (ED) for its response. The matter is scheduled for its next hearing on April 22. Christian James Michel has filed a plea requesting the waiver of the bail condition mandating a surety of Rs five lakh. As a foreign national with no familial ties or significant connections in India, he has sought either a modification or removal of the requirement to provide an Indian surety. The same bench on March 4, 2025 granted bail to Christian James Michel in the matter.



While granting bail to Christian James Michel in the money laundering case, the high court directed him to provide a personal bond and a surety of Rs five lakh each, in addition to surrendering his passport to the trial court. Through a plea, James further requested the revocation of the passport surrender condition, stating that his passport has expired and obtaining a new one would take an estimated 4 to 8 weeks. On February 18, the Supreme Court granted bail to Christian Michel James, the alleged middleman in the AgustaWestland chopper scam, stating that “the trial may not be completed in the next 25 years at this pace.”

Assam CM, Union Minister discuss Silsako wetland revival

TIKAM SHARMA
NEW DELHI,

Assam Chief Minister Dr. Himanta Biswa Sarma met Union Minister for Jal Shakti, CR Paatil, on Tuesday at the minister’s official residence in the national capital. The meeting, which lasted approximately 30 minutes, focused on key water-related projects in Assam, including the rejuvenation of Silsako Beel, a crucial wetland in the state, and various initiatives under the Jal Jeevan Mission. During the discussions, both leaders deliberated on strategies to restore and preserve Silsako Beel, which plays a significant role in Assam’s ecological balance and water management. Additionally, they reviewed the progress and challenges in implementing the Jal Jeevan Mission, a flagship initiative aimed at ensuring piped drinking water supply to rural households. Following the meeting, CM Sarma took to social media platform X (formerly Twitter) to share details about the discussions. He wrote, “Today in New Del-



During the discussions, both leaders deliberated on strategies to restore and preserve Silsako Beel, which plays a significant role in Assam’s ecological balance and water management.

hi, I had a very good meeting with Hon’ble Union Minister Shri CR Paatil Ji. We spoke at length about our plans to rejuvenate Silsako Beel and other issues pertaining to the implementation of Jal Jeevan Mission in Assam.” The Chief Minister’s visit

underscores the Assam government’s commitment to enhancing water infrastructure and conservation efforts in the state. The meeting is expected to pave the way for new policies and financial support to accelerate the execution of these critical projects.

Legacy of Indian classical music safe: Maha CM Fadnavis

CORRESPONDENT
NAGPUR

The rich legacy of Indian classical music is being carried forward by the new generation with great skill, ensuring its preservation. The effort of the Lokmat Media Group in discovering and honouring young music talents is historic, said Maharashtra chief minister Devendra Fadnavis at a glittering ceremony here on Saturday.

The 12th edition of Sur Jyotsna National Music Awards ceremony, organised in the memory of Lokmat Sakhi founder

and connoisseur of music Jyotsna Darda, was held on Saturday. The awards were presented at the hands of Maharashtra chief minister Devendra Fadnavis at this glittering ceremony at Kavivarya Suresh Bhat Auditorium in Reshimbagh here. In this edition of the awards, renowned singer Usha Mangeshkar received the Legend Award, famous ghazal singer Talat Aziz was honoured with the Icon Award and classical singer Aniruddha Aithal, along with the Nandy Sisters (Antara Nandy and Ankita Nandy), were awarded the Young Talent Award.



Speaking on the occasion, Fadnavis praised the event for recognising both legendary and emerging talents. He expressed great honour in presenting an award to Usha Mangeshkar, who belongs to the es-

teemed Mangeshkar family which has set a benchmark in Indian classical music. He also reminisced about the songs of Usha Mangeshkar and Talat Aziz, expressing gratitude towards Lokmat Media Group for organising

the award ceremony. The chief minister emphasised that the young generation today is advancing Indian classical music with remarkable ability. He expressed confidence that the emerging artists hon-

oured with Sur Jyotsna National Music Awards would achieve great recognition in the future. He further stated that music does not require an elaborate setup to reach the people. Where there is art and melody, music naturally finds its way to the audience and wins hearts, he added. The award ceremony was attended by Maharashtra revenue minister Chandrashekhar Bawankule, minister of state for finance and planning Adv Ashish Jaiswal, chairman of editorial board of Lokmat Media Group and former member of Rajya Sabha Dr Vijay

Darda, editor-in-chief of Lokmat Media Group and former education minister Rajendra Darda, Managing director and editorial director of Lokmat Media Group Devendra Darda. Music has power to heal: Dr Vijay Darda. There is often a question from the younger generation: Can Indian classical music cure ailments? The answer is a resounding yes. Music can aid surgeries, assist in childbirth and even increase milk production in cows! Such is the incredible power of music, said the chairman of editorial board of Lokmat Media Group and

former member of Rajya Sabha Dr Vijay Darda. He acknowledged concerns that the legacy of Indian classical music may fade with time but expressed confidence in the emerging new generation of artists who are preserving and advancing this tradition. It was Jyotsna Darda’s sincere wish to encourage and honour young musical talents and through Sur Jyotsna National Music Awards, Lokmat Media Group has successfully built confidence among young artists while ensuring that they received the blessings of senior maestros, he noted.

RBI BARS EXCESSIVE CHARGES ON SMALL PRIORITY LOANS

RBI excludes gold loans from NBFCs from PSL status starting April 1, 2025.

TDG NETWORK
NEW DELHI

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has made it clear that banks cannot impose excessive charges, particularly on smaller loan amounts under the priority sector lending (PSL) category.

The central bank stated that no loan-related and ad hoc service charges or inspection charges shall be levied on priority sector loans up to Rs 50,000. This step aims to protect small borrowers from unnecessary financial burdens and ensure fair lending practices.

It said "No loan related and ad hoc service charges/inspection charges shall be levied on priority sector loans up to Rs 50,000".

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has issued new Master Directions on Priority Sector Lending (PSL), which will come into effect on April 1, 2025. The updated guidelines are set to replace the

TO SUM IT UP

- Banks cannot impose loan-related or inspection charges on priority sector loans up to Rs 50,000 from April 1, 2025.
- Loans against gold jewellery acquired from NBFCs won't qualify as priority sector lending.
- Banks must report PSL data quarterly and annually; failure to meet targets will require contributions to NABARD's Rural Infrastructure Development Fund (RIDF).
- Existing loans under COVID-19 relief measures will continue to be classified as priority sector lending.



existing framework established under the 2020 PSL directions.

In these guidelines the central bank has also clarified that loans taken against gold jewellery acquired by banks from Non-Banking Financial Companies (NBFCs) will not be considered under the priority sector lending category. This means banks cannot classify such loans as part of their PSL targets.

The move is intended to ensure that priority sector funds are directed towards

sectors that genuinely need financial support, such as small businesses, agriculture, and weaker sections of society.

It said "Loans against gold jewellery acquired by banks from NBFCs are not eligible for priority sector status".

The RBI has also assured that all loans categorized under the earlier PSL guidelines (2020 framework) will remain eligible for priority sector classification until their maturity. This move ensures continuity for bor-

rowers and banks, allowing them to follow a smooth transition to the new guidelines.

To ensure better compliance with PSL targets, the RBI will introduce a more rigorous monitoring system. Banks will now be required to submit detailed data on their priority sector advances on a quarterly and annual basis.

As per the guidelines the data must be reported within fifteen days from the end of each quarter and within one

The move is intended to ensure that priority sector funds are directed towards sectors that genuinely need financial support, such as small businesses, agriculture, and weaker sections of society.

month from the end of the financial year. This step is designed to enhance transparency and accountability in PSL implementation.

Banks that fail to meet their prescribed PSL targets will be required to contribute to the Rural Infrastructure Development Fund (RIDF) and other financial schemes administered by NABARD and similar institutions.

Defence production hits Rs 1.27 lakh crore in 2023-24

TDG NETWORK
NEW DELHI

India's defence production has reached a record Rs 1.27 lakh crore in FY 2023-24, the Ministry of Defence said in a release on Tuesday.

According to the ministry, the defence exports hit a record Rs 21,083 crore in FY 2023-24, expanding 30 times in a decade, with exports to 100+ countries.

As per the ministry, initiatives such as Make in India, which has enabled the development of advanced military platforms including the Dhanush Artillery Gun System, Advanced Towed Artillery Gun System (ATAGS), Main Battle Tank (MBT) Arjun, Light Specialist Vehicles, High Mobility Vehicles, Light Combat Aircraft (LCA) Tejas have bolstered the growth in the defence production.

The growth has also been bolstered by Advanced Light Helicopter (ALH), Light Utility Helicopter (LUH), Akash Missile System, Weapon Locating Radar, 3D Tactical Control Radar, and Software Defined Radio (SDR), as well as naval assets like destroy-



ers, indigenous aircraft carriers, submarines, frigates, corvettes, fast patrol vessels, fast attack craft, and offshore patrol vessels.

The release added that once dependent on foreign suppliers, the country now stands as a rising force in indigenous manufacturing, shaping its military strength through homegrown capabilities. The ministry said that the strategic policies have fuelled this momentum, encouraging private participation, technological innovation, and the development of advanced military platforms. The surge in the defence budget, from Rs 2.53 lakh crore in 2013-14 to Rs 6.81 lakh crore in 2025-26, underlines the nation's determination to strengthen its military infrastructure.

According to the ministry,

65 per cent of defence equipment is now manufactured domestically, a significant shift from the earlier 65-70 per cent import dependency, showcasing India's self-reliance in defence.

A robust defence industrial base includes 16 DPSUs, over 430 licensed companies, and approximately 16,000 MSMEs, strengthening indigenous production capabilities.

As per the ministry, the private sector plays a crucial role, contributing 21 per cent to total defence production, fostering innovation and efficiency.

The Defence Ministry further added that India targets Rs 3 lakh crore in defence production by 2029, reinforcing its position as a global defence manufacturing hub.

From May end withdraw your PF through UPI, ATM: Labour Secy

TDG NETWORK
NEW DELHI

In a groundbreaking development for India's workforce, the Employees' Provident Fund Organisation (EPFO) is set to introduce a revolutionary new system for Provident Fund (PF) withdrawals through Unified Payments Interface (UPI).

The Labour and Employment Ministry has approved the recommendation of the National Payments Corporation of India (NPCI), an umbrella organisation that operates retail payments and settlement systems in India.

Speaking exclusively with ANI, Sumita Dawra, Secretary of the Ministry of Labour and Employment, revealed that PF members will soon be able to withdraw funds through UPI

The EPFO has made significant strides in digitalizing its processes, integrating over 120 databases to streamline the withdrawal process.

and ATM by the end of May or June this year.

Dawra said that by May-end or June, members will experience a transformative change in accessing their provident funds. They will be able to view their PF account balance directly on UPI, instantly withdraw up to Rs 1 lakh through an automated system, and choose their preferred bank account for transfers.

The secretary said that

the organisation has significantly expanded withdrawal options to provide more financial flexibility. Members can now withdraw funds for housing, education, and marriage, in addition to the existing sickness provisions.

"The EPFO has made significant strides in digitalizing its processes, integrating over 120 databases to streamline the withdrawal process. Claim processing time has been dramatically reduced to just 3 days, with 95% of claims now automated and plans to further simplify the process underway," said the Secretary.

Dawra said that pensioners have also benefited from recent reforms. Since December, 78 lakh pensioners have enjoyed increased flexibility, with the ability to withdraw funds from any bank branch.

Namami Gange offers Rs 10,000 cr EPC boost

TDG NETWORK
NEW DELHI

The Namami Gange Programme (NGP) of the central government presents a major business opportunity worth Rs 10,000 crore for companies in the Engineering, Procurement, and Construction (EPC) sector, according to a report by ICRA.

The report highlighted that government spending on water supply and sanitation (WSS) schemes, including NGP, has grown significantly over the past decade.

ICRA said "GoI's Namami Gange Programme offers untapped opportunity worth Rs. 100 billion for EPC players".

In the Union Budget for FY2026, the Ministry of Jal Shakti received an allocation of Rs 99,500 crore, reflecting an annual growth rate of 21 per cent over the last ten years.

The Namami Gange Programme was launched in June 2014 to clean and rejuvenate the Ganga River and its tributaries. Initially planned till March 2021, the programme had an outlay of Rs 20,000 crore. It is now in its second phase, extending until March 2026, with an increased budget of Rs 22,500 crore.

As of January 31, 2025, a total of 492 projects have been sanctioned under the NGP, with an estimated cost of Rs 40,120 crore. Out of these, 307 projects are fully operational. The report also notes that 206 sewage infrastructure projects have been sanctioned with a total investment of Rs 33,000 crore, and 127 of them have been successfully completed.

Despite the large fund allocation and numerous projects in the pipeline, the pace of project execution remains a key challenge.

HIL Ltd rebrands as BirlaNu, plans \$150 mn investment for \$1 bn goal by 2028

TDG NETWORK
NEW DELHI

HIL Limited, a subsidiary of the USD 3 billion CK Birla Group, has officially rebranded itself as BirlaNu Limited and is planning to invest USD 150 million, aiming to become a USD 1 billion company by 2028, the company said in a release.

The company has 32 manufacturing facilities across India and Europe, with customers and partners in over 80 countries.

Avanti Birla, President, BirlaNu, said, "Our new identity, BirlaNu, reflects who we are at our core—a company who is always pushing forward. We're in this business because



we believe in quality, innovation and making things that last. The people we serve—homeowners, builders, and designers—are at the heart of everything we do. Whether it's creating better materials, improving sustainability, or bringing fresh ideas to construction, we're here crafting innovative buildings and structures that stand the test of time."

Akshat Seth, Managing Director and CEO, BirlaNu said, "Our focus has always been

on delivering high-quality, sustainable building materials: pipes, construction chemicals, putty, roofs, walls and floors that meet the needs of modern construction. We're making big moves to back that up. We've introduced organic-based stabilisers (OBS) in UPVC pipe manufacturing, an industry that was first in India and eliminated heavy metals. We've doubled our AAC block capacity in Chennai to 4 lakh cubic meters per year, making it one of the country's largest facilities. And marking our expansion into the home and interiors space, we intend to bring our global premium flooring brand Parador to India."

settled the day on a flat note at 23,669.

The broader market underperformed Nifty, with the Nifty Midcap 100 and Nifty Smallcap 100 indices declining by 1.06 per cent and 1.56 per cent, respectively.

Meanwhile, the volatility index, India VIX, cooled off by 0.47 per cent to 13.64, indicating a decline in market volatility.

Samsung Co-CEO Han Jong-hee dies of heart attack

TDG NETWORK
NEW DELHI

Samsung Electronics said on Tuesday that co-CEO Han Jong-hee had died of a heart attack, leaving newly-appointed boss Jun Young-hyun solely in charge of the tech giant as it revamps its underperforming chip business and navigates trade uncertainties.

Han, 63, became chief executive officer of South Korea's biggest company in 2022 and was also in charge of its consumer electronics and mobile devices division. Jun was appointed as Samsung's (005930.KS) co-CEO just last week at its annual shareholders meeting following his promotion in 2024 to lead its semiconductor division, which has been lagging rivals like SK Hynix (000660.KS) and TSMC (2330.TW) in the global artificial intelligence chip market.

Samsung said in a stock exchange filing that Jun would be the sole CEO of the company after Han's death.

Samsung shares were down 0.5% in line with the broader South Korean market (KSI1).

The world's biggest mem-



ory chipmaker has been suffering from weak earnings and a sagging share price in recent quarters after falling behind rivals in advanced memory chips and contract chip manufacturing, which have enjoyed strong demand from AI projects. Samsung has also ceded its smartphone market crown to Apple (AAPL.O).

Han, who was also a board member, passed away at a hospital on Tuesday while being treated for cardiac arrest, a company spokesperson said. Samsung has not yet decided on a successor, the spokesperson added.

The company has traditionally had a co-CEO structure that divides oversight of its consumer and chips divisions.

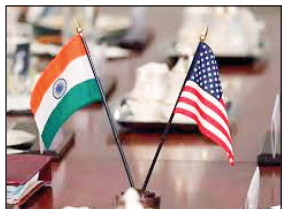
Han joined Samsung nearly 40 years ago and built his career in its television business.

Auto ancillaries looking for new markets: Report

TDG NETWORK
NEW DELHI

The auto component industry in the country is facing export challenges due to the ongoing overhang of tariffs by the USA. In addition, currency depreciation has led to demand weakness in a few Middle Eastern countries and a major slowdown in the European region, says a report by DAM Capital Advisors.

However, the report also noted that Indian companies which have lower exposure to these countries, are planning to mitigate the impact by adding new client



from various other geographies.

It said "there is a high level of demand uncertainty on exports front due to ongoing overhang of tariff by USA, currency depreciation led demand weakness in few middle-east countries and major slowdown in the European region".

It also added that some Indian auto component manufacturers, which have lower

exposure to these affected markets, are trying to mitigate the impact. They are focusing on adding new clients from different regions, increasing their market share, and securing smaller orders from both auto and non-auto segments across various geographies.

The overall automobile industry in India is currently experiencing near-term demand weakness, with slow or declining growth in some segments. While domestic demand is stable, growth remains subdued. Price competition is increasing, leading to rising discounts in most vehicle categories.

disclosures from Rs. 25,000 crore to Rs. 50,000 crore.

This measure is designed to revitalize participatory notes (P-notes) and attract new offshore capital.

Notably, in August 2023, P-notes accounted for 2.28 per cent of the total FPI assets in India, which fell by 1.86% in December 2024.

"This decision could draw offshore funds with limited exposure to India,

reinforcing capital inflows. However, it raises concerns about the potential volatility of the market due to increased speculative negotiation," said VLA Ambala, Co-Founder of Stock Market Today.

Domestic benchmark indices opened higher on the back of strong global cues. However, after an initial spike, Nifty witnessed profit booking and ultimately

Stock markets fail to hold gains

TDG NETWORK
MUMBAI

The Indian stock markets on Tuesday ended flat after witnessing a volatile session. The Indian stocks could not hold their continued upward movement in the trading session today.

At close, the BSE Sensex stood at 78,017.19, up 32.81 points or 0.04 per cent. The Nifty 50 ended at 23,668.65

up 10.30 points or 0.04 per cent.

All the sectoral indices at the National Stock Exchange (NSE) ended in red territory except the IT. The sectoral indices of auto, capital goods, consumer durables, metal, oil & gas, power, PSU bank, realty, and telecom were down 1-1.5 per cent.

At NSE, the stocks of UltraTech Cement, Trent,

Bajaj Finserv, Infosys, and Grasim Industries emerged as the major gainers, while the losers were IndusInd Bank, Dr Reddy's Labs, Adani Enterprises, Coal India, Adani Ports.

Midcap index at BSE Midcap index shed 1 per cent and Smallcap index was down 1.6 per cent.

Today, the regulator SEBI doubled the threshold of Beneficial Ownership (BO)

VOTER SENSITISATION IS THE NEED OF THE HOUR

OPINION

RASHEED KIDWAI



The rising cost of politics in India is preventing candidature of women and young candidates in elections due to various structural and procedural challenges and oligarchization of electoral Politics.

India's 2024 general election was billed as the most expensive ever.

According to a study by Centre for Media Studies (CMS), a staggering INR1.35 lakh crore (US\$16 billion)

was spent by political parties and candidates in 2024 polls. Money power is making a huge adverse impact on democratic integrity and Unregulated institutional design of political parties too.

These are some of the major and pathbreaking findings of a study conducted by the Observer Research Foundation [ORF] Fellows, Niranjan Sahoo and Ambar Kumar Ghosh titled, "The Cost of Politics in India" for Westminster Foundation for Democracy, [WFD] United Kingdom. Some Key highlights of the study are:

Exponential Rise in Costs associated with routine political activities: While most analysts link rising costs to the election campaigns, the study found an equal if not more cost is involved for political aspirants seeking to nurture their constituencies, and more importantly for securing nominations from

their parties. An aspiring politician's routine requirements to carry out socio-cultural outreach activities in their prospective constituency can start months, or even years, before an election bid.. An estimated Rs 3-4 lakhs per month as the minimum expenditure that goes toward this routine mobilizational work in a Lok Sabha constituency. Thus, by the time a candidate secures party ticket, he/she would have spent several crores in routine political activities and these are largely borne by the candidates not parties. In richer southern states such as Telangana and Andhra Pradesh, some of the political candidates shared that parties and/or candidates exchanged Rs 5,000-7,000 to each voter!.

Rising costs associated with securing party nominations:

Many interviewees (particularly from regional parties) confessed that as aspiring candidates they not only have to demonstrate their monetary clout to the party leadership, they are expected to fund their campaigns and generously donate to party coffers or fund certain candidates' campaigns.

Some candidates particularly from South shared that they had to donate 3-4 crore to secure party nomination. Given these realities, leading parties tend to opt for well-resourced (moneysed) candidates in internal selection processes.

Escalating Campaign Costs: The cumulative costs of election campaigns in India have increased exponentially in recent years.

Based on the interviews conducted for this study, an average Rs 5-10 crore has become the expenditure norm for candidates (major parties) fighting for a Lok Sabha seat. However, these costs can vary greatly depending on a number of factors. For instance, if the contest takes place in a constituency in which political heavyweights are contesting, significantly more resources are likely to be spent.

Heightened expenditure was also recorded in cash rich states such as Tamil Nadu, Telangana, Andhra Pradesh and Maharashtra, where the money spent by individual candidates can sometimes reach, or even exceed, Rs 100 crores.

The increasing dominance of business in politics: With

skyrocketing costs and most candidates/parties unable to arrange the sum on their own, they are increasingly relying on friends/private businesses to fund their political activities. The end result is this growing dependency on money has paved ways for influx of 'interested money' into the democratic processes. Thus, the regionally dominant mining, coal or real estate barons and contractors have emerged as major funders of elections. Beyond funding selective candidates/parties, people with wealth have found it easy to secure nominations from political parties or often contest as independent candidates. Respondents contended that this trend has dramatically unbalanced the playing field as traditional politicians without comparable financial support are at a major disadvantage.

Social Media Spend: What has added to escalation in costs is the arrival of digital/social media requiring candidates to hire tech experts/ buy out social media influencers, create and maintain social media profiles, spend on digital political advertisements, etc.

Growing Salience of Vote

Buying: Although vote-buying (cash distributed at the level of candidates and parties, mainly takes place in the run up to polling day) is a persistent feature of Indian elections in the past, the scale of vote-buying has increased at an unprecedented level. Nearly all political aspirants interviewed agreed that even if they are not in a position to distribute money for votes, the actions of rival candidates/parties force them to do so. Some of them confessed that while in earlier times they used to exchange small denominations among their core voters, now they distribute much bigger sums - Rs 2,000-3,000. [1] In richer southern states such as Telangana and Andhra Pradesh, some of the political candidates shared that parties and/or candidate exchanged Rs 5,000-7,000 to each voter.

Sahoo and Ghosh conclude that the major implications of these factors mean women and young candidates facing structural and procedural challenges, Oligarchizing of Electoral Politics, Adverse impact on democratic integrity and Unregulated institutional design of political parties.

Sahoo and Ghosh recommend a robust regulation and enforcement of political finance regimes, plugging legal loopholes, Strengthening of disclosure requirements for political parties and individual candidates and stringent enforcement of regulation.

On more substantial terms, the country needs to reform and democratise functioning of political parties. Structurally, the leadership hierarchy of most parties in India are extremely top-down - some are ostensibly family run enterprises - and often intra-party elections for party posts are not conducted for years or are controlled by power wielders within the party. A similarly centralised ticket distribution procedure with limited transparency or laid down procedures for determining the eligibility of the chosen candidates are also common features. This paves the way for clandestine connections between power holders and vested interests within the party, to the detriment of less well connected or female and youth aspirants.

Sahoo and Ghosh make a strong case for public funding of political parties. Pub-

lic subsidies or state funding for legitimate political activities and campaign expenses can help level the playing field.

When designed and executed well, public funding to political parties can help stem the influence of 'interest money.' Furthermore, public funding can support the emergence of smaller and newer political entrants.

We also need civic education and voter sensitisation. The growing culture of vote buying and open exchange of gifts, liquor and other material goods for votes has negative impacts for the legitimacy of representative democracy as it erodes the trust-based relationship between a voter and the aspirant and replaces it with a new 'transactional' one.

The situation needs both state and societal efforts to mitigate. ECI, police, federal and state level enforcement agencies need to intensify preventive measures as well as punishing violators. Voter sensitisation by civil society organisations, media and ECI should receive priority building on the successful approaches to improve voters' participation in recent years, conclude Sahoo and Ghosh.

Alumni with a difference — Wedded to alma mater's sunshine

OPINION

PROF P K SHARMA & BRIJ B. GOYAL



Basking in the glorious 105-year-old history of its own, Dr Satish Chander Dhawan Government College Ludhiana-a premier temple of learning spreading light of know how in various fields for more than a century is still the deep a sea so far as ocean of quality higher education and all-round knowledge in all the four directions of globe is concerned. No denying the fact that this college brimming with excellence be it either before or after the freedom of nation has aptly been named after a celebrated space scientist of India Dr. Satish Chander Dhawan groomed up in the premises of this institution in the pre-independence era of India rose to the pinnacle of glory guiding the destiny of space science not only in India but in the world too, donning the mantle of Indian Space Research Organisation as its President for the record serving longest term of 12 years to symbolise the same.

William Shakespeare- a celebrated English playwright in his popular comedy "As You Like It" compared this world with a stage and we human beings to mere actors and actresses entering the stage then exiting it after playing the role/roles remarking,

"All the world's a stage, And all the men and women

merely players, They have their exits and entrances, And one man in his time plays many parts...." In light of this fascinating an observation, a vast galaxy of the alumni of this fountain of intellect and expertise did shine in different walks of life leaving their marvelous footprints on the sands of time playing their multi-hued roles ultimately to be the silver linings for this grand society.

Kudos to Principal UKramet who did succeed in making the first day of March, 1945 a memorable, blissful and philosophical for this learning magnet place when he could impress and attract world renowned a guide and philosopher in Dr. Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan to grace and address the Silver Jubilee Special Convocation of the college. In this address, his evergreen and universal message of humanity at large still haunts us and quite relevant even today after eight decades to quote:

"The soul of man is neither English, nor Indian, Nor Chinese, nor Japanese, and neither Hindu nor Muslim. These Universities and educational institutions belong to the Republic of Letters, not to any race, nation, section or community but to humanity at large. For members of such a republic, the qualification should not be less than a dar-

ing truth (Dare To Be True)".

Embracing its Dare To Be True motto in the letter and spirit, the alumni association of this college with a difference has been acting as the eyes and ears of its Alma Mater, leaving no stone unturned to play its constructive, supplementary and complimentary roles to add more and more to the institute's grace and advancement in all respects. It recently got spurred and charged up again once more as usual in wake of media reports, hailing fine a gesture shown by two Alumna of an institute of technology of Rajasthan offering its Alma Mater £ One million each as fiscal help for girl scholarships, Ph.D fellowships and establishing centres of excellence so on and so forth. This association also takes pride in emulating and improvising upon such fine acts.

It indeed goes to the credit of this very guiding light as well as centre of the higher education that it has been instrumental in producing alumni icons and role models excelling in too many streams of life-be it the politics, administration diplomacy, literature, education, industry, journalism and sports.

This fantastic spectrum of alumni doyens includes evergreen poet and lyricist Padam Shri Sahir Ludhianvi, Mr. Prem Kumar Kathpalia a role model bureaucrat, Dr. Manohar Singh Gill former Union Sports Minister, Mr. N N Vohra former Governor J&K, Mr. Balwant Singh Ramoowalia former Union Social Welfare Minister, Mr. Paramjit S. Sahai IPS, India's Ambassador to Sweden, Mr. Yash Pal Sharma 1983 World Cricket Cup Winning Hero, Mr. Sukhbir Grewal International Hockey stalwart, Mr. VK Sibbal IAS, Mr. Swaran Singh Boparai IAS-former VC Punjabi University, Mr. Joginder Singh former CBI Chief, Mr. Keki N Daruwala IPS and Mr. Harbhajan Halwarvi, former Editor Punjab Tribune both recipients of Sahitya Academy Award, Alumna Ms. Kamla



College Building Since 1920- the year of its' establishment

Dalal Choudhary, Dr. Navtej Singh- a history scholar, Mr Amarjit Singh Hayer journalism guru, Padma Shri, Mr. Onkar Singh Pahwa, Mr SS Bhogal industrialists Lt.Colonel AS Cheema Mount Everest Scaler and Prof RK Kakkar, President Federation of Senior Citizens Punjab.

Dr. M. Jahangir Khan, a Pakistan Test Cricketer father of Pakistan Cricket batsman Majid Khan who graced the chair of Principal of this college in 1946 came to Ludhiana all the way from Pakistan as the chief guest of the Festival Cricket Match played between alumni and college cricket teams on the occasion of golden jubilee celebrations.

Recently on March 08, the Alumni and the college hosted a grand function in the Sahir Auditorium to celebrate evergreen poet Sahir Ludhianvi's birthday and International Women's Day jointly. A group of alumni musicians spellbound the music lovers singing popular melodious numbers flowing from the poetic pen of Sahir to mark the occasion.

The Alumni Association demanded that Sahir Ludhianvi Chair be set up to emulate memory of Sahir in his Alma Mater and elsewhere too to promote and encourage research pertaining to Sahir's poetic genius. He also deserves to be decorated with Bharat Rattan Award too posthumously for his spectacular contribution to the twin genres of poetry and lyricism.

To mark International Women's Day, it chose to bestow Life Time Achievement Award on its gracious Alumna Ms. Kamla Dalal

Choudhary- the first Women PCS officer of joint Punjab.

The Alumni always selflessly and keenly focuses on manifold priorities to boost up its Alma Mater's stature. First and foremost is to come to the rescue of the college by contributing in kind to support it, wherever the urgent need be. In the recent past one decade, the concerted efforts of Alumni Association succeeded in motivating philanthropists and alumni to contribute in kind who had been nice enough responding generously to offer worthwhile support in form of infrastructure worth approximately Rs 51 lakh including hefty amount of Rs. 25 lakh by Dr MS Gill from his MPLAD Fund Scheme for computer lab and equipment, seminar hall, furniture, light fitting, gate building etc. Then secondly, its members very actively play its exemplary role in promoting and encouraging library culture so that students take optimum initiatives to brush up their knowledge, intellect and brilliance through the habit of reading and using books to achieve success. To create a congenial reading aura in the library, the members quite generously offer fiscal aid to buy water cooler and competitive exam books so that rich legacy of producing celebrities in all kinds of disciplines continues sans any hiccups. Then it tries its level best in sharing, networking and upskilling of novel and noble ideas in its group by dint of different devices readily available at its disposal to update and awaken youth and society too at large.

Amazingly, this alumnus abounds in creative versa-

lity having an Alumni Authors Section in the library as well. The alumni section has about two hundred forty books on wide ranging subjects on the shelves of the library. Mr. Keki N Daruwala an IPS officer of repute blessed with flair for writing and Mr. Harbhajan Halwarvi - a Punjabi poet as well as former Editor Punjabi Tribune happen to be proud Sahit Academy laureates. Daruwala was decorated with Sahit Academy Award for his creation "The Keeper of the Dead" in 1984 and Halwarvi for his poetry book "Pullan De Paar (Across the Bridges) in the year 2002. Padma Shri Keki qualifying his MA in English from this college in 1950 penned down Commonwealth Poetry, Commonwealth Fiction, Winter Poems and Landfall Poems too.

In the pre-independence times, another alumni Mr Om Parkash Sharma in the year 1935 richly contributed his compositions- his novel "Seven Lives Tie" (A Tribute to Shakuntla), One Dismal Night When I was Alone In The House and The Imperial Prince (Urdu).

Padma Vibhushan Mr. Narinder Nath Vohra, now President The Tribune Trust- former Union Home Secretary wrote a book entitled 'Safeguarding India: Essays on Security and Governance'. Padma Vibhushan Dr. MS Gill too authored two books "Himalyan Wonder: Travels in Lahaul and Spiti" (1972) and "Tales from the Hills: Lahaul's Enduring Myths and Legends (2014).

Erstwhile CBI Chief Mr. Joginder Singh too had a large number of books to his credit, some of his fa-

mous titles being "Positive Thinking", "How to excel when chips are down", "Safalata Ka Jaadoo" and "Sanghursh Se Shikhir Tak". Lyall Book Depot Ludhiana offered complimentary copies of twenty two books of Mr. Joginder Singh to college library worth rupees four thousands.

Dr. Navtej Singh Halwarvi former Chairman of History Department of Punjabi University Patiala another scholar alumnus authored fifteen books on history. His popular titles include "Punjab Under The Colonial Situations: Economy, Society And Politics", "Starvation And Colonialism: A Study Of Famines In The Nineteenth Century British Punjab" and "Challenge To Imperial Hegemony The Life Story Of A Great Indian Patriot Uddham Singh."

Dr. Suresh Vatsayan too a Hindi scholar and poet alumnus did reap the lime light by writing the prayer for Navodaya Vidyalayas of India.

Other alumni who offered their books to their Alma Mater library include Mr. JB Goel's book Sahit Sanjeevani, Principal Dr. J.S. Anand's "Ground Zero" and "Poetic Passions", Mr. Gurbhajan Gill's "Sheesha Jhooth Bolda Hai" and "Raavi", Mr. Jaswant Jaffar's "Assin Nanak De Ki Lagde Haan" and Mr. Ramesh Kumar's "Pattaal Chon".

The alumni group in its WhatsApp group takes deep interest in pondering over the topical, sensitive and burning problems staring the nation in its face, then after parleys airing the same in the media off and on so that those at the helm of affairs of the nation take into account and due notice of its innovative and intellectual feedback and input from time to time. The ultimate aim and object of this group is to redeem the prestige and dignity of the Dare To Be True mission reflected in the college insignia, keeping aloft the flame and light of quality higher education, though for the past over six months this boat

entitled Dr. Satish Chander Dhawan-a fulcrum of higher studies sailing in the deep sea of enlightenment is now rudderless just pulling on without a permanent Principal yet alumni are striving and pressing the concerned Punjab Higher Education authorities to order posting of a regular Principal promptly.

Hail the "Dare To Be True" movement and drive getting a philip in two magnificent messages- one by the Principal Harish Chander Kathpalia of this nursery of dignitaries in the year 1947 who remarked, "I have to work in the laboratory of life and most of my time is spent in an effort to get my students to imbibe the qualities of gentlemanliness and sportsmanship" and the second in form of a pat from then Union Education Minister Dr. VKRV Rao who wrote in his letter, dated : December 7, 1970, "I visited the Government College, Ludhiana on the occasion of the celebration of its Golden jubilee on 22nd November, 1970. I was impressed by the exemplary conduct of the students there and the discipline they observed. I was equally impressed by the fact that the Principal and staff of the college also give respect to the students and afford opportunities to place their difficulties. This has no doubt contributed to the co-operation between the staff and the harmony and discipline prevalent in the college. I wish to congratulate the Principal, staff and students on this worthy achievement."

This alumni wish earnestly that such noble thoughts as well as sentiments must spread to kindle a dazzling light throughout the world of finer values and ideals symbolising sprouting of more and more alumni associations to improve afresh the plight and standards of education at primary, secondary and higher education levels!

Prof PK Sharma is Freelance Journalist, Brij Bhushan Goyal is Organising Secretary, Alumni Association.



The schools which were shut by Naxalites in various parts of Bastar division are now hosting and reorganizing educational sessions through virtual mode. File photo.

TDG NETWORK
NEW DELHI

In the dense forests of Chhattisgarh, a gunshot echoed through the night — a chilling reminder that India's longest-running internal conflict was far from over. The Naxalite-Maoist insurgency, spanning over five decades, has claimed thousands of lives, displaced countless families, and left deep scars on the nation's social and political fabric. How did a small uprising in a remote village spiral into one of India's most complex security challenges — and what might finally bring peace?

HOW A VILLAGE SPARKED A REVOLUTION

The genesis of the Naxalite movement traces back to 1967 in the village of Naxalbari, West Bengal. A faction of the Communist Party of India (Marxist), led by Charu Majumdar, Kanu Sanyal, and Jangal Santhal, initiated an armed uprising calling for radical land redistribution and the overthrow of oppressive feudal structures.

This uprising, known as the Naxalbari movement, was inspired by Maoist ideology, which advocated for agrarian revolution through armed struggle. The movement quickly gained traction among marginalized communities, particularly landless peasants and tribal populations who had suffered generations of exploitation and neglect.

"They came to our homes, demanding food and money," recalls an elderly villager from Naxalbari. "But this time, the farmers were ready. They fought back."

The movement symbolized a direct challenge to the entrenched socio-economic hierarchies of rural India. It wasn't just about land — it was about reclaiming dignity.

RISE, FALL, AND REBIRTH (1970S-1990S)

The early 1970s saw brutal suppression of the Naxalite

movement by state authorities. In 1972, Charu Majumdar was captured and died in police custody, dealing a severe blow to the movement's leadership. However, the ideological fire was far from extinguished.

By the 1980s, the movement had re-emerged with renewed strength, spreading across states like Andhra Pradesh, Bihar,

alites had established a sprawling influence across the so-called Red Corridor — a swath of Maoist-controlled territory stretching from Andhra Pradesh to Jharkhand.

FORMATION OF CPI (MAOIST) AND INTENSIFICATION (2000S)

A pivotal moment in the in-



In the late sixties and early seventies, the Naxalbari uprising ignited a fire in the hearts of both the urban youth and the rural masses. (CPIML.org)

Odisha, and Maharashtra. A major turning point came in 1980 with the formation of the People's War Group (PWG) and the Maoist Communist Centre (MCC). This merger resulted in the formation of the Communist Party of India (Maoist), consolidating the movement's strength and leading to an escalation in violent activities.

The newly formed CPI (Maoist) unleashed a series of high-profile attacks on security forces, politicians, and infrastructure projects. In 2010, a deadly ambush in Chhattisgarh claimed the lives of 76 CRPF personnel — one of the deadliest attacks in the insurgency's history.

The Red Corridor expanded across central and eastern India, encompassing areas rich in mineral resources but plagued by poverty and underdevelopment. CPI (Maoist) cadres used the region's dense forests and rugged terrain to their strategic advantage, establishing training camps and launching hit-and-run attacks on government forces.

"The government wasn't helping us," said a tribal elder in Bastar. "At least the Naxals gave us justice — even if it was harsh."

By the 1990s, the Nax-

alites' history came in 2004 with the merger of the People's War Group (PWG) and the Maoist Communist Centre (MCC). This merger resulted in the formation of the Communist Party of India (Maoist), consolidating the movement's strength and leading to an escalation in violent activities.

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"We were always one step

behind them," admitted a senior police officer who served in Chhattisgarh. "They knew the terrain better than we did."

BETWEEN FORCE AND REFORM

The Indian government's response to the insurgency has oscillated between military operations and developmental initiatives.

In the early stages, state governments implemented special laws allowing for the detention of suspected Naxalites without trial. Specialized police units such as the Greyhounds in Andhra Pradesh were created to counter guerrilla tactics. However, these measures often resulted in allegations of human rights violations, further alienating local populations.

In 2009, the central government launched Operation Green Hunt — a large-scale paramilitary offensive involving 40,000 personnel aimed at dismantling Maoist strongholds. The operation weakened the insurgents' operational capabilities but at a heavy hu-

man cost. Reports of torture, displacement, and extrajudicial killings fueled further resentment among affected communities.

Concurrently, the government introduced the Integrated Action Plan (IAP) in 2010, focusing on development projects in Maoist-affected areas to address underlying socio-economic grievances. While security operations curtailed insurgent activity, the lack of sustained development and continued state excesses hindered long-term success.

"They build a school, but there's no teacher," said a villager in Jharkhand. "They build a road, but it leads nowhere."

FADING INFLUENCE, LINGERING THREAT

In recent years, the insurgency has declined in intensity, largely due to improved counterinsurgency measures and increased surrenders. The number of Naxal-affected districts has decreased from 223 in 2010 to 46 in 2024.

However, sporadic attacks persist. In October 2024, Indian security forces killed 28 suspected Maoist rebels in Chhattisgarh, highlight-



Source: Stratfor Global Intelligence, 'India's Naxalite Threat' http://web.stratfor.com/images/asia/map/7-7-10-India_red_corridor_800.jpg?fn=20rss74 (9 July 2010).

ing the ongoing volatility in certain regions.

HUMANITARIAN IMPACT

From 2000 to 2024, the insurgency has claimed over 4,000 civilian lives and approximately 2,500 security personnel. The Maoists have also suffered significant losses, with around 4,500 insurgents killed.

Beyond fatalities, the conflict has led to widespread displacement, disrupted livelihoods, and a pervasive climate of fear in affected regions.

"We've lost an entire generation to this war," said a social worker in Odisha. "And the scars will last for generations more."

WHY THE CONFLICT HAS ENDURED

Several factors have contributed to the insurgency's

persistence:

- Socio-economic disparities – Endemic poverty and landlessness provided fertile ground for insurgent recruitment.
- Governance failures – Weak state presence and corruption allowed insurgents to fill the vacuum.
- Strategic terrain – Dense forests and difficult terrains provided Maoists with cover and strategic advantages.
- Ideological resonance – The Maoist narrative of class struggle continues to appeal to marginalized communities.

PATHWAYS TO PEACE

Achieving lasting peace in Naxalite-affected regions will require a balanced approach:

- Inclusive Development – Infrastructure, education, and healthcare investments

are crucial.

- Political Engagement – Dialogue with insurgent factions is essential.
- Strengthening Governance – Empowering local institutions builds trust.
- Security Reforms – Military operations must be conducted with respect for human rights.
- Reintegration – Surrender and rehabilitation programs can help reintegrate former insurgents.

THE ROAD AHEAD

The Naxalite-Maoist insurgency is fading — but the scars remain. India stands at a crossroads. A rare opportunity exists to heal the wounds of the past through development and dialogue — but the window is closing fast.

Will India finally seize this chance — or will the embers of rebellion reignite into flames?



Operation Green Hunt movie (2015) still. The image shows actress Aarthi Agarwal in a still from the movie "Operation Green Hunt," surrounded by actors dressed as police officers. cinejosh.com



Naxalbari Uprising (1967). Source: The Caravan.

SUPREME COURT: CONCEALING DRINKING HABIT JUSTIFIES REJECTION OF HEALTH INSURANCE CLAIM FOR ALCOHOL-RELATED HOSPITALISATION

TDG NETWORK
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court in the case Life Insurance Corporation vs Sunita and others observed and has ruled that the insurers can reject health claims which relates to alcoholism if the policyholder concealed alcohol drinking habit while buying the policy.

The Supreme Court in the case approved the decision of the Life Insurance Corporation, LIC to repudiate a claim over the hospitalisation of a policyholder under the 'Jeevan Arogya' scheme since he gave false information regarding his habit of alcohol consumption.

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

An appeal was filed by the LIC against the order of the National Consumer Disputes Redressal Commission, NCDRC which upheld the decisions of the State and District fora to pay an amount of 5,21,650 and costs to the claimant.

In the present matter, the claimant's husband, Mahipal, took LIC's "Jeevan Arogya" policy in 2013. The policy pro-



vided hospital cash benefits, entitling the insured to daily cash payments of 1,000 for non-ICU hospitalization and 2,000 for ICU hospitalization. Almost a year after taking the policy, the policyholder was admitted to the hospital due to severe abdominal pain. He dies, after a month's hospitalisation.

On the other hand, the claim was made by the widow of the policyholder which the LIC rejected on the ground that the deceased had concealed material information regarding his chronic alcoholism.

The LIC cited the exclusion clause of the Jeevan Arogya Plan, specifically Clause 7(xi), which excludes coverage for: 'Self-afflicted injuries or conditions (attempted suicide) and/

or the use or misuse of any drugs or alcohol and complications arising from it.'

However, the claimant then approached the Consumer Forum, wherein it directed the LIC to reimburse the medical expenses.

The Supreme Court in the case disapproved of the approach taken by the NCDRC and the Consumer Fora.

The court noted that the Consumer Fora misconstrued the policy as a medical reimbursement policy and even if the claim was upheld, the claimant was entitled only to the specified cash benefits.

The court also examined the medical records, wherein it is clearly stated that the patient had a history of "chronic alcohol intake." In the proposal

form of the policy, there was a specific question - "Does the Life Insured consume Alcohol/Cigarettes/Bidis or tobacco in any form?". The answer given to this question by the policyholder was "No."

Therefore, the SCDRC rejected the hospital note regarding chronic alcohol intake on the ground that it was issued a year after the policy was taken.

The Supreme Court disagreed with the said approach, wherein it is stated that chronic liver disease, caused by prolonged alcohol consumption, does not develop overnight.

The court observed that, 'The deceased's alcoholism was a long-standing condition, which he knowingly suppressed while subscribing to the policy. Given this suppression of material facts, the appellant was justified in repudiating the claim under the exclusion clause.'

The NCDRC had relied on the Supreme Court's judgment in the case Sulbha Prakash Motegaonekar & Ors. v. Life Insurance Corporation, wherein the court held that mere suppression of a pre-existing disease was not a ground to reject a claim. However, the Court distinguished Sulbha Prakash Motega-

onekar on facts, noting that in that case, the suppressed disease was not the cause of the death. Though the cause of death was cardiac arrest in the instant case, it was related to his chronic liver disease, which was developed due to alcoholism.

The court observed that, 'The record shows that he was hospitalized for severe abdominal pain and vomiting—complications commonly associated with chronic liver disease. He remained hospitalized for nearly a month before succumbing to a cardiac arrest. Given the said medical history, it cannot be said that the cardiac arrest was an isolated event, unrelated to the pre-existing chronic liver disease.'

The court also referred to the case of Bajaj Allianz Life Insurance Co. Ltd. v. Balbir Kaur, wherein the court stated that when the pre-existing disease was the cause of death, its suppression would justify the repudiation of the claim.

The court stated that, 'Sulbha Prakash Motegaonekar does not establish a general principle of law applicable to all cases of non-disclosure. Instead, each case must be assessed based on its specific facts.'

Supreme Court reserves Treasurer and 30% Executive Committee posts for women lawyers in all Karnataka District Bar Associations

TDG NETWORK
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court in the case Deeksha N Amruthesh Versus State Of Karnataka And Ors and connected cases observed and has reserved the post of Treasurer and 30% of the Executive Committee or Governing Council posts for women lawyers across all district bar associations in the State of Karnataka.

The bench comprising of Justice Surya Kant and Justice N Kotiswar Singh was hearing the present matter.

The bench in the case observed and has passed an order, after a prayer was being made that the order reserving posts for women lawyers in the case of Advocates' Association Bengaluru may be extended to all district bar associations in the state.

The bench headed by Justice Kant dictated that:

'This court directed that the directions contained in our order dated January 28, 2025 in respect of Advocates' Association Bengaluru, shall apply mutatis mutandis in the matter of elections of the district bar associations in the entire state of Karnataka. There-

The bench in the case observed and has passed an order, after a prayer was being made that the order reserving posts for women lawyers in the case of Advocates' Association Bengaluru may be extended to all district bar associations in the state.

fore, all the district bar are directed to earmark the post of Treasurer exclusively for women candidates and reserve 30% post of Councilors or members of Executive Committee exclusively for women candidates as was directed in the case of Advocates' Association Bengaluru.'

Further, the court in its order stated that each bar association, after holding its election, shall submit a compliance report to the Registrar General of the High Court, who shall then collate and submit a comprehensive compliance report to the Supreme Court.

One of the counsel appearing before the court appraised the Court about an order passed today by a single bench of the Karnataka High Court whereby Tumakuru District Advocates

Association was directed to create one post of Treasurer and two posts for Executive Committee Members for women, in view of a submission by the Association that it would reserve the said posts for women in the upcoming elections.

The bench of Justice Kant enquired as to when the elections in the High Court Bar and District Bar were scheduled in the state, Senior Advocate Jayna Kothari, appearing for the Karnataka Federation of Women Lawyers, informed that women lawyers had secured Treasurer plus 30% EC posts in the High Court Bar. The said issue only remained with respect to district bar associations, Kothari said, of which elections are upcoming.

Accordingly, the court passed its order.

Law College tells Bombay High Court in plea opposing inspection: Legal education rules framed by BCI not in consonance with Advocates Act

TDG NETWORK
NEW DELHI

The Bombay High Court in the case Nathibai Damodar Thackersey Women's University Law School vs. State Of Maharashtra & Ors observed and has reserved its judgment wherein the petition is filed by a law school against an inspection notice issued by the Bar Council of India, BCI.

The Division bench comprising of Chief Justice Alok Aradhe and Justice MS Karnik was hearing the present matter.

In the present matter, the petition is filed in 2019 by Nathibai Damodar Thackersey Women's University Law School challenging the notice issued by the BCI for inspection of the college.

The petitioner in the plea objected to the notice and argued that BCI does not have the power to inspect the college.

The petitioner argued before the court that the Legal Education Rules framed by the BCI itself are not in consonance

with the Advocates Act.

The petitioner also argued that the BCI broadened the scope of its authority in the Rules and thus, the BCI could not have made rules on inspection when it was absent in the Advocates Act.

The counsel appearing for the petitioner before the court that colleges and universities are distinct entities and that the BCI cannot inspect colleges.

The counsel appearing for the petitioner also submitted that the authority to conduct such inspections of the college lies with the university as the college is affiliated with it.

The petitioner stated that a committee constituted by the UGC and the university has the authority to inspect the law college.

The court in the case then asked if a committee formed by the UGC would have expertise in legal education.

In response, the petitioner stated that the BCI, being

composed of lawyers, lacks the requisite expertise to carry out inspections of legal education institutions.

On the other hand, the Bar Council Of India, BCI argued before the court that it has a statutory duty to carry out the inspection of the law schools to ensure that standard of education in the institutions is maintained.

The Court had appointed Dr. Milind Sathe as the amicus to the case.

Before the court, the amicus elaborated on various powers available to the BCI.

It has been submitted by him before the court that the BCI has a major role in maintaining legal education and that the fundamental powers of BCI with respect to legal education include ancillary powers such as inspection of law colleges.

The amicus referred to Section 7 of the Advocates Act, which deals with the function of the BCI. Specifically, he re-

ferred to Section 7(h) which provides that BCI's function is to promote legal education and to lay down standards of such education in consultation with the Universities and the State Bar Councils. Additionally, he referred to Section 7(i) which states that BCI's functions include recognizing universities whose degree in law shall be a qualification for enrolment as an advocate and for that purpose to visit and inspect Universities.

However, reference was also made to Section 49(d) of the Advocates Act which provides that the BCI may make rules for the standards of legal education to be observed by universities in India and the inspection of universities for that purpose.

The amicus also relied on the Legal Education Rules 2008 and submitted that the BCI can inspect law colleges as per the rules.

Accordingly, the court reserved the orders.

TDG NETWORK
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court in the case The State Of Punjab Versus Bikram Singh Majithia observed and has called out the State of Punjab for the failure of the Punjab Government's panel advocates to appear in matters wherein the notice has been served.

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

The bench in the case was hearing an appeal filed by the Punjab Police against the order of the High Court, wherein the court granted bail to Shiromani Akali Dal leader Bikram Singh Majithia.

On March 04, the court passed an interim order, wherein the court directed Majithia to appear before the Punjab Police on March 17 for interrogation in a drugs case.

The bench headed by Justice Maheshwari stated, 'Mr. Advocate General of Pun-



jab...in your State, even after service of notice, your panel advocates in the Supreme Court are not appearing. This court has already referred in two orders. This is everyday drama...Everyday, we cannot go at your home and knock the doors. Then, you will say the Supreme Court is not allowing me to sleep...Notice has been served, summons has been served to your officers and what is your State doing? In Response, the bench of

Justice Kumar also stated that, 'State of Punjab means absent. Not only in criminal cases, in civil cases also nobody is appearing...If it's in one case, [inaudible] but not every next case.'

Adding to it, Singh responded that this was the first time he was informed about this and that 'he will take care' that this never happens again.

Singh also responded that, 'This should not happen, My lords. I will check. This

is the first time it has come to my notice and I will make sure it never happens again.'

The court with regards to the case of Majithia stated that since he is cooperating with the investigation.

The counsel, Senior Advocate S. Muralidhar appearing for Majithia submitted before the court that Majithia has already answered 150 written questions given to him by the State police.

Majithia also raised concern over the Police holding press conferences every day in this case.

It has been stated by AG Gurminder Singh before the court that the investigation has revealed certain 'startling facts' and said that an affidavit would be filed.

Muralidhar informed, 'Every day, press conference is being held. It is disclosed to the press what answers are given; it cannot be misused.'

However, Advocate General Singh denied holding a press conference.

Accordingly, the court listed the matter for further consideration after 2 weeks.

Supreme Court slams Uttarakhand govt for not paying promised ex-gratia for doctor shot dead in hospital, orders Rs 1 crore compensation

TDG NETWORK
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court in the case The State of Uttarakhand v Sarita Singh and others observed and has criticised the Uttarakhand Government for not paying ex-gratia compensation to the widow of a government doctor, who was shot dead while working in a Community Health Centre in April 2016, despite the then Chief Minister approving a decision to grant Rs 50 Lakh.

The court in the case was displeased that the family of the deceased doctor has been forced to litigate for nearly nine years to get compensation.

The court directed the

State to pay them Rs 1 crore. The court in its order stated:

'This court is of the view that even after the approval of the proposal to pay an amount of Rs. 50 lakhs to the family of deceased by the Chief Secretary, it has not been honoured and the family is litigating since more than nine years. The request made by family to release the sanctioned amount was not acceded to on the pretext of non-approval of the release of the said amount. In our view, looking to the gravity of the incident, the sanction must be honoured and the amount be paid along with interest. Thus, adding interest for about 9 years, we quantify the amount in total

Rs.1 crore.'

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

The court in the case noted that, 'The Government through the Chief Secretary had proposed to pay at least a sum for an amount of Rs.50 lakhs financial assistance as ex-gratia payment to the family of the deceased doctor who was shot dead in hospital during working by assailants. The said note was being approved by the Chief Minister of the State at the relevant point of time. Later, only a sum of Rs.1 lakh was paid on the pretext that under the Rules, such huge amount cannot be paid.'

Supreme Court: Delay in recording witness statements under Section 161/164 of CrPC not fatal if there is adequate explanation

TDG NETWORK
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court in the case Firoz Khan Akbar Khan Versus The State Of Maharashtra observed and has held that a delay caused in recording an eyewitness's testimony would not draw an adverse inference against the prosecution's case if the delay is adequately explained.

The bench comprising of Justice Abhay S Oka, Justice Ahsanuddin Amanullah, and Justice AG Masih was hearing the present matter.

The bench in the case refused to interfere with the conviction of the appellants who challenged their conviction under Section 302 (murder) read with Section 34 (common intention) of the Indian Penal Code, IPC. The appellants raised

a ground that the eyewitnesses examination was conducted after 3/4 delays of the incident.

The bench referred to the case of Ganesh Bhavan Patel v State of Maharashtra, wherein the court to argue that the delay caused in their examination is always fatal to the prosecution's case.

On the other hand, the Respondent-State argued before the court that the delay in recording the eyewitness's testimony was due to the involvement of investigating officer's in maintaining the law and order of the affected area, where the violence took place.

The State argued before the court that the delay caused was sufficiently explained, hence the accused cannot claim benefit.

The judgement authored

by Justice Amanullah observed that when the delay occurred in recording an examination of an eyewitnesses was sufficiently explained than no adverse inference would be drawn against the prosecution's case.

The court observed that, 'Insofar as the delay of 2/3 days in recording the statements of the eye-witnesses under Section 161(5) of the Code of Criminal Procedure, 1973 (hereinafter referred to as the 'Code') is concerned, the said delay has been thoroughly explained by the witnesses, including the Investigating Officer, to the effect that there were riots in the area. On this score, the Investigating Officer was being involved in maintaining law and order in the affected area. In the attendant facts

and circumstances, the course of action adopted by the police cannot be termed unjustified and no adverse inference can be drawn on this count.'

Adding to it, the court stated that the delay caused in recoding witness statements, more so when the said delay is explained, will not aid an accused. Of course, no hard-and fast principle in this regard ought to be or can be laid down, as delay, if any, in recording statements will have to be examined by the Court concerned in conjunction with the peculiar facts of the case before it. Our reading of the above shall apply on all fours to delays in the context of Section 164 of the Code of Criminal Procedure, CrPC.

The court also referred to the case of Lal Bahadur

v. State (NCT of Delhi), wherein a delay is being caused of 27 days in recording the witness's statement was held to be non-fatal to the prosecution's case due to break out of communal violence.

The court while considering the facts and circumstances of the case noted that the decision passed by the co-ordinate bench in the case of Ganesh Bhavan Patel's case cannot be said to be authority on the point because in that case 'the delay caused in recording statements of the material witnesses was accompanied by a delay in registering of the FIR and the surrounding circumstances, which led the Court to hold that there was a 'a cloud of suspicion on the credibility of the entire warp and woof of the prosecution story.'

IRAN OPEN TO UNCONDITIONAL TALKS WITH US: WHAT'S BEHIND THE SHIFT?

As both Iran and the U.S. prepare for what could be a critical few weeks in their diplomatic relationship, the possibility of a breakthrough remains uncertain.

The relationship between Iran and the United States has remained tumultuous and filled with historical grievances. While their interactions have been dominated by nuclear talks, sanctions, and regional influence, recent developments suggest that Iran might be open to a shift in its diplomatic approach toward the U.S. After decades of distrust and confrontations, Iran's leaders are signaling a potential willingness to engage in unconditional talks with Washington. However, the road to a lasting diplomatic resolution remains fraught with challenges and deeply embedded historical tensions.

RISING TENSIONS & STRATEGIC SHIFTS

Iran's willingness to consider dialogue comes at a time of heightened tensions and shifting regional dynamics. The Middle East has witnessed a dramatic series of events that have put Iran on the defensive. The Israel-Gaza conflict and the weakening of Hezbollah's position in Lebanon have strained Tehran's influence in the region. Moreover, the fall of former Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, once a close ally of Iran, has significantly reduced Tehran's leverage over strategic regional actors. As a result, Iran is facing growing challenges both domestically and abroad, leading to a reconsideration of its longstanding policies, including its stance toward the U.S. In light of these regional shifts,

Iran finds itself in a position where reevaluating its relationship with the U.S. might become an imperative for securing its future in a rapidly changing Middle East.

U.S. PROPOSES A NEW NUCLEAR DEAL

In March 2025, a significant diplomatic development unfolded when President Donald Trump sent a letter to Iran's Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei. In the letter, Trump proposed a new framework for direct negotiations aimed at resolving the longstanding nuclear dispute. This initiative set a two-month deadline for Iran to respond, warning of possible alternative measures—such as intensified sanctions and the consideration of military options—if Iran rejected the proposal.

The U.S. hopes that by increasing pressure on Tehran, it can secure a more comprehensive nuclear agreement, one that demands Iran dismantle its nuclear program entirely. Trump's administration believes that Iran's nuclear ambitions pose a threat to regional stability and international security, and that pushing Tehran to comply with tougher terms is the best course of action.

IRAN'S RESPONSE: CAUTIOUSNESS

Despite the U.S. offer, Iran's response has been less than enthusiastic. Ayatollah Khamenei quickly rejected the proposal, emphasizing deep-rooted skepticism regarding the U.S. intentions.



US President Donald Trump (Right) and Iranian Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khamenei. File Photo

He warned that Tehran would not engage in negotiations under pressure, viewing Washington's diplomatic overtures as part of an ongoing strategy to force compliance rather than pursue genuine dialogue. Foreign Minister Abbas Araqchi echoed this sentiment, insisting that for negotiations to move forward, the U.S. must change its approach, particularly its reliance on coercion and sanctions. This rejection highlights the entrenched mistrust between the two nations. Iran views the U.S. as using diplomacy as a cover for its continued pressure tactics, which Tehran sees as counterproductive and ultimately detrimental to any lasting peace agreement.

U.S. MILITARY POSTURE

While the U.S. position has been characterized by a mix of diplomatic outreach

and military readiness, the overall strategy remains aggressive. U.S. Special Envoy Steve Witkoff has emphasized that the goal of the diplomatic overtures is to avoid military confrontation, underscoring Washington's desire for a peaceful resolution. However, National Security Advisor Mike Waltz has reiterated the U.S. hard-line stance, demanding that Iran completely dismantle its nuclear program, a condition Tehran is unlikely to accept. The tension between diplomacy and military preparedness remains a central theme in U.S.-Iran relations. The U.S. aims to pressure Iran into a position of compliance, yet Iran's refusal to fully dismantle its nuclear program suggests that a compromise may be difficult to reach.

ROOTS OF THE US-IRAN TENSIONS

In a surprising develop-

ment, some Iranian officials have begun discussing the possibility of holding negotiations with the U.S. in the United Arab Emirates (UAE), a country that has often served as an intermediary in Middle Eastern diplomatic matters. This proposal illustrates Iran's cautious approach to diplomacy. On one hand, Iran sees the UAE's neutral standing as an opportunity for dialogue without direct exposure to the U.S. influence. On the other hand, some Iranian officials caution that Washington could use such negotiations to trap Iran into unfavorable terms, reflecting the deep skepticism within Tehran.

While some factions within the Iranian government are open to engaging in talks, others remain wary of Washington's true intentions. This divide within Iran's political establishment speaks to the challenges of forging a consensus on how

to approach negotiations with the U.S. moving forward.

ROOTS OF THE US-IRAN TENSIONS

The history of U.S.-Iran relations is filled with layers of animosity and conflict, many of which trace back to pivotal moments in the 20th century. Understanding this historical context is crucial to grasping the current tensions and the potential for any breakthrough in talks.

THE 2015 NUCLEAR DEAL AND TRUMP

In 1953, the U.S. and the United Kingdom orchestrated a coup to oust Iran's democratically elected Prime Minister Mohammad Mossadegh. Mossadegh's decision to nationalize Iran's oil industry angered Western powers, and the coup reinstated the Shah, Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, who was a pro-Western ruler. The events of 1953 sowed the seeds of deep resentment in Iran, which has since viewed the U.S. as an imperialist power undermining Iranian sovereignty.

1979 REVOLUTION & HOSTAGE CRISIS

In 1979, Iran experienced a revolution that overthrew the Shah, replacing his regime with an Islamic republic led by Ayatollah Khomeini. The new government's hostility toward the U.S. reached a peak when Iranian militants seized the U.S. Embassy in Tehran, taking 52 American diplomats hostage for 444 days. The crisis shattered diplo-

matic relations, and the U.S. imposed sanctions on Iran, setting the stage for decades of animosity.

1980S: U.S. BACKS IRAQ AGAINST IRAN

During the Iran-Iraq War (1980-1988), the U.S. supported Saddam Hussein's Iraq with intelligence, weapons, and financial aid, further deepening Iran's distrust of Washington. The situation escalated in 1988, when a U.S. Navy warship mistakenly shot down Iran Air Flight 655, killing 290 civilians, a tragedy that intensified anti-American sentiment.

THE NUCLEAR DISPUTE AND SANCTIONS

In the early 2000s, Iran's nuclear ambitions led to accusations from the U.S. and its allies that Tehran was pursuing nuclear weapons

activities. However, in 2018, President Donald Trump unilaterally withdrew the U.S. from the deal, citing its inadequacies and reimposing sanctions. Iran subsequently resumed uranium enrichment beyond the agreed limits, reigniting tensions.

ASSASSINATION OF QASEM SOLEIMANI

The U.S. assassination of General Qasem Soleimani, one of Iran's most powerful military commanders, in January 2020, triggered a series of retaliatory actions, including Iranian missile strikes on U.S. military bases in Iraq. This further escalated the potential for military conflict.

RECENT UPDATE & THE PATH FORWARD

While the Biden administration has attempted



under the guise of a peaceful nuclear program. As a result, the U.S. imposed severe sanctions on Iran, severely damaging its economy.

THE 2015 NUCLEAR DEAL AND TRUMP

In 2015, Iran and several world powers, including the U.S., signed the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), which lifted sanctions in exchange for Iran agreeing to limit its nuclear ac-

to revive the nuclear deal, negotiations have largely stalled, with both sides entrenched in their respective positions. Iran has supplied drones to Russia for use in the Ukraine conflict, further complicating the situation. Meanwhile, the 2023-2024 Israel-Gaza war has added another layer of complexity, as Iran has backed Hamas and Hezbollah, deepening its conflict with the U.S. and its allies.

● TDG NETWORK

US may require Green Card holders to share social media accounts

A new immigration policy proposal by the Trump administration could significantly change the way green card holders in the United States interact with the government. Under the proposed policy, individuals who are legally residing in the U.S., including green card holders and asylum seekers applying for permanent residency, would be required to disclose their social media accounts to U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS). This rule expands an existing regulation that already mandates visa applicants from abroad to provide their social media handles as part of the visa application process. The expansion aims to include people already living in the U.S. and seeking permanent residency, raising concerns about privacy, free speech, and potential consequences for immigrants, especially those from politically active communities.

THE POLICY PROPOSAL

The new policy proposal extends an exist-

ing rule that already mandates visa applicants outside the U.S. to provide their social media handles to USCIS. Initially introduced in 2019, this rule aimed to enhance the vetting process for individuals seeking entry into the U.S. by providing authorities

with more information to verify identities and improve national security screening. However, the proposed change broadens this requirement, making it applicable not only to foreign nationals applying for visas but also to individuals who are already in the U.S. legally, such as green card holders, refugees, and those applying for asylum or permanent residency.

This move is part of a broader pattern of immigration-related reforms introduced by the Trump administration. These reforms have emphasized tighter immigration controls, stronger vetting measures, and a focus on national security concerns.

This latest proposal continues that trend, but it raises significant questions about its potential impact on the immigrant community, particularly on green card holders from countries with active diasporas, such as India.

CONSEQUENCES & INDIAN IMMIGRANTS

The policy could disproportionately affect Indian



Green card holders and asylum seekers could face increased scrutiny over their social media accounts, which could potentially impact their ability to secure permanent residency or citizenship.

to discussions on political issues, human rights, and international relations. However, under the proposed policy, green card holders and asylum seekers would have to disclose their social media accounts, giving the government access to their personal online activities.

Many critics of the policy argue that this could have a chilling effect on free speech. Green card holders could be deterred from sharing their political opinions online for fear that doing so might harm their immigration prospects. Some fear that vocal political dissidents or individuals critical of certain U.S. policies—especially those critical of the Trump administration—could be targeted for scrutiny, which may jeopardize their chances of securing permanent residency or citizenship.

Indian immigrants who have been outspoken in their support for or opposition to various political causes in India—such as issues related to the government, human rights, or international relations—might face greater scrutiny. Those who express controversial political views may find their social media accounts



flagged for review, leading to questions about the government's potential for bias and selective enforcement.

In addition to concerns about political expression, many Indian immigrants could be concerned about the privacy implications of such a policy. The Indian diaspora, like many others, often uses social media to stay connected with family, share personal moments, and engage in discussions on a variety of topics. Forcing individuals to share these private aspects of their lives with the government could feel like an invasion of privacy, especially if the information is used to vet their immigration applications or track their personal activities.



Citizen candidates attend a US Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) naturalisation ceremony at the Brooklyn Cyclones Maimonides Park in the Brooklyn borough of New York City, US May 3, 2022. File Photo

GOVT'S JUSTIFICATION FOR THE POLICY

The Trump administration has defended the policy, emphasizing its national security benefits. In a notice released on March 5, 2025, USCIS argued that collecting social media identifiers from green card holders and asylum seekers would be an essential step in improving the vetting process. The administration claims that this expanded scrutiny would help with identity verification, public safety screening, and security vetting, particularly for individuals seeking permanent residency or citizenship.

According to the USCIS, reviewing social media accounts can help identify individuals who may pose a security risk to the country, especially

those with connections to extremist groups or activities that could undermine national security. The government has stated that the policy is necessary for strengthening national security measures and ensuring a more rigorous screening process for individuals seeking to stay in the U.S.

Critics, however, argue that the government's emphasis on national security is a pretext for expanding surveillance and imposing stricter control over immigrant populations. Civil liberties organizations and privacy advocates have voiced concerns that the government could misuse this data for purposes beyond national security, such as targeting specific political or ethnic groups, leading to discriminatory practices in immigration decisions.

TRUMP'S IMMIGRATION CRACKDOWN

The proposed policy fits into a broader framework of aggressive immigration policies championed by President Donald Trump. Since returning to office, Trump has continued to push for measures that limit immigration, particularly

from countries with large Muslim or non-Western populations. On his first day back in power, he signed an executive order instructing federal agencies to combat what he described as an "invasion" of illegal immigrants. He frequently links undocumented immigration to rising crime rates and job shortages, despite statistical evidence that contradicts this narrative.

The social media disclosure requirement is another step in the administration's efforts to create a more stringent immigration framework. The move reflects a growing pattern of surveillance and control, which critics argue disproportionately affects legal immigrants, particularly those from countries with politically active communities. Immigrants who are vocal in their support of political causes in their home countries may be seen as risks by the government, even if their political views are unrelated to their immigration applications.

This proposal also raises questions about whether the U.S. is selectively targeting certain immigrant populations.

With the Indian community being one of the largest groups of legal immigrants in the U.S., the policy could have far-reaching consequences for many individuals, particularly those who engage with political issues in both the U.S. and their home country.

CONCERNS OVER PRIVACY

The proposed policy has sparked significant back-

lash from civil rights organizations and privacy advocates who argue that it represents an unjustifiable intrusion into individuals' private lives. By requiring green card holders to disclose their social media accounts, the government could be violating the fundamental rights to privacy and free speech that are enshrined in the U.S. Constitution. Critics point out that the policy is not only invasive but also potentially discriminatory, especially when it comes to political expression.

A major concern is that the policy could lead to self-censorship. Immigrants might avoid posting their political opinions or engaging in public discourse out of fear that their online activities could be scrutinized and negatively impact their immigration status. This fear could be especially potent for individuals with politically sensitive views or affiliations.

THE ROAD AHEAD: WHAT'S NEXT?

As the Trump administration seeks public comments on the proposal, the debate continues over how to balance national security with personal freedoms.

The policy is still in the proposal stage, and it remains to be seen whether it will be implemented in its current form. However, if the policy moves forward, it could have far-reaching consequences for immigrants living in the U.S., particularly those from politically active communities such as the Indian diaspora.

● TDG NETWORK



ing rule that already mandates visa applicants outside the U.S. to provide their social media handles to USCIS. Initially introduced in 2019, this rule aimed to enhance the vetting process for individuals seeking entry into the U.S. by providing authorities

immigrants in the U.S. A significant portion of the Indian community in the U.S. is politically active, with many individuals participating in political discourse both in the U.S. and in India. Social media platforms like Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram have become central

FUND CUTS ENDANGER FOOD BANKS, THREATEN HUNGER FOR POOR AMERICANS

Hunger in the U.S. has ticked up in recent years with rising inflation and the end of pandemic-era programs that expanded food aid.

AGENCIES
WASHINGTON

Food banks across the country, already strained by rising demand, say they will have less food to distribute because of at least \$1 billion in federal funding cuts and pauses by the Trump administration, according to Reuters interviews with organizations in seven states.

Hunger in the U.S. has ticked up in recent years with rising inflation and the end of pandemic-era programs that expanded food aid. President Donald Trump's administration has vowed to lower inflation by cutting back on government spending, including two U.S. Department of Agriculture programs that helped schools and food banks buy food from local farms.

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SUMMARY

Food banks face reduced supplies due to \$1 billion in funding cuts

Emergency food funding paused, impacting food distribution nationwide

Local farmers lose sales as USDA programs are slashed



Senior citizens receive a hot meal at the Roosevelt Community Center in Charleston, West Virginia, U.S., March 19, 2025.

newsletter. Sign up here. One reason is fewer expected shipments from USDA's The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP), one of the agency's core nutrition programs that buys food from farmers and sends it to food pantries, some of the organizations said. Vince Hall, chief government relations officer for Feeding America, the nation's largest food bank

network, said the USDA is reviewing the program and had paused half of TEFAP funding - \$500 million - sourced from the Commodity Credit Corporation, which generally gives the department a broad discretionary funding pool for various programs. A USDA spokesperson told Reuters the agency is still making purchases to support food banks but did not respond to detailed

questions about TEFAP spending and why food banks are seeing reduced deliveries. Feeding America has spoken with the Trump administration about the pause and urged it to make a quick decision on whether to unfreeze the funds, Hall said. That pause compounds losses from the agency's cancellation of the Local Food Purchase Assistance (LFPA) program, which

funded about \$500 million annually for food banks, the organizations told Reuters. Chad Morrison, head of Mountaineer Food Bank in West Virginia, said he saw on a weekly forecast from the state of West Virginia that about 40% of the organization's expected April deliveries of products like cheese, eggs and milk from TEFAP would be canceled. That will reduce the amount of food its network of 450 food pantries and other feeding programs provide, Morrison said. Food banks are handling unprecedented demand as U.S. hunger rates climb after years of decline. In 2023, 13.5% of Americans struggled at some point to secure enough food, the highest rate in nearly a decade, according to the most recent USDA data. In rural America, the hunger rate is even higher, at 15.4%, the data shows.



A picture of Bashar al-Assad, damaged by bullets, hangs on the wall of a burnt building of Criminal Security department, after Syria's Bashar al-Assad was ousted, in Damascus, Syria, December 20, 2024. File Photo

level diplomacy. Among the conditions placed by the United States are Syria's destruction of any remaining chemical weapons stores and cooperation on counterterrorism, the two U.S. officials, the Syrian source and both sources in Washington said. Another demand was making sure foreign fighters are not installed in senior roles in Syria's governing structure, the U.S. officials and one of the sources in Washington said. Syria has already appointed some foreign ex-rebels, including Uyghurs, a Jordanian and a Turk, to its defense ministry - a move

that alarmed foreign governments. Washington also asked Syria to appoint a liaison to assist U.S. efforts to find Austin Tice, the U.S. journalist who went missing in Syria over a decade ago, according to the two U.S. officials and both sources in Washington. In return for fulfilling all the demands, Washington would provide some sanctions relief, all six sources said. The sources did not specify what relief would be offered, and said Washington did not provide a specific timeline for the conditions to be fulfilled.

Balochistan CM orders strict action against anti-state activities

AGENCIES
ISLAMABAD

Balochistan Chief Minister Mir Sarfraz Bugti has ordered strict action against government employees and officers involved in anti-state activities, according to a media report on Tuesday.

Chairing a high-level meeting, the chief minister ordered divisional and deputy commissioners to identify and act against the officials engaged in activities that go against the state's interests, The Express Tribune newspaper reported. The chief minister said that no government employee would be allowed to undermine state policies, warning that violators would be dealt with accordingly. Meanwhile, an FIR has been registered against Mahrang Baloch, leader of the



Balochistan CM Sarfraz Bugti chairs a meeting on March 24, 2025. — Facebook@DprGoB

Baloch Yakjehti Committee (BYC), along with several other leaders and activists, in connection with the killing of three people during a protest in Quetta, reported the paper. The case includes multiple sections of the anti-terrorism act and other legal provisions, police said. So far, three cases have been filed against the

BYC in Quetta. Meanwhile, protests continue across Balochistan against the arrests of Mahrang Baloch and other BYC leaders. On Sunday, a shutter-down strike was observed for the second consecutive day in several cities, including Turbat, Mastung, Kalat, Kharan, Chagai, and Panjgur. During the meeting, officials provided a detailed briefing on the law-and-order situation and service delivery across the province. The chief minister reiterated that maintaining security and upholding the state's authority were top priorities and emphasised that no road would be allowed to be blocked, and every district officer was responsible for ensuring law enforcement in his jurisdiction.

Trump dismisses Yemen war plan leak as 'Glitch'

AGENCIES
WASHINGTON

Donald Trump downplayed a security breach involving a leaked Yemen war plan, calling it a "glitch" and offering strong support for his senior national security team. In a phone interview with NBC, Trump referred to the incident as "the only glitch in two months" and assured that it wasn't a significant issue. He defended National Security Adviser Mike Waltz, stating that he "has learned a lesson" from the situation and praised him as "a good man." The leak stemmed from an accidental inclusion of journalist Jeffrey Goldberg in a Signal messaging group discussing sensitive military plans. Goldberg, editor-in-chief of The Atlantic, revealed

that he had been added to the chat, which included senior officials like Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth, Vice President JD Vance, and Waltz. The discussion centered around military strikes on Iran-backed Houthi rebels in Yemen. Goldberg reported receiving messages from the group, which contained sensitive information about the operation. Although the leak could have jeopardized military operations if Goldberg had published the details immediately, he refrained from doing so. The conversation included internal debates about the U.S.'s role in addressing Houthi attacks, with Vance criticizing Europe's reliance on American support for security issues.

China seeks stronger ties with Europe

AGENCIES
BEIJING

Chinese foreign minister met with his Portuguese counterpart in Beijing on Tuesday, calling for closer ties with Europe as Chinese and European leaders navigate intensifying global trade tensions. China will work with Portugal to promote Chinese-European relations, Wang Yi told Portugal's Foreign Minister Paulo Rangel, according to a Chinese ministry statement. "China regards Europe as an important pole in a multipolar world, and supports Europe in maintaining its strategic autonomy," Wang said. Rangel's visit, the first by a high-level Portuguese government official in over five years.

Bangladesh Army refutes media claims of 'emergency meeting'

AGENCIES
DHAKA

The Bangladesh Army Tuesday dismissed a report published by an Indian media outlet, saying the article claiming an emergency meeting of top army brass was based on "false and fabricated" information. In a statement, the Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR), the media wing of the Bangladesh Army, said the report, titled 'Bangladesh Army Holds Emergency Meeting Amid Possibility of Coup Against Chief Adviser Mohammad Yunus,' is a "glaring example of journalistic malpractice." The ISPR termed it a misleading article based on fabricated information regarding a routine meeting of the



Bangladesh Army Chief General Waker-uz-Zaman. File Photo

Bangladesh Army. The article "lacks credible sources or any verifiable evidence", it said. The information presented in the article is entirely unfounded and the claims of an "impending coup" are "entirely deceitful." It slammed the media outlet for publishing "sensationalist narratives without due

According to the ISPR, this is not the first time the media outlet has disseminated "misleading reports" about the Bangladesh Army.

diligence or a responsible commitment to journalistic integrity". According to the ISPR, this is not the first time the media outlet has disseminated "misleading reports" about the Bangladesh Army. A similar report, published earlier this month, was debunked in a rejoinder issued on March 11, the statement added.

B'desh seeks India's response on Yunus-Modi meeting proposal

AGENCIES
DHAKA

Bangladesh on Tuesday said it was awaiting a response from India to its proposal for a meeting between Chief Adviser Muhammad Yunus and Prime Minister Narendra Modi on the sidelines of the BIMSTEC Summit in Bangkok next week. "From our side, we are fully ready for the meeting. Now, we await a positive response from India," Foreign Secretary Md. Jashim Uddin said at a media briefing here, outlining the Chief Adviser's forthcoming visits to China and Thailand. Dhaka earlier sent a letter to India proposing a meeting between Yunus and Modi amid a strained bilateral relation after the August 5, 2024 regime change



in Bangladesh when Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's 16-year Awami League regime was toppled and she virtually fled to India. Modi and Yunus are likely to visit Thailand to attend the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) summit. Dhaka has proposed their meeting on the sidelines of the event. Jashim Uddin acknowl-

edged the existing strain in bilateral relations but said this could be overcome if a bilateral meeting is held between the two leaders. Last week in Delhi, External Affairs Ministry spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal said he had no update on any planned meeting between the two leaders. Yunus will be in Bangkok to attend the BIMSTEC summit from April 2-4.

'ISIS greatest threat to Russia's security'

AGENCIES
ISLAMABAD

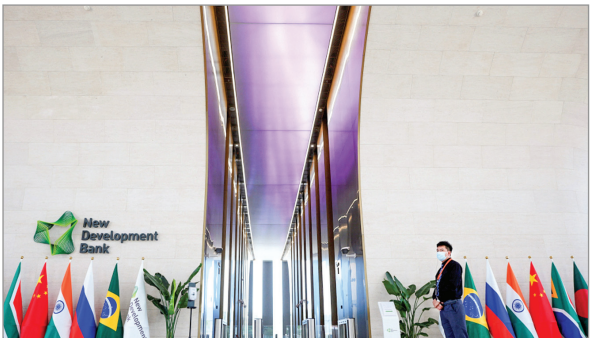
Russia's Ambassador to Pakistan Albert P Khorev on Tuesday identified ISIS as the greatest threat to Russia's national and regional security, a media report said. He told the Express Tribune that Afghanistan's efforts to combat militancy were inadequate but attributed it to economic challenges and prevailing security conditions in the country. The Russian Ambassador was speaking at The Express Tribune at its Peshawar office. Khorev identified ISIS as the greatest threat to Russia's national and regional security, stating that Moscow is closely monitoring the situation and working

with regional partners under the 'Quartet' format to counter terrorism. Khorev also highlighted Russia's collaboration with regional countries under the Collective Security Treaty Organisation (CSTO) to eliminate militancy. He reaffirmed Moscow's support for Pakistan, Afghanistan, and other regional states in tackling militant threats, The Express Tribune reported. Khorev also dismissed media reports alleging that Russia has found evidence of Pakistan supplying arms to Ukraine. "We have not found any proof of Pakistani arms supplies in the Ukraine-Russia conflict. All such claims are baseless," the paper quoted Khorev as saying.

Indonesia to join BRICS' New Development Bank

AGENCIES
JAKARTA

Indonesia will join New Development Bank, a multilateral bank developed by BRICS member nations, President Prabowo Subianto said on Tuesday. Joining NDB as a member would help Indonesia accelerate its economic transformation, Prabowo said. The BRICS group also includes



A view of logo of New Development Bank (NDB) at its headquarters in Shanghai, China July 10, 2023. File Photo

Brazil, Russia, South Africa, China, India, Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran and the United Arab Emirates. Prabowo made the announcement during a visit by NDB president and former Brazilian President Dilma Rousseff. Rousseff said the bank is interested in collaborating in sectors such as renewable energy and biodiesel, as well as technological development.

Hamas had operatives on American campuses, claims rescued hostage

AGENCIES
NEW YORK

A lawsuit by October 7 victims has revealed that Hamas kidnappers told rescued hostage Shlomi Ziv that the terrorist group had operatives on American campuses, with the terrorists showing him articles and pictures of protests held in Columbia University, The Jerusalem Post reported. In a case filed at the New York Southern District Court

against Within Our Lifetime and its leader Nerdeen Kiswani, Columbia Students for Justice in Palestine and representative Maryam Alwan, Columbia-Barnard Jewish Voice for Peace and representative Cameron Jones, and Columbia University Apartheid Divest and lead negotiator Mahmoud Khalil on Monday, plaintiff Ziv said that his Hamas kidnappers referred to protests planned

by terrorists when speaking about having American operatives. Ziv was working as a security guard at the Nova Music Festival, and he fended off terrorists and evacuated people before being taken as hostage to Gaza. He was kept as a hostage in Gaza for 246 days before being rescued alongside three other captives in an Israel Defence Force (IDF) operation in June last year,

The Jerusalem Post reported. The lawsuit alleged that Columbia SJP renewed its dormant Instagram activity three minutes before the attack and that National SJP seemed to have presented propaganda material during or before the attack and argued that affiliated groups had been financed and supported by Hamas through organizations that the terrorist group founded.

PICTURE PERFECT



Disha Patani poses for her social media. (INSTAGRAM)

Vidya on ‘Kahaani 3’: Sujoy Ghosh once ‘threatened’ her about the script

TDG NETWORK
NEW DELHI

Amid growing speculation about Kahaani 3, an old statement by Vidya Balan regarding director Sujoy Ghosh's plans for the film has resurfaced.

The 2012 thriller Kahaani, directed, co-written, and co-produced by Sujoy Ghosh, remains one of Vidya Balan's most acclaimed films. The movie featured Parambrata Chattopadhyay in a key role. Its sequel, Kahaani 2: Durga Rani Singh, released in 2016, starred Balan alongside Arjun Rampal.

Recent reports suggest that the script for Kahaani 3 has finally been locked, with



key actors from the first film, including Parambrata Chatterjee, Nawazuddin Siddiqui, Indraneil Sengupta, and Saswata Chatterjee, expected to return alongside Balan. However, no official confirmation has been made. Amid these rumours, a 2019 interview

of Vidya Balan has resurfaced, in which she spoke about Sujoy Ghosh's plans for the third instalment. Speaking to Hindustan Times, she had said, “Sujoy keeps threatening me that he will write Kahaani 3, but he hasn't written it yet. I am also waiting! Of course, we would love to go ahead with the franchise, but it's crucial to find the right story first.”

On the professional front, Vidya Balan was last seen in Bhool Bhulaiyaa 3, co-starring Kartik Aaryan, Madhuri Dixit, and Triptii Dimri, as well as in Do Aur Do Pyaar alongside Pratik Gandhi, Ileana D'Cruz, and Sendhil Ramamurthy.

Rahul, Athiya welcome baby girl

TDG NETWORK
NEW DELHI

March 24, 2025, will always hold a special place in cricketer KL Rahul's life as he became father to a baby girl on this date. Adding more memorable touch to his day, his IPL team, Delhi Capitals, registered their first thumping victory against Lucknow Supergiants last night.

After winning the match, KL Rahul's team members



congratulated him on being blessed with the daughter. The official X handle of DC celebrated the "extension" of

the DC family in style, welcoming the baby with coach Hemang Badani, Skipper Axar Patel, mentor Kevin Pietersen, Tristan Stubbs and Jake Fraser McGurk being among those in the video making the cradling gesture to welcome KL's baby with wife and Bollywood actress Athiya Shetty.

Axar Patel could be seen leading the celebration as he said, 'Aa le chak main aa gaya'.

BRAIN PICKING



For me, love is magic, it's about trust and understanding. It's putting the other person before you effortlessly.
— ADITI RAO HYDARI
(Indian Actress)

Neha breaks down at Melbourne concert, apologises to fans for arriving late

TDG NETWORK
MELBOURNE

Singer Neha Kakkar broke down and apologised profusely to her fans after she allegedly arrived three hours late for her concert in Melbourne, Australia.

In a video, posted on Reddit by a user, the singer is seen crying on stage while some audience members

HORROR THRILLER ‘CHHORII 2’ TO PREMIERE ON APRIL 11

TDG NETWORK
MUMBAI

The OTT giant Amazon Prime Video announced the premiere date of the much-awaited franchise horror thriller Chhorii 2, which stars Nushratt Bharuccha and Soha Ali Khan in the lead roles.

It is set to premiere worldwide on April 11, 2025. The much-awaited sequel is directed by Vishal Furia. Apart from the lead role, the film will also star Gashmeer Mahajani, Saurabh Goyal, Pallavi Ajay, Kuldeep Sareen, and Hardika Sharma in key roles.

Following the phenomenal success of 'Chhorii', which impressed viewers with its spine-chilling story



and deep-rooted folklore, the sequel promises to push the boundaries of supernatural horror, fear, and suspense with a riveting tale of a mother's battle against paranormal forces and societal evils.

Director of Content Licensing, Prime Video India, reflected on the success of the movie's first instalment and said that the sequel aims to take the creative vision of the

film a step further.

"With Chhorii, we introduced audiences to a story that was deeply intriguing yet emotionally powerful. The film struck a perfect chord with cinephiles of the horror genre, blending fear with folklore in a way that felt fresh and authentic. With Chhorii 2, we are taking that creative vision further, crafting a sequel of

the well-acclaimed franchise that is darker, more intense, and replete with more twists and turns," shared Manish Menghani, Director of Content Licensing, Prime Video India, in a press note.

The film is produced under the banner of T-Series, Abundantia Entertainment, Psych, and Tamarisk Lane Production. Vikram Malhotra, CEO of Abundantia Entertainment, shared the inspiration behind the formation of Chhorii 2 in a press note by the makers.

"The overwhelming love and appreciation for the first film encouraged us to expand this universe with Chhorii 2, where the horror intensifies, and the battle for survival becomes even more personal and dangerous.

Sonam, Anil share adorable snaps

TDG NETWORK
MUMBAI

Bollywood actress Sonam Kapoor penned a heartfelt message for her mother, Sunita Kapoor, on her birthday on Tuesday.

Taking to her Instagram handle, the 'Saawariya' actress shared an adorable throwback childhood photo in which she was seen resting on the lap of her mother while posing for the photograph.

In a heartfelt note birthday note, Sonam credited her mother for giving her 'strength' and being a 'guiding light' in her life.

To my favourite WOMAN in the whole world,



my mama, my inspiration, my strength, my guiding light - happy birthday! My constant through every season of life, showing me what it means to live with grace, courage, and boundless love. Everything I am and everything I hope to be is rooted in the values you've taught me - through your actions, your compassion, and your unwavering support."

Sonali Bendre to host 'The Happy Pawdcast'

TDG NETWORK
NEW DELHI

Actor Sonali Bendre will be a host of the upcoming podcast "The Happy Pawdcast", dedicated to pet parenting and pet care.

The podcast, which will have its first episode out on YouTube on March 28, aims to "be a trusted guide for both new and experienced pet parents, promoting responsible and informed pet care," according to a press release.

Bendre, who most recently appeared in "The Broken News 2", said her love for animals has grown stronger over the years.

I have been a pet parent for

years and my love for animals has only grown stronger. Being part of 'The Happy Pawdcast' is truly special for me because it's a platform where I can connect with fellow pet lovers, share my experiences and most importantly, spread awareness about responsible pet parenting.

"Taking care of a pet is not just a responsibility but a deeply rewarding journey and this podcast is the perfect first step for anyone looking to embark on it. Through engaging conversations and expert insights, I hope to educate and inspire more people to welcome pets into their lives with love," she added.

Chaos at Sonu Nigam’s DTU concert as students throw Stones

AGENCIES
NEW DELHI

Bollywood singer Sonu Nigam's live concert at Delhi Technological University's (DTU) Engifest 2025 turned chaotic when students threw stones and plastic bottles at him. The event, held on March 23 (Sunday), forced the singer to stop mid-performance and urge the crowd to behave.

More than one lakh students gathered at the university to attend the concert, leading to overcrowding and unruly behavior. Reports suggest that the security struggled to control the excited audience, making it difficult to maintain order.



As objects started flying toward the stage, Sonu Nigam directly addressed the crowd, urging them to stop. He said, "Main aapke liye aaya hoon yahan pe so that we can all have a good time. I'm not asking you to not enjoy, but please aisa na kariye (I have come here for you so that we can all have

a good time. I'm not asking you to not enjoy, but please don't do this)."

According to a Hindustan Times report, Nigam expressed concern for his team members, fearing they might get hurt. Despite the tense situation, he tried to manage the crowd with patience.

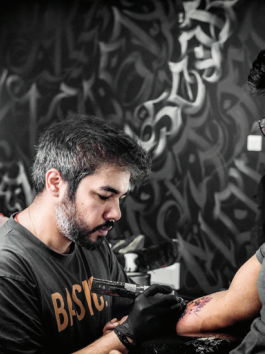
Prashant Yaduvanshi: From JEE topper to global tattoo artist

TDG NETWORK
NEW DELHI

In an age where career paths often follow predictable blueprints, Prashant Yaduvanshi stands as a bold exception. Once a JEE topper and on track for a thriving engineering career, he made the audacious decision to leave the security of conventional success behind, venturing into the world of body art. Today, he is one of the most recognized names in realism tat-

tooning, with Shaman Ink studios flourishing in both India and the Netherlands.

In this candid Q&A, he opens up about moments of doubt, how realism became his signature, and the emotional stories behind some of his most transformative cover-ups. He also talks about how tattoo culture differs between India and Europe, why he's passionate about mentoring new artists, and where he sees the future of ink in a tech-driven world.



From JEE topper to internationally recognized tattoo artist, your career shift defies conventional

wisdom. Did you experience moments of doubt, and how did you reconcile intellectual rigor with artistic instinct in your work?

Yes, there was always doubt during the shift and for quite some time after because I had no exposure to the industry and was leaving behind a very promising career without knowing where this new venture would take me. However, once I made up my mind and let go of all the safety nets, it became an all-or-

nothing situation—which, I think, is a very powerful space to be in.

Your expertise in realism tattoos extends beyond conventional inkwork to hyper-detailed textures like sticker tattoos, origami, and thread patchwork. How do you approach realism differently from other artists, and what role does engineering precision play in your artistry?

I think my unique approach to black and grey realism lies in my choice

of a distinct palette of solid true grey tones instead of the traditional grey wash technique. This makes my work stand out and has become something of a signature style in India. However, when it comes to color realism, I'm still in the process of exploring and evolving.

Cover-up tattoos require more than technical mastery—they demand an emotional and psychological understanding of the client's journey. Can you

share a particularly moving transformation you've facilitated through your work?

There have been quite a few, but one in particular stands out. A client from a well-to-do background, who held an important position and regularly presented himself in high-level business meetings with industrialists and capitalists, had a large, poorly done tattoo on his arm. It severely impacted his confidence and self-image. Despite the

difficulty, we managed to cover it up, and it turned out to be a life-changing experience for him. He couldn't stop thanking me and shared how much he had given up on the idea that it could ever be fixed.

You've expanded Shaman Ink across continents, with studios in India and the Netherlands. How do cultural influences shape the way people perceive body art in these two regions, and how do you adapt your artistry accordingly?

A CULINARY JOURNEY AT SWASTIK: WHERE FOOD NOURISHES THE BODY AND ELEVATES THE SOUL

TDG NETWORK

Nestled in the serene Peacock Valley of Pune, Swastik Wellbeing Sanctuary stands as a luxurious haven for those seeking holistic rejuvenation. While Swastik is renowned for its transformative wellness programs and thoughtfully designed spaces, it also offers a culinary experience that elevates the art of nourishment. At its core, Swastik's cuisine is an extension of its holistic philosophy, where food is not just sustenance but a pathway to healing, balance, and joy.

Rooted in Ayurveda and naturopathy, the dining experience at Swastik is designed to align with the five key dimensions of wellbeing: Health, Wealth, Love, Bliss, and Spirituality. Every dish served at the sanctuary is meticulously crafted with fresh, organic ingredients, ensuring that each meal nourishes not just the body but also the mind and soul. The emphasis is on conscious eating, with menus designed to harmonize the five elements—Earth, Water, Fire, Air, and Space—essential for optimal health and vitality.

AYU VIHAR: WHERE HEALING BEGINS WITH FOOD

Swastik's Ayurvedic restaurant in Ayu Vihar is the epicenter of health and healing. The menu here is carefully curated to promote digestive bal-



Ayurvedic Thali, Swastik Wellbeing Luxury



Arvind Joshi, Executive Chef at Swastik Wellbeing Sanctuary

ance, detoxification, and rejuvenation. Guests can enjoy seasonal delicacies, sattvic meals, and detox beverages tailored to their

individual doshas (Vata, Pitta, Kapha). The philosophy is simple: by eating in alignment with one's body constitution, guests can ex-



Hot Steam Burger_Swastik Wellbeing Luxury, Pune

perience enhanced energy, improved digestion, and mental clarity.

Signature offerings include nutrient-dense porridges, fresh vegetable stews, ghee-infused khichdi, and herbal teas infused with tulsi, ashwagandha, and cardamom. The restaurant also incorporates ancient cooking techniques such as slow cooking and fermenting to retain maximum nutritional value.



Strawberry Coconut Chia Pudding

ANAND VIHAR: A CELEBRATION OF FLAVORS AND COMMUNITY

Overlooking the picturesque Khadakwasla Lake, Anand Vihar is a vibrant dining space that brings joy to the act of eating. Here, guests can savor wholesome yet flavorful meals that are designed to evoke bliss and gratitude. The emphasis on "Ananda Immersion" is reflected in the

Green Peas Galate

thoughtfully plated dishes that stimulate the senses while fostering mindful eating.

Standout dishes include Ayurvedic thalis that balance sweet, salty, sour, bitter, pungent, and astringent flavors in perfect harmony. Locally sourced millets, fresh greens, and seasonal fruits form the base of many preparations, reflecting the sanctuary's commitment to sustainability and

conscious living. For those seeking indulgence, there are guilt-free desserts such as jaggery-sweetened date laddoos and coconut chia puddings.

A CULINARY HUB FOR TRANSFORMATION

Swastik's cuisine goes beyond the plate to offer immersive culinary workshops where guests can learn about Ayurvedic cooking principles, mind-

ful eating, and food-based healing. Whether it's a detox juice-making session or a deep dive into Vedic spices, these workshops empower participants to integrate wellness into their daily lives.

A PERSONAL TOUCH: TAILORED DINING EXPERIENCES

What truly sets Swastik apart is its personalized approach to dining. Each guest's meals are tailored based on their wellness goals, whether it's weight management, sleep optimization, or hormonal balance. Expert nutritionists and Ayurvedic practitioners guide guests on how to make food choices that enhance vitality and wellbeing.

THE SWASTIK DINING EXPERIENCE: A PATHWAY TO BLISS

At Swastik, every meal is a sacred experience. From the calming ambiance of the dining spaces to the loving preparation of each dish, the focus is on creating an environment where guests can slow down, savor each bite, and connect with their inner selves. The emphasis on gratitude, community, and conscious eating transforms the act of dining into a joyful, transformative ritual. Whether it's a three-night Discover retreat or a longer healing program, Swastik's culinary offerings leave an indelible impression, reminding guests that true nourishment goes beyond food—it's about feeding the soul.

Comorin Brings Its Taste to The Whole of New Delhi Now!

SANJANA CHAWLA

In a city like New Delhi, where food options are endless, it's not often that a new delivery service gets us excited. But Comorin, a popular eatery which was voted India's Best Restaurant Bar at 30 Best Bars 2022, is finally delivering in the capital, and I couldn't wait to try it out. I ordered a variety of dishes to get a feel for Comorin's menu, so read on to know what I felt about the eatery's offerings and taste!

The Comorin Vada Pav was a great starting point. The vada was crispy on the outside and soft on the inside, just like it should be, and the pav was fresh, while the chutneys added a nice tanginess to the dish.

The Sweet Corn Khichadi was another unique surprise as I didn't know what to expect! The dish turned out to be a flavorful, slightly sweet, and comforting bowl of goodness. The sweet corn added a nice pop of flavor, and the khichadi was cooked to perfection - just what a comfortable, homely meal should be like!

For mains, I tried the Comorin Paneer Rara with Garlic & Green Chilli Naan. The curry was a creamy, spicy delight and the paneer was cooked to perfec-



tion. Then aans were not too garlicky or spicy, and were a great accompaniment to the other dishes.

The Kashmiri Guchhi Pulao, on the other hand, was a rich, earthy delight and definitely my favourite! The pulao was cooked to perfection, and the mushrooms and soya chunks in it were flavorful and aromatic. It was a dish that warmed the

heart and filled the belly and I couldn't stop eating it all! The accompanying Saffron Raita added a cool, refreshing, soothing touch to the pulao.

Finally to end my hearty meal from Comorin, I tried the Malai Cheeni Toast, which was a sweet, indulgent treat. The toast was crispy, the malai was creamy, and the honeycomb added a nice sweetness to the dish.

Overall, I was impressed with Comorin's offerings as all the dishes were flavorful, aromatic, and expertly cooked. The delivery was prompt, and the packaging was impressive. If you're looking for a taste of the world in New Delhi, Comorin is definitely worth trying out.

Rating: 4.5/5

The Coffee Bean & Tea Leaf: 25 Stores Planned by FY 2025

TDG NETWORK

As India's café culture flourishes, The Coffee Bean & Tea Leaf® continues to elevate the coffee and tea experience with the opening of its second café in GKI, the shopping hub of South Delhi. Known for its premium blends and hand-crafted beverages, the global brand offers a space that seamlessly blends innovation, comfort, and world-class flavors.

The Coffee Bean & Tea Leaf® is accelerating its expansion in India with the support of its sole franchisee, Ekaagra Ostalaritza Pvt. Ltd. With plans to open 25 locations by the end of FY 2025 and 250 by 2029, the GKI café marks a key milestone in becoming a leading player in India's thriving café culture. Each location is more than just a



café—it represents a commitment to an exceptional coffee and tea experience.

As part of a creative strategy for its store opening, The Coffee Bean & Tea Leaf® launched the «Dude with a Signboard» campaign—a playful and engaging activation that captivated GKI customers. Featuring witty, relatable slogans like "Caffeine first, shopping later" and «You need coffee more than that

extra pair of shoes,» the campaign cleverly blended humor with everyday coffee cravings. The result? Excitement extended beyond a single market, as shoppers stopped, laughed, snapped photos, and shared their experiences on social media, amplifying the brand's reach and creating a buzz around the new café.

This experiential marketing strategy transformed

the store opening into a memorable event, driving conversations, social media sharing, and genuine engagement. The campaign resonated with coffee lovers in Delhi, reinforcing the brand's mission to elevate each cup beyond just a beverage—turning it into a moment to savor and cherish.

The Coffee Bean & Tea Leaf® is fast becoming a go-to destination for coffee and tea lovers, with two locations now open in Delhi NCR. The GKI café offers a welcoming space to relax, work, or connect over rich espressos, creamy lattes, exotic teas, and signature ice-blended drinks.

A study from the Coffee Board of India, part of the government's Ministry of Commerce and Industry, noted discretionary spending in the country is up, hybrid and remote work are

bringing young professionals to cafes, and consumer preferences are shifting to artisanal and specialty coffees. Nearly 70 percent of non-coffee consumers are willing to try coffee at cafes, the study said.

«The Coffee Bean & Tea Leaf's commitment to quality sets it apart—it exclusively selects the top 1% of Arabica beans and the finest two leaves and a bud for its teas, sourcing directly from private, family-owned tea estates.

«Our unwavering focus on quality is a key differentiator and a strong USP. Coupled with our offering of hot, freshly prepared food alongside your favorite coffee and tea, we're set to elevate the café experience,» said Prashant Chauhan, Chief Strategy Officer at Ekaagra Ostalaritza Pvt. Ltd.

STRAWBERRY & COCONUT MARGARITA MOCKTAIL

Recipe by The Drunken Botanist

INGREDIENTS

- 1 cup fresh strawberries (hulled and sliced)
- 1/2 cup coconut milk (unsweetened for a lighter taste)
- 1/4 cup lime juice (freshly squeezed)
- 2tbsp agave syrup or honey (adjust to taste)
- 1/2 cup sparkling water (for fizz)
- Ice cubes (as needed)
- Shredded coconut (for rimming the glass)
- Lime wedge (for rimming)

INSTRUCTIONS

1 Prepare the Glass:

- Rub the rim of your glasses with a lime wedge.
- Dip the rim into shredded coconut for a tropical touch.

2 Blend the Base:

- In a blender, combine strawberries, coconut milk, lime juice, and agave syrup.
- Blend until smooth.

3 Assemble the Drink:

- Fill the prepared glasses with ice.
- Pour the strawberry-coconut mixture about 3/4 full.
- Top with sparkling water for that margarita fizz.

4 Garnish & Serve:

- Garnish with a strawberry slice or lime wheel for an extra pop.
- Stir gently and enjoy!



SUCCESSFUL IMPLEMENTATION OF NEP REQUIRES ADDRESSING A SET OF CHALLENGES: DR. RAJESH CHANDEL

TDG NETWORK

Dr. Rajesh Chandel, an eminent educationist, has been serving the pious education sector for more than 28 years, holding to his pride, an enriched experience and expertise in teaching, administrating, and managing educational institutions in the capacity of Principal/Head of Department. His greatest assets, logical thinking, and effective problem-solving have helped students realize their strengths and utilize their potential in the right direction. Team Daily Guardian had a conversation with him about various aspects of education system. Here are the excerpts.

As an educator, what is your take on modern-day education system?
The modern education system offers notable advancements such as

increased access to information, personalized learning experiences, and global connectivity, promoting critical thinking and skill development in diverse formats. Despite these strengths, challenges persist, including educational inequality, an overemphasis on standardized testing, and questions about curriculum relevance. Additionally, many educators lack adequate support to integrate new technologies effectively, and student mental health is a growing concern under academic pressures. Addressing these issues is crucial.

Owing to certain flaws in education system, students are going abroad for higher education, your take on the issue.

As an educationist, I express deep concern about the brain drain phenomenon, highlighting its long-term implications for na-



tion's development. While seeking higher education abroad presents valuable opportunities, it results in a significant loss of local

talent and essential skills. To counter this trend, we must improve the local education system by focusing on curriculum relevance,

faculty support, and infrastructure.

The New education policy seems to have many positives, how do you view its implementation?

The New Education Policy (NEP) has great potential to positively transform education by emphasizing a holistic, multidisciplinary approach that fosters critical thinking and creativity. Its flexibility allows students to choose subjects aligning with their interests, while prioritizing early childhood education builds a strong foundational literacy and numeracy. Enhanced teacher training and the integration of vocational education into mainstream schooling can improve employability. Promoting regional languages alongside national languages helps preserve cultural heritage and improve learning. Successful implementation will require addressing

challenges like resource allocation and stakeholder collaboration, ensuring the NEP enhances the quality and accessibility of education.

Any downsides of NEP

The New Education Policy (NEP) faces potential downsides, including implementation challenges, resource allocation issues, and the need for extensive teacher training. Equity concerns may arise, widening gaps in access to quality education, particularly in underprivileged areas. Additionally, rapid curriculum changes and unequal access to technology can create confusion and disparities.

Conventional courses are being replaced with vocational courses. What do say about this transition?

The transition from conventional courses to vocational courses reflects a growing recognition of

the importance of practical skills and employability in today's job market. Vocational courses provide students with hands-on training, equipping them with relevant skills tailored to specific industries. This shift can enhance job readiness and meet the demands of employers, addressing skill gaps in the workforce.

In Modern times education has become an industry. What is your take about the commercialization of education.

The commercialization of education has transformed it into an industry, which can lead to improved resources and infrastructure. However, this shift often prioritizes profit over quality and accessibility, creating disparities in educational opportunities. Increased tuition fees may limit access for underprivileged students, and a focus on marketable skills can

overshadow holistic development. Balancing profit motives with educational integrity is crucial.

Any specific suggestions to make education system fully functional and more robust.

To create a fully functional and robust education system, several key strategies can be implemented. First, enhancing teacher training and support is essential to ensure educators are well-equipped to engage students effectively. Second, integrating technology in the classroom can facilitate personalized learning experiences. Third, promoting a well-rounded curriculum that includes life skills, critical thinking, and vocational training will better prepare students for real-world challenges. Additionally, increasing community and parental involvement can foster a supportive learning environment.

Why immersive education is the key to unlocking career success for Gen Z



As digital transformation continues to influence our personal and professional lives, traditional education approaches are no longer adequate in preparing students for the dynamic careers of the future.

Gen Z, born into a digital-first world, needs an education system that goes beyond textbooks and theoretical knowledge. Immersive education, which integrates hands-on learning experiences, has emerged as the key to unlocking career success for this tech-savvy generation. Immersive education leverages simulations and experiential learning to create engaging, real-world learning experiences. By offering interactive environments, it enables students to gain practical skills, develop critical thinking, and prepare for real-world challenges more effectively than traditional learning methods.

Gen Z has grown up with smartphones and on-demand learning platforms. They expect education to be just as interactive and engaging as their digital experiences. Immersive learning allows students to apply knowledge in real-life scenarios, ensuring they are industry-ready from the start.

Furthermore, interactive simulations and role-playing scenarios enhance communication, problem-solving, and teamwork, alongside industry-specific technical skills. Innovative education platforms cater to individual learning styles and paces, ensuring

students grasp complex concepts efficiently.

Studies show that immersive learning leads to better retention rates compared to passive classroom lectures, making it a powerful tool for acquiring knowledge.

Several industries are already integrating immersive education into their training programmes, giving Gen Z the advantage of hands-on experience before they enter the workforce. In the realm of healthcare, simulations help medical students practise surgeries and patient interactions in a risk-free environment. In engineering and manufacturing, they enhance precision and safety in complex technical tasks.

The retail and customer service sectors use role-playing simulations to prepare employees for real-time customer interactions. In finance and business, interactive simulations teach investment strategies and market dynamics.

With rapid advancements in education, immersive learning is set to revolutionise how students and professionals gain skills. Schools, colleges, and corporate training programmes must embrace experiential learning

Gen Z has grown up with smartphones and on-demand learning platforms. They expect education to be just as interactive and engaging as their digital experiences. Immersive learning allows students to apply knowledge in real-life scenarios.

methods and industry partnerships to equip Gen Z with future-ready skills.

For both students and professionals, adapting to immersive education methodologies is not just an advantage but a necessity. By blending theoretical knowledge with real-world application, immersive education is the ultimate key to unlocking career success for Gen Z in a fast-changing world.

To further enhance the effectiveness of immersive education, strategic collaborations between educational institutions and industry leaders are crucial. By actively involving employers in the development of curricula and training programmes, schools can ensure that students are equipped with the relevant skills and knowledge that are in demand in the job market.

Furthermore, the rise of disruptive technologies like virtual reality (VR) and augmented reality (AR) plays a significant role in the evolution of immersive education. The tools powered by these technologies can transform conventional learning environments by creating realistic simulations that facilitate experiential learning in a safe environment. For example, students can conduct virtual lab experiments or participate in simulations of historical events.

By integrating these innovative technologies into the curriculum, educators can enhance engagement and motivation, making learning more engaging.

Immersive education has the potential to reshape the entire educational landscape. A rapid shift towards it will empower Gen Z and future generations to navigate their careers with confidence, adaptability, and a robust set of skills. Tannay Jit Singh is founder of Kladio.

Unified educational identity: Moving from prestige to purpose

A Radical Approach to Demolishing the New Caste System in Indian Education



SHANTANU PRAKASH

Education, a tool for empowerment and social mobility, has effectively been reduced to a status symbol. The "branding" of educational institutions—where a student's identity, worth, and future are often judged by the name of the school or college they attended—has created a deeply entrenched hierarchy. This phenomenon is particularly alarming in India, where the focus on democratizing education risks being undermined by the elitism propagated by these brands.

As the founder of a well-known chain of schools, I recall our early efforts to create a brand that people would aspire to. We focused heavily on logos, public relations, color schemes, advertising, and brand language. A decade later, The Millennium Schools have become a recognized name. Yet, despite this success, I receive more calls seeking admission recommendations for "legacy brands"—even if these schools are far away, expensive, or unsuitable for the child. Parents are willing to compromise everything because they believe their child needs the "brand tattoo" for life. This is a familiar and unfortunate story that highlights one of the most dysfunctional aspects of Indian education. We're all complicit in perpetuating the magnetic pull of becoming "elite."

ELITE SCHOOL BRANDS: A NEW-AGE CASTE SYSTEM

ECONOMIC AND BUREAUCRATIC DOMINANCE.

Graduates from elite schools and colleges such as the Indian Institutes of Technology (IITs), Indian Institutes of Management (IIMs), and prestigious private schools dominate high-paying corporate roles, policymaking, and bureaucracy. Their alumni networks become exclusive clubs dictating access to power and influence.

For example, a disproportionate number of IAS officers and corporate CEOs—over 60%, according to recent studies—hail from these institutions. This creates a feedback

loop where these schools become gateways to privilege rather than centers for democratized learning.

Exorbitant fees charged by elite private schools (often exceeding Rs 15 lakhs annually) and international curriculums make them accessible only to the affluent, excluding millions of capable but underprivileged students. Institutions such as Doon School and Mayo College replicate a culture of exclusivity reminiscent of colonial-era privileges.

Employers and society at large prioritize institutional brands over individual merit. A degree from a branded institution eclipses actual skills, creativity, or passion, sidelining those without access to such schools.

The focus on elite branding undermines the value of government schools and state universities, perpetuating the myth that quality education is synonymous with private institutions alone.

THE BRANDING DIVIDE

Educational branding, akin to corporate branding, highlights an institution's distinctiveness by promising superior facilities, distinguished faculty, and exceptional extracurricular opportunities. However, this branding comes at a price—one that only a select few can afford.

The emphasis on branding can overshadow the core mission of education. Schools invest heavily in marketing and infrastructural grandeur, often at the expense of educational quality. The glitzy image can mask underlying inadequacies in teaching methods and curriculum development. Just open any airline magazine today—over 70% of the advertising is related to education.

The branding race exacerbates resource allocation disparities. Prestigious schools attract more investment, donations, and sponsorships, leaving public schools and lesser-known institutions grappling with limited funds. This unequal distribution perpetuates a cycle of privilege where affluent students receive better education while others are left behind.

PRIVILEGE IN NUMBERS

A significant proportion of India's power structures—including bureaucracy and politics—is dominated by individuals from elite educational backgrounds. Studies reveal that nearly 60% of top bureaucrats and 50% of politicians attended



Educational quality could be incentivized by rewarding schools for outcomes and innovative teaching methods rather than branding prestige. Targeted public awareness campaigns could shift the focus of parents and communities towards learning outcomes over brand value.

stress, leading to better mental health. Additionally, it encourages a culture of collaboration, where schools share resources, knowledge, and best practices, fostering community-driven growth and improvement.

Implementing change in India's education system could start with promoting neighborhood schools, encouraging a "walk-to-school" culture to reduce long commutes and strengthen community bonds. Policy reforms are crucial, focusing on equitable resource distribution and standardized quality assurance across all schools, with increased funding and accountability measures for both public and private institutions. Educational quality could be incentivized by rewarding schools for outcomes and innovative teaching methods rather than branding prestige. Targeted public awareness campaigns could shift the focus of parents and communities towards learning outcomes over brand value. Additionally, fostering public-private partnerships can help bridge resource gaps and enhance infrastructure, driving systemic improvement.

EDUCATION AS AN EQUALIZER

By removing the branding of educational institutions, India can move closer to democratizing education and dismantling systemic inequalities. A student's worth should derive from their capabilities, knowledge, and character—not the logo on their degree. Transitioning "from prestige to purpose," a unified, universal education brand system can lay the foundation for a truly equitable society.

PBKS EDGE OUT GT IN HIGH-SCORING IPL THRILLER

AGENCIES
AHMEDABAD

Punjab Kings (PBKS) secured a thrilling 11-run victory over Gujarat Titans (GT) in a high-scoring IPL 2025 encounter at the Narendra Modi Stadium in Ahmedabad. The match witnessed an intense run chase as Gujarat came close to chasing down Punjab's massive 243/5 but fell short at 232/5 in 20 overs.

Opting to bat first, Punjab Kings got off to a blazing start despite losing opener Jonny Bairstow early. Priyansh Arya (47 off 23) set the tone with a flurry of boundaries before falling to Rashid Khan. Glenn Maxwell, expected to make an impact, was dismissed for a golden duck, leaving Punjab in a precarious position. However, skipper Shreyas Iyer played a scintillating knock of 97* off 51 balls, falling just short of a well-deserved century. His innings was laced with 10 fours and five sixes, providing the backbone of Punjab's imposing total.

Iyer found an able ally in Marcus Stoinis (20 off 15), who stabilized the innings in the middle overs. But it was Shashank Singh who provided the finishing touches, hammering 44 off just 16 deliveries, including four sixes and three boundaries. His aggressive stroke play ensured Punjab Kings crossed the 240-run mark, ending at 243/5 in their allotted 20 overs. Gujarat's bowling unit struggled to contain the onslaught, with Rashid Khan (2/35) and Kagiso Rabada (1/41) being the pick of the bowlers.

Chasing a mammoth 244, Gujarat Titans needed a fiery start. Their captain, Shubman Gill, played a brisk knock of 33 off 14 de-



BRIEF SCORES

Punjab Kings: 243 for 5 in 20 overs (Priyansh Arya 47, Shreyas Iyer 97 not out, Shashank Singh 44 not out; R Sai Kishore 3/30).

Gujarat Titans: 232 for 5 in 20 overs (Sai Sudharsan 74, Shubman Gill 33, Jos Buttler 54, Sherfane Rutherford 46; Arshdeep Singh 2/36).

liveries before falling to a well-disguised slower ball from Arshdeep Singh. Despite Gill's early departure, Jos Buttler (54 off 33) and Sai Sudharsan (74 off 41) took charge, stitching together a vital partnership that kept Gujarat in the hunt.

Sudharsan was the ag-

gressor, dispatching Punjab's bowlers to all corners of the ground. His innings included eight boundaries and three towering sixes. Buttler complemented him well with calculated aggression, taking on the spinners effectively. Their 98-run stand threatened to take the

game away from Punjab.

However, Punjab struck back with timely wickets. Buttler's dismissal, courtesy of a sharp bouncer from Sam Curran, slowed down Gujarat's momentum. Though Sherfane Rutherford (46 off 28) launched a late assault with some powerful hitting, Gujarat still required 27 runs from the final over.

With the game hanging in the balance, Arshdeep Singh delivered a match-winning final over. He conceded just 15 runs, ensuring PBKS held on for a hard-fought victory. His crucial dismissal of Rutherford in the last over, combined with a run-out of Rahul Tewatia, shut the door on Gujarat's hopes. Despite a brief cameo from Shahrukh Khan (12* off 5), PBKS emerged victorious

by 11 runs.

This victory propels Punjab Kings to the top half of the IPL 2025 points table, giving them a solid start to their campaign. Meanwhile, Gujarat Titans, despite a commendable fight, will have to regroup and come back stronger in their next match.

Punjab Kings will now focus on maintaining their winning momentum as they face Mumbai Indians in their next game. Gujarat Titans, on the other hand, will look to bounce back in their upcoming fixture against Rajasthan Royals.

The thrilling contest showcased the sheer entertainment value of the IPL, reaffirming its status as the premier T20 league in the world.

Shreyas Iyer's explosive 97

AGENCIES
AHMEDABAD



Punjab Kings (PBKS) secured a thrilling 11-run victory

over Gujarat Titans (GT) in a high-scoring IPL 2025 encounter at the Narendra Modi Stadium in Ahmedabad. Punjab's massive 243/5 but fell short at 232/5 in 20 overs, thanks to a scintillating unbeaten 97 off just 42 balls by captain Shreyas Iyer.

After winning the toss, Gujarat elected to bowl first. Punjab's debutant, Priyansh Arya, gave them a flying start, helping the team reach 50 in just 4.3 overs. Arya played a flyer of 47 off 23 balls, smashing seven boundaries and two sixes before falling to the experienced Rashid Khan, leaving PBKS at 79/2.

Afghanistan all-rounder Azmatullah Omarzai made an impact immediately, launching a six off his compatriot Rashid Khan on the very first ball he faced. However, his innings was short-lived as he was dismissed for 16 off 15 balls by Sai Kishore, who struck twice in quick succession by trapping Glenn Maxwell

for a golden duck on the very next delivery.

Marcus Stoinis then joined Iyer at the crease, and the duo stitched together a crucial 57-run stand before Sai Kishore claimed his third wicket by dismissing Stoinis for 20.

Punjab reached the 200-run mark in 17.4 overs, with Iyer and Shashank Singh accelerating towards the end. Their explosive 81-run partnership propelled PBKS to a massive total. While Iyer remained unbeaten on 97, Shashank played a fiery cameo, scoring 44 off just 16 deliveries, finishing the innings in style by attacking Mohammed Siraj in the final over. For Gujarat, Sai Kishore was the standout bowler with three wickets, while Rashid Khan and Kagiso Rabada picked up one wicket each. However, all GT bowlers endured a tough outing against Punjab's aggressive batting.

Gujarat Titans now face a steep chase of 244 runs to secure their first victory of the season.

Brief score: Punjab Kings 243/5 (Shreyas Iyer 97*, Priyansh Arya 47; Sai Kishore 3/30) vs. Gujarat Titans

CELEBRATION



Players celebrate their win in the final match of the Men's International Sepaktakraw Federation (ISTAF) World Cup 2025 match, in Patna on Tuesday. (ANI Photo)

WHL: Odisha, Mizoram, Maha, J'khand secure victories on Day 5



AGENCIES
NEW DELHI

On Day 5 of the final phase of the National Women's Hockey League 2024-2025, the Hockey Association of Odisha, Hockey Mizoram, Hockey Maharashtra and Hockey Jharkhand registered wins in their respective matches here at the Marang Gomke Jaipal Singh Astro Turf Hockey Stadium in Ranchi, Jharkhand.

In the first match, the Hockey Association of Odisha defeated Hockey Haryana 2-0 in Pool A. Prativa Kindo (9') and Shibani Lugun (59') scored for their team to take the game away from table toppers Hockey Haryana. The Hockey Association has now moved to the second spot in the pool standings.

In the other match, Hockey Mizoram defeated Hockey Madhya Pradesh 2-1 in Pool A. Lalitachungi (42') and Manglawmsang (58') scored for Hockey Mizoram, whereas, on the other hand, Suneeta Kumari (54') scored the consolation goal for Hockey Madhya Pradesh. With this win, Hockey Mizoram is now in the third position in the pool standings, whereas Hockey Madhya Pradesh slipped to fifth position. In the third match, Hockey Maharashtra defeated Hockey Bengal 4-2 in Pool A to secure its first win in the tournament. Sanika Chandrakant Mane (18'), Tanushree Dinesh Kadu (29'), Nikku Gurjar (54') and Khushi (56') scored for Hockey Maharashtra in the second and fourth quarters of the game. In response,

Jamuna Ekka (3') opened an account for Hockey Bengal, joined by captain Subila Tirkey (48'), who also scored one goal. Hockey Maharashtra is in the sixth position, whereas Hockey Bengal is yet to open its account in the pool standings.

In the last match today, Hockey Jharkhand defeated Manipur Hockey 8-0 in Pool A, in a high-scoring thriller. Both Sangita Kumari (2', 21', 48') and Sweetie Dungdung (20', 35', 51') scored a hat-trick for Hockey Jharkhand. Pinki Kumari (23', 37') also scored a brace to take the game further away from Manipur Hockey. Hockey Jharkhand now holds the fourth position in the pool standings, whereas Manipur Hockey is in seventh place, with one win in the tournament.

AGENCIES
NEW DELHI

Uttar Pradesh shooter Akash bagged the gold medal in the mixed 50m pistol SH1 category at Tuesday's Khelo India Para Games.

The shooting competition ended with Rajasthan topping the medal tally with nine medals, including four gold and two silver.

Uttar Pradesh (four medals with two gold) and Maharashtra (three medals, with two gold) finished second and third, respectively.

With two days of competition left in this edition of KIPG, 166 gold medals have been decided by the end of day six.

Haryana (95 medals with



30 gold) have a healthy lead over Tamil Nadu (67 with 25 gold) and Uttar Pradesh (54 medals with 22 gold).

Paris Paralympian Rudransh Khandelwal of Rajasthan, who had earlier claimed gold in the men's 10m air pistol SH1, suffered loss on Tuesday after his pistol malfunctioned at a critical juncture of the finals.

It gave Tokyo Paralympian Akash a clear advantage and the UP shooter pipped Tamil Nadu's Sanjeev Kumar for the gold.

Akash maintained his cool and scored 15.7 in his final two shots to maintain a lead by 0.2 to take the top spot.

Speaking after the win, Akash, who hails from Khedki village in Baghpur, Uttar Pradesh, said that

he was focused on his own game and is elated to win the gold medal. "I am happy to win the gold medal

here at Khelo India Para Games. This is the first major step for me as I begin my journey towards Paralympics 2028 in Los Angeles and winning gold here will boost my confidence," he said.

"Khelo India Para Games has given us a new lease of life like 'sanjeevani booti'. We are getting motivated and have a chance to develop. People are also recognising us as it is being broadcast live." Meanwhile, Khandelwal, who settled for a bronze, expressed satisfaction with his overall performance.

"I am very proud of my performance at the second edition of the Khelo India Para Games. There was a malfunction of my weapon today while I was loading it. This incident was not intentional, and such malfunctions can sometimes occur. The matches were tough but I played well and in accordance to my skillset. So, I am happy with the overall result." The day also saw powerlifters in action at the Jawaharlal Nehru Stadium complex.

Tamil Nadu's Kasthuri Rajamani, who won a gold in the last edition of KIPG, clinched her second gold by emerging winner in the women's 67kg category on Tuesday.

2026 FIFA World Cup: Japan, New Zealand secure their spots

AGENCIES
AUCKLAND

Japan made history by becoming the first nation, outside of the host countries, to qualify for the 2026 World Cup. Their qualification was sealed with a decisive 2-0 victory over Bahrain at Saitama Stadium on March 20, 2025. This win solidified Japan's impressive record in Group C of the third round of the Asian Football Confederation (AFC) qualifiers.

This achievement marks Japan's eighth consecutive FIFA World Cup appearance, underscoring their consistent presence on foot-

ball's biggest stage. Historically, the Samurai Blue have reached the Round of 16 on four occasions, reflecting their competitive stature in international football. The 2026 tournament will be particularly significant for Japan as it represents their debut World Cup appearance in North America.

In the Oceania Football Confederation (OFC), New Zealand has emerged as the region's representative for the 2026 World Cup. The OFC qualification process, which ran from September 6, 2024, to March 24, 2025, saw New Zealand navigate through a series of matches to secure their spot. This



qualification marks the first time the OFC has been granted a direct slot in the World Cup.

New Zealand's consistent performance throughout the qualifiers underscores their dominance in the Oceania region. With this qualification, the All

Whites are set to make their fourth World Cup appearance, having previously participated in the 1982, 2010, and 2014 tournaments. Their return to the global stage presents an opportunity to showcase the growth and development of football in New Zealand. In

addition to Japan and New Zealand, the host nations United States, Canada, and Mexico have also secured automatic qualification for the 2026 World Cup. As the tournament will feature an expanded format with 48 teams with numerous spots remain up for grabs, with qualifying matches ongoing across various confederations. The qualifications of Japan and New Zealand highlight the diverse paths teams undertake to reach the World Cup. As preparations continue, both teams will aim to build upon their successes and make a significant impact in the 2026 tournament.