

# THE PERFECT VOICE



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## States-Centre Rift Over Delimitation

# Southern states gain allies

### JAC TELLS CENTRE TO FREEZE PARLIAMENTARY CONSTITUENCIES BY 25 MORE YEARS

**Chennai:** The DMK-led Joint Action Committee meeting to ensure "fair delimitation" on Saturday urged the Centre to extend the freeze on Parliamentary constituencies, based on the 1971 Census population, by another 25 years and decided that MPs would submit a joint representation to press for demands to Prime Minister Narendra Modi during the ongoing Parliamentary session.

A resolution adopted in the JAC meeting said that any delimitation exercise carried out by the union government to improve the "content and character" of democracy should be carried out transparently, enabling political parties of all the states, state governments and other stakeholders to deliberate, discuss and contribute.

"Given the fact that the legislative intent behind the 42nd, 84th and 87th Constitutional amendments was to protect / incentivise states which have implemented population control measures effectively and the goal of national population stabilisation has not yet been achieved,



Tamil Nadu Chief Minister MK Stalin with Pinarayi Vijayan at the first Joint Action Committee (JAC) meeting in Chennai on Saturday. Pic: PTI

the freeze on Parliamentary constituencies based on 1971 Census Population, should be extended by another 25 years," it said.

#### Population control is key

The states which have effectively implemented the population control programme and consequently whose population share has come down, should not

be penalised and the Centre must enact necessary constitutional amendments for this purpose.

"The core committee consisting of Members of Parliament from the represented states will coordinate the parliamentary strategies to counter any attempts by the union government to undertake any delimitation exercise contrary to the principles

mentioned above. The core committee of MPs shall submit a joint representation on the above lines to the Prime Minister of India during the ongoing Parliamentary session," the resolution said.

The political parties from different states represented in the meeting will initiate efforts to bring appropriate legislative assembly resolutions in their

#### Are you genuinely concerned on delimitation: RSS

**Bengaluru:** RSS joint general secretary Arun Kumar on Saturday asked those discussing the delimitation process have any political agenda or they were genuinely concerned about it.

"In my opinion, those who are taking part in the discussions on the delimitation should introspect whether it's their political agenda or they are genuinely thinking about the interest of their region," Kumar said, during a press briefing.

"Let them (Stalin and others) think about it and you (media) should ask them if the delimitation process has actually started," he added.

"Neither the census has started nor the discussion over the delimitation has been initiated (by the Centre). Even the Act has not been drafted yet," he pointed out.

Noting that delimitation is a constitutional process in India and elections are conducted under a democratic process, Kumar said delimitation happens for elections under a law. He explained that the delimitation happened in 2002 after an Act was promulgated. Prior to that, a similar exercise was carried out in 1972.

He also recalled that in 2002 the freezing of parliamentary seats was done and the matter was closed.

respective states on the issue and communicate the same to the union government.

"The JAC will also undertake necessary efforts to disseminate information on the history and context of past delimitation exercises and the consequences of the proposed delimita-

tion among the citizens of their respective States, through a coordinated public opinion mobilization strategy."

The DMK, in the meanwhile, commenced its reach out exercise on delimitation by way of advertisements in the social media. -PTI

"Set up an expert panel to draw up the political and legal action plan. Name the panel as 'Joint Action Committee for fair delimitation'. We are not against delimitation, we are for fair delimitation."

M.K. Stalin, Chief Minister, Tamil Nadu

"The delimitation of LS seats was hanging like the sword of Damocles. The BJP government is going ahead on the issue without any consultation."

Pinarayi Vijayan, Chief Minister, Kerala

"The BJP wanted to increase seats in states where it wins and reduce in states where it loses. In Punjab, the BJP does not win."

Bhagwant Mann, Chief Minister, Punjab

"If BJP carried out delimitation exercise based on population, south India will lose its political voice, and north will make us secondary citizens."

A Revanth Reddy, Chief Minister, Telangana

"Our stand is that population should not be the only criterion to determine the number of seats in the highest representative body of our country."

Naveen Patnaik, Chief, Biju Janata Dal

"There is no clarity on delimitation, and we are concerned. Delimitation should be done, but in a fair manner. We are in touch with the DMK."

Supriya Sule, MP, NCP (SP)

## Injured man dies in hospital



**Nagpur:** A 40-year-old man, who sustained injuries in the violence that broke out in Maharashtra's Nagpur city earlier this week, died while undergoing treatment at a hospital on Saturday, an official said.

A hospital official said Irfan Ansari died at 1.20 pm at the Indra Gandhi Government Medical College & Hospital (IGGMCH).

He said that Ansari had been admitted with grievous wounds.

Ansari, a welder, left home around 11 pm on Monday to catch a train to Itarsi from Nagpur railway station, one of the areas affected by the violence.

Large-scale stone pelting and arson were reported in several parts of Nagpur on March 17 over rumours that a "chadar" with holy inscriptions was burnt during protests led by the Vish-

#### NAGPUR RIOTS

wa Hindu Parishad (VHP) seeking the removal of Mughal emperor Aurangzeb's tomb, which is in Chhatrapati Sambhajinagar district.

The Ansari family received a call from the IGGMCH, informing them that Irfan had been admitted following an accident.

The deceased's brother Imran had earlier told PTI that Irfan suffered severe head wounds and a fractured leg and was undergoing treatment in the ICU, receiving oxygen.

The family remained unaware of what transpired during his journey to the railway station.

Will use bulldozer if needed, says CM ... Page 2

## Sushant case: CBI files closure report

**New Delhi:** The CBI has filed a closure report in the alleged suicide case of Bollywood actor Sushant Singh Rajput, officials said Saturday.

The CBI has submitted its findings before a special court in Mumbai which will now decide whether to accept the report or order further probe by the agency, the officials said.

Rajput was found hanging from the ceiling of his apartment in suburban Bandra in Mumbai on June 14, 2020. He was (34).

The central agency had taken over the probe from Bihar Police which had registered an abetment of suicide case on a complaint filed in Patna by his father K K Singh.

In its conclusive medico-legal opinion to the CBI, forensic specialists at AIIMS had dismissed the claims of "poisoning and strangling" made in the case. The CBI had recorded the statements of Rhea Chakraborty, the rumoured girlfriend of Rajput, and others in his close circle, and collected the actor's medical records.



Rapper Karan Aujla and actor Disha Patani perform during the opening ceremony of Indian Premier League 2025 at the Eden Gardens in Kolkata on Saturday. Pic: PTI

## Cash Allegations Against Judge CJJ constitutes 3-member probe committee

**New Delhi:** Chief Justice Sanjiv Khanna on Saturday constituted a three-member committee to conduct an inquiry into allegations against Justice Yashwant Varma from whose official residence a large stash of cash was allegedly discovered after a fire.

CJI Khanna ordered the in-house inquiry after getting a report from Chief Justice of Delhi High Court D K Upadhyay and asked him not to assign any judicial work to Justice Yashwant Varma.

The inquiry committee consists of Justice Sheel Nagu, Chief Justice of the High Court of Punjab and Haryana, Justice G S Sandhawalia, Chief Justice of the High Court of Himachal Pradesh, and Anu Sivaraman, Judge of the High Court of Karnataka.

"The Chief Justice of the High Court of Delhi for the time being has been asked not to assign any judicial

work to Mr Justice Yashwant Varma.

"The Report submitted by the Chief Justice of the High Court of Delhi, response of Mr. Justice Yashwant Varma, and other documents, are being uploaded on the Supreme Court website," a statement from the top court said.

The purported discovery of a huge stash of cash happened when a fire broke out at Varma's Lutyens Delhi residence at around 11.35 pm on March 14, prompting the Delhi fire department personnel to rush to the spot and douse it.

Delhi Fire Services Chief Atul Garg, however, denied claims of the cash discovery by the firefighters.

The incident created ripples in the legal circuit, with many voices calling for the judge's resignation while criticising the Supreme Court collegium decision to transfer him.

-PTI

#### Delhi HC chief justice submits report to CJI

Delhi High Court's Chief Justice D K Upadhyaya has submitted a report to Chief Justice of India (CJI) Sanjiv Khanna in connection with the alleged discovery of cash from Justice Yashwant Varma's official residence here. Justice Upadhyaya had commenced an in-house enquiry procedure over the incident, collecting evidence and information. He submitted his report to the CJI on Friday after talking to all the authorities concerned, including the fire department and police.

## Art market in a 'crazy boom'

### MF HUSAIN'S 'GRAM YATRA' SOLD FOR RECORD SHATTERING RS 118 CRORE

**New Delhi:** The record-breaking auction of legendary painter MF Husain's work has thrilled gallerists, art collectors and emerging artists alike, as excitement grows over the "crazy boom" in the art market and the much-awaited entry of Indian artworks into the 100-crore club.

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 a Christie's auction in New York on March 19, setting the new record for the most expensive work of modern Indian art.

The artwork, according to industry sources, is bought by Indian art collector and philanthropist Kiran Nadar. However, the Kiran Nadar Museum of Art (KNMA), where Nadar is a trustee, has declined to comment on the acquisition.

The milestone event has sparked widespread enthusiasm across the art

community, some even calling it as a transformative moment for Indian art on the global stage.

"It is an absolute delight to see this world record being achieved for MF Husain, this was long overdue and the world is finally waking up to the glory of Indian talent. For many years now from the modern and even contemporaries, there's so much talent that's emerging that had not previously found a world stage.

"With this milestone, we

would bring attention to what can be achieved with talent that is present in the land of India, MF Husain has been at the forefront of attention," said Arjun Sawhney, avid art collector and co-founder of Delhi-based Gallery Pristine Contemporary.

Pooja Singhal, founder of Pichvai Tradition & Beyond, echoed Sawhney's sentiments and said the art market is going through a crazy boom, reminiscent of the period between 2000 and 2008,

when the sales peaked in 2006 and 2008.

Similarly, buoyed by the over-118-crore sale of Husain's masterpiece, Mohit Jain of the Dhoomimal Art Centre said the staggering figure would undoubtedly impact the market—and the Indian art scene as a whole—which he believed is on an upward trend.

"Fortunately, since 2005, the Indian art market has seen a very positive trend and will continue so. This will also attract new collec-

tors globally, where they can trust Indian Modern Art and also get inspired to acquire. But, I believe the effect of this figure will still be limited to the era, the strength, the subject and the size of each artist," he explained.

Comprising 13 unique panels spanning nearly 14 feet on a single canvas, "Gram Yatra" - meaning 'village pilgrimage' - is widely regarded as a cornerstone of Husain's oeuvre. The work celebrates the diversity and



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

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. -PTI



# Fadnavis promises strict action, 'Bulldozer will roll'

**Nagpur:** The state's Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis said on Saturday that the bulldozer will roll if necessary, when asked if perpetrators of violence in Nagpur will face the "Uttar Pradesh style" action.

Addressing the media, he said the government would recover the cost of property damaged during the violence from rioters, and if they failed to compensate, their properties would be seized and sold to recover the losses.

Replying to a query whether "bulldozer action" will be initiated against rioters in Nagpur on the lines of Uttar Pradesh, Fadnavis said, "The Maharashtra government has its own style of working... bulldozer will roll when necessary. Wherever wrong things are happening, they will be crushed. Nobody (perpetrators) will be spared."

He emphasised that strict action would be taken against those who attacked police officers during the unrest.

Fadnavis stressed that the incident cannot be termed "intelligence failure", but the intelligence (gathering) could have been better. "Police will be alert. We won't tolerate any kind of disturbance".

He said 104 individuals have been identified so far, following an analysis of CCTV footage and video recordings. Action has been initiated against 92 people, including 12 minors, as per the law.

The violence erupted on March 17, after rumours spread that a 'chadar' with religious inscriptions had been burnt during protests led by the Vishwa Hindu



## Fourteen more held; fresh FIRs registered

At least 14 more persons have been arrested in connection with the violence in Nagpur earlier this week, taking the total number of arrests to 105, a senior police official has said. According to the police, 14 persons, including 10 juveniles, were nabbed on Friday. The official said three more FIRs have been registered in connection with the incident.

"Fourteen accused were arrested from different parts of the city in connection with the riots. Three more FIRs have been registered related to the riots," Nagpur police commissioner Ravinder Kumar Singhal said. He said the decision to lift the curfew from some parts of the city would be made after a high-level review meeting. Key accused Fahim Khan is among those booked for sedition.

Parishad (VHP) demanding the removal of Aurangzeb's tomb in Chhatrapati Sambhajnagar.

The clashes resulted in widespread stone-pelting and arson across several parts of the city, leaving 33 police personnel, including three Deputy Commissioner of Police-rank officers, injured.

### Modi to visit Nagpur

Fadnavis said Prime Minister Narendra Modi's scheduled visit to Nagpur on March 30 would proceed as planned, unaffected by the violence.

## NAGPUR RIOTS

"The cost of properties damaged during Nagpur violence will be recovered from rioters and the failure to pay up would lead to the seizure and selling of their properties to recover losses.

"My government will not rest until those responsible for attacking the police are found and dealt with sternly," said Fadnavis, who also heads the Home Ministry.

He said the situation in Nagpur is calm now, and ef-

orts are underway to relax the curfew. "Riots broke out only in parts of the city, while 80 per cent of Nagpur wasn't impacted," he added.

### Compensation for victims

Fadnavis stated that the distribution of compensation for victims would begin soon and that 68 social media posts that aggravated the situation had been identified and deleted.

He said those who circulated inflammatory content would be charged as co-accused for their role in incit-

ing violence. He added it was too early to comment on a foreign or Bangladeshi link to the riots as the probe is underway.

### Inflammatory social media posts

Fadnavis said those who circulated inflammatory posts on social media that aggravated the situation would be made co-accused in the riots case because they facilitated in instigating people.

"68 such social media posts have been identified and deleted," he added.

### Female cop not violated

When asked if rioters behaved indecently with a female police constable, the chief minister said he had spoken with the police commissioner (who told him) that the purported incident didn't take place.

"Rioters had thrown stones at female police constables," he admitted.

Notably, an FIR had stated that a group of rioters allegedly touched a woman constable inappropriately and tried to disrobe her during the violence.

### CM Visits Nagpur

During his first visit to Nagpur after the violence on Friday, the chief minister assessed the situation and chaired a meeting with senior police and administrative officers at the police commissionerate.

When asked if Congress was politicising the issue by dispatching a committee to visit the violence-hit areas, Fadnavis pointed out that one of the members of the visiting panel is an accused in the Akola violence case.



Prime Minister Narendra Modi with BJP leader Archana Patil during a meeting in New Delhi. Pic: PTI

# CMO orders study against tiger attacks

**Mumbai:** The Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis has called for special measures to prevent casualties due to tiger attacks in Gadchiroli district and ordered a study by experts, an official said on Saturday.

As per a statement issued by the Chief Minister's Office, the report of the study is to be submitted within three months, with measures such as special compensation to families of persons who have died in tiger attacks in the last five years and translocation of big cats.

The chief minister has taken serious note of the loss of lives due to tiger attacks and directed that a plan be formulated under the guidance of Pravin Pardeshi, chief executive officer of the Maharashtra Institution for Transformation (MITRA).

Pardeshi held a meeting

with senior forest officers in Nagpur on Saturday to discuss various strategies.

More than 50 people have died in tiger attacks in Gadchiroli district in five years. The attacks have occurred in the Gadchiroli, Cham-ooshi, Aramori, Wadsa, and Dhanora areas.

Based on the study by experts, some tigers will be translocated within three months.

The chief minister has directed that information on families of persons who died in tiger attacks in the last five years be collected, and they receive special compensation, the statement said.

It was also decided to appoint forest patils for every village and supply compressed biogas (CBG), produced using grass from fields, through pipelines to prevent villagers from entering forests in search of firewood.

Expedient compensation for crops damaged by wild animals, assessing the social and economic status of locals in six villages in Chhapra sanctuary for relocation, and finding new areas for resettlement were other decisions made during the meeting.

Experts from organisations, such as the Wildlife Institute, will also be appointed for further action.

It was noted that tigers involved in human-animal conflicts tend to be older, and there is a need for a policy decision regarding the relocation of such big cats. -PTI

# Jayant Patil meets Ajit Pawar

By Correspondent

**Mumbai:** Jayant Patil, the state NCP (SP) chief who has been at loggerheads with Sharad Pawar's grand-nephew Rohit for a while, held a closed-door meeting with NCP national president Ajit Pawar on Saturday. The meeting went on for an hour which raised many eyebrows in the political circle.

The meeting was held at the Vasantdada Sugar Institute at Manjari in Pune just prior to the institute's governing council meeting. According to sources, Ajit Pawar arrived for the meeting at around 8 am. First, he met some visitors.

Later he accepted memorandums from citizens who were waiting for him since early morning. Around that time Jayant Patil also arrived at the institute and directly entered Pawar's cabin. Both leaders were together for more than an hour.

NCP (SP) chief Sharad Pawar arrived at 9.40 am at the institute. When he entered the meeting between Ajit Pawar and Jayant Patil was on. Pawar then presided over the governing council of the institute. Former

ministers Dilip Walse Patil and Harshvardhan Patil were present. Ajit Pawar and Jayant Patil joined later.

Amidst speculation that Jayant Patil will leave the NCP (SP), this closed-door meeting added to the ongoing churning. In recent days, speculation has been rife that Jayant Patil might switch loyalties to the NCP led by Ajit Pawar. However, Patil has denied any such possibility. Sources in the NCP (SP) said that Patil is upset because of growing clout of Rohit Pawar in the party fold. He strongly feels that Rohit wants to take over the reins of the party.

Meanwhile, Shiv Sena (UBT) spokesperson Sanjay Raut criticised the closed-door meeting. "We parted ways with Eknath Shinde but we never met his MLAs or held closed-door meetings. They (NCP [SP] leaders) keep meeting each other frequently," he said.

Earlier this month, Shiv Sena spokesperson and Minister Sanjay Shirsat had said, "He is not likely to stay in the NCP led by Sharad Pawar. He is not in a mood to stay there. He will be joining Ajit Pawar's party."

# Cong slams Mahayuti

**Nagpur:** The state's Congress leader Manikrao Thakare on Saturday accused the Mahayuti government of being biased against a particular community and claimed that police did not allow his party's "fact-finding" committee to visit violence-hit areas in Nagpur.

Thakare, head of the seven-member committee, also wondered how the government would ensure a fair and impartial probe into the Nagpur violence.

Addressing a press conference, Thakare said the government had failed to protect its citizens while its ministers routinely targeted a particular community and spread hate.

Action should be taken not only against those involved in arson and violence but also the instigators, he said. "We met Hindus and Muslims here to understand the sequence of incidents and who was responsible," said the Congress leader.

He accused the police of not allowing the party's fact-finding committee to visit the violence-hit areas of the city under the pretext of curfew.

His comments came even as Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis promised action against the perpetrators.



Bollywood actor Kim Sharma during an event Celebrating Power of Women in Entertainment in Mumbai on Friday. Pic: PTI

# LOC issued against Koratkar

By Correspondent

**Mumbai:** The Kolhapur Police have issued a Look Out Circular and took the passport of the 'missing' journalist Prashant Koratkar amid speculation that he had reportedly fled to Dubai, even as the Opposition slammed the Mahayuti government.

Kolhapur Police said that they have issued a LOC and dispatched crack search teams to Mumbai, Chandrapur and Nagpur.

"We have also alerted the Bureau of Civil Aviation Security (BCAS) to keep tabs in case he travels

by air... We are hopeful of tracking him soon," a top police official said.

The Kolhapur Police directed Koratkar's wife to deposit his passport with the local police station.

In the thick of the political row over Koratkar, the Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) allies Congress-Shiv Sena (UBT) and Nationalist Congress Party (SP) trained guns on the Mahayuti regime.

Without mincing words, state Congress President Harshwardhan Sapkal demanded to know how this could happen and whether "the government was sleep-

ing when Koratkar managed to slip away".

This morning a photo showing Koratkar in Dubai went viral but later reports said that it was an old photo and he may still be hiding somewhere in the state with the police teams hot on his pursuit.

Koratkar is wanted for making objectionable references to Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj, Chhatrapati Sambhaji Maharaj and also allegedly issuing death threats to a historian Indrajit Sawant who had questioned certain historical accuracies in the recently-released film, Chhaava.

# Sule slams AI over flight delay

**Mumbai:** NCP (SP) MP Supriya Sule slammed Air India on Saturday for "constant mismanagement" and termed the flight delays as a continuous trend affecting passengers despite paying premium fares.

Sule's furious response came after an Air India flight she booked was delayed by 1 hour and 19 minutes.

She highlighted that flights are delayed despite paying premium fares and demanded that Civil Aviation Minister Rammohan Naidu hold the airline accountable for frequent delays.

"Flights are endlessly delayed — this is unacceptable! We pay premium fares, yet flights are never on time. Professionals, children, and senior citizens — all affected by this constant mismanagement," the Baramati MP posted on X.

Sule said she was travelling on Air India flight AI0508 which was delayed by 1 hour and 19 minutes. "Part of a continuous trend of delays affecting passengers," she added.

Sule demanded stricter regulations be enforced to hold airlines like Air India accountable for repeated



delays and ensure better service standards for passengers.

Speaking to reporters, Sule claimed flight trackers were faulty which gave misleading results.

"I was stranded at the Delhi airport on the flight but the tracker showed that the flight was airborne. I would take up the issue of trackers with the Civil Aviation Minister," Sule added.

A response to a query sent to Air India on Sule's charges was awaited.

Notably, Union Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan had last month slammed Tata Group-owned Air India for allotting him a "broken and sunk" seat. After Chouhan's outburst, his ministerial colleague K Rammohan Naidu instructed the airline to take "necessary action".

## QUOTE OF THE DAY

**Beed sarpanch Santosh Deshmukh was murdered, a woman was raped in Pune and there was violence in Parbhani. The state is under Tughlaqi rule. I stand by my statement that the administration of Fadnavis and that of Aurangzeb is similar.**



**Harshvardhan Sapkal,**  
Congress chief, Maharashtra

# NCP to celebrate 'Maha Mahotsav'

**Mumbai:** The Nationalist Congress Party will celebrate Maharashtra Mahotsav to mark the 65th anniversary of the formation of the state on May 1, state unit chief Sunil Tatkare said on Saturday.

He provided an outline of the events that will be organised as part of the celebrations at a meeting of the party's various cells on Friday.

Various social, cultural, artistic, sports and literary programmes will be held in Mumbai between May 1 and May 3 with the aim of introducing the youth to Maharashtra's glorious history.

Over the following 15 days, similar events highlighting Maharashtra's rich cultural heritage will be



organized in administrative regions like Nagpur, Chhatrapati Sambhajnagar, Nashik, Pune, and Amravati, Tatkare said in a statement.

He urged functionaries to propose ideas that highlight the state's

identity and cultural richness while celebrating Maharashtra Mahotsav' as an official state-wide party event, adding that the Foundation Day of the state on May 1 will be celebrated with grandeur across all six state divisions, including Mumbai.

Under the leadership of Deputy Chief Minister Ajit Pawar, the NCP is moving ahead with the vision of "20 per cent politics and 80 per cent social service", he said.

The party had earlier organised 'Swarajya Saptah' on February 19 to commemorate the birth anniversary of Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj as well as 'Classical Marathi Language Day' on February 27.

## PUBLIC NOTICE

Notice is hereby given to all that, Mr. Arun Kumar Sidhu a member of Gokul Nagri No.-2 (F, G) Co-operative Housing Society Ltd., having address at: W.E.Highway, Kandivali (East) Mumbai-400101 and holding Flat No.G-102, died intestate on 03.12.2023 leaving behind him 1. Smt. Suman Arunkumar Sidhu (wife) 2. Mrs. Ruchi Sidhu Chandra (daughter) and 3. Mr.Ashish Sidhu (son) as his legal heirs.  
1. Smt. Suman Arunkumar Sidhu and 2. Mrs.Ruchi Sidhu Chandra (Releasers) have transferred their total 66.66% (33.33% each) undivided share and interest in the said flat to Mr.Ashish Sidhu (Releasee) vide registered Release Deed dated 06.01.2025. By virtue of the said Release Deed Mr.Ashish Sidhu is holding 100% share and interest in the said property. Mr.Ashish Sidhu has submitted an application for transfer of share and interest in the said flat to the society along with all necessary documents. We hereby invites claims and/or objections from the claimant or claimants/ objector or objectors for the transfer of said shares & interest in the said flat within the period of 15 days from the publication of this notice, with copies of such documents and other proofs on support of his/her/their claims/objections. If no any claims/objections are received within the period prescribed above, society shall be free to transfer the shares & interest of deceased member in the said flat in the name of Mr.Ashish Sidhu as provided under the bye laws of the society.  
Place: Mumbai  
Date: 22.03.2025

Dilip Yashavant Lad  
(M.com.LL.B., GDC&A,DCM)  
ADVOCATE HIGH COURT  
B-22/304, Saraf Choudhari Nagar, Thakur Complex,  
Kandivali (East) Mumbai-400101, M:9833506305  
E-mail:advdlipplad@gmail.com





Vehicles move past graffiti of Mumbai Indians players on the side of a building in Mumbai.

Pic: PTI

## HSRPs can be fitted in society-sans extra fees

By Quaid Najmi

**Mumbai:** In a laudable move, the Maharashtra Transport Commissionerate has directed that the mandatory High Security Registration Plates for old vehicles can be fitted in housing society premises without levying extra charges.

The order was issued today (March 22) by Joint Transport Commissioner Shailesh Kamat today, extending the facility for group bookings and fitting of HSRPs in the state for multiple reasons, as the deadline of June 30 looms ahead.

The move is ostensibly due to poor response and low implementation of HSRPs in the state for multiple reasons, as the deadline of June 30 looms ahead.

Accordingly, Kamat has directed the local Regional Transport Officers (RTO) to hold discussions with associations/unions of trucks, buses, taxis or three-wheelers and exhort them to go for the HSRPs.

In places with 25 applications or more from two-wheelers, four-wheelers, autorickshaws, taxis, buses and



trucks, the RTO should make arrangements through the authorized agency to fit the HSRPs without levying the 'home fitment fees'.

The venues can be cooperative housing societies or the place of choice of the associations/unions as per the convenience of their members, and would be applicable to vehicles registered prior to April 1, 2019, said Kamat.

The Commissionerate admitted that since Jan. 1, 2025, when the drive for HSRP kicked off in the state, the implementation has been 'very poor'. The government has appointed

three (03) authorized agencies to complete the stupendous task through their fitment centres, adhering to a strict deadline.

However, in some districts, there are very few fitment centres and the public have complained of experiencing difficulties in securing appointments, including through the online process.

The state RTOs have been asked to review the situation in their respective jurisdictions and direct the fitment agencies to open additional fitment centres as required.

Discarding the red-tape, the Transport Commissioner has even authorized the local RTOs to grant approval to the fitment agencies for starting more fitment centres.

As per reports, of the total 1.15 crore vehicles registered in Maharashtra, nearly 10 lakh new vehicles (post-April 1, 2019) are plying without the HSRP, and barely a fraction of the old vehicles (pre-April 1, 2019) have either applied for or are fitted with HSRPs.

## Ailing stray dog finds new home in Toronto

**Thane:** In a heart-warming tale of compassion, an ailing stray dog from Thane city has found a new home in Canada thanks to the efforts of an NGO.

Rani, who was found in a frail and fragile state in the Vartak Nagar locality of the city, was transported to Toronto, where she will begin a new life with her rescuer.

Salil Navghare, who was visiting from Toronto, spotted Rani at the building where his parents lived in December last year, said Nilesh Bhanage, a spokesperson of the Plants & Animals Welfare Society (PAWS).



Moved by her plight, Navghare, who had volunteered with the organisation, started looking after the canine, and she was placed in foster care at a temporary shelter while the NGO co-ordinated with a veterinarian who monitored her medical care.

Once Rani was deemed fit for travel, Navghare sought the help of a pet transporter who managed the necessary quarantine measures and paperwork required for her relocation.

A generous friend of Navghare's then booked Rani's flight ticket. She boarded her flight to Paris on Thursday and reached her new home in Toronto on Friday.

## EXPERT'S VOICE Some lessons from recent violence in Nagpur



By  
Praveen Dixit

● Social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram are being increasingly used to incite persons of certain community in couple of hours without any apparent preparation. Similar situation prevailed in riots in Bangalore & Delhi in recent past.

● Vehicles like tractor trollies full of huge stones were rushed in from neighbouring outside places in a particular direction with a target of attacking particular community

● Houses identified by Tulsi and vehicles having Ganesh idols were subjected to brutality & arson

● Police officers were subjected to violent attacks including by axe, stones and swords

● Swords from ancient period were available with a section of attackers. These continue to be stored unchecked.

### Lessons:

● Continuous monitoring of social media platforms either technically or by being members of groups run by suspected persons

● Enforcing 'Nakabandi' to check movement of vehicles & suspicious persons towards a particular direction suddenly

● Keeping adequate reserve police squads equipped with riot control equipment including helmets, shields, tear gas, and weapons to meet any contingency in sensitive police stations

● Have 'police mitra' in huge numbers who can inform police about suspicious developments in advance and also work with police during riots

● Police officers should not rush to such spots without helmet and ade-



quately prepared, else they are victims and sustain serious injuries or even deaths

● Constant dialogue with sensible leaders to avoid flaring up of tempers

● Instruct corporation officers to ensure no construction material is allowed on roads as the same can be used as missiles

● Remove road blockades including tyres regularly as it hinders movement of police, fire brigade and ambulances in emergency

● Continuous preventive action against known bad elements who take disadvantage of such situations and create ruckus

● Have regular mock drills, once in six months, by police even when there is peace to face such violent situations

● Police also need to be more equipped during the month of Ramzan as most of the riots have taken place during this period. This is allegedly linked to incitement in the name of battle of Badr, where on 17 th day of Ramadan Prophet Mohammad had attacked his enemies at Badr.

(The author is a former Director General of Police, Maharashtra.)

## Engineer suspended

**Ulhasnagar:** Ulhasnagar Municipal Commissioner Manisha Awhale has suspended junior engineer TarunSevkanni after he failed to respond to a show-cause notice regarding irregularities in development projects. Sevkanni, who was previously given charge as City Engineer and Executive Engineer despite being a junior officer, was transferred back to his original post last month. The suspension has sparked concerns among municipal officials, as the commissioner has hinted at further action against others involved in questionable work.

During a recent inspection of Prabhat Garden, Commissioner Awhale found that despite spending crores of rupees, the expected development was not visible. As a result, she ordered an inquiry into the project.

Following this, she reassigned Sevkanni from his acting position as City Engineer to his original junior engineer post. Additionally, she issued a show-cause notice regarding outstanding payments for completed projects over the past three years and the failure to cancel projects that had not started.

## Disha Salian Ghost Returns Rane demands FIR, Aadiya's arrest

SAYS UDDHAV HAD CALLED HIM TWICE

**Mumbai:** BJP leader Narayan Rane on Saturday claimed the then chief minister Uddhav Thackeray had called him twice and "requested" not to drag his son Aadiya Thackeray in the Disha Salian death case.

Addressing media, Rane demanded that the police register an FIR and arrest the former minister (read Aadiya Thackeray).

"When he was chief minister, Uddhav Thackeray called me twice during the COVID pandemic and requested me not to drag his son in the Disha Salian case," the BJP MP claimed.

The former Union minister further claimed he told Thackeray that he had not named anybody and only referred to a minister in his press conference.

"Register an FIR based on the evidence gathered so far and arrest him (Aadiya)," Rane said. Rane and Thackeray, both former chief ministers, are bitter rivals.

Uddhav Thackeray had rubbished the claim and said his son Aadiya was not even remotely connected to the case. Aadiya too said



the charges were an attempt to malign him and he would answer them in court.

The Salian case resurfaced after her father Satish Salian said he would approach the Bombay High Court seeking a fresh probe into the mysterious circumstances under which the former manager of late actor Sushant Singh Rajput was found dead in June 2020.

Satish Salian has demanded the registration of a First Information Report against Shiv Sena (UBT) leader Aadiya Thackeray and the transfer of the probe to the CBI. Rane claimed that Rajput was murdered.

## Man cheated of Rs 67 lakh

**Thane:** A 53-year-old man from Thane district was allegedly cheated of Rs 67.65 lakh by cyber fraudsters who lured him to invest in online share trading, police said on Saturday.

The police registered a first information report (FIR) under relevant provisions of the Information Technology (IT) Act on Thursday and have identified three persons involved in the fraud only through their mobile phone numbers, an official said.

He said the complainant has alleged that the accused contacted him in December 2024 and convinced him to invest in share trading by promising him high returns.

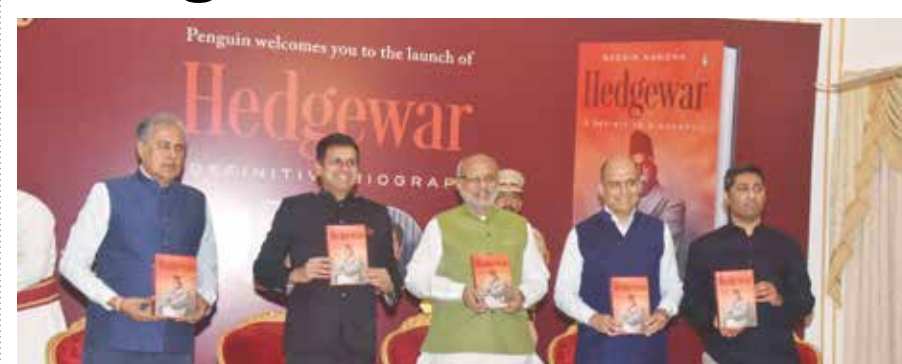
The accused provided a trading application to the man and instructed him to transfer money to different bank accounts, the official said.

He said the complainant transferred Rs 67.65 lakh over multiple online transactions till January 2025.

However, when the man later sought to withdraw his profits or the original investment, the fraudsters stopped responding, the official added.

"We have registered an FIR under the IT Act," a senior police officer said.

## 'Hedgewar more relevant'



By Correspondent

**Mumbai:** Maharashtra Governor C P Radhakrishnan said on Saturday that the founder of Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) Dr. Keshav Baliram Hedgewar was more relevant than ever today.

He was speaking while releasing a book 'Hedgewar - A Definitive Biography' penned by UK businessman-turned-author Sachin Nandha.

Radhakrishnan said that secessionist forces were active in some states even today. "The thoughts of unity and integration propounded by Dr Hedgewar are more relevant today than ever," he said.

Complimenting the author for producing a well researched biography on Dr Hedgewar, the Governor said the RSS has emerged as the biggest na-

tionalistic organisation in the entire world. He said RSS in its long and illustrious journey produced hundreds of patriots who lived selflessly and died for the nation.

The Governor recalled his association with RSS and highlighted the work done by RSS in Tamil Nadu, especially in Tirupur. Countering the argument that India was never a homogenous country in the past, the Governor said Samrat Ashok had united the Indian subcontinent several centuries ago. He said culturally and traditionally India was always a single nation. The foreign invaders divided India and managed to rule it. The message of unity is therefore all the more relevant.

Nandha said that Dr Hedgewar's philosophy of cultural nationalism shall prove to be a guiding force

for the entire world in the times to come. His book offers insights into the motivation and mind of Dr Hedgewar and his philosophy that may be termed as 'Hedgewarism'.

Nandha also said that the book is meant for readers who are not oriented into the RSS and philosophy professed by its founder. He also said that he was fascinated by Hedgewar's transformation from a revolutionary to a political activist and from that to a cultural revolutionary and has tried to capture it in this biography.

Promoter of Asian Paints Jalaj Dani, Chairman of Avaada Group Vineet Mittal, Managing Director of Mohit Diamonds Mohit Mehta, MD & CEO of NSE Dr Ashish Kumar Chouhan, Ravindra Sanghvi and Milind Ghumare were present.

## MBA-CET Admission Fraud Four held

**Mumbai:** Four persons, including two B.Tech students, have been arrested for alleged involvement in fraudulent activities related to the MBA-CET admission process for 2025-26, a Mumbai Crime Branch official said on Saturday.

Ambarish Kumar Singh, owner of an online marketing firm, third-year B.Tech students Aditya Raj and Ketan Yadav as well as one Abhishek Shrivastav were held from Delhi on Friday, he said.

They were held in a case filed at Azad Maidan police station on Tuesday on the complaint of Abhishek Joshi, a project coordinator with Eduspark International Private Limited, which conducts around 18-19 admission tests and exams for Maharashtra Common Entrance Test (MHT-CET) cell, the official said.

"Candidates facing issues while filing application forms here have a helpdesk for queries and directions. The accused operated a website called collegeinside.org that offered guidance to students. The accused came in contact with one Rajbir who gave them a list of students appearing for such exams."

## QUOTE OF THE DAY

"A case was immediately registered after Akbaruddin Owaisi's statement (in the past). However, when Nitesh Rane used public platform to say he would beat Muslims by entering mosques, no action was taken."

Imtiaz Jaleel, Former MP, AIMIM



## Not an inch of land given to Adani:Shelar

**Mumbai:** The Dharavi Redevelopment Project is the only one in Mumbai that ensures housing for even ineligible slum dwellers within the city, Maharashtra minister Ashish Shelar said on Friday while asserting that not an inch of land there has been given to (billionaire industrialist Gautam) Adani.

Replying to a debate in the assembly on infrastructure issues, he said the claim that Dharavi's land has been given to Adani is completely false and misleading.

"Those making such allegations should know that all the

land in Dharavi is owned by Dharavi Redevelopment Authority, a company established by the state government," he said while challenging critics to provide a single official land record (7/12 extract) in Adani's name to support their claims.

The DRPPL (Dharavi Redevelopment Project Private Limited) is the contractor tasked with the redevelopment, and as per the agreement, 20 percent of the contractor's profits will be allocated to the state government, he said.

Answering questions from members on the Dharavi redevelopment plan, the minister said,



DHARAVI REDEVELOPMENT

"Out of the total 430 acres of Dharavi land, 37 per cent will be allocated for open spaces such as playgrounds and entertainment

areas."

Nearly 50 percent of Dharavi's land belongs to the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC), while other portions are owned by the state and Central governments.

According to redevelopment norms, landowners whose land is utilized for slum rehabilitation receive compensation equivalent to 25 percent of the ready reckoner rate.

"This applies to BMC and government authorities as well. Also, eligible slum dwellers will be provided houses within Dharavi, while ineligible slum dwell-

ers will be allocated homes elsewhere but in Mumbai itself. This makes the Dharavi Redevelopment Project unique as it ensures housing solutions for all affected residents," Shelar said.

Meanwhile, to facilitate the rehabilitation of slum dwellers on railway land in Mumbai, the government has formed a committee under the chairmanship of the state chief secretary, he informed the House.

"Meetings have already taken place. Coordination with the Central government is being carried out through letters and discussions," he added.



# Persecution of Hindus in Bangladesh a matter of concern: RSS

**Bengaluru:** The RSS on Saturday expressed serious concern about the allegedly planned violence, injustice and oppression faced by the Hindu and other minority communities at the hands of radical Islamist elements in Bangladesh after the regime change there.

On the second day of the meeting of the Akhil Bharatiya Pratinidhi Sabha (ABPS), the highest decision-making body of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), a resolution was passed on Bangladesh.

The RSS said the persecution of the Hindus is a serious case of violation of human rights.

"The Akhil Bharatiya Pratinidhi Sabha expresses its serious concern on the unabated and planned violence, injustice and oppression faced by the Hindu and other minority communities at the hands of radical Islamist elements in Bangladesh," the resolution read.

It further said that during the recent regime change in Bangladesh, several incidents of attacks on Mutts, temples, Durgapuja pandals and educational institutions, desecration of deities, barbaric killings, looting of properties, abduction and molestation of women and forcible conversions are being continuously reported.

"Denying the religious angle of these incidents by claiming them to be only political is the negation of truth, as scores of victims of such incidents belong to Hindu and other minority



communities only," ABPS said.

The resolution said the persecution of Hindus and other minority communities, especially scheduled castes and scheduled tribes in Bangladesh at the hands of fanatic Islamist elements was not new.

"The continuous decline of Hindu population in Bangladesh (From 22 per cent in 1951 to 7.95 per cent today) indicates the existential crisis for them," said the ABPS.

It said the governmental and institutional support for the violence and hatred witnessed during last year is a serious cause of concern.

ABPS cautioned Bangladesh that the persistent 'anti-Bharat rhetoric' can severely damage the relationship between the two countries.

"There is a concerted effort on the part of some international forces to foment instability in the entire region surrounding Bharat by creating an atmosphere of distrust and confrontation by pitting one country against another," the RSS noted.

The ABPS called upon thought leaders and schol-

ars in international relations to keep vigil on such anti-India atmosphere, activities of Pakistan and Deep State and expose them.

"The ABPS wishes to underscore the fact that the entire region has a shared culture, history and social bonds because of which any upheaval at one place raises concern throughout the region. The ABPS feels that all vigilant people should make efforts towards strengthening this shared legacy of Bharat and neighbouring countries," the resolution said.

The ABPS said a noteworthy fact during this period is that Hindu society in Bangladesh has courageously resisted these atrocities in a peaceful, collective, and democratic way.

It is commendable that this resolve found moral and psychological support from the Hindu society in Bharat, it noted.

Various Hindu organisations in Bharat and different countries voiced their concern against this violence and demanded the security and honour of Bangladesh Hindus through demonstrations

and petitions, the ABPS said.

The issue has also been raised by many leaders from the international community at their level, it added.

The RSS said the Government of India has expressed its resolve to stand with the Hindu and other minority communities of Bangladesh and the need for their protection.

It further said the Government of India has taken up the issue with the interim Government of Bangladesh as well as on several global platforms.

"The ABPS urges the Government of Bharat to make all possible efforts to ensure the protection, dignity and wellbeing of Hindu community in Bangladesh along with engaging Government of Bangladesh in continuous and meaningful dialogue," the resolution said.

The ABPS said it is incumbent on the international organisations like United Nations' Organisation (UNO) and global community to take serious note of the inhumane treatment meted out to Hindus and other minority communities in Bangladesh and pressurise Bangladesh government to put a halt to these violent activities.

"The ABPS also calls upon Hindu community and leaders from different countries and international organisations to raise their voice in solidarity with the Hindu and other minority communities of Bangladesh," the resolution said. -PTI

## Trump says he'll pay overtime to Williams, Wilmore

**Washington:** US President Donald Trump on Friday said he would pay out of his pockets the overtime for astronauts Barry "Butch" Wilmore and Sunita "Suni" Williams, who returned to Earth this week after spending nine months in space.

The two astronauts, who were supposed to be on an eight-day mission, spent 286 days in space—278 days longer than anticipated after their spacecraft malfunctioned.

While speaking with reporters in the Oval Office, Trump, when asked about the calculated overtime, said, "Nobody's ever mentioned this to me. If I have to, I'll pay it out of my own pocket."

Trump said this when a Fox News reporter highlighted Wilmore and Williams each received USD 5 per diem for each day in space, amounting to USD 1,430 in extra pay.

A rescue crew brought Williams and Wilmore back to the Earth this week on a SpaceX Crew Dragon capsule.

Trump also thanked Elon Musk, the head of Tesla, SpaceX and the leader of the Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE).

"Think if we don't have him?" Trump said. "If we don't have Elon. They could be up there a long time. Who is else is going to get them?"

He noted that "body starts to deteriorate" after a few months orbiting in space.

In addition to their annual salary — about USD 152,258, according to NASA — Wilmore and Williams received around USD 1,430 for their 286 days in space.

## WASTE TO BEST

# The Hidden Costs of Wasting Food and Water

Wasting food is not just about hunger and starving people — it is about wasted water, energy, and effort.



By Dr. Sanjay Joshi



**Hello readers,**

People love food — not only to get enough energy our bodies need but also because it's often the centre of social events; we celebrate with food, and it's simply delicious. So it's quite a surprise that one-third of the food in the world doesn't make it to our plates. That amounts to an incredible 1.3 billion tonnes of food! This amount of food could feed around 3 billion people each year. That exceeds the number of all the hungry people worldwide by nearly 4 times! Can you guess what we waste the most? Well, we will discuss that later. The day before, we celebrated the International Day for Forests or World Forestry Day, and yesterday we celebrated World Water Day. Both forests and water are the most precious natural resources for food production. World Forestry Day was proclaimed by the United Nations General Assembly on 21st March 2012. Since then, March 21st every year has been celebrated, keeping the forests at centre stage.

This year, the theme for this day is "Forests and Food" to highlight the crucial role forests play in food security, nutrition, and livelihoods across the globe. With unsustainable food systems driving deforestation and biodiversity loss, the messaging for the day focused on "The ABCs of Forests: Adapt, Balance, Change"—a call to rethink how forests and food systems interact. A- Adapt food systems to work with forests and not against them; B - Balance and share benefits equitably and effectively; C- Change policies.

Forests are the pillars of global food security and nutrition and provide the livelihoods of millions of families. They provide essential foods such as fruits, seeds, roots, and wild meat, the fundamental resources for indigenous and rural communities.

Yesterday, the world observed World Water Day, held annually on March 22nd since 1993 to highlight the importance of freshwater and promote its sustainable management. It is about taking action to tackle the global water crisis. Water resources and food production are closely linked with each other. Globally, agriculture accounts for 72 percent of global freshwater withdrawals—amounting to nearly 3,000 cubic kilometres of water—taken from the world's rivers, lakes, and groundwater aquifers each year. In developing countries like India, water withdrawal for food production is about 90 percent. For harvesting one kilogram of wheat, more than 1800 litres of water is utilised. That means, when we waste food equivalent to one kilogramme of wheat, we waste 1800 litres of water!

Additionally, there is a wastage of energy used by the farmer to irrigate the wheat crop; there is wastage of manpower, and hard work put in by the farmer physically and emotionally; then there is wastage of other resources as well.

In my next article, I will throw more light on this aspect of food waste. On this occasion of World Water Day, plan your day to minimise the wastage of water!

(The author is an environmentalist.)

# Mobile water treatment unit provides relief

By Durba Ghosh

**Tukergram (Assam):** Water-related woes are not new for the 32 households of Tukergram, a hamlet in Assam's Cachar district, as they endure contaminated floodwaters for five to seven months each year.

After years of hardship, a mobile water treatment unit has become a lifeline, supplying safe drinking water to these households.

The District Disaster Management Authority and Public Health and Engineering Department identified Tukergram as one of the worst flood-affected areas and the hamlet does not have a government-provided pipeline.

The sanctioned pipeline through Kalinagar Gram Panchayat had to pass through a drain, making its execution difficult while the hamlet on the hillock also lacked road connectivity, electricity, and toilets.

Nestled beside a picturesque lake that was once part of the meandering Barak River, this hillock turns into an island during the flood-affected months and continues to remain marooned until the water

level recedes.

During this period, families living in low-lying areas migrate to the highest part of the hamlet, enduring congested and unhygienic conditions, a local resident said.

Fifty-eight-year-old Abdul Jabbar, one of the 152 residents of the village, said, "Families here rely on the lake for daily water needs, but during floods, the overflowing lake becomes contaminated leading to immense difficulties and health problems."

Rainfall and floods have become increasingly erratic and intense, prolonging the monsoon season and worsening its impact, he pointed out.

During these months, residents collected rainwater and used alum to decontaminate the water or else 'we have to manage with water from the 'nala', Jabbar said, adding that the problem was acute.

It was decided to work with the community and make interventions that will not only address the immediate water needs but also help build community resilience against future floods," Cachar DDMA Pro-

ject Officer Shamim Laskar said.

An emergency mobile water treatment unit was provided, which purifies the lake water through the simple process of pumping, filtration, and disinfection using chlorine, he said.

"The unit is easy to install and operate and this has become a game-changer for Tukergram, ensuring safe drinking water, especially during floods," he said.

Implementing sustainable water and sanitation solutions in remote and flood-prone areas is not easy, the project officer said.

"Hilly terrain makes access difficult, infrastructure gap persists, raising community awareness and coordinating multiple stakeholders are also challenging tasks, but we are committed to finding solutions," Laskar said.

The Community Facilitation and Resource Centre (CFRC) plays a crucial role in bridging the gap between communities and disaster response agencies, ensuring that relief reaches those who need it most, CFRC nodal officer Ashim Kumar Das said.



## 'Difficult phase will be over'

SC JUDGES' DELEGATION REACHED THE VIOLENCE HIT MANIPUR

**Churachandpur/Imphal:** Mar 22 (PTI) Supreme Court judge, Justice B R Gavai, on Saturday expressed hope that the "current difficult phase" in ethnic strife-torn Manipur will be over soon with the assistance of the executive, legislature and judiciary and the state will prosper like the rest of the country.

Justice Gavai, who led a delegation of Supreme Court judges that visited Manipur, called upon the people of the state to work together to restore peace and harmony.

Justice Gavai, along with Supreme Court judges Vikram Nath, M M Sundresh and K V Vishwanathan, visited a relief camp in Churachandpur district and met internally displaced persons.

The delegation also virtually inaugurated a legal services camp, a medical camp and a legal aid clinic

from the Mini Secretariat at Lamka in the district, they said.

Chief Justice of Manipur High Court, Justice D Krishnakumar, and Justice Golmei Gaiphulshilu were also present.

Addressing the gathering, Justice Gavai said, "Our country is a true example of unity in diversity. India is home for all of us. We know that you all are going through a difficult phase but with the assistance of everyone, the executive, the legislature and the judiciary, this phase will be over in a short period."

"Our Constitution is a great document. When we compare our country to our neighbouring countries, we will realise our Constitution has kept us strong and united. Have belief in the Constitution... one day, complete peace will return."

## Meitei body urges for legal protection

**A Churachandpur-based Meitei body on Saturday urged Supreme Court judge Justice B R Gavai to ensure legal protection of villages belonging to the community and resettlement of internally displaced persons in the Kuki-dominated district of Manipur. "The Meitei villages in Churachandpur have historically belonged to our community but increasing encroachment threatens our rightful ownership," it said. The committee also called for resettlement of the Meitei community in the district with enhanced security.**

# FIR against over 50 Ahmadis

By M Zulqarnain

**Lahore:** An FIR was registered against more than 50 members of the minority Ahmadi community under blasphemy laws in Punjab province of Pakistan for offering "Friday prayers" even as a radical Islamist party besieged their worship places in several cities.

They were booked under the Pakistan Penal Code (PPC) for "insulting a religion or religious beliefs of any class of people, referring to themselves as Muslims and referring to their faith as Islam".

The police booked 50 Ahmadis and nominated eight others on the complaint of Muhammad Amanullah who alleged they were offering Friday prayers like that of Muslims, a practice banned for them under the law, police officer Zahid Pervez told PTI.

Radical Tehreek-e-Labbaik Pakistan (TLP) besieged several worship places of Ahmadis in Punjab on Friday to stop them from offering prayers.

The Jamaat-e-Ahmadiyya Pakistan (JAP) said Ahmadis were assaulted by extremists during Friday

prayers in Faisalabad.

"The extremists also besieged Ahmadi places of worship in Kartarpur, Gujrat and Sialkot districts," the JAP said.

It added that extremist groups over the past month tried to prevent Ahmadis from offering Friday prayers at 33 different locations.

"The religious extremists' objective is to obstruct Ahmadis from performing their religious rites and to have their places of worship sealed," it said.

It said preventing individuals from practising their faith was a clear violation of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and Article 20 of the Constitution of Pakistan.

"The government must ensure the safety of Ahmadis and take legal action against extremist elements," JAP spokesperson Aamir Mahmood said.

"How does registering baseless cases against Ahmadis at the behest of an extremist group serve the nation's interests?" he questioned.

He demanded these baseless cases be dismissed and that all innocent Ahmadis be released immediately.

By Correspondent

# Maidan Cricket finally gets its due

**Mumbai:** When Gopal Koli was felicitated by Maharashtra Governor C. P. Radhakrishnan, there was a feeling in Mumbai cricket circles that the maidan cricket has finally got its due.

In a grand award ceremony held at the Sharad Pawar Indoor Cricket Academy and Recreation Centre in BKC, the Mumbai Cricket Association (MCA) honoured veteran cricket coach and former Ranji player Gopal Koli with the 'Glory of Maidan' award.

Koli has played for Mumbai in two Ranji trophy

matches and has also represented New Hind Club, Central Bank and Koli Combined XI teams. Later, he turned to coaching and has played a major role in shaping the careers of many cricketers.

Koli has continued to guide young cricketers on the field even at the age of 84. So when the MCA, for the first time, decided to honour a cricket coach, who has dedicated his life to maidan cricket, at its annual awards ceremony, he was an obvious choice for the award.

## GOPAL KOLI HONOURED WITH 'GLORY OF MAIDAN' AWARD



84?" Replying to him, Koli said, "My entire life revolved in the triangle of maidan, players and matches. This triangle is a source of my energy."

When Koli went to the dais to receive the award, his disciple and current president of the MCA, Ajinkya Naik, touched his feet and greeted him. On this occasion, State Cultural Affairs Minister Ashish Shelar, Vice President Sanjay Naik, MCA secretary Abhay Hadap, MCA joint secretary Deepak Patil and MCA treasurer Armaan Malik also congratulated Koli for being honoured with the award.

## QUOTE OF THE DAY

**"There is a competition on who is more backward. People are not casteist but political leaders are for their selfish interests. there is need to eradicate social inequality. Caste discrimination must end and the process must start from self."**



Nitin Gadkari, Union Minister, Roadways



# Bandhs over regional pride



Stranded commuters amid Ranchi bandh on Saturday.

Pic: PTI

## KARNATAKA OBSERVES 12-HOUR STATEWIDE SHUTDOWN BY PRO-KANNADA GROUPS

**Bengaluru:** A 12-hour statewide bandh called by the pro-Kannada groups to protest the alleged assault on a state-run bus conductor in Belagavi last month for not knowing Marathi began in Karnataka on Saturday morning amid tight security.

In several parts of the state, the pro-Kannada groups took to the streets staging protests and they appealed to the shopkeepers to cooperate and extend their support for the cause. But most of the shops were open as usual.

In Bengaluru, the activists gathered at the Mysore Bank circle and raised slogans holding placards.

Some activists staged a demonstration at the BMTC and KSRTC bus stand at Majestic in the state capital.

The protestors appealed to the bus drivers and conductors to support the call for bandh. As their agitation intensified, police took them under preventive custody.

In Mysuru, some pro-Kannada activists staged a sit-in protest by blocking buses at the suburban bus stand.

They staged a dharna near the exit gate to block buses heading to Bengaluru and other parts of the state.

Some members of pro-Kannada groups were taken into preventive custody after they attempted to stop a KSRTC bus in Mysuru.

In Davangere too, the protestors took to the streets.

Sources in Belagavi said the KSRTC buses were ply-

ing as usual but there was restricted movement of buses from Maharashtra to this border town in north Karnataka, which was at the centre of the linguistic row.

Besides the attack on a bus conductor at Balekundri, Panchayat officials were abused recently in Kinaye village in Belagavi for not speaking in Marathi.

Belagavi just at the border of Maharashtra has a substantial Marathi population where the border row flares up from time to time.

The accused in both the cases were taken into custody.

Elaborate security arrangements are in place across the state with senior officers overseeing the situation on the ground to prevent any untoward incident.

According to officials, police in various districts have deployed home guards along with the City Armed Reserve unit as a precautionary measure to ensure that the bandh is observed peacefully without causing inconvenience to the public.

Bengaluru Police Commissioner B Dayananda has warned that legal actions will be taken against those found coercing people into taking part in the bandh.

He said that 60 Karnataka State Reserve Police platoons, 1,200 home guards and the entire civil and traffic police force have been deployed in Bengaluru City as a precautionary measure.

Karnataka Deputy Chief

**“We will protect the interests of the state. Everyone should maintain peace and follow the law.”**

**DK Shivakumar,**  
Deputy Chief Minister,  
Karnataka

Minister DK Shivakumar has urged people to maintain peace and abide by the law. “We will protect the interests of the state. Everyone should maintain peace and follow the law. However, I feel there is no need for a bandh,” he told the reporters on Friday.

According to Bengaluru Deputy Commissioner Jagadeesha G, no holidays has been declared for schools and colleges.

On February 28, ‘Kannada Okkuta,’ an umbrella organisation representing various pro-Kannada groups, announced the statewide bandh from 6 am to 6 pm on March 22.

Some organisations and unions have either chosen to stay away from the bandh or have decided to offer only moral support.

According to sources, some autorickshaws, cabs and private drivers’ unions, associations have extended support to the shutdown, while hotel associations, malls, bars and restaurants have only offered moral support.

Meanwhile, emergency services -- pharmacies, hospitals, and ambulance services, petrol pumps and metro services will remain operational amid the bandh.

**“We will protect the interests of the state. Everyone should maintain peace and follow the law.”**

## Meerut Killing



# Rajput's head was severed: Cops

**Meerut/Shimla (UP):** The Uttar Pradesh Police Saturday said they plan to take the Saurabh Rajput murder case to a fast-track court while a post-mortem revealed the extreme brutality with which he was killed and the body dismembered allegedly by his wife and her lover.

Rajput's head was severed from the body, both hands were cut off from the wrist and his legs were bent backwards, suggesting an attempt to fit the body in a drum, the autopsy report disclosed. The cause of death has been attributed to shock and excessive bleeding.

After the murder, Muskan Rastogi and her lover Sahil Shukla travelled to Himachal Pradesh's Kasol on March 10 and checked into a hotel by introducing themselves as husband and wife. They left on March 16, the hotel operator said, adding the accused duo's driver accompanied them.

They stayed in their hotel room the whole day, going out once a day in their car which was unusual, and had minimum interaction with the staffers who were not allowed to clean their room, he said. During check-out, they told the hotel operator that they had come from Manali and would return to Uttar Pradesh.

Senior Superintendent of Police Vipin Tada told PTI that the police will prioritise filing a charge sheet in the case as quickly as possible.

“We will try to run the case in a fast-track court so that the accused get punishment as soon as possible,” he said, adding police will seek to take Muskan and Sahil in their custody once their 14-day judicial custody ends.

Doctors who conducted the post-mortem reported that Rajput was stabbed in the heart with extreme force thrice, indicating a sustained and violent attack. “The blows from the sharp long knife pierced deep inside the heart,” one of the doctors said.

The medical team further detailed the gruesome attempt to conceal the body.

“It was put in the drum and then filled with dust and cement. The body solidified in the cement and did not rot due to lack of air. The smell was not extremely foul,” a member of the post-mortem team disclosed.

The drum had to be cut open and the hardened cement painstakingly removed to retrieve the body.

Rajput was allegedly drugged and then stabbed to death by his wife and her lover on March 4.

-PTI

## TRIBAL OUTFITS PROTEST AGAINST CONSTRUCTION OF A FLYOVER AT SACRED SITE

**Ranchi:** Activists of various tribal outfits hit the streets on Saturday morning to enforce an 18-hour bandh in Jharkhand's capital Ranchi to protest against the construction of a flyover near the Sarna Sthal, a sacred tribal religious site.

The protestors were seen burning tyres and blocking roads, mainly on the outskirts of Ranchi.

The Ranchi-Lohardaga road was blocked near Tita Chowk in Ranchi, while agitators gathered at the city's Kanke Chowk and other areas to impose the bandh.

Compared to other days, the number of vehicles on the roads in Ranchi was less during the morning hours.

The protestors are demanding the removal of a

ramp being built in Siram Toli, claiming that it obstructs access to the religious site and could disturb its sanctity due to frequent traffic movements.

Several tribal organisations took out a torchlight procession on Friday evening, seeking people's support for the bandh.

The protestors alleged that the government ignored their concerns.

They said when thousands of tribals gather at Siram Toli Sarna Sthal during Sarhul, the most significant tribal festival, the flyover ramp would disrupt access to the site.

In view of the bandh call, the Ranchi police have made elaborate security arrangements.

The administration has urged the organisations to

hold the protest peacefully without causing trouble to anyone.

The district administration has issued strict instructions, stating that anyone in support of the bandh or chakka jam should not cause any disruption or obstruction to the traffic, dignitaries, students, members of educational institutions, or the general public, the Ranchi administration said in a statement.

The construction of a 2.34-km-long elevated road, which includes a 132-metre section over a railway line, is aimed at easing traffic movement by connecting Siram Toli to Mecon.

The Rs 340-crore project was launched in August 2022, an official said.

-PTI

## CBI files FIRs in Rs 9000 cr 'scam'

**New Delhi:** The CBI has registered three cases related to alleged irregularities in the allotment, development and sanction of Sports City projects in Noida which turned into a Rs 9000-crore 'scam', officials said Friday.

Acting on the orders of the Allahabad High Court, the agency registered the FIRs against real estate firms Logix Infra Developers Pvt Ltd, Xanadu Estates Pvt Ltd and Lotus Green Constructions Pvt Ltd, their directors and some unnamed officials of Noida Authority, following it up with a search operation, they said.

No immediate reactions were available from the companies.

According to an official, the Noida Sport City Project was aimed to develop world class sport facilities with residential and com-

mercial areas in the sector 78, 79 and 150 of Noida.

“It was alleged that... after the allotment of projects, the related conditions were allegedly breached multiple times by the allottees/sub-leasees, in connivance with Noida Authority officials causing suspected financial loss to the State exchequer at approximately Rs 9000 crore and undue advantage to certain developers at the State expense,” the official said.

The CBI has alleged the authorities took no remedial measures even after the CAG report pointed out irregularities in the massive project.

“In this connection, CBI conducted searches at several locations in Delhi and Noida leading to recovery of incriminating documents and digital evidences,” the CBI said in a statement.

-PTI



Members of the Students' Federation of India (SFI) and Democratic Youth Federation of India (DYFI) during a protest march against Israel in Kolkata on Friday.

Pic: PTI

## Minor shot at Mahayajna

**Kurukshetra (Haryana):** A minor boy sustained bullet injury, allegedly when a security guard at a 'Mahayajna' being conducted opened fire during an altercation over the quality of food being served, officials said on Saturday.

Enraged over the incident, a large number of brahmins who came to perform rituals at the yajna blocked the Kurukshetra-Pehowa road.

Police said efforts are on to resolve the issue amicably.

The Mahayajna is being organised at Keshav Park in Kurukshetra by Shri

Shri 1008 Swami Hari Om of Tripura Shaktipeeth, Manikut. A large number of brahmins have arrived to perform rituals at the days-long event.

According to police, on Saturday, some of the brahmins complained of the poor quality of food being served to them. This led to an altercation between the brahmins and Swami Hari Om. The brahmins alleged that Hari Om's security guard fired at them, they said.

The enraged brahmins then ransacked posters of the event and allegedly resorted to stone-pelting, police said.

-PTI

## Tribal museums remain incomplete

**New Delhi:** A parliamentary panel has said that more than five years after the government announced the setting up of museums to honour tribal freedom fighters, many remain incomplete, and work has not even begun on three of them.

In a report tabled in the Lok Sabha recently, the Standing Committee on Social Justice and Empowerment said the Union Tribal Affairs Ministry has supported 11 such museums in 10 states to recognize the contributions of tribal leaders and instill a sense of pride in tribal communities.

However, it pointed out that only three — Bhagwan Birsa Munda Memorial Freedom Fighter Museum in Ranchi, Jharkhand; Badal Bhoi State Tribal Freedom Fighters Museum in Chhindwara, Madhya Pradesh; and Raja Shankar Shah and Kunwar Raghunath Shah Freedom Fighter Museum in Jabalpur, Madhya Pradesh — have been inaugurated so far.

“The committee would like to underline the slow progress in construction of the remaining 8 museums, as they were sanc-

tioned far back in 2017-18, 2018-19 and 2019-20, such as in Andhra Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Telangana, Gujarat and Mizoram which are yet to be completed,” the panel said.

It also said that the museums planned for Kerala, Manipur and Goa in 2017-18, 2018-19 and 2020-21, respectively, are “still at the DPR stage even after the lapse of several years”.

The panel urged the ministry to speed up the construction and ensure that the four museums scheduled for completion by November 2025 and one by May 2026 are finished on time.

The committee also raised concerns about many Eklayva Model Residential Schools (EMRS) operating from rented buildings.

The central government had set a target of building 728 EMRSs to provide quality education to tribal children from Class 6 to 12 in remote areas and help them compete on an equal footing with others.

For 2025-26, Rs 7,088.60 crore has been allocated to the EMRS scheme which is 47 per cent of the ministry's total budget.

-PTI

## PM Modi to visit Sri Lanka

**New Delhi:** Prime Minister Narendra Modi will visit Sri Lanka on April 5, President Anura Kumara Dissanayake has announced.

Dissanayake was delivering a statement in Parliament on Friday when he announced the date for Modi's visit, according to news portal Adaderana.lk.

As announced by Foreign Minister Vijitha Herath last week, Modi will arrive here to finalise agreements reached during President Dissanayake's visit to Delhi last year.

The president also told Parliament that the construction work on the Sampur Power Plant in the eastern port district of Trincomalee is scheduled to commence at the same time as the Indian PM's visit.

Dissanayake said Modi is visiting Sri Lanka due to the stability of the country.

Last month, Sri Lanka and India reached an agreement for setting up of solar power plants in the island country, Health Minister Nalinda Jayathissa announced.

-PTI

## QUOTE OF THE DAY

**“The Srivani Trust, which was started under the TDP government, thrived under the YSRCP, funding 3,600 temples nationwide. A vigilance probe found no irregularities, yet Chandrababu Naidu, in a hypocritical move, plans to continue the trust while adding another one for temple construction.”**

**B Karunakar Reddy, Leader, YSRCP**



## Child labour declines in incense industry

**New Delhi:** A new study by a coalition of child rights NGOs has claimed that child labour in India's incense stick manufacturing industry has found a significant decline in the employment of underage workers.

The research, conducted across Bihar, Karnataka, and Andhra Pradesh, highlighted progress in eradicating child labour from the sector. However, concerns were raised regarding children engaged in home-based work under unregulated conditions.

The study, undertaken by the Just Rights for Children Alliance in collaboration with multiple NGOs, revealed that 82 per cent of respondents did not witness any child labour in their localities.

Only 8 per cent reported seeing children engaged in incense stick (agarbatti) manufacturing, with a total of 31 children identified across the surveyed states — 13 in Andhra Pradesh and 18 in Karnataka.

“The incense stick industry has made remarkable progress in eliminat-



ing child labour, thanks to heightened awareness, policy interventions, and stricter regulations. However, we must remain vigilant, as pockets of child labour persist, particularly in home-based settings,” the report stated.

The study surveyed a total of 153 respondents across three states, selected based on literature review and local NGO insights.

The sample included shopkeepers, tea sellers, labourers, and local residents, ensuring diverse perspectives on the prevalence of child labour in the industry.

According to the findings, 77 per cent of the observed child labourers worked in home-based production rather than formal workshops, making regu-

lation and monitoring more challenging.

Additionally, 85 per cent of these children were engaged in packaging incense sticks, a task requiring minimal skill but drawing vulnerable children into the workforce.

The study also sheds light on the working conditions of these children.

About 92 per cent of them reported working between five to eight hours daily, with 77 per cent earning less than Rs 5,000 per month.

Despite India's legal

framework prohibiting child labour, enforcement remains a challenge.

The Child Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Act, 1986, and its 2016 amendment prohibit employment of children under 14 in all occupations, except for assistance in family enterprises.

The incense stick industry, which employs over two million workers nationwide, is primarily a home-based sector, with women constituting 80 per cent of the workforce.

-PTI



# Govt disburses Rs 14,020 cr in 10 PLI schemes

**New Delhi:** The government has disbursed Rs 14,020 crore under Production-Linked Incentive schemes for ten sectors, including electronics and pharma, since the launch of the support measure to boost domestic manufacturing, an official statement said on Saturday.

In 2021, the government announced Production-Linked Incentive (PLI) schemes for 14 sectors like telecommunication, white goods, textiles, manufacturing of medical devices, automobiles, speciality steel, food products, high-efficiency solar PV modules, advanced chemistry cell batteries, drones, and pharma, with an outlay of Rs 1.97 lakh crore.

"The incentive amount of around Rs 14,020 crore disbursed under PLI schemes for 10 sectors," the commerce and industry ministry said.

These sectors are large-scale electronics manufacturing, IT hardware, bulk drugs, medical devices, pharmaceuticals, telecom and networking products, food processing, white goods, automobiles and auto components and drones.

Individual cases have been approved over a period of time through a transparent mechanism, the ministry said in the statement.

Projects are implemented over a period of time



ranging from two-three years, depending on the nature of manufacturing, and claims are usually made after 1st year of production.

"Hence, most of the projects are at the implementation stage and will be filing incentive claims in due course," it noted.

The ministry said that as of date, 764 applications have been approved under the schemes for 14 sectors.

"176 MSMEs are among the PLI beneficiaries in sectors such as bulk drugs, medical devices, pharma, telecom, white goods, food processing, textiles and drones," it added.

Actual investment of around Rs 1.61 lakh crore (USD 18.72 billion) has been reported till November 2024, which has generated production/sales of about Rs 14 lakh crore

(USD 162.84 billion) and employment of over 11.5 lakh.

The schemes have witnessed exports surpassing Rs 5.31 lakh crore (around USD 61.76 billion), with significant contributions from sectors like electronics and pharmaceuticals.

In the scheme for speciality steel, it said, about Rs 20,000 crore of investments have been made by companies out of Rs 27,106 crore committed and these projects have given a direct employment to 9,000 people.

Incentive of Rs 48 crore has been released to the industry so far.

"The Ministry of Steel estimates that an incentive of Rs 2,000 crore will be disbursed by the end of the scheme tenure," it said, adding that 14 of 58 projects withdrew from the scheme due to changes in

business plans of the company and project execution delays.

The statement added that 35 companies have shown interest in the second round of the PLI scheme for speciality steel. They have committed an investment of Rs 25,200 crore.

The steel ministry is in the process of selecting and signing MoUs with these companies.

"An incentive of Rs 3,600 crore is estimated to be disbursed to these projects," the ministry said.

In the food processing sector, it said for 2022-23, an incentive of Rs 474 crore has been disbursed, and for 2023-24, the disbursement target is Rs 700 crore, which is on track to be achieved.

Further it said that in the food processing sector, currently 171 active beneficiaries are there across all categories. Six firms have withdrawn their applications.

The departments implementing their respective schemes are responsible for the disbursements.

The scheme's aim is to attract investments in key sectors and cutting-edge technology, ensure efficiency, bring economies of size and scale in the manufacturing sector and make Indian companies and manufacturers globally competitive.

-PTI

## Starlink in Pakistan Temporary permission granted

By Sajjad Hussain

**Islamabad:** Pakistan announced on Friday that it granted temporary permission to tech billionaire Elon Musk's satellite-based internet provider Starlink to provide its service in the country.

Starlink Services is one of the most technologically advanced companies globally among those providing internet via Low Earth Orbit (LEO) satellites.

Minister for Information Technology and Telecommunication Shaza Fatima Khawaja confirmed in a statement, saying that Starlink has been granted temporary registration in Pakistan following the directives of Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif.

The minister said with the consensus of all security and regulatory bodies, Starlink has been issued a temporary No Objection Certificate (NOC).

"Starlink has been issued a temporary NOC with the consensus of all security and regulatory agencies," Shaza said. "Starlink's arrival in Pakistan will mark the formal launch of satellite internet services."

She said the Pakistan Telecommunication Authority (PTA) would oversee compliance with fee payments and other licensing requirements by the company.

Shaza said that under Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif's leadership, Pakistan is making significant strides towards digital transformation.

"The prime minister had directed that the internet system in Pakistan should be improved," Shaza said.

## MONEY MATTERS

# Three Types Of Credit Card Users



By  
Kaustubh Kale

Credit cards have become an essential financial tool, offering convenience, rewards, and short-term liquidity. However, the way users manage their credit cards varies significantly. Generally, credit card users fall into three categories: those who pay in full, those who rely on EMIs, and those who only pay the minimum due. Each type has a different impact on financial health.

### 1. The Responsible Payer

The first type of credit card user is the most financially disciplined. This person uses their credit card for various purchases and expenses but ensures that the full outstanding balance is paid before the due date. By doing so, they avoid interest charges and late fees while still enjoying the benefits of reward points and cash-back offers.

This is the ideal way to use a credit card, as it helps maintain a strong credit score without accumulating unnecessary debt. However, from the perspective of credit card companies, such users are not highly profitable, as they do not generate significant fees or revenue.

### 2. The EMI Enthusiast

The second type of user prefers converting almost every purchase into Equated Monthly Installments (EMIs). Whether it's a no-cost EMI or an interest-bearing one, they choose to spread pay-

ments over several months to manage cash flow.

While no-cost EMI options may seem like a good deal, this habit can be problematic because it encourages spending money that has not yet been earned. Excessive reliance on EMIs can encourage overspending, making long-term financial stability harder to maintain. The situation worsens when purchases are converted into interest-bearing EMIs, adding unnecessary financial burdens.

### 3. The Minimum-Due Trapper

The third and most financially risky category includes users who only pay the minimum amount due each month, allowing the remaining balance to accumulate interest. This practice can be extremely dangerous, as credit card companies charge steep interest rates—often exceeding 30% annually—on the unpaid balance.

Over time, this approach leads to mounting debt, making it increasingly difficult to break free from financial obligations. While credit card companies benefit significantly from such users, their financial health suffers due to compounding interest charges.

### Which Approach Is Best?

To maintain financial stability, it is crucial to follow the habits of the first type—paying off the full balance on time and avoiding unnecessary EMIs. While no-cost EMIs may be reasonable in some cases, frequent reliance on them can lead to unhealthy spending habits. Most importantly, paying only the minimum due should always be avoided, as it leads to long-term financial strain.

Understanding these three types of credit card users can help individuals make smarter financial decisions and avoid debt traps in the future.

(The author is a Chartered Accountant and CFA (USA).  
Financial Advisor.  
Views personal. He could be reached on 9833133605.)



## Largest Station of Namo Bharat Corridor

# Construction likely to be completed in April



**New Delhi:** The largest Namo Bharat station in the Delhi-Ghaziabad-Meerut corridor, Sarai Kale Khan, is likely to be completed by the end of April.

According to an official statement, with key construction and electrification works nearing completion, trial runs on the stretch between New Ashok Nagar and Sarai Kale Khan are expected to begin by the end of this month.

The National Capital Region Transport Corporation (NCRTC) stated that track work between New Ashok Nagar and Sarai Kale Khan stations has been completed.

Sarai Kale Khan will serve as a major transport hub, connecting the Namu Bharat corridor with Haz-

rat Nizamuddin Railway Station, Delhi Metro's Pink Line, the Veer Haqueqat Rai Inter-State Bus Terminal (ISBT) and Ring Road, it stated.

To enhance interconnectivity, a 280-meter-long foot overbridge (FOB) is being built to link the Namu Bharat station with Hazrat Nizamuddin Railway Station, it mentioned.

The NCRTC stated that this FOB, equipped with six travelators, will ensure smooth movement between different modes of transport. NCRTC is also constructing a network of FOBs that will allow commuters to easily cross the busy Ring Road and access the Namu Bharat station, as well as the ISBT and the metro station, it stated.

A dedicated vehicle drop-

off zone is also being developed under the elevated station, accommodating more than 40 vehicles simultaneously, the NCRTC said.

Additionally, a city bus interchange with space for over 15 buses is being constructed beneath the station to create a well-organized public transport system, it said. Designed to handle high passenger volumes, the station will have five entry-exit gates, multiple staircases, 14 lifts, and 18 escalators, it stated.

According to the NCRTC, all lifts and escalators have already been installed. The station spans 215 metres in length, 50 metres in width, and 15 metres in height, ensuring efficient passenger movement across different levels.

Currently, Namu Bharat trains are running along a 55-kilometer stretch from New Ashok Nagar in Delhi to Meerut South, covering 11 stations. Beyond this operational section, the corridor will extend further to three more stations -- Shatabdi Nagar, Begumpul, and Modipuram, it added.



Rajasthan Deputy Chief Minister Diya Kumari visits the 26th Vintage & Classic Cars exhibition in Jaipur on Saturday.  
Pic: PTI

## Twitter bird sign sells for USD 35,000

**San Francisco:** Twitter's iconic bird logo that was removed from the company's former San Francisco headquarters when Elon Musk took over the social media company and re-branded it to X has sold for nearly USD 35,000 at an auction.

RR Auction, which deals in "rare and collectible

items" said the 254 kg sign, which measured 12 feet by 9 feet sold for USD 34,375. It did not name the buyer.

Musk had previously auctioned off other items from the former Twitter, ranging from signs and memorabilia to more mundane items such as kitchen equipment and office furniture.

Other tech history items that fetched sizable sums in the auction included an Apple-1 computer with accessories sold for USD 375,000, an Apple Computer Co. check signed by Steve Jobs in 1976 for USD 112,054 and a first-generation 4GB iPhone, sealed in its package, for USD 87,514. -AP

## Pakistan Economy in the Doldrums IMF pushes for tax target of Rs 15 trillion

By Sajjad Hussain

**Islamabad:** The International Monetary Fund has (IMF) proposed a tax target of over Rs 15 trillion for Pakistan in the next budget, according to a media report on Saturday.

The development comes days after the IMF urged Pakistan's Special Investment Facilitation Council (SIFC) to refrain from granting tax exemptions to international investment projects, including the Chaghi-Gwadar railway track project worth USD 2 billion.

ARY News reported citing sources that the IMF delegation maintained that tax exemptions for international investments would hinder the country's revenue generation.

The IMF and Pakistan are holding virtual talks, with 85 per cent of the discussions completed successfully. The talks are focused on finalising the details of the next budget, which is expected to be presented in the National Assembly soon.

The new budget is expected to increase the tax-

to-GDP ratio to 13 per cent and collect Rs 2,745 billion in non-tax revenue. The government is also expecting the economy to grow by over 4 per cent in the next fiscal year, driven by increased investment and consumption.

The government had requested Gulf countries to invest in the Chaghi-Gwadar railway track project, but the IMF has refused to grant tax exemptions to the SIFC for international investments.

The SIFC has been providing a platform for investment and facilitating the transportation of minerals from RekoDiq to Gwadar through a new railway line.

Officials stated that a platform is being provided to facilitate investment, and a new railway line will be constructed to transport minerals from RekoDiq to Gwadar, according to a news report.

Pakistan set Rs 12.97 trillion tax collection target for the fiscal year 2024-25 but the Federal Board of Revenue (FBR) has been facing challenges to meet the target.

# Hundreds throng Beijing's Vasant Mela

By K J M Varma

**Beijing:** The diplomatic enclave of the Chinese capital came alive on Saturday as over 4,000 Chinese people thronged the third edition of Vasant Mela marking a "new beginning" in Sino-India ties as the two countries sought to normalise the ties breaking the four-year chill.

Organised by the Indian Embassy here, the gathering soaked in the Indian cultural festival filled with a variety of Indian dances

performed mostly by Chinese enthusiasts specialising in India's art forms, and ethnic cuisine.

This year's Mela had shades of India-China bonhomie as Liu Jinsong, Director General of Asia and India's point man in the Chinese Foreign Ministry took part in the event.

Welcoming Liu and the vast Chinese crowd, Indian Ambassador to China Pradeep Kumar Rawat said spring is a time for "new beginnings, strengthening of bonds and opportunity



to experience the essence of India."

This year's Mela has taken place in the backdrop of India and China ending their over four-year freeze in relations over the eastern Ladakh standoff

beginning with the meeting of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Chinese President Xi Jinping at Kazan in Russia on the sidelines of the BRICS Summit last October. The meeting was fol-

lowed by a host of high level talks at various levels holding the promise of a new beginning in the troubled relations between the giant neighbours.

At the Saturday's event, Rawat, accompanied by his wife Shruti Rawat along with Deputy Ambassador Abhishek Shukla and senior Indian diplomats, greeted the visitors and interacted with them.

The cultural events included five types of classical Indian dances, including Bharatanatyam and

Kathak, which were largely performed by the Chinese artists specialising in these art forms besides Hindi film numbers.

The Chinese holiday crowd was treated with a vast variety of Indian cuisine by 35 stalls set up by Beijing-based Indian restaurants and families of Indian professionals based in the city.

Also, shops displaying Indian handicrafts, artificial jewellery and garments were a centre of attraction. -PTI

## QUOTE OF THE DAY

"In the end, Americans are going to lose from American trade action and that's one of the reasons I am confident that there will be that discussion with the appropriate amount of respect and the breadth."



Mark Carney,  
Prime Minister, Canada



# Columbia University caves in to Donald Trump's threats

AGREES TO ADOPT A NEW DEFINITION OF ANTISEMITISM, PUT MIDDLE EAST STUDIES DEPARTMENT UNDER NEW SUPERVISION AND MORE

By Jake Offenhardt

**New York:** Columbia University has agreed to put its Middle East studies department under new supervision and overhaul its rules for protests and student discipline, acquiescing to an extraordinary ultimatum by the Trump administration to implement those and other changes or risk losing billions of dollars in federal funding.

As part of the sweeping reforms, the university will also adopt a new definition of antisemitism and expand "intellectual diversity" by staffing up its Institute for Israel and Jewish Studies, according to a letter published Friday by the interim president, Katrina Armstrong.

The announcement drew immediate condemnation from some faculty and free speech groups, who accused the university of caving to President Donald Trump's largely unprecedented intrusion upon the school's academic freedom.

"Columbia's capitulation endangers academic freedom and campus expression nationwide," Donna Lieberman, the executive director of the New York Civil Liberties Union, said in a statement.

Earlier this month, the Trump administration pulled USD 400 million in



research grants and other funding over the university's handling of protests against Israel's military campaign in Gaza. As a precondition to restoring those funds — along with billions more in future grants — federal officials last week demanded the university immediately enact nine separate reforms to its academic and security policies.

In her response on Friday, Armstrong indicated Columbia would implement nearly all of them. She agreed to reform the college's long-standing disciplinary process and bar protests inside academic buildings. Students will not be permitted to wear face masks on campus "for the purposes of concealing one's identity." An exception would be made for people wearing them for health reasons.

The university will also appoint a new senior provost to review the leadership and curriculum of several international studies departments to "ensure the educational offerings are comprehensive and balanced."

The appointment appeared to be a concession to the Trump administration's most contentious demand: that the university places its Middle Eastern, South Asian and African Studies Department under "academic receivership for a minimum of five years."

"It's an escalation of a kind that is unheard of," Joan Scott, a historian and member of the academic freedom committee of the American Association of University Professors, said of the call for receivership last week. "Even during the McCarthy period in the United States,

this was not done." The Trump administration has repeatedly accused Columbia University of letting antisemitism go unchecked at protests against Israel that began at the university last spring and quickly spread to other campuses.

In her letter, Armstrong wrote that "the way Columbia and Columbians have been portrayed is hard to reckon with. We have challenges, yes, but they do not define us."

While Trump has made Columbia the most visible target of his crackdown on higher education, he has put other universities on notice that they will face cuts if they do not embrace his agenda.

Last week, his administration announced investigations into 52 universities for their diversity, equity and inclusion programmes.

## Russia gets N Korea's full support

**Seoul:** North Korean leader Kim Jong Un expressed his unwavering support for Russia's war in Ukraine during a meeting with a top Russian security official in Pyongyang, North Korean state media said on Saturday.

Friday's meeting between Kim and Sergei Shoigu, Russia's Security Council secretary, followed a South Korean intelligence assessment in late February that North Korea had likely sent additional troops to Russia after its forces suffered heavy casualties fighting in the Russian-Ukraine war.

North Korean and Russian state media said Kim and Shoigu discussed various issues, including Russia's war in Ukraine, Moscow's dialogues with the Trump administration and the security situation on the Korean Peninsula. They reaffirmed the willingness of the two countries' leaders to "unconditionally" uphold a major mutual defense treaty reached at a summit last year in Pyongyang, which pledges mutual assistance if either country faces aggression.

Kim during the meeting said his government will "invariably support Russia in the struggle for defending the national sovereignty, territorial integrity and security interests."

Shoigu conveyed a message from Russian President Vladimir Putin, who extended his greetings to Kim and vowed to give "utmost attention" to implementing agreements reached in their recent summits. He expressed gratitude for North Korea's solidarity with Russia's position on all critical geopolitical issues.

-AP



A British Airways plane takes off as Heathrow Airport slowly resumes flights on Saturday. Pic: AP/PTI

## Flights resume at Heathrow

**London:** Heathrow Airport said it was "fully operational" on Saturday, after an almost daylong closure sparked by an electrical substation fire. But airlines warned that severe disruption will last for days as they scramble to relocate planes and crews and get travellers to their destinations.

Inconvenienced passengers, angry airlines and concerned politicians sought answers about how one seemingly accidental fire could shut down Europe's busiest air hub.

"We have hundreds of additional colleagues on hand in our terminals and we have added flights to today's schedule to facilitate an extra 10,000 passengers travelling through the airport," Heathrow said in a statement.

"Passengers travelling today should check with their airline for the latest information regarding their flight."

British Airways, Heathrow's biggest airline, said it expects to operate about 85 per cent of its scheduled flights at the airport on

Saturday. More than 1,300 flights were cancelled and some 200,000 people stranded on Friday after an overnight fire at a substation 2 miles (3.2 kilometers) away from the airport cut power to Heathrow, and to more than 60,000 properties.

Residents in west London described hearing a large explosion and then seeing a fireball and clouds of smoke when the blaze ripped through the substation. The fire was brought under control after seven hours, but the airport was shut for almost 18. A handful of flights took off and landed late Friday.

Police said they do not consider the fire suspicious, and the London Fire Brigade said its investigation would focus on the electrical distribution equipment at the substation.

Still, the huge impact of the fire left authorities facing criticism that Britain's creaking infrastructure is ill-prepared to deal with disasters or attacks.

Heathrow is one of the world's busiest airports for

international travel, and saw 83.9 million passengers last year.

Passengers on about 120 flights were in the air when the closure was announced found themselves landing in different cities, and even different countries.

Friday's disruption was one of the most serious since the 2010 eruption of Iceland's Eyjafjallajökull volcano, which spewed clouds of ash into the atmosphere and shut Europe's airspace for days.

Mark Doherty and his wife were halfway across the Atlantic when the in-flight map showed their flight from New York's John F. Kennedy Airport to Heathrow was turning around.

"I was like, you're joking," Doherty said before the pilot told passengers they were heading back to New York.

Doherty called the situation "typical England — got no back-up plan for something happens like this. There's no contingency plan".

-AP

## Boeing to make US fighter jets

**Washington:** US President Donald Trump announced on Friday that Boeing will build the Air Force's future fighter jet, which the Pentagon says will have stealth and penetration capabilities that far exceed those of its current fleet and is essential in a potential conflict with China.

Known as Next Generation Air Dominance, or NGAD, the manned jet will serve as quarterback to a fleet of future drone aircraft designed to be able to penetrate the air defences of China and any other potential foes.

The initial contract to proceed with production on a version for the Air Force is worth an estimated USD 20 billion.

The 47th president, who announced the award at the White House with Defence Secretary Pete Hegseth and Air Force leadership, said with a grin that the new fighter would be named the F-47.

Critics have questioned the cost and the necessity of the programme as the Pentagon is still struggling to fully produce its current most advanced jet, the

F-35, which is expected to cost taxpayers more than USD 1.7 trillion over its lifespan.

With evolving drone and space warfare likely to be the centre of any fight with China, Dan Grazier, a military procurement analyst, questions whether "another exquisite manned fighter jet really is the right platform going forward."

The selection of Boeing, which has faced intense pressure from Trump over cost overruns and program delays on Air Force One, came after an independent analysis by the Air Force, an official said on the condition of anonymity.

The Air Force has not specified how many aircraft will be produced. In a statement, however, Allvin said there would be more F-47s produced than F-22s, the advanced fighter jet it's replacing.

There are now about 180 F-22 fighter jets in service.

A separate Navy contract for its version of the NGAD fighter is still under competition between Northrop Grumman and Boeing.

-AP

## US bans former Argentine president

**Buenos Aires:** The State Department has banned former Argentine President Cristina Fernández from entering the United States, accusing her of involvement in "significant corruption" while in office.

The State Department also banned Fernández' planning minister Julio Miguel De Vido and their families.

"The United States will continue to promote accountability for those who abuse public power for personal gain," Secretary of State Marco Rubio said.

In November, a tribunal in Argentina upheld a six-year prison sentence and a lifetime ban from holding public office against Fernández.

The former President was convicted and sentenced in 2022 by a three-judge panel for a fraud scheme that embezzled millions of dollars through public works projects during her presidency. She appealed, but the higher tribunal ratified the original ruling.

Fernández has denied all the accusations.



Senior officials from Indian and Italian Defence General Staff during the 13th India-Italy Military Cooperation Group (MCG) Meeting in Rome. Pic: AP/PTI

## Italian singles can adopt foreign kids

**Rome:** Italy's Constitutional Court ruled Friday that unmarried people can adopt foreign minors, ending a 40-year ban on the practice and setting a precedent that could pave the way to allowing Italian singles to adopt from within the country.

Friday's court ruling declared unconstitutional the exclusion of singles from international adoptions under a 1983 Italian law, which allowed only married couples to pursue international adoptions.

According to Italy's top court, the exclusion of single people risked undermining "the effectiveness of the child's right to grow up in a stable and harmonious family environment."

The court decision also reflects concerns among

adoption advocates over a downward trend in Italy's international adoption over the past few years, due to increasing difficulties for couples in completing adoptions abroad and the high costs related to the lengthy process.

According to Italy's international adoption commission, in the first semester of 2024 international adoption in the country fell by 5.6 per cent from the same period a year before and by 14.3 per cent from the first semester of 2022.

Italy's right-wing government headed by Premier Giorgia Meloni has opposed singles' adoptions in court, but the country's centre-left opposition hailed Friday's ruling as a "historic turning point."

-AP

## Former Polish defence minister charged for treason

**Warsaw:** Polish prosecutors filed charges against a former defence minister, accusing him of exceeding his powers when he declassified parts of a plan for national defence that had been prepared years before under an earlier government led by Prime Minister Donald Tusk.

Tusk's government has accused the former defence minister, Mariusz Blaszczak, of betraying national interests by revealing military secrets for political gain ahead of a national election.

"If we were to imagine the basic task of a spy in Poland, the theft of defence plans would be his priority, but no one predicted that such a role could be played by the minister of national defence," the current deputy defence minister, Cezary Tomczyk, said last month in parliament.

Blaszczak served as defence minister in a national conservative government that held power from 2015-2023. In 2023 he made public parts of a military defence plan that had been drawn up in 2011. The document laid out plans for



the Polish army to retreat westward to the Vistula River, which runs through the centre of Poland, in case of an invasion from the east by Russia.

Blaszczak was read the charges at the District Prosecutor's Office in Warsaw on Friday, he told reporters afterward, according to the state news agency PAP.

He wrote on X that he was being charged for "declassifying the plan of the first Tusk government to give up half of Poland without a fight."

"I would do it again without hesitation. I had not only the right, but also the duty" he said.

"Thanks to this, Poles know the truth about the fate you prepared for the inhabitants of Eastern Poland," he said.

-AP

### QUOTE OF THE DAY

"I am carrying President Trump's America First agenda. I've always believed in having constructive dialogue and that has been the nature of all my visits to China over the course of many years."



Steve Daines, Senator, US

## UNICEF urges Taliban to lift ban

**Islamabad:** The UN children's agency on Saturday urged Afghanistan's Taliban rulers to immediately lift a lingering ban on girls' education to save the future of millions who have been deprived of their right to education since the Taliban returned to power in 2021.

The appeal by UNICEF comes as a new school year began in Afghanistan without girls beyond sixth grade. The ban, said the

agency, has deprived 400,000 more girls of their right to education, bringing the total to 2.2 million.

Afghanistan is the only country in the world that bans female secondary and higher education, with the Taliban justifying the ban saying it doesn't comply with their interpretation of Sharia, or Islamic law.

"For over three years, the rights of girls in Afghanistan have been violated," Catherine Russell,



UNICEF executive director, said in a statement. "All girls must be allowed to return to school now. If these capable, bright young girls continue to be

denied an education, then the repercussions will last for generations." A ban on the education of girls will harm the future of millions of Afghan

girls, she said, adding that if the ban persists until 2030, "more than four million girls will have been deprived of their right to education beyond primary school." The consequences, she added, will be "catastrophic."

Russell warned that the decline in female doctors and midwives will leave women and girls without crucial medical care. This situation is projected to result in an estimated 1,600

additional maternal deaths and over 3,500 infant deaths. "These are not just numbers, they represent lives lost and families shattered," she said.

The Afghan Taliban government earlier this year skipped a Pakistan-hosted global conference where Nobel laureate Malala Yousafzai condemned the state of women's and girl's rights in Afghanistan as gender apartheid.

-AP



## NEWSMAKER OF THE WEEK

## The Perennial Outlier



By

Kiran D. Tare

Shashi Tharoor has never been one to retreat from an unpopular opinion or acknowledgment. Speaking at the Raisina Dialogue yesterday, the Congress MP and author admitted to a misjudgment that left him with “egg on his face.” Tharoor, who criticized India’s stance on the Russia-Ukraine conflict in 2022, now conceded that Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s balancing act between Moscow and Kyiv was, in fact, a diplomatic coup. That confession lauding Modi, delivered with Tharoor’s characteristic eloquence, has predictably upset his own party while delighting the BJP.

The BJP’s Sambit Patra, never one to miss an opportunity for schadenfreude, called on Rahul Gandhi and Mallikarjun Kharge to acknowledge the wisdom of their own maverick MP.

Having only recently endured a furore over Tharoor’s unvarnished praise of the Left-led Kerala government’s industrial

**As Congress’s most erudite contrarian Shashi Tharoor courts controversy within his party once again, speculation mounts on will he stay, or will he cross the Rubicon?**

policy, the Congress seems resigned to his occasional rebellions.

Tharoor, for his part, has denied any intent to switch sides, citing “stark ideological differences” with the BJP. And yet, the murmurs persist. After all, Tharoor has spent years navigating Congress’s factional waters, his intellectual independence often putting him at odds with the party’s old guard. In 2022, he dared to challenge the party establishment by contesting the Congress presidency, facing off against Kharge who was the Gandhi family’s anointed choice. He lost, but the act itself was an assertion that he was not content to be a mere ornament in the Congress.

His history of friction with the party is long and storied. His “cattle class” remark in 2009, which was an acerbic response to a question about economy-class travel during the UPA’s austerity drive, had earned him a sharp rebuke. His stay at a five-star hotel, alongside then External Affairs Minister S.M. Krishna had landed him in hot water with the government. In 2010, his role in securing a stake for his late wife, Sunanda Pushkar, in an IPL franchise forced his resignation as a junior minister. And in 2014, Pushkar’s sudden death in a Delhi hotel room threw him into a vortex of legal battles and personal tragedy, culminating in his 2021 acquittal in a murder case.

Yet, despite the controversies (or perhaps because of them) Tharoor has remained an electoral force. Since 2009, he has won four consecutive Lok Sabha elections from Thiruvananthapuram, defying critics who long dismissed him as an elite intellectual with little grassroots appeal. He commands a distinct support base of urbane, educated persons often disillusioned with the Congress’s traditional



By

Priya Samant

politics. His literary flourish, his Oxford-inflected baritone and his technocratic approach to governance set him apart in a party still steeped in dynastic and caste equations.

But being a perennial outlier has its costs. In Kerala, Tharoor’s recent remarks about the Congress’s lack of grassroots leadership rankled the state unit, which is already wary of his unpredictable streak. His praise of the Left’s industrial policy was seen as an unnecessary provocation, triggering suspicions about his long-term allegiance. That his latest comments lauding PM Modi on India’s foreign policy only adds to the intrigue.

Tharoor has insisted he is a Congress loyalist, describing himself as a “classic liberal” rather than an ideologue. But the lingering question is how long can a man of his intellectual autonomy and impatience of any party orthodoxy remain tethered to a party that seldom celebrates dissent?

Tharoor’s political career, like his prose, is complex, layered and full of contradictions. Whether he stays within the Congress to challenge its ossified structures or charts a new course altogether, one thing is certain: Shashi Tharoor will not fade into the background. He never has.

## AROUND THE WORLD

## The Old Magnet King



By

Priya Samant

The world economy is evolving. The new robotic revolution fuelled by AI is changing the global equations rapidly. America wants to purchase Greenland, annex Canada as the 51st state, dig deep into Ukrainian soil, and plough dollars into the clays of the third-world mines. Meanwhile, with advanced military infrastructure and tactical lawfare, China is trying to tame the South China Sea. It is strengthening its roots in Vietnam, influencing Myanmar, grabbing African land, expanding its presence in polar regions, and now it aims to mine the moon rocks. All this is to power the tiny AI chip that needs some exotic elements - the critical metals, and minerals.

These elements are used in AI chips and shape many products that represent modern life. They bring colors and light up our mobiles, TV screens and laptops. They add comfort and stability to our cars. These elements are essential for germinating seeds and guiding missiles and jets at war. Their unique properties make them critical components in transforming the technology, healthcare, energy, and defense.

These are 17 elements collectively known as Rare Earth Elements (REE) found in rocks and clays all across the Globe. But then what makes them “rare”? Well! They are called rare as they rarely exist in pure form. Their deposits are usually smaller than a kilometre in diameter, and their economically exploitable ores are scarce. Generally, these elements are mined as byproducts of widely used metals and minerals. They require numerous complicated and costly refining processes before they are put to end-use. Although these minerals are essential for clean energy transition, their processing

plants often generate radioactive waste that is costly to dispose of or causes environmental hazards that are difficult to dodge. As a result, many countries prefer importing over capital-intensive domestic mining and/or processing. Notably, despite being a wealthy and developed country, America has only one active mine and processing facility, and it imports 70% of its REE requirements from China-Hong Kong.

Nevertheless, China ignored environmental consequences and capitalised on the critical demand and short supply of REEs. Currently, China holds approximately half of the global reserves of rare minerals and is said to be the largest miner in the world, mining 75 per cent of the world’s total extraction. Over decades, China has been building smelting and refining capacity, and currently, it controls almost 90 per cent of Global REE processing.

China is the only country that carries out all phases of the supply chain, from extraction to processing, and the steps of separating, purifying, and refining each REE. It also manufactures super magnets at remarkably low cost. Consequently, Western countries send their ores to China for refining, or import end products for their EVs. With decades of strategic investments, unparalleled economies of scale, and an ever-growing REE market, China continued to exploit a flexible pricing strategy and strengthened its monopoly in the global mineral market. Control over these strategic elements has empowered China to maintain economic stability and power to create global chaos.

When Xi and Trump are racing for rare earth resources, one might ask, why isn’t Putin joining the game? Despite the ongoing war and U.S. sanctions, recently, Putin launched the “New Materials and Chemistry” initiative. He expressed openness to collaborating with the U.S. to secure rare earth minerals! It could be a strategic move by Putin to loosen the sanctions grip and catch up in the race for rare earth minerals.

As for Europe, the region is almost “entirely” dependent on China for the supply and processing of Key rare earths, which is a serious economic threat. China can exploit this situation



anytime by banning the export of strategic minerals or restricting processing facilities like it did in the past. Hence, European countries are exploring affordable and dependable alternatives to obtain REE. The region aims to recycle electronic waste to source at least 30 per cent of its REE demand and reduce dependence on China. Now, the question is whether these recycled magnets would be strong enough for future EVs, wind turbines, and so on to pull the whole of Europe out of China’s magnetic field.

Researchers at Cambridge University are developing a large-scale industrial process to manufacture high-performance magnets from “stardust”. If successful, these cosmic magnets could eliminate the reliance on rare earth materials. For several years, America too has been examining various cost-effective techniques. As a result, it is now planning to exploit unconventional resources like coal ash and mining waste to extract critical rare earths. We may soon see the rare element rise from the ashes, “Unleashing American Energy”.

Countries are rushing to secure REE supplies by signing Mineral Security Partnerships (MSP) with the United States or negotiating tariffs and peace accords! US-MSP might consider all the possible measures to counter China, but the new mines and processing facilities take decades to commercialise! In this scenario, will these unconventional methods and newly established partnerships without dollar funding be genuinely able to challenge the old magnet king??

*(The author is a foreign affairs expert. Views personal.)*

## POLITICS AND PROSE

## Did a CIA Counterintelligence Clique Kill JFK? The Latest Files Offer Clues



By

Shoumojit Banerjee

The death of a President. The birth of a thousand theories. For over six decades, the idea that Lee Harvey Oswald, a disaffected former Marine with Soviet sympathies could change the course of history by killing U.S. President John F. Kennedy with three rifle shots from a Texas book depository has been too banal to accept. The 888-page report presented by the Warren Commission, established by President Lyndon B. Johnson to investigate JFK’s assassination on November 22, 1963, and the subsequent killing of Oswald by nightclub owner Jack Ruby, concluded that Oswald and Ruby had acted alone in their respective crimes. Since then, the report has been met by near-universal incredulity.

So, earlier this week, when the Trump administration declassified 2,182 PDF documents comprising about 63,400 pages pertaining to JFK’s assassination, the million-dollar question was if the a ‘smoking

**According to some researchers, the latest declassifications confirm the complicity of a CIA cabal in engineering President Kennedy’s death.**

gun’ was found in these records. Was there indeed a second shooter besides Oswald who fired at Kennedy from the infamous grassy knoll in Dealey Plaza?

After all, eyewitnesses at the scene did report hearing shots from multiple directions, and acoustic analyses of police recordings have suggested the possibility of a second gunman.

That said, no declassification would ever give a graphic detail of any such plot. The details will have to be decoded by beaver-like intelligence experts. Jefferson Morley, a former journalist for The Washington Post and one of the most persistent and meticulous investigators of the Kennedy assassination, is emphatic that the latest declassifications move us closer than ever to understanding what really happened on that fateful day in Dallas.

Morley, whose Substack JFK Facts has a dedicated following, has slammed so-called experts who claimed the latest declassifications were a ‘nothing burger.’ According to him, the latest document release is the most significant since the 1990s, offering the strongest evidence yet that Oswald was monitored and manipulated by the CIA, especially the legendary CIA counterintelligence chief James Jesus Angleton.

Among the most striking revelations is evidence suggesting that Oswald was considered for recruitment as a CIA source in 1959. Angleton not only monitored Oswald’s movements for a considerable period but that a 180-page dossier on him was lying on his desk just a week before Kennedy’s trip to Dallas. His life, his contacts, were rigorously monitored and Oswald was assigned at least six different CIA codenames. That Oswald, a man who had defected to the Soviet Union and contacted a known KGB official, was never deemed a security threat by Angleton and other top CIA officials raises serious questions.



Was this sheer incompetence on Angleton’s part, or was Oswald part of a larger intelligence operation run by Angleton?

Recall that immediately after his arrest following the assassination, Oswald had repeatedly denied killing President Kennedy, famously declaring, “I’m just a patsy.” This statement has since become a cornerstone of conspiracy theories suggesting he was ‘set up’ by powerful forces.

One of the most puzzling episodes in the lead-up to the Kennedy assassination is Oswald’s visit to Mexico City in late September and early October 1963. According to CIA surveillance records, Oswald visited both the Soviet and Cuban embassies, seeking a visa to defect to Cuba. But the details of this trip are riddled with inconsistencies. Multiple accounts suggest that different ‘Oswalds’ presented themselves at the embassies. The CIA’s own reports describe a man who was taller, stockier and older than the real Oswald. A phone call recording from the Soviet embassy features a man speaking broken Russian, whereas Oswald, having lived in the Soviet Union for over two years, was known to be fluent.

What these latest disclosures confirm is that the CIA knew far more about Oswald than it admitted to the Warren Commission. Oswald, after

all, had been a Marine radar operator at an airbase used for U-2 spy missions, had defected to the Soviet Union, then returned to the U.S. under circumstances that should have invited scrutiny.

Another striking detail in these released documents is the ‘Underhill Memo’ dated June 1967. It concerns Gary Underhill, a U.S. Army intelligence officer and former CIA asset who, in the wake of the assassination, told associates that a small clique within the Agency was responsible. Underhill fled Washington in a state of great agitation the day after Kennedy was killed. Six months later, he was found dead.

For long, theories of a sinister conspiracy involving rogue CIA operators, anti-Castro Cubans, the military-industrial complex and the Mob (even Lyndon B. Johnson’s complicity) have flourished and thrived. Portrayals of the JFK assassination in films and literature have reinforced the public scepticism surrounding the ‘lone-nut’ theory.

In fact, the Warren Commission report itself is riddled with contra-

dictions, noting that Oswald as a Marine had barely qualified as a marksman, with a score just above the failing threshold. His rifle - a cheap, unreliable Mannlicher-Carcano - was ill-suited for precision shooting, with misaligned sights and a left-handed scope for a right-handed shooter - a fact that ought to disprove outright his ‘expert’ shooting of President Kennedy.

Films like the low-key but fascinating Executive Action (1973), starring Burt Lancaster and Robert Ryan, and Oliver Stone’s bravura JFK (1991) have firmly embedded the idea in public imagination that JFK was the victim of a high-level plot. Stone’s film, in particular, was so controversial and influential that it directly led to the passage of the 1992 JFK Records Act, which mandated the declassification of assassination-related documents.

Stone’s JFK, a postmodern cinematic fever dream that blended several of the facts mentioned above with speculation and gossip, still shapes popular discourse. A key source work for the film was former New Orleans District Attorney Jim Garrison’s On the Trail of the Assassins. In JFK, Garrison, played by Kevin Costner, is obsessed with a grand conspiracy to kill Kennedy that leads him to challenge the Warren Commission’s conclusions, particularly the ‘magic bullet’ theory which implausibly posited that a single projectile struck both Kennedy and Texas Governor John Connally, causing multiple wounds. To Garrison and his supporters, the notion that one bullet could take such a convoluted trajectory was absurd, reinforcing suspicions of multiple shooters. Stone’s gripping film distils JFK conspiracy lore, depicting the CIA as orchestrating Kennedy’s murder to thwart his détente with the Soviets or as fallout from the botched ‘Operation Mongoose’ against Castro.



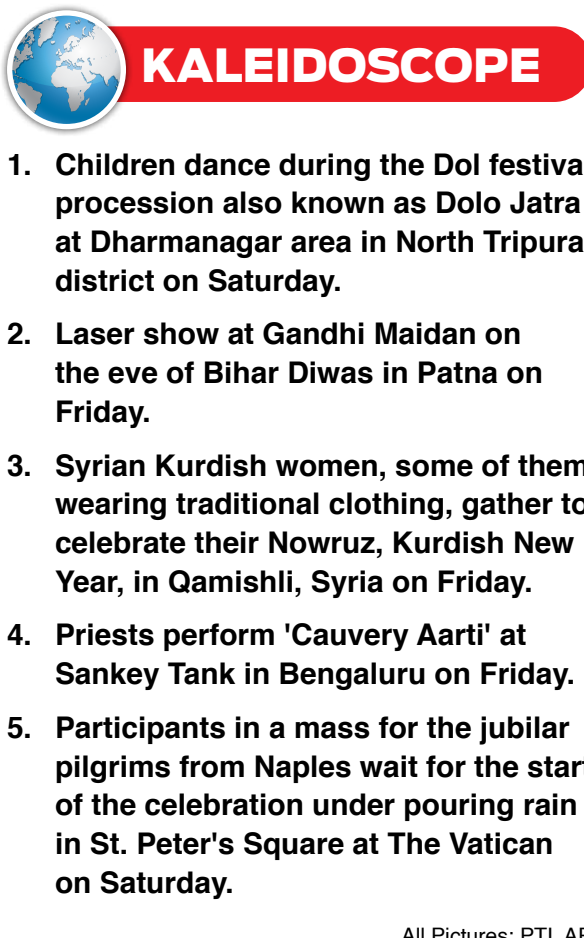
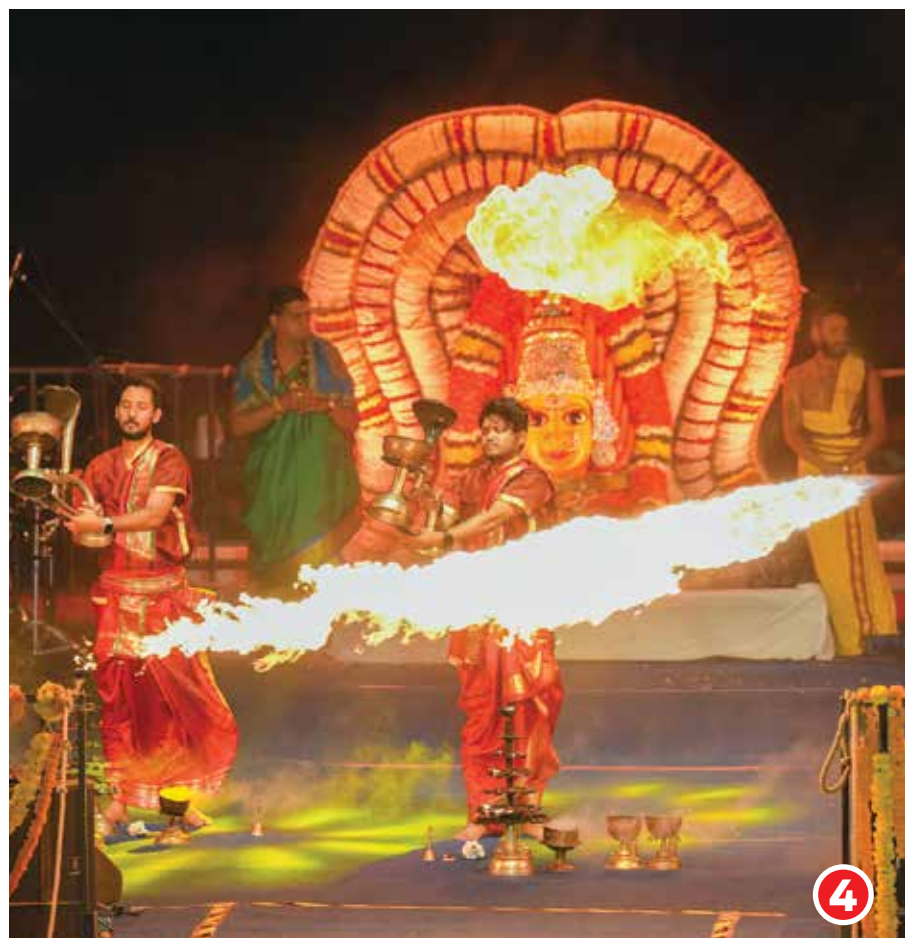
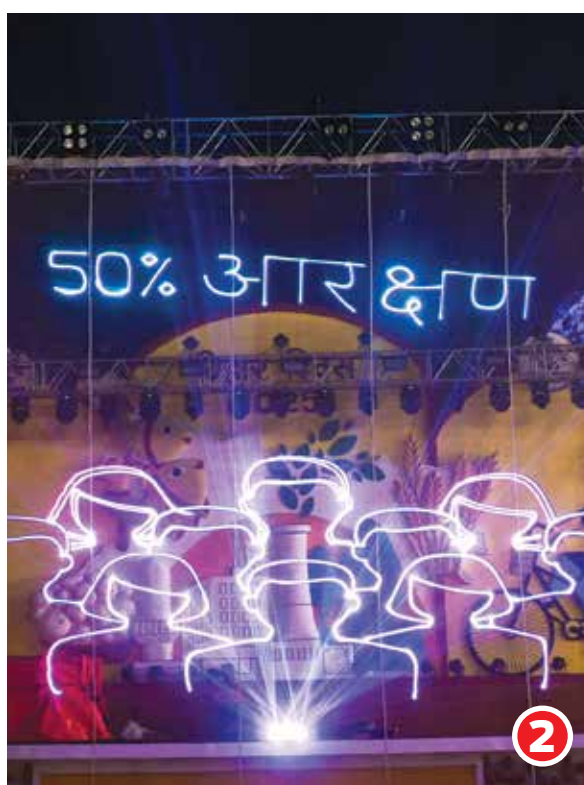
Even though many picked holes in JFK’s version of events, the film brilliantly succeeded in evoking the atmosphere of paranoia and distrust between Kennedy and the CIA. The assassination has birthed an entire cottage industry of books ranging from the plausible to the absurd. Mark Lane, who wrote Rush to Judgment (the basis for Executive Action), proposed that Kennedy’s body was altered to falsify autopsy evidence. The Zapruder film, initially withheld from the public, became a Rorschach test for theorists dissecting every frame for inconsistencies.

The event has inspired some of the most compelling fiction of the past half-century. Don DeLillo’s Libra (1988) weaves a paranoid, fragmented narrative that blurs history and fiction, portraying Oswald as both a pawn and an enigma in a larger, unknowable plot. Norman Mailer’s Oswald’s Tale (1995) reinforces the idea of Oswald as a lonely, resentful drifter rather than a grand conspirator.

For once, latest declassifications may just end up proving the paranoid right - that the shadows were always hiding something after all.







### KALEIDOSCOPE

1. Children dance during the Dol festival procession also known as Dolo Jatra at Dharmanagar area in North Tripura district on Saturday.
2. Laser show at Gandhi Maidan on the eve of Bihar Diwas in Patna on Friday.
3. Syrian Kurdish women, some of them wearing traditional clothing, gather to celebrate their Nowruz, Kurdish New Year, in Qamishli, Syria on Friday.
4. Priests perform 'Cauvery Aarti' at Sankey Tank in Bengaluru on Friday.
5. Participants in a mass for the jubilar pilgrims from Naples wait for the start of the celebration under pouring rain in St. Peter's Square at The Vatican on Saturday.

All Pictures: PTI, AP

### READERS' VOICE

## Tribal Spirit Shines at Kumbh



By  
Sharad Chavan

The Kumbh Mela at Prayagraj broke records and spotlighted India's enduring spiritual and cultural legacy. Viewed through mythological, religious, and historical lenses, it offered new insight into timeless traditions. Even today, the Triveni Sangam remains a powerful symbol of religious identity.

In a tech-driven era, India's spiritual roots continue to transcend caste, class, wealth, education, and status—bound by faith. This historic Kumbh rekindled that spiritual flame.

Marking the RSS centenary, the Akhil Bharatiya Vanvasi Kalyan Ashram hosted the Janajati Sanskritik Samagam from 6-10 February 2025. Over 10,000 traditionally dressed tribals joined a grand procession and rituals at the Triveni Sangam. The Yuva Kumbh added youthful energy and broad participation.

Held every 12 years, the Kumbh Mela symbolises Indian identity and faith. Tribals eagerly await it, though many face challenges due to distance and lack of transport. Since 2005, the Vanvasi Kalyan Ashram has helped tribals attend Kumbhs—whether in Shabari, Ujjain, Nashik, or Prayagraj—to offer prayers and take the sacred dip.

Bringing 15,000 tribals to this year's Prayagraj Kumbh took careful planning. Multiple meetings were held between Vanvasi Kalyan Ashram, spiritual leaders like Swami Avadheshanand Giri Maharaj, and organisations like Surabhi Pratishthan and Uttam Dham.

From 6-10 February, the temporary Birsa Centre hosted the Janajati Yuva Kumbh, royal baths, processions, folk art displays, and gatherings of tribal saints and social workers.

The main event, on 6 February, wit-

nessed over 5,000 tribal youth take part. Key attendees included Swami Avadheshanand Giri Maharaj—the only Mahamandaleshwar from the tribal community—Swami Raghunathbappa Maharaj, Union Minister Shri Durga Das Uike, Vanvasi Kalyan Ashram President Shri Satyendra Singh, ex-NCST Chairman Shri Harsh Chouhan, and Padma Shri Chaitram Pawar.

Shri Chouhan spoke of the Kumbh's role in preserving tribal identity, calling it a living symbol of forest-rooted culture. Saints urged youth to treasure their forest traditions and called on spiritual leaders to visit tribal areas to experience their sacredness. They stressed that the Kumbh remains incomplete without forest-dweller unity—echoing Swami Avadheshanand Giri Maharaj's words earlier in Prayagraj.

The Yuva Kumbh also spotlighted tribal struggles and achievements. Speakers like Shri Lakshmanraj Singh Markam, Shri Jitendra Dhruv, Smt Meena Murmu, Dr Ram Shankar Uraon, and Arvind Bhil addressed the gathering. Shri Markam, a Madhya Pradesh official, delivered a message in Hindi and English outlining seven key principles for youth-led social change.

Shri Satyendra Singh encouraged youth to share their community's wisdom via media and grow as confident leaders.

Over four days, the wisdom and blessings from saints and social leaders left a strong impression on attendees and future generations.

Swami Avadheshanand Giri Maharaj honoured Vanvasi Kalyan Ashram leaders and social workers, including Padma Shri Pawar. Sixteen young tribal activists were also felicitated with shawls, mementos, and certificates.

On 7 February, after the Youth Conference, 10,000 tribals in traditional attire marched from two locations to the Triveni Sangam, dancing and chanting along the way—one group covering 14 km. Swami Yatindranand Giri Maharaj and other saints, including Swami Aseemanand Ji and senior Kalyan Ashram leaders, joined them for the royal bath.

While the holy bath was the centrepiece, another key aim was to showcase India's tribal and Sanatan culture. The grand procession offered

Kumbh visitors a vibrant glimpse of tribal life.

A cultural programme began and continued through 8-9 February. Organised by Vanvasi Kalyan Ashram, the Union Ministry of Tribal Affairs, and IGNCAs, 106 folk groups performed music and dance at four venues—Kailashanand Ashram, Uttam Dham, Prajyotishpuram, and Chhat-tisgarh Bhavan.

Tribal performers from across India celebrated nature-rooted traditions and the Panch Mahabhutas. Through native dialects and music, they fostered unity—reminding all that urban life springs from forest roots.

In Sanatan Dharma, regional songs—from Kokna's "Donyi Polo" to Marathi bhajans—evoke nature and gratitude. Despite varied dialects, they shared a spiritual resonance.

Here, distinctions between rural, urban, and forest life faded—everyone was simply Indian. Ashram heads praised the performances, urging continued efforts to preserve this living heritage.

The Sant Samagam on 9-10 February brought together saints from the Northeast. Dr. Krishna Gopal Ji spoke; RSS Sarkaryavah Dattatreya Hosabale Ji, Suresh Soni Ji, VHP's Dinesh Ji, and UP Minister Shri Jain also attended. Fifty-one saints were honoured, with Sarkaryavah Ji walking to each and offering flowers—a deeply moving moment.

Concerns were raised about external interference, especially missionary activity. Legal benefits for tribals are often diverted. Saints called for action on forest conservation, displacement, and sustainable development.

A shining example of the spirit of "Tu Main Ek Rakt" (You and I are of one blood) was Shri Jalan of Surabhi Sanstha, who ensured all tribals and devotees were fed prasad—no small feat, successfully managed.

The Kumbh drew wide media coverage. Volunteers live-streamed events, and IGNCAs helped take this spiritual celebration global.

The mission behind this grand tribal participation in the Kumbh was fulfilled.

(The author is the national general secretary of Akhil Bharatiya Vanvasi Kalyan Ashram)

### EXPLAINER

## How the Pope is Rewriting the Narrative on His Authority

During his first foreign trip in 2013, Pope Francis made headlines when he carried his own black leather briefcase as he boarded the Alitalia charter bound for Brazil, since popes never carry bags and until the 1970s were themselves carried on thrones.

Asked what was in the bag, Francis joked that it wasn't the nuclear codes. But he seemed baffled that something as normal as an airplane passenger carrying a briefcase could create such a fuss.

"I have always taken a bag with me when travelling—it's normal," he told his first news conference as pope. "We must get used to being normal. The normality of life."

Over 12 years, Francis has sought that kind of normality for the papacy with his informal style and disdain for pomp while ensuring that he still wields the awesome power held by Christ's vicar on Earth and Europe's last absolute monarch.

The way Francis has managed his five-week hospitalization for pneumonia has followed that same playbook: He has allowed the public to follow the very normal ups and downs of an 88-year-old man battling a complex lung infection through spare but regular medical bulletins, while also continuing to run the 1.3-billion strong Catholic Church.

### Francis has stayed in control, remotely

In between respiratory crises, prayer and physiotherapy, Francis has appointed over a dozen bishops, approved a handful of new saints, authorised a three-year extension of his signature reform process and sent off messages public and private. Vatican cardinals have stood in for him at events requiring his presence.

That's not as easy a balancing act as it sounds, since there are few positions of power that are both as absolute as the papacy and, during times of illness, as seemingly fragile: According to the church's canon law, the pope



possesses "supreme, full, immediate, and universal ordinary power in the church." He answers to no one but God, and there is no appeal of his decisions.

And while popes aren't subject to re-election campaigns or no-confidence votes, they essentially owe their jobs to the 120 men who elected them. While those same cardinals swear obedience to the pope, they will ultimately choose his successor from within their own ranks. It's no surprise then that talk of conclaves, papal contenders and challenges facing a future pope has been a constant buzz in Rome ever since Francis was admitted to Gemelli hospital February 14.

Francis is well aware that anytime he has gone into the hospital, the plotting has begun for electing the next pope, contributing to a certain lame duck status. "Some wanted me dead," he said after his 2021 hospitalisation, when he learned that secret meetings had already been held to plan the conclave.

He knows as well that even before his current hospitalisation, an anonymous cardinal had circulated a seven-point memo listing priorities for the next pope to correct the "confusion, division and conflict" sowed by Francis.

### Not shy about showing weakness

And yet Francis has never been shy about showing his weakness, age or infirmities in ways that seem unthinkable for public fig-

ures for whom any sign of fragility can threaten their authority and undermine their agenda.

Within months of being elected, for example, Francis reached out to an Argentine doctor and journalist, Dr. Nelson Castro, and suggested he write a book about the health of popes, himself included.

"My hypothesis is that he wanted first of all to show himself as a human being," Castro said in an interview. "We tend to see popes like saints, but the way he talked about his diseases showed me, I'm like you and me, being exposed to diseases."

Francis had read and appreciated Castro's earlier book, "The Sickness of Power," about the ailments that have afflicted Argentina's leaders and how power itself had afflicted them. He invited Castro to research and write about past popes and his own case in a similar light.

"The Health of Popes" was published in 2021. Castro said what struck him most was that Francis disclosed not only his physical ailments, but his mental health challenges too: Francis revealed that he had gone to a psychiatrist when he was the Jesuit provincial during Argentina's military dictatorship in the 1970s to help him cope with fear and anxiety.

"Pope Francis is a man of power," Castro said. "Only a man of power, feeling quite sure of himself, would dare to talk about his diseases so openly." -AP



# CSK lean on spin strength against depleted Mumbai Indians

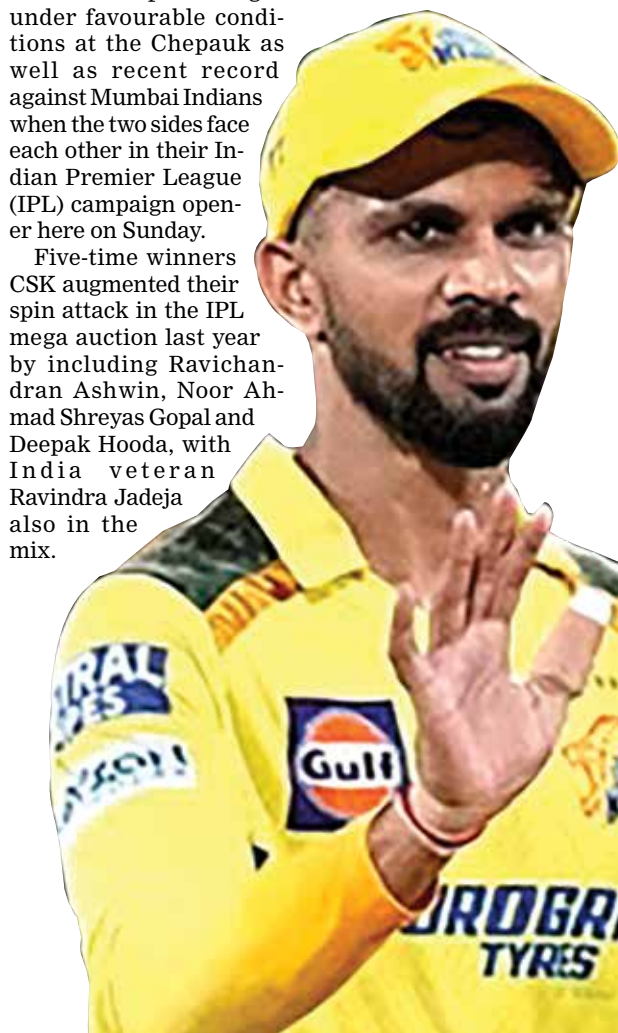


**Chennai:** Chennai Super Kings will lean on their formidable spin strength under favourable conditions at the Chepauk as well as recent record against Mumbai Indians when the two sides face each other in their Indian Premier League (IPL) campaign opener here on Sunday.

Five-time winners CSK augmented their spin attack in the IPL mega auction last year by including Ravichandran Ashwin, Nour Ahmad Shreyas Gopal and Deepak Hooda, with India veteran Ravindra Jadeja also in the mix.

CSK's pre-season moves indicate how the spin-friendly conditions at the MA Chidambaram Stadium here could be a major factor in their game plan. Starting their season against an equally formidable opponent in Mumbai Indians, this strategy could well deliver the goods right from the beginning.

For CSK, MS Dhoni will be the cynosure of all eyes



once again, having remained with the team since the inception of the IPL in 2008.

On the other hand, the absence of India bowling spearhead Jasprit Bumrah could be acutely felt in the MI ranks as the right-arm pacer remains on a comeback trail from a back-related issue which has kept him sidelined so far this year.

Bumrah is expected to miss the initial stages of this IPL and his absence will leave MI without their lethal weapon in the death overs, presenting the management with a headache to work with other options and strategies.

MI will also be without regular skipper Hardik Pandya for this clash as the India all-rounder serves a one-match ban for the side's slow over-rate in their final league match last year.

But for a team which has no dearth of leadership options, MI will have India T20I captain Suryakumar Yadav leading them in their tournament opener and important away clash.

CSK face a healthy selection conundrum for the opening slot with one among the two Kiwis, Rachin Ravindra and Devon Conway, set to partner skipper Ruturaj Gaikwad at the top.

The middle order is set to feature the

likes of Rahul Tripathi, Shivam Dube, Hooda and Vijay Shankar, followed by Dhoni and Jadeja.

Among the favourable factors is CSK's recent record of four wins in their last five matches over Mumbai Indians including three victories in last as many games.

Pandya's appointment as MI skipper, replacing Rohit Sharma, heavily marred the five-time IPL winners' campaign last season where they had finished at the bottom. The squad looks well settled now after the tumults of last season.

Even though Ishan Kishan's exit has left a void at the top, the explosive South African wicket-keeper Ryan Rickelton can be expected to match Rohit's firepower at the top, followed by India batting mainstays Suryakumar and Tilak Varma in the middle.

While MI will have to wait to field their desired fast bowling attack which comprises a mix of veterans in Trent Boult, Deepak Chahar and Reece Topley and Bumrah, the presence of Corbin Bosch makes things interesting as to how their think tank is able to use their resources optimally.

Former CSK frontman Mitchell Santner's experience and knowledge of conditions

at Chepauk is likely to come in handy along with Karn Sharma and Mujeeb Ur Rahman.

Sunday's contest between CSK and MI could also give some impressions of how the ball-change rule in the second innings plays out.

## Teams (from):

**Chennai Super Kings:** Ruturaj Gaikwad (c), MS Dhoni (wk), Devon Conway, Rahul Tripathi, Shaik Rasheed, Vansh Bedi (wk),

C Andre Siddharth, Rachin Ravindra, Ravichandran Ashwin, Vijay Shankar, Sam Curran, Anshul Kamboj, Deepak Hooda, Jamie Overton, Kamlesh Nagarkoti, Ramakrishna Ghosh, Ravindra Jadeja, Shivam Dube, Khaleel Ahmed, Nour Ahmad, Mukesh Choudhary, Gurjapneet Singh, Nathan Ellis, Shreyas Gopal, Matheesha Pathirana.

**Mumbai Indians:** Hardik Pandya (c), Rohit Sharma, Suryakumar Yadav, Robin Minz, Ryan Rickelton (wk), Shrijith Krishnan (wk), Bevon Jacobs, Tilak Varma, Naman Dhir, Will Jacks, Mitchell Santner, Raj Angad Bawa, Vignesh Puthur, Corbin Bosch, Trent Boult, Karn Sharma, Deepak Chahar, Ashwani Kumar, Reece Topley, VS Penmetsa, Arjun Tendulkar, Mujeeb Ur Rahman, Jasprit Bumrah.

Match starts at 7:30 PM IST.

-PTI

## We are going to become greatest Punjab Kings side: Ponting

Their immediate target is to end their title drought in the Indian Premier League (IPL), but head coach Ricky Ponting has also set the goal of becoming the best-ever Punjab Kings team.

With Ponting taking over as the head coach and last year's IPL winning captain Shreyas Iyer becoming the skipper, Punjab Kings hope for a strong turnaround in their fortunes as they hunt for a maiden title win.

Punjab Kings will take on Gujarat Titans in their opening match on March 25 in Ahmedabad.

"The overall vision for this team is to win the IPL. I told the guys on the very first day when I joined the camp in Dharamshala that we were going to create and become the greatest Punjab Kings team that's played," Ponting was quoted as saying in a release from the franchise.

"That's the journey that we're on and that doesn't happen overnight. You've got to create that," he said.

The Australian batting legend emphasised on developing a winning attitude, adding that he doesn't want the opposition to take anything away from his side.

"Winning is really an attitude thing. If we turn up to play, the opposition turns up to play, if they want to beat us, then it feels like they're taking something away and I don't want to let anyone take anything away from me or take anything away from my team," he said.

## Eyes on Shedge and Khan

Ponting tipped uncapped Indian players in Delhi's Priyansh Arya and Mumbai duo of Suryansh Shedge and Musheer Khan to come good this season.

"Priyansh Arya, I think is a very special potential opening batsman for us going forward in the tournament. Depending on which way we go with our overseas make-up, he's very exciting. Suryansh Shedge is also someone who has been very impressive in our training so far," he said.

"When I talk about energy and fun, another player that I am impressed with, is Musheer Khan. He's brought a lot to the group already. He has got an infectious attitude, and around the training ground and around the team so far, he's been someone that I've really enjoyed working with."

Ponting also emphasised on the senior players setting the right example for youngsters.

"I put a lot of the bait on them to ensure that they're setting the right example," he said.

"Because a lot of the young domestic Indian players look up to the overseas boys and if the overseas boys aren't doing the right thing, then it's easy for the young Indian guys to not do the right thing either. So I empower the overseas guys to be the leaders and lead the way," added the former Australia captain.

## Women's National Coaching Camp HI names 65-member group

**New Delhi:** Hockey India on Saturday named a 65-member core probable group for the senior women's national coaching camp, set to begin at the SAI center in Bengaluru on Sunday.

The group has been selected based on the players' recent performances at the Senior Women's National Championship in Panchkula, where Hockey Jharkhand emerged champions, defeating Hockey Haryana in a tense shootout.

"We saw some exceptionally talented players at the National Championships earlier this month and players have been called-up basis how they performed for their respective state teams," India chief coach Harendra Singh, who was present at the domestic national championship, said in a release.

"This camp with 65 players will give us a sense of how they can be prepared for the next level in their careers. The group will be pruned down to 40 members for the next phase of FIH Hockey Pro League."

## Duleep Trophy Traditional Inter-Zonal format returns

**Kolkata:** The BCCI Apex Council on Saturday decided to re-introduce the traditional inter-zonal format for the Duleep Trophy -- the first class tournament for six regions.

Last year, the Ajit Agarkar-led national selection committee had picked squads on the basis of players' performance in the Ranji Trophy, where 38 domestic teams competed.

However, North, South, East, West, Central and North-East Zones will now compete for the Duleep Trophy title instead of A, B, C and D teams competing in Challenger Trophy format.

From 1961-62 till 2014-15, Duleep Trophy was played as an inter-zonal first class meet. It was when Rahul Dravid took over as head of NCA in 2015, he suggested to conduct Duleep Trophy in Challenger Trophy format where national selectors would pick India Blue, Red, Green teams and the concept was followed till the 2019 season.

Due to Covid, Duleep Trophy wasn't held in 2020 and 2021 season before it

made a comeback as a zonal meet in 2022 and 2023.

In 2024 again the tournament's format was changed with the national selection committee picking the teams.

It is understood that to keep a watch on a vast pool of players and also ensuring that all state team performers get more games, the Board has gone back to the traditional format.

It means that each zone will once again have its own selection committee. It will be interesting to see whether the national selectors from all five zones (barring North East, which doesn't have a national selector) are made permanent invitees of their zonal selection committees.

Former India opener and national selector Devang Gandhi, who has seen both systems, feels that the zonal format gives selectors a better opportunity to observe a wider talent pool.

"Look 18 games are held in each Ranji Trophy round. Out of five selectors, one is always on India team duty. So other four are going to four games

which means at one go, only eight states are being covered. It is not possible to look at all talents, so zonal system isn't all that bad. They can act as facilitators for national selectors," Gandhi said.

## Elite and Plate group system for white ball events

The national white-ball tournaments will also be played in Elite and Plate system unlike earlier season where 38 men's teams, 37 women's teams barring Services and 36 age group sides barring Railways and Services would compete in mixed format.

However, from the 2025-26 season, the six bottom placed domestic teams of Syed Mushtaq Ali Trophy and Vijay Hazare Trophy and 2024-25 season will compete in the Plate Group while the other teams will participate in Elite group.

The bottom-placed team of the Elite group will be relegated to Plate and Plate group champion will be promoted to Elite group.

-PTI

## National Para Fencing Championship Bhubaneswar to host from March 28

**Bhubaneswar:** Top para fencers from across the country will compete for honours at the National Championship, scheduled to be held here from March 28 to 31.

The prestigious event, organised by the Para Sports Association of Odisha (PSAO) under the aegis of the Paralympic Committee of India (PCI), will take place at the Biju Patnaik Indoor Stadium and Kalinga Sports Complex.

Supported by the Sports and Youth Services Department, Government of Odisha, the championship is expected to witness participation from over 25 states and 20 additional teams, with approximately 200 para fencers vying for top honours. "We are thrilled to host the National Para Fencing Championship in Bhubaneswar. This event will not only highlight the exceptional talents of our para-athletes but also underline Odisha's strong commitment to sports development," said Kamala Kanta Rath, President of PSAO.

## 2026 World Cup Argentina without Messi wins

**Montevideo:** Argentina didn't miss Lionel Messi, Lautaro Martinez and other key players and beat Uruguay away 1-0 in convincing fashion in their South American World Cup qualifying match.

Thiago Almada scored the winner with a powerful curled shot from the edge of the box on Friday, putting the defending champions one point away from its direct spot in the tournament next year.

Argentina leads the round robin competition with 28 points after 13 matches, and could secure its place with a home draw with Brazil on Tuesday. The team of coach Lionel Scaloni already has 15 points ahead of 7th-placed

Bolivia, with only five rounds to the end of the competition. The last time the two soccer powerhouses clashed, Argentina won 1-0 at the Maracana Stadium in Rio de Janeiro.

Earlier, Ecuador defeated Venezuela 2-1 and moved into second place in South American World Cup, edging close to reaching the tournament once again.

Brazil is third with 21 points, one ahead of Uruguay and Paraguay. Colombia, with 19 points, has the sixth position.

The top six teams will secure direct berths to the tournament in the United States, Mexico and Canada. The seventh-place team among the 10 of the region

will still have a chance to qualify through an international playoff.

No Messi, no problem Argentina had to accommodate key absences beyond Messi. Lautaro Martinez, Lisandro Martinez, and Rodrigo De Paul did not play in Montevideo. So coach Lionel Scaloni gave a place to Giuliano Simeone in the starting lineup, with Julián Alvarez and Thiago Almada up front.

Uruguay, playing in a full Centenario Stadium against its archrival, took the initiative and had the clearest chances in the first half. But Argentina managed to hold its ground and started getting the better opportunities after halftime.

-AP



# Nothing on table for T20 in Saudi: IPL chairman

By Bharat Sharma

**New Delhi:** Nearing two decades of existence, brand IPL has become stronger than ever and doesn't see any threat from the growing number of T20 leagues globally, its chairman Arun Dhumal said on Saturday as he steered clear of the speculation swirling around an event backed by Saudi Arabia.

Speaking to PTI as the league enters its 18th edition, Dhumal said the BCCI supports the rise in number of T20 leagues globally, especially in un-

charted territories like Saudi Arabia, Europe and the USA. He feels the growth will eventually help the game ahead of the 2028 Los Angeles Olympics where cricket will be played.

"There is no point discussing something on the basis of speculation. There is nothing on the table for discussion with everyone (all stakeholders). And as far as my knowledge goes, there is no infrastructure as of now in Saudi Arabia that can cater to a tournament of this scale. "So, there is no point dis-

cussing speculative stories," said the IPL chairman.

Plenty has been reported in international media about the oil-rich Saudi Arabia foraying into cricket over the last two years but nothing concrete has come out of those speculations.

Having said that, Saudi Arabia has been a sponsor in the IPL and hosted the mega auction last year.

Now there is fresh chatter around a tennis Grand Slam styled league funded by the Arab giant but concrete details are yet to



emerge. No threat from other leagues

The IPL is estimated to be at valued at over USD 12 billion and in terms of per

match, it is the second most valued sporting league in the world, only behind the NFL in the United States.

In that context, no other cricket league poses a threat to the IPL. In fact, IPL owners have been expanding their footprint with investments in leagues organised by foreign boards including CPL, SA20, MLC, ILT20 and most recently The Hundred in the UK.

"The idea of getting cricket into the Olympics is that the game grows through the length and

breadth of the globe. It is good that more leagues are taking shape and we don't see anybody as a threat," said Dhumal.

"We would want to make sure that more and more games happen across the different territories, the newer territories. Whether it is Saudi, America, Europe, it doesn't matter. Nobody can stop anybody and we would not want to stop anyone."

"We would only focus on strengthening our tournament and our property."

Ban for last-minute pull outs justified

In the run-up to this year's IPL, England star Harry Brook was handed a two-year ban for pulling out of his contract with Delhi Capitals, causing quite a flutter.

Dhumal defended the sanction which led to quite a debate.

"Teams pick players auction strategy in mind. In case a player withdraws from the tournament without a genuine reason, it changes the whole gameplan of the impacted and also affects the tournament," said Dhumal.

-PTI