

THE PERFECT VOICE



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‘How there was no blood if she fell from 14th floor?’

DISHA SALIAN'S FATHER'S ALLEGATIONS AGAINST AADITYA THACKERAY HITS UP POLITICS



By Correspondent

Mumbai: Satish Salian, the father of a celebrity manager Disha Salian, has raised several questions regarding her suspicious death in his petition to the Bombay High Court.

“Overall, looking at the entire investigation, I think it is murder,” Salian told Republic TV. “Because a person’s body falls from the 14th floor, but still there is not a single injury visible on that person’s body. There is no injury anywhere on the head, so how can this happen? We need to think about this. Even if a body falls from the 14th floor, how can that body remain clean?”

Salian produced photographs and videos of Disha’s dead body for the first time since her death on June 8, 2020. Her head and face are seen clean without any injury

mark. In their investigation, the Mumbai Police had concluded that she had jumped from her 14th floor apartment in Malad.

Salian said, “There was no pressure on me from anyone. However, I was convinced that way. Also, I had faith that Disha’s friends who were present at the party on that night would never lie about what happened. Also, the police had told us at that time that it was a suicide. We had trusted the police then.”

He said then Mumbai Mayor Kishori Pednekar had come to his house and convinced him that Disha had ended her life.

Salian’s lawyer Nilesh Ojha said from the first days of the incident, Satish Salian had the same question that not a single drop of blood was seen after falling from the 14th floor. Also, not a single drop of blood was found



on the clothes. “The most important thing is that when Disha Salian’s body was handed over to her family, there was no injury on her body. Then how come there was no injury after falling from the floor of the building? This is the question,” said Ojha.

Ojha, told ANI, “During the murder, Uddhav Thackeray’s government was there (in Maharashtra), and the accused was his son Aaditya Thackeray. The corrupt police officials tried to cover up the case. After 2.5 years, Shinde’s government came, and Fadnavis was the Home Minister. This matter has not come all of a sudden.”

He further added, “On 12th January 2024, a written complaint was filed accusing Aaditya Thackeray, Sooraj Pancholi and others of gang rape. FIR was not registered for more than one year. The affidavit filed by Aaditya Thackeray stated lies that he was given a clean chit by the CBI in the case. There is also proof that Anil Deshmukh didn’t want any action (on Aaditya Thackeray).”

As this happened, Ojha said that Disha’s father approached him to file the peti-

tion. “Nothing happened, but the conversations around it made Disha Salian’s father realise that he had been lied to, and he came to us. After that, his petition was drafted and filed,” he said.

Demanding that the police officials who failed to register an FIR be penalised, Ojha said that action must also be taken against the SIT official as per the Supreme Court’s guidelines on rape and murder cases. Otherwise, the concerned police officials must be penalised as per the relevant sections of IPC. In this case, they have failed to register a case in over a year. This is a serious matter, and action must be taken against the SIT official, he said.

“The affidavit filed by Aaditya Thackeray stated lies that he was given a clean chit by the CBI in the Disha Salian case...Anil Deshmukh also didn’t want any action (on Aaditya Thackeray),” Ojha added.

Reacting to Salian’s plea, Kishori Pednekar called it a conspiracy. “Someone is behind it, and there is a conspiracy. How come this matter has come under the spotlight after more than four years? The CID conducted an enquiry, there is already an SIT (formed to probe the matter),” Pednekar told PTI.

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“I was surprised how come this (Salian) issue was not raised in the last 2-3 sessions. There is nothing new in it as this issue has been raised repeatedly in the House in the past. There is no substance in this issue. But if politics is being done in such a bad way then it will hurt everyone. I want to tell these people that if you want to turn falsehoods into truth, then it will also boomerang on you.”

Uddhav Thackeray, Chief, Shiv Sena (UBT)

Markets climb for fourth day

Mumbai: Rallying for the fourth straight session, stock market benchmarks Sensex and Nifty surged over 1 per cent on Thursday, powered by across-the-board buying amid a mixed trend in global equities after the US Federal Reserve maintained its rate cut projections for this year.

Hectic buying in market heavyweights Reliance Industries, Bharti Airtel and IT stocks bolstered investor sentiment, traders said.

The 30-share BSE benchmark Sensex jumped 899.01 points or 1.19 per cent to settle at 76,348.06, regaining the 76,000 level. During the day, it soared 1,007.2 points or 1.33 per cent to 76,456.25.

As many as 2,410 stocks advanced while 1,606 declined and 129 remained unchanged on the BSE.

The NSE Nifty surged 283.05 points or 1.24 per cent to reclaim the 23,000-mark to finish at 23,190.65.

“Nifty surged by 283 points, marking gains for the fourth consecutive day as all sectors closed in the green. Optimism was driven by signals of two Fed rate cuts in 2025 and hopes of a halt in FII selling,” Prashanth Tapse, Senior VP (Research), Mehta Equities Ltd, said.

Bharti Airtel was the biggest gainer in the Sensex pack, rising 4.17

per cent, followed by Titan, Tata Consultancy Services, Hindustan Unilever, Infosys, Nestle, Reliance Industries, Mahindra & Mahindra, HDFC Bank and Tata Motors.

In contrast, IndusInd Bank, Bajaj Finance and UltraTech Cement were the laggards.

Meanwhile, the Federal Reserve said the US economy still looks healthy enough to keep interest rates unchanged. The US central bank pointed out that it is expecting to cut rates twice this year even as inflation stays elevated.

“On Wednesday, the Federal Reserve announced its decision to keep the policy rate in the 4.25-4.50 per cent range. Policymakers anticipate two rate cuts in 2025, with economic growth projected at 1.7 per cent and inflation at 2.7 per cent for the year.

“Overall, this decision has mixed implications for currency movements, capital flows and market sentiment in India. Higher US interest rates could lead to foreign capital outflows from Indian markets, whereas lower rates may attract investment,” Ravi Singh, SVP – Retail Research, Religare Broking Ltd, said.

The BSE smallcap gauge climbed 0.73 per cent, and the midcap index rose 0.61 per cent.

Four Dead in Pune Bus Disgruntled bus driver started fire: Police

Pune: The deadly fire in a minibus owned by a private firm that claimed the lives of four employees near Pune was allegedly an act of sabotage by a disgruntled driver, police said on Thursday.

“Investigation revealed that the fire was not an accident but sabotage,” said deputy commissioner of police Vishal Gaikwad of Pimpri Chinchwad Police at a press conference here.

Janardan Hambardekar, the accused driver, was angry after his salary was cut recently, he said.

The incident took place in Hinjawadi area near Pune city on Wednesday morning as the bus, owned by Vyoma Graphics and carrying 14 of its employees to the workplace, caught fire.

“The accused had procured benzene (an inflammable chemical). He had also kept a cloth used to wipe toners in the bus. On Thursday, as the bus neared Hinjawadi, he lit a

match and set the cloth on fire,” said the DCP.

In the resultant fire, he himself also suffered injuries though he got down from the bus along with a few others after the fire started.

Hambardekar was undergoing treatment at hospital and will be arrested later, the police official said.

Ten passengers sustained burn injuries of which two were seriously injured.

Four of the employees -- Shankar Shinde (63), Rajan Chavan (42), Gurudas Lokare (45) and Subhash Bhosale (44) -- died as they were sitting in the rear and could not open the emergency exit door in time.

Further probe was on, the DCP said.

Body of Pune man found in Andamans

Port Blair: The body of a middle-aged man was found near Radhanagar beach at Swaraj Dweep

(Havelock Island) in Andaman and Nicobar Islands on Thursday, police said.

According to police, the man was identified as Aneesh Hegde (40), a resident of Kalyani Nagar in Maharashtra’s Pune.

Sources said the body was first seen by local people at 11.40 am at Neil’s Cove (near Radhanagar beach), who alerted Swaraj Dweep police station.

“A police team, accompanied by an executive magistrate, soon reached the spot. Upon searching the deceased’s belongings, a PAN card and an HDFC Bank ATM card were found. Using these, we identified the man and found his address,” a senior officer said.

“The family of the deceased has been informed. No injury marks were found on the body,” he said.

Radhanagar is rated as one of the best beaches in Asia and a popular tourist destination.



30 Naxalites, one cop killed

Bijapur/Kanker: In a fresh offensive against Naxals, security forces killed at least 30 members of the banned CPI (Maoists) in two separate encounters in Chhattisgarh’s Bastar region on Thursday, officials said.

While 26 Naxalites were killed in Bijapur district, four Maoists were gunned down in Kanker by a joint team of the BSF and District Reserve Guard (DRG) personnel of the state police.

A police jawan was also killed in the encounter in Bijapur, the officials said. Union Home Minister Amit Shah said the secu-

riety forces have achieved another big success in their march to make the country Naxal-free with the two encounters.

“The Modi government is moving forward with a ruthless approach against Naxalites and is adopting a zero tolerance policy against those Naxalites who are not surrendering despite all the facilities being offered to them, ranging from surrender to inclusion. The country is going to be Naxal-free by March 31 next year,” Shah wrote on X in Hindi.

An official said a gunfight broke out around 7 am in a forest along the

border of Bijapur and Dantewada districts when a joint team of security personnel was out an anti-Naxalite operation in Gangoor police station area in Bijapur.

The bodies of 26 Naxalites besides firearms and explosives were recovered from the spot, Inspector General of Police, Bastar Range Sundarraj P told PTI.

A jawan of the DRG unit was also killed in the gunfight, he said.

Another encounter took place in the morning in a forest along the border of Kanker and Narayanpur districts when a joint team

of the DRG and Border Security Force (BSF) was out on an anti-Naxal operation, Kanker Superintendent of Police Indira Kalyan Elesela said.

The bodies of four Naxalites and automatic weapons were recovered following the action.

Search operations were underway at both the encounter sites, police said.

With the latest action, 113 Naxalites have been killed in encounters in the state so far this year. Of them, 97 were eliminated in the Bastar division comprising seven districts including Bijapur and Kanker.

Germany reopens Syrian embassy

Damascus: Germany’s foreign minister reopened its embassy in Damascus on Thursday, 13 years after it was shut in the early days of Syria’s civil war, saying that Europe needs “eyes and ears” on the ground as it follows the Syrian political transition.

Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock reopened the embassy before meeting interim President Ahmad al-Sharaa and others during a visit to Damascus, her second since the fall of former President Bashar Assad in December.

Among the European Union’s 27 members, Italy reopened its embassy last year before the fall of Assad, and Spain reopened its embassy after his ouster.

“With this embassy opening, we are saying very clearly that Germany is back in Damascus, Germany has a paramount interest in a stable Syria,” Baerbock said. For time being the embassy will have a very small team, supported by colleagues based in neighbouring Lebanon, and offer no consular or visa services.

India’s 118th rank below Pakistan, Ukraine, Palestine

London: India ranked 118th in the World Happiness Report 2025 published Thursday, up from the 126th position in the previous year but below countries such as Nepal, Pakistan, Ukraine and Palestine.

The report, released coinciding with the International Day of Happiness that falls on March 20 each year, focuses on the impact of caring and sharing on people’s happiness, including how sharing a meal increases happiness.

Finland is ranked as the happiest country in the world for the eighth consecutive year and other Nordic countries – Denmark, Iceland and Sweden – continued to remain in the top four, in that order.

The annual report, published by the Well-being Research Centre at the University of Oxford in partnership with Gallup, the United Nations Sustainable Development Solutions Network ranks the countries according to the self-assessed life evaluations by those

DENMARK AT THE TOP PLACE, AFGHANISTAN AT LAST

polled averaged over the years 2022–2024.

Country rankings for the three benevolent acts covered by the Gallup World Poll – donating, volunteering, and helping strangers – vary depending on cultural and institutional differences, the authors of the report said.

While India ranked 118th overall, in terms of the ‘Country rankings for six measures of benevolence’, it was listed much higher at 57 for (how people) donated; at 10 for how people volunteered; 74 for helping a stranger, and in case of wallet returned by a neighbour (115), stranger (86) and police (93).

In India’s neighbourhood, Afghanistan is again ranked as the unhappiest country in the world, this year 147th against last year’s 143rd rank (last). While Nepal with 92nd rank (93 in 2024) and Pakistan, with 109th rank (108 in 2024) remained much ahead of India, Sri



WORLD HAPPINESS REPORT

Lanka, with 133rd rank (128 in 2024) and Bangladesh 134th position (129 in 2024) lagged behind.

China was ranked in 68th position this year, down from the 60th last year. State of Palestine is ranked 108th (103 in 2024) while Ukraine is at 111 rank (105 in 2024).

According to the World Happiness Report website, the annual report and much of the growing interest in happiness research “exists thanks to Bhutan,” which had sponsored a resolution for considering happiness for a holistic approach to development.

Bhutan’s resolution was adopted by the UN General Assembly on July 19, 2011 and the first World Happiness Report was brought out in 2012. After the UN General Assembly adopted and declared March 20 as the International Day of Happiness, the World Happiness Re-

port is released around that day each year.

However, Bhutan, which focuses on Gross National Happiness, does not feature in the ranking of the 147 countries in this year’s World Happiness Report.

Explaining the methodology for this year’s report, the authors wrote: “Our measurement of subjective wellbeing continues to rely on three main wellbeing indicators: life evaluations, positive emotions, and negative emotions. Our happiness rankings are based on life evaluations, as the more stable measure of the quality of people’s lives.”

The Gallup World Poll remained the principal source of data in this report. Typically, around 1,000 responses are gathered annually for each country.

The United States dropped to its lowest-ever position at 24.

“The increasing number of people who eat alone is one reason for declining wellbeing in the United States,” the report said. -AP

Knives out in legislature



By Abhijit Mulye

Mumbai: Death of celebrity manager Disha Salian in 2020 once again rocked the Maharashtra legislature on Thursday. While cabinet ministers Nitesh Rane and Shambhuraj Desai demanded that Shiv Sena (UBT) leader Aditya Thackeray be arrested in the case, BJP MLA Amit Satam in the assembly and another BJP member Chitra Wagh in the council demanded that the report of SIT to probe Salian's death be made public.

Incidentally, amidst repeated disruptions in both the houses, some members from the treasury benches were seen speaking in favour of Aditya Thackeray, while Shiv Sena (UBT) members like Adv Anil Parab were seen supporting the BJP members' demand that the report of the SIT probe be made public. In addition, there were allegations and counter allegations and personal accusations among members from the treasury and opposition benches which led to heated debate on occasions.

The opposition termed the attempts from the treasury benches to link Shiv Sena (UBT) leader Aditya Thackeray's name in the case, as a 'conspiracy'.

"I think this matter has gone to the court. We have no idea what he (Disha's father) has said, but Aaditya Thackeray is a mature leader, a young leader. The Bharatiya Janata Party is conspiring to defame him by putting pressure on him. We don't need to answer to this conspira-



Shiv Sena members demand justice for Disha Salian at Vidhan Bhavan.

Pic: Bhushan Koyande

cy. The court will answer," Ambadas Danve said.

Earlier in the day, when the house gathered for the business, Minister of State for Home appraised the assembly of the status in this case. "SIT has been formed to probe in the case. Their report has not been received as yet. However, the government shall act according to directives from the court," the minister told the house.

Another BJP minister Nitesh Rane, however, said that since Satish Salian has levelled allegations against an MVA minister, that leader be treated like a common person and that everybody should be treated equally before the law. Shiv Sena minister Shambhuraj Desai too supported the demand. "Since the allegations are grave, the person in question should be immediately arrested and the case be investigated," he said.

Later, while speaking to media in the legislature premises, Rane asked Uddhav Thackeray to come clean on the issue. "If they

say that we are politicizing the issue, Uddhav Thackeray should also tell the people why he had called, not just once but twice, to the then union minister Narayan Rane urging him to save his son?" Rane said.

He also accused the opposition of shying away from coming clean on the issue. "If they feel that we are not telling the truth, they should say so in the house. But they are shying away from doing so. Bhaskar Jadhav, who is always aggressive, was nowhere to be seen when this issue came up in the house. Sunil Prabhu too escaped the house under the pretext of a phone call. I challenge them to say that whatever I said on the issue is wrong," Rane said.

He also said that Aditya Thackeray should resign on moral grounds till his name is cleared in the case.

BJP MLA Amit Satam demanded that the details of the SIT probe be made public so that the people would know if the probe is headed in right direction.

Interestingly, while the ruling parties were targeting the opposition in the case, senior BJP leader Sudhir Mungantiwar surprised all with his unexpected support to Thackerays. "I do not have any evidences in the case. But if her father has made any fresh allegations that needs to be investigated thoroughly. The assembly can discuss the issue at length tomorrow. In the meanwhile, members like Rane, who seem to have some evidences in the case should hand them over to the investigating agencies and help the probe," he told the house.

Shiv Sena's Sanjay Gaikwad and Sheetal Mhatre too toed the line and demanded that more and more evidences should come forth.

Similarly, when members of treasury benches were pushing for revealing the details of the probe till date to the public, Shiv Sena (UBT) member Anil Parab supported the demand. "Doing that shall conclusively prove the innocence of Aditya Thackeray," he said.

"Have evidence to show that Disha was raped, murdered"

By Aditi Pai

Mumbai: As the Disha Salian death case rocked the Maharashtra Assembly on Thursday, Nitesh Rane, Minister for Fisheries and Ports, who has been keenly following the case since June 2020, tells 'The Perfect Voice' that he has enough evidence to show that Disha was raped and murdered.

You've been speaking about this case since her death in June 2020. Who all do you think are involved?

June 8 and June 13 were related. To cover up what happened on June 8, June 13 occurred. I have been speaking about it since June 2020 because I know it wasn't a suicide or accidental death but it was a murder. We have enough evidence to show that Disha Salian was raped and murdered.

What is the incriminating evidence that you have?

There are mobile tower records which show that Disha, Aditya Thackeray, and a Zomato delivery person's phones were at the same location in Malad. The Zomato delivery person has also given his statement in this regard.

How was an alleged murder brushed off as a suicide?

The post mortem report was modified and tampered with. I have the original post mortem report which I procured from the municipal hospital where the post mortem was done. But these original reports were never made public. It shows that Disha was gang raped and murdered because the report shows injury marks around her private parts. There are many loopholes in their theory- if someone falls from the 14th floor, there are bound to be injuries on the face but the photographs we saw yesterday show no marks on her

"The original post mortem report states that Disha Salian was gangraped and murdered."

"We have to protect our sisters in this state."

"Our demand is that the Supreme Court judgement should be followed and a rape accused must first be arrested."

The post mortem reports that were released say that there were injuries on her face but look at the recent photos. Where are the marks? How is that even possible?

You have made a connection between Aditya Thackeray, Dino Morea and Sooraj Pancholi. What is the connection?

They are all friends who were partying during the Covid lockdown when everyone was staying home.

Most people are questioning the timing of Disha Salian's father's petition in the court. Why now after almost five years?

Her father stated that he was until now brainwashed into believing it was a suicide. But now he wants justice for his deceased daughter. Why question the timing?

A father wants justice so he has approached the High Court. The police will act on court orders. It will come up for hearing on the High Court on Monday or Tuesday next week. Our assembly colleagues have come together to say that we should follow the Supreme Court's judgement—that if a person is accused of rape, he should first be arrested. In the Assembly, we have only made this demand that the Supreme Court's judgement should be followed.



Deshmukh points towards 'conspiracy'

Mumbai: Former home minister of Anil Deshmukh on Thursday stated that in a way the issue of Disha Salian resurfaced it seems like it's a larger political conspiracy. The timing selected for targeting Shiv Sena (UBT) leaders has raised many questions. "Aditya Thackeray has nothing to do with this," he said.

Deshmukh said, "I am taking information on the plea filed by Disha Salina's father. All this now looks like a gloomy affair. Disha's father has gone to court. Salian has named Aditya Thackeray, but we are sure Aditya Thackeray has nothing to do with this. We are with him, but let the court decide. If a person is trying to get justice, he should get justice."

"Significantly, if you look at the BJP's style of functioning, they will now start doing politics on it. Four years ago Sushant Singh Rajput committed suicide. At this juncture I am gathering information on the sensitive Disha episode. Once I get the details on this particular issue I will come before the media."

Rattled, Thackeray says 'do not rely on lies'

By Quaid Najmi

Mumbai: Shaken by the sudden spotlight on the Disha S. Salian death case, Shiv Sena (UBT) President and ex-CM Uddhav Thackeray and his son Aditya Thackeray appeared at a loss for words to react to the development, but said 'lies' should not be relied upon.

In a relief of sorts, a ruling ally Shiv Sena MLA came out in open support of the beleaguered Thackerays and the ex-CM expressed his gratitude.

The five-year-old incident concerning the unexplained death of Bollywood celeb manager Disha rocked the Maharashtra Legislature afresh with the ruling MahaYuti and Opposition Maha Vikas Aghadi allies hurling accusations at each other.

"There is no substance in these allegations... The matter is in the court...let them say it there," dared Thackeray, who served as the MVA CM from November 2019-June 2022 when the case had blown up.

"I am confident that the case would boomerang on them in the court," Thackeray declared dismissively, with Aditya beside him.

Thackeray wondered "why the issue keeps cropping up only during the Legislature sessions", and said there is nothing new in this.

"Every time the Legislature comes into session, this matter is raised...



Why did it not come in the past couple of sessions... I am surprised. It keeps coming up but there is nothing new to it. Whatever Satish Salian's lawyer claims, he should say it in the court," said Thackeray sharply.

"Many generations of our family are in front of the public. We have no connection with this case at all. But if politics is being twisted and taken in the wrong direction, everyone will suffer. When you rely on lies, it will also backfire on you," warned Thackeray.

During a brief interaction with the media earlier in the day, Aditya Thackeray said that "since the matter has gone to the court, I shall also submit whatever I have to say before the court".

"For the past five years they have been trying to defame me. But they were exposed on all counts... Now, the matter has gone in the court... I will respond there," said Aaditya.

Salians were initially 'satisfied' with cops

A few years ago, the Salian couple had said that they were satisfied with the police and other agencies' probe plus pleaded publicly that the media and politicians should stop hounding or defaming their family. In March 2022, Satish and his wife Vasanti had written to the President of India, complaining that the (then) Union Minister Narayan Rane and his son Nitesh Rane are 'liars and virtually driving them (the Salians) to suicide'. Drawing parallels with the Nirbhaya rape-cum-murder case of Delhi over a decade ago, the Salians pointed out that till now, that victim's identity has not been revealed, but "Rane is blatantly taking my daughter's name" repeatedly and saying that she was raped. Displaying signs of desperation, the Salians asked "whether the law of the land is not applicable to the Union Minister", and pointed out how even after registering a (police) complaint against them, the "liars" Rane duo did not stop maligning the family's name.

SIT remained on paper

Mumbai: The Special Investigation Team (SIT) formed in June 2023 to investigate the death of Disha Salian has not yet submitted its report to the state government.

A source said that the investigation was hampered as all the officers who were inducted in this SIT have been transferred. The SIT was headed by then Additional Commissioner of Police Rajeev Jain. Deputy Commissioner of Police Ajay Kumar Bansal and Senior Inspector Chimaji Adhav were other members of the SIT.

The source said the SIT had issued several summonses to those who alleged foul play in Disha's death. The work remained incomplete. An officer said they had recorded statements of her friends who were present at the party. They reportedly said she was upset due to some monetary losses at work and that they had also called a friend living abroad to help cheer her up. Fisheries Minister Nitesh Rane have raised questions over the induction of Adhav in the SIT. "A few senior police officers were also under suspicion in this case. How come an officer of a Senior Inspector rank question his superiors?" Rane said.

The friendship files

LOVE FOR GYM AND FILMS BROUGHT MOREA, PANCHOLI, AADITYA TOGETHER

By Correspondent

Mumbai: Otherwise poles apart, the trio - Aaditya Thackeray, Dino Morea and Sooraj Pancholi - have two things in common, passion for gym and cinema. This passion brought them together and created a bonding among them.

Aaditya has always enjoyed the company of film stars since many of them used to visit his grandfather the late Balasaheb Thackeray at their Bandra residence, Matoshree. Aaditya developed friendship with Morea during one of such meetings when he was a teenager. The friendship grew over the years irrespective of 20 years of gap in their age.

In 2016, when Morea opened an open-air gym in Marine Drive, Aaditya was the one who had inaugurated it along with actor Jacqueline Fernandez. Several pics of the duo posing together dating back to 2014 can also be found online. Aaditya is reportedly a regular visitor at Morea's house in Bandra on almost each of his private celebrations.

Their friendship is in spotlight again since Sat-

ish Salian, the father of deceased Disha Salian, has named them as prime accused in her death case in a petition filed in the Bombay High Court on Wednesday. Salian has demanded that the trio should be probed for their role in his daughter's "gang-rape and murder".

The names of Morea, Pancholi and Aaditya began doing the rounds on various social media platforms right after Disha Salian's death on June 8, 2020. In hush hush tones, their friendship became the talk of the town. People started adding two and two together. Salian used to work as an executive with a company which managed Rajput's Public Relations. Salian and Rajput had a professional connection and Morea, Pancholi and Aaditya had a personal connection.

Salian has alleged that the trio has attended a 'party' at Disha's Malad house. Salian believes that the trio are eye witnesses to what happened on that fateful night and there should be a thorough investigation into their role in covering up Disha's "murder" as a "suicide".

QUOTE OF THE DAY

No information obtained through AI is certified by either the state or the Union government. It would be premature to formulate an education policy based on AI at this stage.



Ashish Shelar, Minister, Information and Technology

HC upholds closure order for mall

Mumbai: The Bombay High Court has upheld the closure directions against a suburban mall for not obtaining environmental clearance, noting that operating such an establishment raises the "seriousness of the ecological issue".

The petitioner company, Grauer and Weil (India) Limited, considers itself above the law and has shown scant regard for environmental concerns, a division bench of Justices M S Sonak and Jitendra Jain said in its order on Wednesday.

It further said the petitioner company has taken law into its

own hands and proceeded with construction of the mall without obtaining any environmental clearance, hence it is only proper that the closure directions are implemented immediately.

"The contention that the petitioner has applied for clearance under some amnesty scheme certainly does not entitle it to reap commercial profits at the cost of environmental clearances," the bench said.

It directed the Maharashtra Pollution Control Board (MPCB) to immediately enforce the closure directions.

The HC dismissed the petition



filed by Grauer and Weil (India) Limited, which operates the mall in Kandivali area here, challenging the closure directions issued against it by the Maharashtra MPCB on March 5.

No case is made out to interfere with the closure order, the court said, adding that relief can be granted only to promote justice and not perpetuate gross illegalities.

"Operating a mall that is constructed without obtaining any environmental clearance is extremely serious and operating such a mall without obtaining consent to establish/operate magnifies the seriousness of the ecological issue," the HC said.

The petitioner company has taken law into its own hands and proceeded with construction of the mall without obtaining any

environmental clearance, hence it is only proper that the closure directions are implemented immediately, the court added.

The bench directed the MPCB to immediately enforce its closure directions.

The plea claimed the principles of natural justice were not followed before passing of the orders and that there was no grave urgency for the closure order to be passed.

The high court, however, refused to accept this contention and said the authority cannot wait for some environmental disaster.

Protesting farmers evicted

Chandigarh: Following the eviction of protesting farmers from the Shambhu border, Haryana security personnel on Thursday morning started removing cemented barricades, which were erected to prevent the Punjab farmers from heading to Delhi.

At the Shambhu border, JCB and other machines have been deployed to remove the concrete blocks to clear the Shambhu-Ambala road, which remained closed for over a year.

The Haryana security officials had fortified the state border with Punjab with cement blocks, iron nails and barbed wire to scuttle any attempt by the farmers from Punjab to move towards the capital as part of their 'Delhi Chalo' programme.

Punjab Police also resumed its operation to dismantle the remaining temporary structures on the Punjab side of the Shambhu border on Thursday to clear the road.

Dharnas outside offices Meanwhile, the Samyukta Kisan Morcha (Non-Political) and the Kisan Mazdoor Morcha on Thursday announced to hold dharnas outside the offices of deputy commissioners in protest against the Punjab Police crackdown.

Both the bodies, which spearheaded the farmers' stir at Shambhu and Khanauri border points, slammed the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) government in Punjab for evicting the protesters and detaining farmer leaders on



Farmers being detained at the Bahadurgarh Fort in Patiala on Wednesday. Pic:PTI

Wednesday. Punjab Police detained several farmer leaders, including Sarwan Singh Pandher and Jagjit Singh Dallewal, in Mohali on Wednesday as they were returning after a meeting with Union Agriculture Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan in Chandigarh.

Police also evicted the agitating farmers from the Shambhu and Khanauri protest sites, which were blocked for more than a year, and dismantled the temporary structures and stages put up there using JCB machines.

Seventh round of talks At the meeting in Chandigarh, the seventh round of talks between the two sides, the central delegation was also represented by Consumer Affairs Minister Pralhad Joshi and Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal.

The meeting discussed the various demands of the farmers, especially a law guaranteeing minimum support price (MSP) for crops.

As the departing farm-

ers entered Mohali after the meeting, they were met with heavy barricading.

Kisan Mazdoor Sangharsh Committee (KMSC) leader Satnam Singh Panu on Thursday condemned the police action, and accused the Punjab government of being 'hand-in-glove' with the Centre in launching the crackdown on the protesting farmers.

"It was the murder of democratic rights. The farmers wanted to go to Delhi but the Haryana government barricaded the roads at the Centre's behest," Panu alleged.

Thousands of policemen were deployed to forcibly remove the dharna from Shambhu and Khanauri border points, he said.

"The governments led by Bhagwant Mann and the BJP at the Centre will face the consequences," Panu warned.

Site wears deserted look after police crackdown Till Wednesday, temporary structures and trolleys at the Shambhu bor-

der provided shelter to farmers who had been protesting on the key highway -- the Shambhu-Ambala road -- in support of their various demands for more than a year.

But following a crackdown by Punjab Police on Wednesday, the structures and sheds have now been razed and turned into rubble using JCB machines to resume traffic movement.

The crucial stretch of the highway in Shambhu wore a deserted look on Thursday, with utensils, LPG cylinders, tea kettles, freezers, washing machines, chairs, tables, beds and clothes lying scattered on the road.

At one of the structures that the protesters used as kitchen, vegetables, 'daal', milk and other essential items were left unused.

The temporary structures, including sheds and platforms that once served as shelters and meeting points for the protesting farmers, have been razed to the ground. Trolleys, which were turned into makeshift shelters, were seen lying on the road.

Situation in Manipur still tense

Imphal: The situation in Manipur's curfew-bound Churachandpur district remained tense on Thursday, two days after clashes between the Hmar and Zomi communities left one dead and several injured, police said.

Schools and shops remained shut, while church leaders and civil society groups worked to restore peace, an official told PTI. Security personnel conducted flag marches on Wednesday night to prevent further violence.

At least one person, 51-year-old Lalropui Pakhuangme from the Hmar community, was killed in Tuesday night's clashes.

He suffered bullet injuries and was taken to Slemat Christian Hospital, where he was declared dead. The clashes between the two tribes started after Hmar Inpui general secretary Richard Hmar was attacked by some Zomi people on Sunday, leading to violence and imposition of curfew in the district the next day. Meanwhile, several displaced people from the Kuki community in relief camps were moved to safer locations.

Churachandpur is mainly home to Zomi people, with Hmar and Kuki communities living in some areas. Hours after a fresh shutdown was imposed by a student body in the district on Wednesday, a group of MLAs and tribal organisations separately appealed for peace.

At least 12 Kuki-Zomi and Hmar organisations have called for peace among communities and agreed to form a joint peace committee to monitor the situation and prevent misunderstandings in the future.



External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar with Minister of Foreign Affairs of Bolivia Celinda Sosa during a meeting in New Delhi. Pic:PTI

Police ask MLA to use bulletproof vehicle

Hyderabad: A notice has been issued to BJP legislator T Raja Singh by the city police, directing him to use the bulletproof vehicle and security personnel allotted to him by the government for security reasons.

Singh, who represents the Goshamahal constituency in the city, stated that he prefers to travel by his two-wheeler to remain accessible to the people, as a bulletproof car would cause inconvenience in the narrow lanes and bylanes of his constituency.

The notice was issued to Singh on March 19 by the Mangalhat Police Station, and he has acknowledged its receipt, a police official said on Thursday.

"He (Singh) has been asked to use the bulletproof vehicle and the (1+4)

security personnel allotted to him to prevent any untoward incidents, as he has been seen moving in public without them," they said, adding that the notice is a routine alert as part of security measures.

"It is to alert you that you have been receiving frequent threatening calls, and it has been noticed that you often leave your residence and office without security personnel, moving among the public, which shows negligence towards your safety," the notice addressed to Singh stated.

Acknowledging the notice, the firebrand Hindutva leader reiterated that his priority is to remain accessible to the people.

He emphasised that his constituency consists of residential colonies, slums,

and business establishments, with narrow lanes where a bulletproof car would be inconvenient.

The MLA said travelling freely on a two-wheeler allows him to stay connected with people without causing unnecessary disruptions. However, he took exception to the police rejecting his request for a gun license.

"What exposes the hypocrisy of the system is that when I applied for a gun license citing security concerns, the same police department rejected my application, citing cases against me. Ironically, many individuals with pending cases have been granted gun licenses without any objections," Singh said in a statement.

-PTI

First chartered flight after pandemic

Panaji: The first chartered flight from Iran after COVID-19 pandemic has arrived in Goa, marking yet another milestone in the coastal state's growing appeal as an international tourist destination, a tourism department official said.

The flight, operated by Qeshm Air from Iran, landed at Dabolim airport (in South Goa) at 6.30 pm on Wednesday, bringing 140 tourists to the state, the official said in a release.

This chartered flight arrival highlights the increasing interest among international travellers in exploring Goa's rich cultural heritage, diverse traditions, and vibrant culinary offerings, the tourism department said.

"This arrival marks the first chartered flight from Iran and yet another milestone in Goa's growing appeal as an international tourist destination," a spokesperson of the tourism department said.

Officials from the Department of Tourism ensured a smooth and warm welcome for the visitors. The Department of Tourism remains committed to actively promoting Goa as a year-round destination.

RS adjourned over DMK MPs wearing T-shirts

New Delhi: Rajya Sabha failed to transact any significant business on Thursday and was adjourned for the day after witnessing three adjournments over a row on some DMK members wearing T-shirts with slogans written on them.

This is the first day during the second part of the Budget Session when the House was adjourned without transacting any business except for the laying of papers.

Soon after the House met in the morning, Chairman Jagdeep Dhankhar allowed the laying of papers and some reports of the parliamentary standing committees, after which he adjourned the House for about an hour.

He said he wanted to meet leaders of political parties over what he witnessed in the House. Without sharing details of what he witnessed, Dhankhar adjourned the proceedings till noon.

"I will be calling a meeting of floor leaders in my chambers at 11.30 am today. I would share with the members what I have seen



MPs from Tamil Nadu wearing t-shirts in New Delhi on Thursday. Pic:PTI

in the House a while ago," he said soon after listed papers were laid on the floor of the House.

While the chairman did not cite any reason for the adjournment, the issue of DMK members wearing T-shirts with slogans written on them was objected to by the chairman.

Some of the DMK MPs attended the House proceedings wearing T-shirts with the slogan "Delimitation - Tamil Nadu will fight, Tamil Nadu will win", which was objected to by the Chair.

Some MPs also donned stoles that played upon Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan's re-

marks on DMK MPs' protest in Lok Sabha against the three-language formula of National Education Policy (NEP), and had the word "uncivilised" written on it, with the first two alphabets 'U' and 'N' having been crossed.

As the deadlock over the issue continued, when the House reassembled at noon, Deputy Chairman Harivansh announced that the proceedings had been adjourned again for another 15 minutes.

At 12.15 pm, he again came amid the deadlock and announced that the House stood adjourned till 2 pm.

As soon as it reconvened

at 2 pm, the deputy chairman announced that the House stood adjourned for the day.

"The House stands adjourned to meet at 11 am on Friday, 21st March," Deputy Chairman Harivansh informed members.

During the meeting with floor leaders of various parties, the chairman sought their cooperation and urged the DMK members not to wear T-shirts that were against the rules. However, the DMK members did not budge. Floor leaders of various parties assured the chairman that they were in favour of smooth functioning of the House.

Doctor sells infant to couple

Guwahati: A doctor in Sribhumi district of Assam allegedly sold an infant to a couple after an unmarried woman gave birth to the child, an official said on Thursday.

A police case has been registered against the doctor, who is currently absconding, she said.

According to the official of the district Child Protection Unit (CPU), they got information about an illegal adoption four-five days back.

"We started our investigation and found the news to be true. The doctor prepared false papers and handed over the newborn child to a couple from Sribhumi in exchange for a huge amount of money," she said.

As per preliminary investigation, a woman had come to the accused doctor around four months ago for an abortion, but he did not go ahead with it then as she was almost five months pregnant, the official said.

"He then carried out a cesarean operation on the woman at a private hospital a few days ago and sold the child to the couple by preparing false documents," she said.

Jarkiholi alleges 'honey trap' on senior minister

Bengaluru: Karnataka Public Works Minister Satish Jarkiholi on Thursday claimed that two unsuccessful "honey trap" attempts were made on a senior minister in the state and called for a police investigation into the matter.

"There were two attempts (on a minister), but they weren't successful. This is not the first honey trap incident in Karnataka," Jarkiholi told reporters in response to a question.

Condemning the incident, he said politics should not involve such tactics. "We have asked the concerned minister to file a complaint, only then can the police act and launch an investigation," he added. Jarkiholi emphasised that those behind it should be brought to justice.

"We will speak to the Chief Minister (Siddaramaiah)... have already discussed it with the Home Minister (G Parameshwara). If there is a complaint, it will help the investigation," he said.

Stressing the need for a non-partisan fight against honey trapping, the Minister said politicians cutting

Parameshwara vows to bring culprits to justice

Bengaluru: Karnataka Home Minister G Parameshwara on Thursday said he will order a high-level probe into the "honey trap" cases in the state. He insisted that there is a need to put an end to such tendencies. "If we have to save the dignity of our members, we have to put a brake on such incidents. It's a serious issue," the Home Minister told the Assembly. "I will order a high-level probe into it," he added. Karnataka Minister for Cooperation K N Rajanna said he came to know that at least 48 people have been "honeytrapped" and their obscene videos have been made.

across all parties have been victims of it.

"In the earlier governments too there were victims of honey trapping, some names were heard, now our people's (Congress) names are heard, if it happens in the future too, it won't be surprising. This must end," he added.

-PTI

QUOTE OF THE DAY

"Glorifying invaders means strengthening the very roots of treason. New India will never accept those who insult our great ancestors and praise those who attacked our civilisation, violated our women, and struck at our faith."

Yogi Adityanath, Chief Minister, UP



MF Husain painting fetches \$13.8 million

New Delhi: Legendary painter MF Husain's Untitled (Gram Yatra), billed as one of his most important and sizable works from the 1950s, went for USD 13.8 million (over Rs 118 crore) at an auction, setting the new record for the most expensive work of modern Indian art.

The sale, which took place at a Christie auction in New York on March 19, nearly doubles the previous record-holder, Amrita Sher-Gil's 1937 "The Story Teller", which fetched

around USD 7.4 million (Rs 61.8 crore) at an auction in Mumbai in 2023.

Comprising 13 unique panels that occupy almost 14 feet across a single canvas, Gram Yatra, which means 'village pilgrimage', is widely regarded as a cornerstone of Husain's oeuvre, celebrating the diversity and dynamism of a newly independent nation.

"We are thrilled to have been a part of setting a new benchmark value for the work of Maqbool Fida Husain and the entire category.



This is a landmark moment and continues the extraordinary upward trajectory of the Modern and Contemporary South Asian Art market," Nishad Avari, head of Christie's South Asian Modern and Contemporary Art, said in a statement.

The 1954 painting, which left India the same year, re-

mained largely unseen since its acquisition by the Ukrainian-born Norway-based doctor Leon Elias Volodarsky, who was in Delhi to establish a thoracic surgery training centre for the World Health Organization (WHO).

Volodarsky bequeathed the painting to Oslo University Hospital in 1964. The

proceeds of the sale will support the training of future generations of doctors at the institution.

Previously, Husain's most expensive painting, Untitled (Reincarnation), was sold for USD 3.1 million (approximately Rs 25.7 crore) in London last year.

Born on September 17, 1915 in Pandharpur in Maharashtra, Husain remains one of India's most important and sought after artists whose oeuvre inspires art and conversations across the globe.

An avid reader of history and mythology and Indian culture, a large part of Husain's art includes paintings of gods and goddesses in the context of the politics of the time, works that put him in the crosshairs of controversy.

With FIRs and persistent death threats, Husain was forced into self-exile, staying in Dubai and travelling to New York and London, where he died on June 9, 2011 at the age of 95, leaving behind a prodigious body of work.

-PTI

Hong Kong's richest man angers Beijing

Hong Kong: Hong Kong tycoon Li Ka-shing's business empire is in the cross-hairs after CK Hutchison Holdings chose to sell its Panama Canal port assets to a consortium that includes US investment firm BlackRock Inc, apparently angering Beijing.

Over the past week, Beijing's Hong Kong affairs offices have posted scathing commentaries from a local state-backed media outlet over the tentative deal by Hutchison, which is controlled by Li's family.

That raises questions about the deal and highlights the difficulties Hong Kong businesses face as they balance demands from Beijing for national loyalty and their own capitalist interests in the once free-wheeling Asian financial hub. Here's what to know about the issue.

Nicknamed "Superman," Li is among the world's 50 richest people, with Forbes calculating his net worth at USD 38 billion. Li, 96, retired from his position as chairman of CK Hutchison in 2018, succeeded by his elder son Victor. But he's still one of Hong Kong's most influential figures.

Li's ties with Beijing

Li's influence extends beyond business. He has met with top Chinese leaders and has served on the elite



committee that selected Hong Kong's leader.

Experts on ties between Beijing and Hong Kong said ruling Communist Party leaders once understood that support from the business sector was crucial for maintaining Hong Kong's capitalist system. It's been strategically vital for mainland China's economy, given the role their global networks and resources play in the country's development. So, Li has had notable political influence.

Panama ports deal

CK Hutchison announced March 4 that it would sell all its shares in Hutchison Port Holdings and in Hutchison Port Group Holdings to the consortium that also includes BlackRock subsidiary Global Infrastructure Partners and Terminal Investment Limited, which is chaired by Italian shipping scion Diego Aponte, whose

family reportedly has a longstanding relationship with Li's.

If approved, the deal, valued at nearly USD 23 billion including USD 5 billion in debt, will give the consortium control over 43 ports in 23 countries, including the ports of Balboa and Cristobal, located at either end of the canal. The transaction does not include ports in Hong Kong or mainland China. CK Hutchison said the transaction was purely commercial in nature.

The deal angered Beijing

One of the Beijing-backed newspaper commentaries described the deal as a betrayal of all Chinese and said the company should think about which side to take. The other said great entrepreneurs are patriots, suggesting that businesspeople who "dance with" predatory American politicians would be

doomed to infamy.

Comments on popular posts about the deal on Chinese social media platform Weibo tend to be more critical than favorable toward Li.

Some unconfirmed reports have suggested Chinese leaders were angry not to have been consulted in advance about the deal. Ports are valuable strategic assets and transactions involving them are always sensitive, said Wilson Chan, co-founder of the Pagoda Institute, a think tank focusing on public policy and the global political economy.

It is unclear whether pressure from Beijing will affect the deal, which has to be approved by Panama's government. China's Foreign Ministry deflected a question about whether authorities are investigating the deal, saying reporters should ask other authorities.

Longer term implications

If Beijing steps up pressure on Li to scrap the deal, the Trump administration could hit back with more sanctions and restrictions on Hong Kong and Chinese businesses and some individuals, he said.

The situation shows that Washington's concerns about Hong Kong's business autonomy are valid. -AP

No windfall tax on oil cos after new law

New Delhi: Oil and gas companies will not face any new taxes like the windfall profits tax after the coming into effect of a new law that promises stability of fiscal regime, Petroleum Minister Hardeep Singh Puri said.

Parliament has passed the Oilfields (Regulation and Development) Bill, 2024 that provides policy stability to investors, decriminalises provisions and promotes ease of doing business.

"After this bill, it will be difficult to levy (new taxes like) windfall tax because somebody will sue us (for failing to keep the promise of fiscal stability)," he said at a reception he hosted to celebrate the passage of the bill.

India imposed a windfall profit tax on July 1, 2022 joining a growing number of nations that tax super normal profits of energy companies. At that time, export duties of Rs 6 per litre (USD 12 per barrel) each were levied on petrol and ATF and Rs 13 a litre (USD 26 a barrel) on diesel.

A Rs 23,250 per tonne (USD 40 per barrel) windfall profit tax on domestic crude production was also levied. The tax rates were reviewed every fortnight based on average oil prices in the previous two weeks. The levy was scrapped in December last year after 30 months. Puri said global oil majors have been exploring investing in India.

The Bill is part of the government's reforms agenda to make it easier to find and produce crude oil (which is refined into fuels like petrol and diesel) and natural gas (which is used to generate power, make fertilizer or turn into cooking gas and CNG).



Gardners work on flower beds as part of preparation before opening of Tulip garden for the public in Srinagar on Wednesday. Pic: PTI

Trump believes India will lower tariffs

New York: President Donald Trump has said that he believes India will lower its tariffs on American goods, even as he reiterated his threat to impose reciprocal US tariffs on the country starting April 2.

In an interview with Breitbart News, an American news, opinion, and commentary website, Trump discussed the US relationship with India.

Asked about his summit with Prime Minister Narendra Modi last month, Trump said he has a "very good relationship" with India.

"But the only problem I have with India is they're one of the highest tariffing nations in the world," the website quoted Trump as saying.

"I believe they're...probably going to be lowering those tariffs substantially, but on April 2, we will be charging them the same

tariffs they charge us," Trump added.

When asked about the India-Middle East-Europe-Economic Corridor (IMEC), a deal he signed the US on to during Modi's visit to the US, Trump did not mention China in particular but said it was a "group of wonderful nations" banding together "countering other countries that look to hurt us on trade," Trump further added.

"We have a powerful group of partners in trade," Trump said.

"Again, we can't let those partners treat us badly, however. We do better in many ways frankly with our foes than we do with our friends," Trump was quoted as saying by the website.

"The ones that wouldn't be as friendly to us in some cases treat us better than the ones that are supposed to be friendly, like the Eu-

ropean Union, which treats us terribly on trade," Trump explained.

"India and everybody would think of them as an ally. I can say the same for others. But this is a group of wonderful nations that is countering other countries that look to hurt us on trade," Trump further added.

Trump earlier this month said that India has agreed to cut its tariffs "way down" as he reiterated his claim that the country charges America massive tariffs that make it difficult to sell products there.

Commerce Secretary Sunil Barthwal, however told a Parliamentary panel in New Delhi on March 10 that negotiations are still on and no agreement on trade tariffs has been reached so far between India and the US. -PTI

Vikas Kaushal CMD of HPCL

Mumbai: Vikas Kaushal has assumed charge as the Chairman & Managing Director of Hindustan Petroleum Corporation Ltd. (HPCL), a Maharatna Oil Company, effective March 17.

Kaushal is a seasoned global leader with over three decades of experience in the energy domain. A Chemical Engineering graduate from DCET, Punjab University, he holds an MBA from the Indian Institute of Management, Ahmedabad.

Kaushal started his career with ICICI Limited in Project Finance and Advisory Services before transitioning into global management consulting. Since 2000, he has been associated with A.T. Kearney, where he played a pivotal role in expanding the firm's business in India. As a Partner for over 17 years, he led several high-impact initiatives, including serving as the Global Leader for Energy and Process Industries, where he managed a portfolio of major global energy clients, including international oil and gas majors. He also held the role of Managing



Director and Country Head for A.T. Kearney India for five years and was Chairman of India Business until recently.

Kaushal has also chaired the Finance and Audit and Governance Committees of the board, bringing extensive leadership in strategic planning, corporate governance, and financial management. With deep expertise in oil and gas, power, renewables, and new energies, Kaushal has been a trusted advisor to India's leading state-owned oil & gas companies, including HPCL, Indian Oil, BPCL, and GAIL, guiding them through large-scale transformation programs. He has also provided strategic counsel to global energy firms, shaping key industry initiatives.

RBI appoints new executive director

Mumbai: The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) on Thursday said it has appointed Indranil Bhattacharyya as executive director (ED).

As executive director, Bhattacharyya will look after the Department of Economic and Policy Research, the RBI said in a statement.

The appointment is effective from March 19.

Prior to his promotion as ED, Bhattacharyya was serving as Adviser in the Monetary Policy Department of the RBI.

Over a span of nearly three decades, he has worked in the areas of monetary policy, fiscal policy, banking, and international economic relations in the Monetary Policy Department, Department of Economic and Policy Research and the International Department of the RBI.

He has also served as an economic expert in the technical office of the Governor at Qatar Central Bank, Doha, Qatar for 5 years (2009-14).

Bhattacharyya has a postgraduate degree in economics from Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi.



Goa Chief Minister Pramod Sawant chairs meeting of the Department of Information Technology, Electronics & Communication on Thursday. Pic: PTI

Gujarat firm to operate 900 E-Buses

Mumbai: Gujarat-based bus passenger mobility firm Chartered Speed on Wednesday said it has bagged a contract to operate over 900 electric buses by Convergence Energy Services Limited (CESL).

The company will procure, operate and maintain these buses under the Pradhan Mantri e-Bus Sewa Scheme across 13 cities in three states, the company said in a statement.

"The company aims to serve more than 2.9 lakh passengers daily and create employment for over 2,000 people, contributing to both the transportation and job markets," it said.

Chartered Speed intends to supply and operate electric buses for intra-city travel across 13 cities in the states of Chhattisgarh, Rajasthan, and Meghalaya.

The cities included Raipur, Korba, Ajmer, Al-

war, Bikaner, Bhilwara, Jaipur, Jodhpur, Kota, Udaipur, and Shillong.

Sanyam Gandhi, Whole-Time Director, Chartered Speed said that the company is transitioning its fleet from ICE-powered vehicles to green fuel-powered buses.

Chartered Speed operates a fleet of over 1800 buses across Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, Odisha and Assam. -PTI

GCCs in India expect 9.8 pc salary growth

Mumbai: Global capability centres (GCCs) in the country are poised for 9.8 per cent salary growth over the next 12 months, as organisations adapt to evolving talent demands and navigate macroeconomic challenges, a report said on Wednesday.

In India, GCCs are seen as the top payers, outpacing traditional IT services in pay parity and growth, and are expected to give 9.8 per cent salary growth over the next 12 months, 'India's Talent Takeoff - The GCC 4.0 Story' report by digital talent solutions provider NLB Services said.

"With India hosting over 55 per cent of the world's GCCs and projected to reach a market size of USD 110 billion by 2030, these centres have become critical nodes for organisations seeking agility, cost efficiency, and access to a vast talent pool. This growth trajectory is now translating into significant salary increases for employees, especially for specialised skills which are commanding higher premiums than ever before," NLB Services CEO Sachin Alug said.

However, he said, despite this strong momentum, gender-based disparities still require attention, with women earning approximately 75-85 per cent of male salaries on average, a gap which further widens at senior positions, reflecting the limited representation in leadership roles. The strong salary growth spans across junior and mid-level roles, fueled by demand in fields like AI, ML, Cloud Computing, and Cybersecurity. On the contrary, senior roles are set for modest increases as organisations prioritize cost efficiency in leadership, said the report.

Looking ahead, India's GCC sector is expected to grow at a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 9-12 per cent through 2030, and salaries are set to grow exponentially, the report added. -PTI



Bill Gates uses startup's pesticide sprayer

Chhatrapati Sambhajnagar: Microsoft co-founder Bill Gates has tried his hand at a new pesticide sprayer made by a startup, creating a more handy and efficient option for farmers to help them safely cover more crops at a time.

The sprayer has been designed by local engineer Yogesh Gawande, who formed a company in 2019 to manufacture the product in Chhatrapati Sambhajnagar. The company has so far

sold more than 5,000 sprayer units and generated 100-plus direct and indirect job opportunities, as per Gawande.

Bill Gates tried his hand at operating the sprayer at the Indian Agricultural Research Institute (IARI) in New Delhi on March 17 in the presence of Gawande.

"I first made the sprayer as part of a project during my engineering course," Gawande said at a press meet held at the Marathwada Accelerator for Growth



and Incubation Council (MAGIC) office here on Wednesday.

With this sprayer, farmers do not need to carry heavy chemical tanks on

their back for spraying pesticides. They can now spray chemicals over four rows of crops at the same time with this innovative device which is operated

on wheels, he said.

The height of the sprayer's nozzles can be adjusted till 12-14 feet to cover large trees. The pressure of nozzles is adjustable and hence, the crop is not damaged due to the pressure, Gawande said.

"I had earlier tried to sell this sprayer on a highway near Chittimpalgaon (Gawande's native village) at Paithan in Chhatrapati Sambhajnagar. Subsequently, I dropped the idea to manufacture it further because though the prod-

uct was applauded, it could not be converted into a business," he said.

Gawande said he later received help from MAGIC, following which he started his company.

"I am connected to the Gates Foundation. As Bill Gates came to India, my product was selected to be presented before him. He gave 5-7 minutes to us and also tried his hand at the sprayer. He asked multiple questions on the sprayer's functioning like a farmer," Gawande said. -PTI

QUOTE OF THE DAY

"India's space sector is on the cusp of a significant transformation but there is a need to scale up commercial applications of space technology to drive economic growth. It has to be brought into the commercial domain."



S Somnath, Former Chairperson, ISRO

No end in sight to war

FRESH ISRAELI STRIKES ACROSS GAZA KILL 58

By Wafaa Shurafa and Samy Magdy

Deir-al-Balah: Israeli strikes killed at least 58 Palestinians across the Gaza Strip overnight and into Thursday, according to three hospitals. The strikes hit multiple homes in the middle of the night, killing men, women and children as they slept. Israel resumed heavy strikes across Gaza on Tuesday, shattering a ceasefire that had halted the war and facilitated the release of more than two dozen hostages. Israel blamed the renewed fight-

ing on Hamas because the militant group rejected a new proposal that departed from their signed agreement. More than 400 Palestinians were killed on Tuesday alone, mostly women and children, according to Gaza's Health Ministry. There have been no reports of Hamas firing rockets or carrying out other attacks. One of the strikes early Thursday hit the Abu Daqa family's home in Abasan al-Kabira, a village just outside of Khan Younis near the border with Israel. It was inside an area the

Israeli military ordered evacuated earlier this week, encompassing most of eastern Gaza. **Retake part of Gaza corridor** Israel said Wednesday its troops retook part of a corridor that bisects Gaza, and its defence minister warned that attacks would intensify until Hamas frees dozens of hostages and gives up control of the territory. The military said it had retaken part of the Netzarim Corridor that divides northern Gaza from the south, and from where it



had previously withdrawn as part of a ceasefire that began in January. That truce was shattered Tuesday by Israeli airstrikes that killed more than 400 Palestinians, mostly women and children, according to the Gaza Health Ministry. The advances by Israel on Wednesday — which included sending more troops to southern Gaza — threatened to drag the sides into all-out war.

Israel to order new evacuations instructions

Hundreds of thousands of Palestinians who had fled northern Gaza for the south were prevented from returning throughout the war, until Israel withdrew from Netzarim in January. Many of them have since returned. But Israel Katz, the Israeli defense minister, said the military would soon order Palestinians to evacuate from combat zones. Katz said Tuesday's aerial bombardment "was just the first step" in Israel's plan to ratchet up the pressure on Hamas to release the remaining hostages and give up control of Gaza.

Trump escalates action in Yemen

TRUMP THREATENS HOUTHİ REBELS SAYING THEY'LL BE 'COMPLETELY ANNIHILATED' AS AIRSTRIKES POUND YEMEN

Dubai: US President Donald Trump threatened Yemen's Houthi rebels on Wednesday that they'll be "completely annihilated" as American airstrikes pounded locations under their control, while further pressuring the group's main benefactor Iran. Strikes hit Sanaa, Yemen's rebel-held capital, as well as their stronghold of Saada in the country's northwest on Wednesday night, the Houthi's al-Ma-

rah satellite news channel reported. It also said strikes happened overnight Tuesday, though the US military has not offered a breakdown of places targeted since the airstrikes campaign began. The first strikes this weekend killed at least 53 people, including children, and wounded others. As the strikes hit, Trump wrote on his Truth Social website that "tremendous damage has been

Yemen's Houthis launch strikes in Israel

Deir Al-Balah: The Israeli military says air raid sirens have sounded in several areas of the country following a missile attack from Yemen early Thursday. In Jerusalem, several explosions were heard shortly after the sirens sounded. There were no immediate reports of injuries. Yemen's Houthi group this week resumed missile attacks following the collapse of Israel's ceasefire with Hamas. Police also reported sirens in central Israel in the 4 a.m. attack. The MADA rescue service says it has received no reports of injuries. Israel said Wednesday its troops retook part of a corridor that bisects Gaza, and its defense minister warned that attacks would intensify until Hamas frees dozens of hostages and gives up control of the territory. The military said it had retaken part of the Netzarim Corridor that divides northern Gaza from the south, and from where it had previously withdrawn as part of a ceasefire that began in January. That truce was shattered Tuesday by Israeli airstrikes that killed more than 400 Palestinians, mostly women and children, according to the Gaza Health Ministry.



inflicted upon the Houthi barbarians." "Watch how it will get progressively worse — It's not even a fair fight, and never will be," Trump added. "They will be completely annihilated!" Meanwhile, Trump again warned Iran not to arm the Houthis, claiming without offering evidence that Tehran "has lessened its intensity on Military Equipment and General Support to the Houthis." "Iran must stop the sending of these Supplies IMMEDIATELY," he

wrote. Iran had no immediate response to Trump's post. The Islamic Republic has long armed the Houthis, who are members of Islam's minority Shiite Zaydi sect that ruled Yemen for 1,000 years until 1962. Tehran routinely denies arming the rebels, despite physical evidence, numerous seizures and experts tying the weapons back to Iran. That's likely because Tehran wants to avoid sanctions for violating a United Nations arms embargo on the Houthis. The Houthi rebels attacked over 100 merchant vessels with missiles and drones, sinking two vessels and killing four sailors, from November 2023 until January this year when a ceasefire began in Gaza. The campaign also greatly raised the Houthi's profile in the wider Arab world and tamped down on public criticism against their human rights abuses and crackdowns on dissent and aid workers.

UN worker killed in strike

Jorge Moreira da Silva, head of the UN Office for Project Services, declined to say who carried out the strike in the central city of Deir al-Balah. He said the blast was not accidental or related to demining activity. He did not provide the nationalities of those killed and wounded. Moreira da Silva said strikes had hit near the compound on Monday and struck it directly on Tuesday

and again on Wednesday. He said the agency had contacted the Israeli military after the first strike. "Israel knew this was a U.N. premise, that people were living, staying and working there," he said. Lt. Col. Nadav Shoshani, a military spokesperson, said the explosion was not caused by Israeli fire. "There were no forces around that building, no aerial attacks on that area," he said.

Indian scholar in US detained over Hamas ties

New York: An Indian national enrolled as a post-doctoral fellow in the US has been detained by immigration authorities, said a media report, less than a week after a Columbia student from India self-deported following allegations of activities supporting Hamas.



Badar Khan Suri's lawyer claimed that he is being punished "because of the Palestinian heritage of his wife — who is a US citizen — and because the government suspects that he and his wife oppose US foreign policy toward Israel."

He is a former student of Jamia Millia Islamia, New Delhi.

Suri is currently a post-doctoral fellow at the Al-waleed Bin Talal Center for Muslim-Christian Understanding at the Edmund A Walsh School of Foreign Service, Georgetown University, Washington DC.

A report in Politico said that Suri, who was studying and teaching on a student visa, has been "detained by federal immigration authorities amid the Trump administration's crackdown on student activists whom the

government accuses of opposing American foreign policy." According to his profile on the website of Georgetown University, Suri completed his PhD in Peace & Conflict Studies from Nelson Mandela Center for Peace and Conflict Resolution, Jamia Millia Islamia, New Delhi in 2020. He wrote his thesis on "Transitional Democracy, Divided Societies and Prospects for Peace: A Study of Afghanistan and Iraq" in which he underlined the complexities involved in introducing democracy in ethnically diverse societies; as

well as challenges to project state building. He has travelled extensively in the conflict zones of India, Pakistan, Balochistan in Iran, Turkey, Kurdish Areas in Turkey, Syria, Lebanon and its southern region, Egypt and Palestine.

Suri's detention comes less than a week after Ranjani Srinivasan, an Indian student at Columbia University, self-deported after her visa was revoked for allegedly "advocating for violence and terrorism" and involvement in activities supporting Hamas.

Srinivasan had entered the United States on an F-1 student visa as a doctoral student in Urban Planning at Columbia University, the Department of Homeland Security had said.

It added that Srinivasan was "involved in activities supporting" Hamas, a terrorist organisation.

The Department of State had revoked her visa on March 5. The Department of Homeland Security said it has obtained video footage of Srinivasan using the Customs and Border Protection (CBP) Home App to self-deport on March 11.

-PTI



A group of Russian soldiers wave as they sit in a bus after being released in a prisoners swap between Russia and Ukraine, at an unspecified location in Russia.

Pic: AP/PTI

At least six killed in vehicle collision

Abuja: At least six people died near Nigeria's capital Abuja after a trailer crashed into halted vehicles and burst into flames, police said Wednesday.

The accident happened on a highway near the Nyanya Bridge in Ayo, around 10 kilometers (6 miles) from Abuja, after the trailer, laden with cement, lost control and rammed into 14 vehicles that were stuck in traffic, the Federal Capital Territory Police Command said in a statement.

The police said six victims were pulled from the wreckage and rushed to



the hospital, but were confirmed dead by medical personnel on duty. With the absence of an efficient railway system to transport cargo, fatal truck accidents are common along most major roads in Nigeria, Africa's most populous country. In January, 98 people

were killed in a gasoline tanker blast in north-central Nigeria, near the Suleja area of Niger state, after individuals attempted to transfer gasoline from a crashed oil tanker into another truck using a generator. Some bystanders were at the scene to scoop gasoline. -AP

Russia, Ukraine swap prisoners

Chernihiv region: Russia and Ukraine said Wednesday they had each swapped 175 prisoners in one of the largest exchanges since the Russian full-scale invasion started three years ago.

"We are bringing back soldiers, sergeants, and officers — warriors who fought for our freedom in the ranks of the Armed Forces, the Navy, the National Guard, the Territorial Defense Forces, and the Border Guard Service," said Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelenskyy.

The Ukrainian leader said Tuesday that releas-

"We had a constructive call about moving toward a ceasefire between Kyiv and Moscow. US must take control of Ukrainian power plants to ensure their security. US could be very helpful in running those plants with its electricity and utility expertise." Donald Trump, President, US

"Coalition of the willing plan, led by Britain and France, is moving into an operational phase. But it's unclear how many countries are willing to send troops, or whether there will be any ceasefire to protect." Keir Starmer, Prime Minister, UK

ing all prisoners of war as well as captured civilians would be an important step toward peace and could help build trust between the two countries. He has repeatedly called for an "all-for-all" prisoner exchange.

Warm reunions

Shortly after the exchange took place near the northern border of the two warring countries, dozens of anxious families rushed to a hospital in Ukraine's Chernihiv region set to receive the released prisoners. -PTI

QUOTE OF THE DAY

"India and the EU face evolving security threats that require innovative and collaborative solutions. Learning from each other's experiences will help us build more effective strategies for de-radicalisation, rehabilitation, and long-term prevention."



Dinkar Gupta, Former Director General, NIA

Platform for Indian-origin artist's work

By Gurdip Singh

Singapore: Singapore and Japan unveiled on Wednesday the world's deepest ocean art installation comprising three metal cubes designed by the city state's leading Indian-origin artist Lakshmi Mohanbabu.

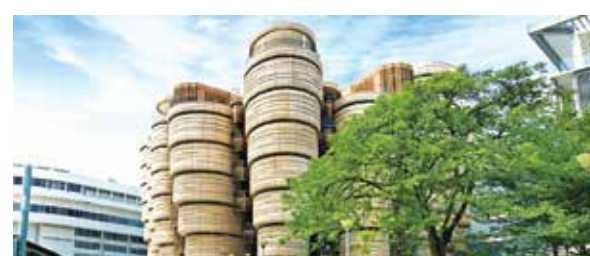
Deployed 7 km below the sea, the artwork is by Mohanbabu, local tech firm NuStar Technology and Nanyang Technological University (NTU) here.

"Singapore is now the first country to have an art

installation 7,000 metres beneath the ocean," said a media release from the three partners in the project.

The historic milestone, part of Singapore's SG60 (60 years of independence) celebrations was observed on Wednesday at Gallery ART NOW.

A tribute to all those impacted by natural disasters, these artworks were installed near the Mariana Trench off the coast of Japan by NuStar Technologies in December last year,



said the release. Sharing her sentiments about the project, Mohanbabu said, "But beyond art, this project holds a deeper significance. It illuminates global efforts to mitigate challenges posed by natu-

ral disasters. While we cannot avert nature's wrath, we can honour those impacted and highlight the collective global efforts to mitigate it."

"The ocean floor installation is a symbol of that

collective effort—a reminder of what we can achieve when we come together for a greater cause," said Mohanbabu, a leading artist, architect and leader of the project.

Each of the three hollow cubes is crafted from corrosion-resistant stainless steel, measuring 10 cm on each side. There are five sides for each cube, showcasing the iconic "Universal Language of Symbols" by Mohanbabu.

One of the cubes was made using a new hybrid

manufacturing process developed by NTU. To accommodate the artwork, specially designed cavities and holders were incorporated into the Long-Term Borehole Monitoring System (LTBMS) equipment bay frame. The LTBMS was originally developed to monitor seismic activity near tectonic plate boundaries and supports real-time data monitoring for earthquake and tsunami early warning systems. -PTI

EDITORIAL

Truth Awaits

For nearly four years, the death of Disha Salian, manager of late actor Sushant Singh Rajput, has remained a matter of intense speculation, whispers and conspiracy theories. Now, in a new twist, her family has approached the Bombay High Court, demanding a fresh investigation into what they allege was no suicide but a brutal murder orchestrated at the highest levels of politics and entertainment. The petition names, among others, Shiv Sena (UBT) leader Aaditya Thackeray, scion of one of Maharashtra's most famous political dynasties. The allegations are serious and it is high time for Thackeray to come forward and clear the air, and not evade the questions that refuse to go away.

Salian (28) was found dead on June 8, 2020, after falling from the 14th floor of a high-rise building in Malad. Just six days later, Sushant Singh Rajput was found dead in his own apartment. The twin tragedies, which occurred under the watch of Aaditya's father - Uddhav Thackeray's Chief Ministership - set off a storm of speculation and political mudslinging with an absence of definitive answers. The Mumbai police quickly concluded that both deaths were suicides. But questions persisted. Why was Salian's post-mortem conducted two days after her death? Why was it not disclosed earlier that her body was found without clothes? Why was the case hurriedly closed as an accidental death without exhausting all forensic avenues?

The latest petition filed by Salian's father alleges that she was sexually assaulted and murdered, with a politically motivated cover-up shielding the guilty. It demands the transfer of the case to the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) and the registration of an FIR against Aaditya Thackeray. The petition further claims that Salian was in possession of damaging information about a powerful coterie of politicians, film industry figures and law enforcement officials, making her a target. It alleges that forensic and eyewitness evidence has been ignored or suppressed.

The Sena (UBT) predictably has dismissed the allegations as politically motivated, accusing the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) of using the case as a tool to discredit him. There is no doubt that politics is in play. But politics does not negate the need for accountability.

For Thackeray, this case is no longer just about a legal challenge but about his credibility. Silence, in such matters, fuels suspicion. If he truly has nothing to hide, he should welcome a thorough reinvestigation rather than dismiss it as a conspiracy. Anything less will allow doubts to fester and deepen public distrust.

The Mumbai police, too, must explain their actions. Their handling of Salian's case has been clumsy at best and evasive at worst. The rushed conclusion of suicide despite circumstantial evidence suggesting otherwise is precisely what led to accusations of a cover-up.

The courts will decide whether the allegations against Thackeray and others hold merit. But perception matters. For a leader hoping to carve out a future beyond the shadow of his father, Aaditya cannot afford to be seen as dodging tough questions. He must cooperate fully with investigators and make a clean breast of any involvement in order to prove his innocence.

Modi-Jinping Bhai Bhai? - Trade, Tariffs and the Ghosts of 1962



By
Ruddhi Phadke

Donald Trump did not invent trade wars, but his ongoing onslaught of tariffs and geopolitical brinkmanship has forced nations - friends as well as foes - across the world to rethink their strategic footing. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the uneasy tango between India and China - two Asian giants with shared histories, deep suspicions and economic ambitions. Let us rewind to the winter of 1949, when Mao Zedong stood atop Tiananmen Gate and declared the birth of the People's Republic of China.

Mao's rise was a triumph of Marxist-Leninist ideology, but it came at an enormous human cost. His Great Leap Forward (1958-1962), an attempt at rapid industrialization and collectivization, resulted in one of the deadliest famines in recorded history. His Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) upended China's intellectual and political class, sending thousands of 'bourgeois elements' to labour camps, leaving an indelible scar on the nation's psyche. Yet, despite economic deprivation, Mao's China was ideologically unified, exporting its brand of communist insurgency beyond its borders.

How India and China's tangled past informs their economic manoeuvring in the age of Trump's trade wars.

India was not immune to the ideological ripples emanating from Beijing. In the late 1960s, inspired by Mao's vision of peasant uprisings, Naxalite rebels in India's eastern states launched a violent insurgency that still simmers in remote pockets of the country today. But China's involvement with India was not merely ideological; it was also territorial. When Mao's forces annexed Tibet in 1950, it was the first tremor in a geopolitical fault line that would culminate in outright war.

By the early 1960s, India had embraced the idealism of Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru, whose faith in diplomacy led to the now-infamous "Hindi Chini Bhai Bhai" (Indians and Chinese are brothers) slogan. This faith, however, was shattered in 1962 when China launched a swift and brutal invasion into Indian territory, occupying 40,000 square kilometers in Aksai Chin, a region that remains under Chinese control today.

In Himalayan Blunder (1968), arguably the most famous memoir to come out of this humiliating defeat, Brigadier John Parashuram Dalvi, who became a prisoner-of-war in the early stages of the conflict, revealed how India's failure to utilize its superior air force - a decision made at the highest levels of government - was one of the main causes of the Chinese victory.

When questioned in Parliament about the loss of territory, Nehru merely quipped, "Not a fig leaf grows there." The indifference of Oxford-educated Nehru to the ground realities of war left a wound on India's national psyche, one that would fester for decades.

Fast forward to the present when the world's economic order is shifting under the weight of American protectionism, and Trump's trade war with China and other countries has set off a scramble among global manufacturers. Beijing is keenly aware of the potential repercussions.

In this scenario, India is walking a



tightrope. While Prime Minister Narendra Modi has projected himself as a strongman capable of standing up to China, his government is also aware of the economic imperative to maintain a functional relationship. The recent thawing of rhetoric between New Delhi and Beijing is not an act of ideological convergence but of necessity. India, coping with its own Trump-imposed tariffs, has been hedging its bets - deepening defence deals with Washington while simultaneously exploring free trade agreements with the European Union. China, in turn, has responded with uncharacteristic warmth, lauding Modi's diplomatic pragmatism.

At a psychological level, this courtship evokes uncomfortable historical echoes. In the months preceding the 1962 war, Chinese Premier Zhou Enlai made a high-profile visit to India, and the 'Hindi Chini Bhai Bhai' slogan had reached fever pitch.

The betrayal that followed in form China's invasion was a moment of national humiliation that we still have not quite come to grips with. The scars of 1962 run deep, and they resurface every time India faces off against China - whether in the high-altitude standoff at Doklam in 2017 or the deadly skirmishes in the Galwan Valley in 2020.

However, India in 2025 is not the India of 1962. Its military is better equipped, its leadership less naive and its econom-

ic aspirations more pronounced. The global stage, too, is vastly different. Trump's America has jettisoned its post-Cold War role as a stabilizing force, leaving nations to fend for themselves in an increasingly volatile economic landscape. Washington's preoccupation with China's rise has made India a convenient counterweight, but New Delhi knows better than to be a pawn in someone else's game. Modi's strategy appears to be one of cautious engagement - leveraging the U.S.-China rivalry to extract concessions from both sides while avoiding direct entanglement.

In the long run, the question remains: Can India and China put aside their historical baggage for sheer economic pragmatism? The potential is undeniable for together, they account for nearly 40 percent of the world's population and wield enormous economic clout.

It is tantalizing to think if the Indo-China relationship transforms from that of uneasy coexistence to genuine partnership, can overtures of friendship be met with the cautious refrain of Modi-Jinping Bhai Bhai?

Until then, the world must contend with an awkward reality: Modi and Xi Jinping may exchange diplomatic pleasantries, but the specter of Mao and Nehru still looms large. And in the shadow of that history, every overture of friendship is met with the cautious refrain—Modi-Jinping Bhai Bhai?

GLOBAL WATCH

A Reset in the Indian Ocean

Last year, India-Maldives relations appeared to be at their nadir. The newly elected President Mohamed Muizzu's initial pro-China stance, coupled with the lingering echoes of the "India Out" campaign, raised concerns in New Delhi about the future of its traditionally warm ties with Malé. However, the trajectory of 2025 suggests a marked improvement in bilateral relations, buoyed by mutual strategic necessities and historical interdependencies.

The Maldives' former President Mohamed Nasheed, in a recent discussion at the Raisina Dialogue, succinctly captured the island nation's predicament when he said that the safety, security and prosperity of the Maldives depended on keeping good relations with India. His remarks underscored an enduring reality that New Delhi remains Malé's most reliable partner in times of crisis.

Muizzu's early days in office were marked by tensions with India. His administration distanced itself from the country's long-standing security partnership with New Delhi, seeking to reduce the Indian military's footprint in the archipelago. This shift was widely perceived as a tilt towards China, which has been increasing its influence in the Maldives through infrastructure investments albeit at the cost of significant debt distress.

Yet, the need for developmental assistance, economic stability, and crisis management brought New Delhi back into the picture. The Maldives' Foreign Minister MoosaZameer had explicitly distanced his government from the 'India Out' campaign that had been championed by former President Abdulla Yameen. This was reinforced by Defence Minister Ghassan Maumoon's visit to India, where he acknowledged New Delhi's consist-

After a rocky diplomatic year, India and the Maldives are finding common ground again.



ent role as the Maldives' first responder in times of crisis.

For decades, India has extended military, economic and humanitarian aid to the Maldives, irrespective of the political dispensation in Malé. When mercenaries attempted a coup in 1988, India swiftly launched 'Operation Cactus' to reinstate the legitimate government. Following the 2004 Asian tsunami, India provided substantial relief aid. In 2014, under Yameen's rule, New Delhi had dispatched potable water when Malé's only desalination plant suffered a fire accident - this, despite his anti-India stance. More recently, during the COVID-19 pandemic, India delivered medical supplies and extended \$250 million in financial aid to the Maldives when tourism, its economic lifeline, collapsed.

These instances illustrate why Maldivian leaders eventually gravitate back towards India. A recent Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between the two nations will facilitate further High Impact Community Development Projects (HICDPs), reinforcing India's long-term role in Maldivian development.

Beyond economic and developmental cooperation, defence relations are also stabilizing. India has agreed to replace its military personnel operating aerial platforms in the Maldives with civilian experts. Simultaneously, India has reaffirmed its commitment to strengthening the Maldives' defence capabilities, announcing a \$4 million grant for supplying essential equip-

ment to the Maldivian National Defence Force (MNDFF).

The timing of these developments is crucial, given China's continued attempts to entrench itself in the Indian Ocean region. During a recent visit to Malé, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi emphasized fast-tracking key infrastructure projects, particularly in housing and road construction. His visit, while symbolic of Beijing's growing influence, lacked a strategic security component, indicating that Malé is maintaining some distance when it comes to deeper military engagement with China.

Unlike its assertive stance against Chinese encroachments elsewhere in South Asia, India has opted for quiet diplomacy and strategic patience in dealing with the Maldives. By ensuring a smooth transition in the defence arrangement and continuing its developmental initiatives, India has reinforced its indispensable role without appearing overbearing.

This approach seems to be yielding results. The recalibration of ties, characterized by renewed defence cooperation and economic collaboration, suggests that the worst of last year's turbulence is behind them. If recent months are any indication, the Maldives understands the perils of over-reliance on Beijing and the value of sustaining a cooperative relationship with India. For India, patience and continued engagement appear to be the most effective strategies in ensuring that its smallest maritime neighbour remains within its strategic fold.

STATES WATCH

A Perpetual Inferno

A fresh wave of violence in Manipur's Churachandpur district has once again exposed the deep fault lines in the state's ethnic landscape. Clashes between the Hmar and Zomi communities erupted just two days after their leaders signed a peace agreement, underscoring the futility of diplomatic efforts in the face of long-standing animosities. The unrest, which left one dead and several injured, is only the latest flare-up in a state that has been in turmoil since May 2023, when fighting between the Kuki-Zo tribes and the dominant Meitei community plunged Manipur into chaos. Despite government interventions, curfews, and appeals for calm, violence continues to simmer.

The immediate spark for the recent clashes was the attempt by a Zomi group to hoist their community flag. Hmar groups opposed the move, arguing that it would deepen ethnic divisions rather than promote unity. The disagreement quickly turned into street battles, with mobs pelting stones, torching vehicles, and firing shots. The situation had already been volatile following an earlier attack on Hmar Inpui general secretary Richard Hmar by suspected Zomi assailants, which had led to the imposition of a curfew. That restrictions and a peace deal failed to prevent further bloodshed speaks to the fragility of the region's security apparatus and the deep-seated mistrust among its communities.

A state of barely three million people, the divide between the valley-dwelling Meiteis who dominate the political and economic landscape and the hill tribes (comprising the Kuki-Zo, Zomi and Hmar groups) has caused decades of conflict in Manipur. While the Meiteis constitute around 53 percent of the population,

Despite fresh agreements, tribal tensions continue to engulf Manipur, exposing deeper political failures.

they control most of the land in the Imphal Valley and have historically held disproportionate political power. The hill tribes, who together make up about 40 percent of the population, have resented their exclusion and have often agitated for greater autonomy.

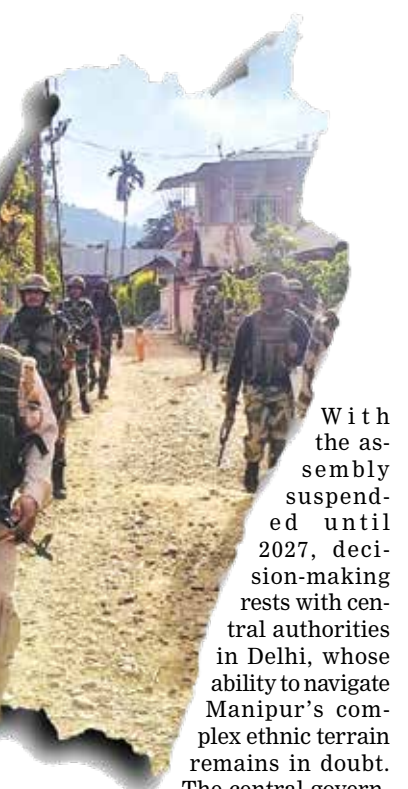
The latest bout of violence stems from the broader battle for ethnic and territorial assertion. The Kukis and Zomis, despite their shared ancestry, have had a strained relationship, especially over representation in local governance. The demand for a separate

MANIPUR

administrative region for the Kuki-Zo people has deepened tensions, as different subgroups within this broad identity struggle for political dominance. The Hmar community, traditionally allied with the Kukis, has found itself increasingly at odds with the Zomis over influence in Churachandpur.

This internal fragmentation among tribal groups comes against the backdrop of a larger, more destructive war between the Kuki-Zo groups and the Meiteis. Since May 2023, over 250 people have been killed and thousands displaced in a paralyzing ethnic conflict. The violence was triggered by the Meiteis' demand for Scheduled Tribe status, which would have given them greater access to land and government benefits, a move fiercely opposed by the Kuki-Zo tribes.

Manipur's governance has collapsed under the weight of these crises. The resignation of Chief Minister N Biren Singh last month and the subsequent imposition of President's Rule have left the state without an elected government.

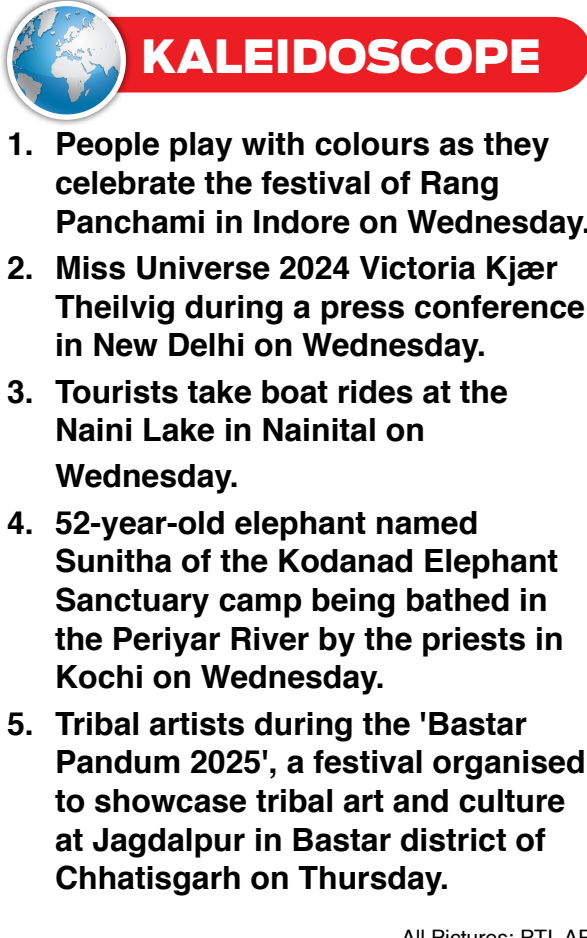


With the assembly suspended until 2027, decision-making rests with central authorities in Delhi, whose ability to navigate Manipur's complex ethnic terrain remains in doubt. The central govern-

ment has deployed security forces, imposed curfews and held high-level talks, but none of these measures have translated into lasting stability.

The six MLAs from Churachandpur and Pherzawl districts, who released a joint statement urging peace, represent a political class that appears increasingly powerless to prevent violence.

The indefinite shutdown announced by the Zomi Students' Federation following the clashes signals that anger on the ground is far from subsiding. The real danger is that Manipur in its current trajectory is becoming ungovernable. With ethnic militias controlling large swathes of territory, and the state machinery reduced to issuing appeals for peace, the region is in a state of de facto partition. Unless there is a political breakthrough, perhaps in the form of a federal restructuring that grants the hill tribes greater autonomy while ensuring Meitei interests are protected, Manipur's bloodshed will continue.



KALEIDOSCOPE

1. People play with colours as they celebrate the festival of Rang Panchami in Indore on Wednesday.
2. Miss Universe 2024 Victoria Kjær Theilvig during a press conference in New Delhi on Wednesday.
3. Tourists take boat rides at the Naini Lake in Nainital on Wednesday.
4. 52-year-old elephant named Sunitha of the Kodanad Elephant Sanctuary camp being bathed in the Periyar River by the priests in Kochi on Wednesday.
5. Tribal artists during the 'Bastar Pandum 2025', a festival organised to showcase tribal art and culture at Jagdalpur in Bastar district of Chhattisgarh on Thursday.

All Pictures: PTI, AP

EXPLAINERS

Why Is Crimea Coveted by Both Russia and Ukraine?

Russia's seizure of the Crimean Peninsula from Ukraine exactly 11 years ago on March 18, 2014, was quick and bloodless, but it sent Moscow's relations with the West into a downward spiral unseen since the Cold War.

It also paved the way for Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022, during which Moscow annexed more land from the war-torn country. A look at the diamond-shaped peninsula in the Black Sea, coveted by both Russia and Ukraine for its naval bases and beaches:

Why is Crimea important?

Crimea's unique location makes it a strategically important asset, and Russia has spent centuries fighting for it. Crimea was home to Turkic-speaking Tatars when the Russian empire first annexed it in the 18th century. It briefly regained independence as a Tatar republic two centuries later before being swallowed by the Soviet Union.

In 1944, Soviet dictator Josef Stalin deported nearly 200,000 Tatars, or about a third of Crimea's population, to Central Asia, 3,200 kilometres to the east. Stalin had accused them of collaborating with Nazi Germany — a claim widely dismissed by historians. An estimated half of them died in the next 18 months of hunger and harsh conditions.

Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev transferred the peninsula from Russia to Ukraine in 1954, when both were part of the USSR, to commemorate the 300th anniversary of the unification of Moscow and Kyiv. In 1991, when the Soviet Union collapsed, the peninsula became part of newly independent Ukraine.

Russia kept a foot in the door, however: Its Black Sea Fleet had a base in the city of Sevastopol, and Crimea — as part of Ukraine — continued to host it.

Sevastopol also was a preferred holiday destination for Nicholas II, the last Russian czar. The southern town of Yalta was a prime holiday destination in Soviet times, with many sanatoriums there. It drew



worldwide renown when Stalin, US President Franklin D. Roosevelt and British Prime Minister Winston Churchill met there in 1945 to discuss the fate of Germany and Europe after World War II.

For Kyiv, Crimea had been a strategic asset, too. By the time Russia annexed it in 2014, it had been a part of Ukraine for 60 years and had become part of the country's identity.

What happened after annexation of Crimea?

Putin has called Crimea "a sacred place," and has prosecuted those who publicly argue it is part of Ukraine. Repressions against the Crimean Tatars continued under Putin, despite Moscow's denials of discrimination. They strongly opposed the annexation, and an estimated 30,000 of them fled the peninsula between 2014 and 2021.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy vowed to retake it and said that Russia "won't be able to steal" the peninsula.

Russia's relations with the West plummeted to new lows. The United States, the European Union and other countries imposed sanctions on Moscow and its officials.

Weeks after the annexation, fighting broke out in eastern Ukraine between pro-Kremlin militias and Kyiv's forces. Moscow threw its weight behind the insurgents, even though the Kremlin denied supporting them with troops and weapons.

Russian hard-liners later criticised Putin for failing to capture all of Ukraine that year, arguing it was easily possible at a time when the government in Kyiv was in disarray and its military in shambles.

The fighting in eastern Ukraine continued, on and off, until February 2022, when Putin recognised the two war-torn Ukrainian regions of Donetsk and Luhansk as independent states and several days later launched a full-scale invasion of Ukraine.

What role does Crimea play in Russia's war in Ukraine?

In its assault on Ukraine, Moscow deployed troops and weapons to Crimea, allowing Russian forces to quickly seize large parts of southern Ukraine in the first weeks of the war.

Before the invasion, Zelenskyy focused on diplomatic efforts to get Crimea back, but after Russian troops rolled across the border, Kyiv started publicly contemplating retaking the peninsula by force.

The peninsula soon became a battleground, with Ukraine launching drone attacks and bombing it to try to dislodge Moscow's hold on the territory. The attacks targeted the Russian Black Sea Fleet there, as well as ammunition depots, air fields and Putin's prized asset — the Kerch Bridge linking Crimea to Russia, which was struck in October 2022 and again in July 2023. -AP

Why US Targeted Houthi Rebels?

The United States under President Donald Trump has launched a new campaign of intense airstrikes targeting Yemen's Houthi rebels.

The recent strikes killed at least 53 people, including children, and wounded others. The campaign is likely to continue, part of a wider pressure campaign by Trump now targeting the Houthis' main benefactor, Iran, as well.

How it all started

The Houthi rebels attacked over 100 merchant vessels with missiles and drones, sinking two vessels and killing four sailors, from November 2023 until January this year. Their leadership described the attacks as aiming to end the Israeli war against Hamas in the Gaza Strip.

The campaign also greatly raised the Houthis' profile in the wider Arab world and tamped down on public criticism against their human rights abuses and crackdowns on dissent and aid workers.

Why US targeted Houthis before?

Under former President Joe Biden, the US and the United Kingdom began a series of airstrikes against the Houthis starting in January 2024. A December report by The International Institute for Strategic Studies said the US and its partners struck the Houthis over 260 times up to that point.

US military officials during that period acknowledged having a far-wider target list for possible strikes.

While the Biden administration didn't go too far into explaining its targeting, analysts believe officials largely were trying to avoid civilian casualties and not rekindle Yemen's stalemate war, which pits the Houthis and their allies against the country's exiled government and their local and international allies, such as Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates.

The Trump administration, however, appears willing to go after more targets, based on the weekend's strikes and public remarks



made by officials.

"We're doing the entire world a favour by getting rid of these guys and their ability to strike global shipping," US Secretary of State Marco Rubio told CBS News' "Face The Nation" on Sunday. "That's the mission here, and it will continue until that's carried out."

Rubio added: "Some of the key people involved in those missile launches are no longer with us, and I can tell you that some of the facilities that they used are no longer existing, and that will continue."

Impact on wider Mideast?

In two words: More attacks. The Houthis said last week they'll again target "Israeli" ships travelling through Mideast waterways like the Gulf of Aden and the Red Sea, because of Israel's blocking of aid to the Gaza Strip. No rebel attack targeting commercial shipping has been reported as of Monday morning.

However, the new US campaign likely could inspire Houthi attacks at sea or on land beyond American warships. The rebels previously targeted oil infrastructure in Saudi Arabia and the UAE, two countries deeply involved in Yemen's war since 2015.

Gulf Arab countries "will distance themselves from ongoing hostilities but now face threats to their major oil infrastructure. The Houthis will want to hit President Donald Trump where it hurts, oil prices."

Meanwhile, the Houthis likely

will expand their possible targets for ship attacks, meaning shippers will continue to stay out of the region, said Jakob P Larsen, the head of maritime security for BIMCO, the largest international association representing shipowners.

The stand of Iranians?

Iran long has armed the Houthis, who are members of Islam's minority Shiite Zaydi sect, which ruled Yemen for 1,000 years until 1962. Tehran routinely denies arming the rebels, despite physical evidence, numerous seizures and experts tying the weapons back to Iran.

That's likely because Tehran wants to avoid sanctions for violating a United Nations arms embargo on the Houthis.

The Houthis now form the strongest group within Iran's self-described "Axis of Resistance." Others like Lebanon's Hezbollah and the Palestinian militant group Hamas have been decimated by Israel after the October 7, 2023 attack by Hamas that sparked Israel's war of attrition in the Gaza Strip.

Allied Shiite militias in Iraq largely have kept their heads down since the US launched retaliatory attacks last year over a drone attack that killed three American troops and injured at least 34 others at a military base in Jordan.

While Iranian state television aired footage of civilian casualties from the weekend strikes in Yemen, top political leaders stayed away from suggestion Tehran itself would get involved in the fight. -AP

Team India to get Rs 58 cr cash reward



New Delhi: The BCCI on Thursday announced a cash reward of Rs 58 crore for the Indian cricket team that won the ICC Champions Trophy earlier this month in Dubai.

The Rohit Sharma-led India defeated New Zealand by four wickets in the final to grab their third Champions Trophy title.

The financial windfall will cover the players, coaching and support staff and members of the men's selection committee headed by Ajit Agarkar. The Board did not give a break-up of the reward in its statement.

"Winning back-to-back ICC titles is special and this reward recognises Team India's dedication and excellence on the global stage," said BCCI president Roger Binny in a release.

Binny said the Champions Trophy triumph is a testament to India's strong cricketing eco-system.

"This was also our second ICC Trophy in 2025, following the ICC U19 Women's World Cup triumph and it highlights the strong cricketing ecosystem in place in our country," he said.

In fact, it was India's third ICC trophy in the last eight months as they had won the last year's T20 World Cup, beating South Africa in the final.

BCCI secretary Devajit Saikia said the victory justified India's top-ranking in white ball formats.

"Their dominance in world cricket is a result of years of hard work and strategic execution. This victory has justified India's top ranking in white-ball

cricket, and we are sure the team will continue to excel in the years to come," said Saikia.

India dominated the Champions Trophy from the start, registering four commanding victories en route to the final.

India began their campaign with a solid six-wicket win over New Zealand, then secured a convincing six-wicket triumph against Pakistan.

They continued their momentum with a 44-run victory over New Zealand before overcoming Australia by four wickets in the semifinal.

"The dedication and commitment shown by the players have set a new benchmark, and we are confident that Indian cricket will keep raising the bar on the global stage," Saikia

added.

BCCI vice-president Rajeev Shukla said Indian players displayed excellent composure under pressure during the ICC marquee event.

"The players exhibited remarkable composure under pressure, and their success is an inspiration to aspiring cricketers across the country."

"The team has once again proved that Indian cricket is built on a strong foundation of skill, mental toughness, and a winning mentality," he said.

Prabhat Bhatia, the BCCI treasurer, and joint secretary Rohan Gauns Desai too lauded the team and said the governing body will continue to work towards strengthening the cricketing infrastructure in the country. -PTI

PCB to be richer by USD 10 million

Lahore: The Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) on Thursday claimed that it is set to earn approximately USD 10 million as profit by hosting the Champions Trophy, where the Indian team emerged champion.

PCB spokesperson, Aamir Mir and Chief Financial Officer (CFO) Javed Murtaza addressed media following reports that Board had suffered financial losses by hosting the ODI tournament and spending enormous amounts on upgrading stadiums in Karachi, Lahore and Rawalpindi for the event.

"All expenses for the tournament were covered by the ICC," Mir said adding that the PCB generated revenue through gate money and ticket sales.

"Additionally, after the audit, we expect to receive another Rs 3 billion from the ICC," he added.

He also claimed that PCB had initially targeted Rs 2 billion in earnings from the Champions Trophy, but they surpassed this goal.

He also claimed that the PCB's total revenue for the 2023-24 fiscal year reached Rs 10 billion.



A poster of Kolkata Knight Riders put up at Eden Gardens ahead of the opening ceremony of the Indian Premier League (IPL) 2025 cricket tournament in Kolkata on Thursday. Pic: PTI

WTC 2025-27 Cycle

Bonus point system to be pondered over

New Delhi: The International Cricket Council (ICC) is likely to ponder over a new bonus points system during its board meeting in April which could give more weightage to bigger victories, especially overseas, during the next World Test Championship cycle.

The 2025-27 WTC cycle will begin with India's five-match away Test series against England in June.

As per the prevailing rules, the team winning by the smallest margin or by an innings gets 12 points, six points for a tie and four points for a draw.

But this could see a change as the global governing body, as per a report in Telegraph, is considering awarding bonus points for innings victories or for a win above a certain big margin such as 100 runs.

"In fact, issues such as

giving bonus points for innings wins etc has been in continuous discussion from the beginning of the WTC, as many teams felt that due weight is not getting for wins against big teams," a source close to the development told PTI.

"So, such topics have been a part of discussions, and this could again come up for deliberations," he said.

But this could now change as the ICC might bring in bonus points for landslide wins, and extra points could be given to victories over frontline teams such as India, Australia and England, as per their rankings.

"Yeah, it's a good move if it really happens. The teams will be more motivated to go for results, as we could see some exciting games," a former India player told PTI on condition of anonymity.

The ICC is also mulling giving extra points for wins away from home. "Yeah, it will be a motivating factor for, you know, those 'smaller' teams, Look, when New Zealand beat India last year, it was a historic win for them as not many teams came here and beat us. But they did not get any extra points for it."

"While winning away from home in itself can act as a motivating factor, now the teams will have that carrot in front of them — extra points, if it really happens," he added.

Other than this, the ICC board meeting might also consider the two-tier Test system.

"It needs a lot of discussion before putting into practice as some teams might feel deprived of regular chances to play against strong teams like India or Australia."

Rajawat, Muthuswamy in second round



Basel: India's Priyanshu Rajawat entered the pre-quarterfinals of the men's singles event of the Swiss Open Super 300 badminton tournament with a straight-game win over local player Tobias Kuenzi here.

Rajawat, ranked 35th in the world, beat Kuenzi 21-10 21-11 in just 29 minutes in an opening round match late on Wednesday to set up a clash with Toma Junior Popov of France.

S Sankar Muthuswamy Subramanian also progressed to the next round, beating Magnus Johanesen of Denmark 21-5 21-16. He will face second seed Anders Antonsen of Denmark later on Thursday.

But it was curtains for Kiran George in the men's singles as he lost 21-18 17-21 10-21 against Rasmus Gemke of Denmark in the opening round.



Sindhu ousted
Two-time Olympic medalist and seventh seed PV Sindhu's poor run continued as she crashed out in the opening of the women's singles event, losing 17-21 19-21 against lower ranked Julie Jakobsen of Denmark.

In another all-Indian women's singles first round match, Anupama Upadhyay beat Anmol Kharb 21-14 21-13 to set up a clash against fourth seed Putri Kusuma Wardani of Indonesia.

Sathish Kumar Karunakaran and Aadya Variyath also progressed to the second round of the mixed doubles event, beating Algerian duo of Tanina Violette Mammeri and Kocella Mammeri 21-15 22-20. PTI

The Indian duo will next play Chinese Taipei's Kuang Heng Liu and Yu Chieh Jheng.

Tour de France returning to UK in 2027

Paris: Britain will host the Grand Départ of both the Tour de France and the women's version of the race in 2027, organisers said.

It will be the 28th time that the Tour de France starts from a foreign country, and the first time since 2014 — when the Tour began in the Yorkshire region — that Britain hosts the start of cycling's biggest race. The 2007 Tour started in London.

For the Tour de France Femmes, it will be the first time holding stages in Britain, with the start location to be announced later.

The men's and women's races will take place on different dates.

Full details of the route have yet to be announced but organisers revealed on Wednesday that the men's Tour de France will begin in Edinburgh, Scotland. There will be stages in England and Wales, too.

When the Tour departed from Yorkshire, the event drew enormous crowds.

-PTI



New Zealand Prime Minister Christopher Luxon plays cricket at Wankede Stadium in Mumbai. Pic: PTI

Swimming Championship in India

New Delhi: India will host the 11th Asian Swimming Championship at Ahmedabad's Naranpura Sports Complex from October 1 to 15, the national federation announced on Thursday.

Swimmers from Japan and South Korea are expected to compete at the continental meet, marking the event's first-ever edition in the country.

"We have received in-principle approval from

the Gujarat government and Asia Aquatics. The MoU is in its early stages and should be signed by March or mid-April," Swimming Federation of India Secretary-General Monal Chokshi told PTI.

The 10th Asian Age Group Championships in 2019 was the last international swimming event hosted by India.

The championship will feature swimming, diving, artistic swimming, and wa-

ter polo.

Ahmedabad remains central to India's 2036 Olympic bid, with the Naranpura Sports Complex — set for completion next month — designed as an Olympic-standard venue for multiple sports, including swimming and wrestling.

The national junior championship will serve as a test event for the Asian Championship.

-PTI

Riyan to lead RR in three IPL games

By Kushan Sarkar

New Delhi: Rising star Riyan Parag will lead Rajasthan Royals in their first three IPL games as regular captain Sanju Samson has been told to avoid wicket-keeping duties by the BCCI due to a finger surgery, which means that he will only be available as a batter in these games.

Samson's finger was fractured after a Jofra Archer delivery hit him during the T20 International against England in Mumbai, following which he had to undergo a minor surgery last month.

While he has been cleared to bat, it is understood that medical and sports science teams at the BCCI's Centre of Excellence in Bengaluru have told to give his fingers some more rest before he starts keeping wickets.

Parag (23) will have the distinction of being one of the youngest captains in IPL. Virat Kohli holds the top position in that list having captained Royal Challengers Bengaluru as a 22-year-old.

"Rajasthan Royals have announced that Riyan Par-

ag will lead the team for the first three matches of IPL 2025," RR said in a statement.

"The young all-rounder will take charge in the opening fixture against Sunrisers Hyderabad on March 23, followed by home encounters against defending champions Kolkata Knight Riders on March 26 and five-time champions Chennai Super Kings on March 30," the franchise stated.

Samson, an integral part of the Royals set-up, will remain a key contributor with the bat till he gets cleared for wicket-keeping and fielding. He will return as captain once fully fit and could be used as an impact substitute in these three games.

The Royals management explained why the Assam cricketer got the nod ahead of another exciting and internationally more experienced Yashasvi Jaiswal.

"Rajasthan Royals' decision to hand Riyan the captaincy underscores the franchise's confidence in his leadership, a skill he has demonstrated through his tenure as Assam's domestic captain."

Khelo India Para Games open with blitz

New Delhi: Sports Minister Mansukh Mandaviya on Thursday inaugurated the second edition of the Khelo India Para Games here and lauded the country's para-athletes for showing steely resolve despite the many challenges they face.

Over 1300 athletes will compete for the top honours in the Games that will conclude on March 27. Participants include several high-profile para-athletes like Paris Paralympics gold-medallist archer Harvinder Singh, club thrower Dharambir, and Khel Ratna-winning high jumper

Praveen Kumar. "Khelo India slowly and steadily established its importance. Today when I am here witnessing these athletes, I see the fire in their eyes, I see the belief. It is indeed in the right direction," Mandaviya said during the opening ceremony of the Games here.

"It has made the nation believe, it has made the PM believe that these games, the platform has enabled us to showcase our talent and we will not disappoint anyone," he added.

Mandaviya cited India's Paris Paralympics perfor-

mance to highlight the progress made in para-sports. India won 29 medals in the French capital last year, including seven gold, nine silver and 13 bronze medals.

"The biggest example of it is the Paris Paralympics performance of these athletes. These athletes may have seen something taken away from them but they have never let it stop them," Mandaviya said referring to the often tragic circumstances that have resulted in disability for the athletes.

"I want to wish everyone

good luck, do well. I now declare the Khelo India Para Games 2025 open," the minister added.

The event started with Paris bronze-medallist sprinter Simran Sharma, who is partially blind, Khel Ratna awardee Praveen Kumar, Paris gold-winning shuttler Nitesh Kumar, and two-time Paralympics medal-winning runner Preethi Pal handing over the Games torch to the sports minister.

Also present was Union Minister of Social Justice and Empowerment Virendra Kumar.



Artists perform during the opening ceremony of the Khelo India Para Games 2025 in New Delhi on Thursday. Pic: PTI