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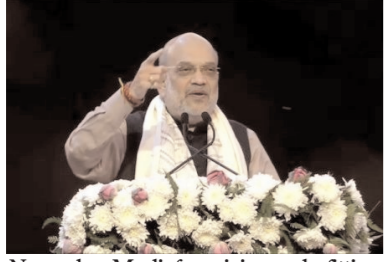
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Airstrikes after Pulwama terror attack befitting reply to terrorists: Amit Shah

Sanjay Kumar

New Delhi, Feb.15: Union Home Minister Amit Shah Friday paid homage to the martyrs of the Pulwama terror attack and praised Prime Minister



Narendra Modi for giving a befitting reply through airstrikes in Pakistan. Forty jawans were killed when a Jaish-e-Mohammad suicide bomber rammed an explosive-laden car into a CRPF convoy at Lethpora-Pulwama on the Jammu-Srinagar National Highway

on February 14, 2019. Days later, Indian Air Force fighter jets bombed terror training camps in Balakot, deep inside Pakistan. On the anniversary of the terror attack, Shah said the martyrdom of the jawans made the country's borders safe. Addressing an event at the conclusion of the 38th National Games here, the Union home minister said, "On this day in 2019, our 40 jawans were martyred in Pulwama. But their martyrdom made the country's borders safe. "I pay tribute to them with all my heart. But through the airstrikes that followed Prime Minister Narendra Modi gave a fitting reply to terrorists," he said. The Pulwama attack and the airstrikes that followed have changed the way the world looked at India, he said. "It sent out a message to terrorists all over the world not to play with our troops or our borders."

Cops find Ranveer Allahbadia's Mumbai flat locked, summon him again

Tejinder Kaur Babbar

Mumbai, Feb. 15: Mumbai Police have asked podcaster Ranveer Allahbadia to appear before them on Saturday as part of a probe into his controversial remarks on a YouTube show, as he did not turn up during the day. Teams of Mumbai and Assam police on Friday visited his residence here but found the flat locked, an official said. Crass remarks by Allahbadia, popular on YouTube for his 'BeerBiceps' channel, about parents and sex on comedian Samay Raina's now-deleted YouTube show 'India's Got Latent' have sparked massive outrage, leading to complaints from several persons. "The Mumbai police, who have initiated an inquiry in connection with Ranveer Allahbadia's controversial remarks, on Friday went to his flat in Versova area but found it



locked," an official said. Allahbadia had been asked to remain present at the Khar police station here on Thursday in connection with the probe into his controversial comments. But after he failed to appear, the police issued a second summons, asking him to appear on Friday, he said. The podcaster had requested the Khar police that his statement be recorded at his residence, but his request was turned down, he added. Meanwhile, an Assam police team also wants to question Allahbadia in a case registered in Guwahati on a complaint by a resident there for alleged promotion of obscenity in a publicly accessible online show, he said. "Accordingly, teams of the Mumbai and Assam police went to Allahbadia's flat in Versova but found it locked. Both the police teams then returned to Khar police station," the police official said. The case in Guwahati was registered on Monday. Besides Allahbadia and Raina, others named in the case in Assam are Ashish Chanchalani, Jaspreet Singh and Apoorva Makhija. The Assam police team on Thursday met the Maharashtra Cyber Department officials. The Mumbai police and the cyber department, who are conducting separate probes into the remarks, have also asked Raina to appear before them in the next five days. The Mumbai police (Khar police station) have recorded the statements of eight persons, including Makhija, Chanchalani and Allahbadia's manager, on a complaint filed by a BJP functionary. However, the city police have not registered any FIR in this connection so far. On Friday, police recorded the statement of Pratham Sagar, video editor of 'India's Got Latent' show.

Congress alleges 'systemic failure' in education sector

Patna, Feb 15: Congress leader Kanhaiya Kumar said just as the system is responsible for farmer suicides, it is also responsible for student suicides. The Congress on Saturday questioned the government over students' suicide cases and closure of coaching institutes, and alleged a "systemic failure" in the education sector in the country. "For the past several days, there has been continuous news of coaching institutes, which claim to prepare students to become doctors and engineers, shutting down after collecting fees from people. Whenever such systemic failures occur in the country, the government must take responsibility. But today, students and citizens are caught between the government and the market. Dreams are being sold, and there is a surge in coaching institutes because the government system is weak," said Kanhaiya Kumar, the party's in-charge of the National Students' Union of India (NSUI). Addressing the media at the Congress office in Delhi, Kumar said the coaching institute chain, which prepares students for competitive exams, has been facing legal action, with affected parents filing complaints and police seizing over ₹21 crore from 12 bank accounts linked to the institute. On students' suicide cases, he said, "Just as the system is responsible for farmer suicides, it is also responsible for student suicides."

Rahul Gandhi calls for stronger industrial, manufacturing base in India

Simmi Kaur Babbar




New Delhi, Feb 15: Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Saturday accused Prime Minister Narendra Modi of "failing to grasp" innovations like drones, which require a "strong industrial system." He called for a "strong production base" to build "real industrial prowess" and generate employment for the youth. "Drones have revolutionised warfare, combining batteries, motors and optics to manoeuvre and communicate on the battlefield in unprecedented ways. But drones are not just one technology - they are bottom-up innovations produced by a strong industrial system. Unfortunately, PM Modi has failed to grasp this. While he delivers 'teleprompter' speeches on AI, our competitors are mastering new technologies," Gandhi posted on X, accompanying a nine-minute video. The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) is yet to

comment on this. Story will be updated once the party makes a statement. In the video, he cited the



example of a drone manufactured by the Chinese company DJI, which is sold as a toy in India. He

explained that the use of motors, lithium batteries, and the connection to telecom equipment (via the device used to control the drone) is transforming the nature of warfare in Ukraine. "The sad fact is that we're nowhere here. We don't make any of the components inside this. We don't understand how it's made. We certainly don't make any of the optics [camera]. We don't understand how it's made. And that's what my speech was getting at that this is actually where we should be playing and the network that produces this is where the real value is and all AI is actually going to be operating on this network," Gandhi said. Gandhi said that Modi's claims about India becoming "number one in AI" are "complete junk" as India neither has the production network, nor the consumption data. "India has given away its consumption data to large multinational companies and India doesn't even play in the production space," he added

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Narendra Modi, Prime Minister

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NEWS BOX

Woman raped, murdered near Hassan Railway junction

HASSAN. The body of an unidentified 40-year-old woman was found at an under-construction tower wagon shed building, attached to Hassan Railway Junction on Thursday evening.

The railway police said the miscreant had smashed her head with bricks, after allegedly raping her in one of the rooms. The police have not yet identified the victim. The police have shifted the body to the mortuary at Hassan Institute of Medical Sciences (HIMS), and are making efforts to identify her. A source said the victim might have migrated from a neighbouring state and was working as a construction worker in the same building site. Fingerprint experts and the sniffer dog squad have arrived on the scene to gather clues.

Site engineer of the yard re-modelling railway stations Pavan CM, in his complaint, said he came to know of the incident through Kumar, a labourer. The railway police registered a murder case and are investigating.

HEADLESS BODY OF SENIOR CITIZEN FOUND IN CHINTAMANI

CHINTAMANI. The headless body of a senior citizen was found near Yagnyavalka temple in Chintamani, Chikballapur district on Thursday. The deceased is Muniyappa (65), a resident of Gowdanathatha Gadda village in Srinivasapura taluk. He worked as a mason in Chintamani. The incident came to light when a pack of stray dogs were found near the body, and were dragging the head.

The villagers noticed it and immediately alerted the police. SP Kushal Chowksey said the police are probing the case in all angles. Preliminary investigation revealed that Muniyappa was facing health issues. However, a technical team has been assigned in the case. A source said the deceased had two wives.

Power cut: Doctors suture wound using phone torch in Karnataka's Ballari

BALLARI. Close on the heels of five maternal deaths at BIMS, which sent shockwaves across the state, the government's Super Speciality Trauma Centre in Ballari is in the news for the wrong reasons. The emergency ward witnessed a sudden power cut for about 15 minutes and the doctors attending on a patient who had met with an accident had to use mobile phone torchlight to stitch up a wound which the patient had suffered, on Thursday evening, creating a panic situation at the hospital. Lack of maintenance and shortage of staff is being blamed by the public, who are demanding strict action against the authorities. The hospital was jointly started by the Union and state governments two years ago and from day one, there are many complaints against it. A relative of the patient whose wound was stitched up said the former was rushed to the hospital after he met with an accident.

"Around 7 pm, there was a sudden power cut in the emergency ward. No one seemed to be bothered about the power interruption. When the doctors were approached, they came and stitched up the wound with the help of a smartphone torchlight," he said.

"The power supply was interrupted for about 15-20 minutes, and we could see some patients on ventilators struggling to breathe. This shows how staff of government hospitals work everyday. We urge the state and Central governments to take necessary action against such negligence by the staff," he demanded, adding, "The government spends lakhs of rupees on the doctors' salaries, but some of them fail to provide good treatment."

Seven-year-old schoolgirl dies as iron gate collapses on her at Nanganallur

CHENNAI. In a tragic accident, a seven-year-old girl died after the iron gate of her apartment complex broke from its fixtures and fell on her at Nanganallur on Thursday afternoon.

The Palavanthangal police said S Aishwarya of MMTC Colony in Nanganallur was a Class 2 student at a private school in Nanganallur. Her father owns a supermarket in the locality. On Thursday evening, Aishwarya returned home from school on her father's bike. She opened the gate and her father first went inside. Before Aishwarya could close the gate, it collapsed on her injuring her grievously. Passers-by rushed to her help and lifted the gate.

Aishwarya was rushed to a hospital where doctors declared her brought dead. Police sent the body for postmortem. Sources said police have not registered a case of death due to negligence as Aishwarya's parents did not lodge a complaint against anybody.

How Chennai's IT corridor becoming an urban development disaster

Chennai. Chennai's IT corridor, located along the Old Mahabalipuram Road (OMR), is facing a severe infrastructure crisis due to rapid urbanisation outpacing the development of basic amenities. Despite substantial investments in infrastructure and taxes, a joint inspection of 2,513 buildings by the Greater Chennai Corporation (GCC), Metro Water, and Chennai Metropolitan Development Authority (CMDA) has exposed serious shortcomings that could lead the area toward an urban disaster. Adding to the problem are buildings flouting government norms.

According to a report in Times of India on Friday, key issues include inadequate water and sewage connections, poor road infrastructure, ineffective storm water drainage, and mismanagement of solid waste. "Beyond SRP Tools, there is no water or sewage connection. With more than 90 new residential and commercial projects in the pipeline, we're heading toward a perfect storm of infrastructure deficiencies," said a developer.

In 2024, Chief Secretary N. Muruganadam ordered an inspection after OMR experienced severe flooding even during minimal rainfall. The inspection, conducted in December across zones 13, 14, and 15, identified a major issue: the absence of rainwater harvesting (RWH)

systems. Only 35% of buildings had proper RWH systems in place, while 56% were poorly maintained. "Many high-rises follow the norms; the defaulters are mid-rise buildings," said a CMDA official. Although CMDA guidelines mandate RWH systems and tie them to completion certificates, lax enforcement has

situation, contributing to waterlogging and drainage issues during the monsoon.

Urban planning experts warn that this lack of coordination is creating an environmental disaster. "The absence of a cohesive plan to address these issues is undermining efforts to resolve OMR's infrastructure challenges," said an urban planner. The lack of enforcement and poor coordination between authorities remains a significant concern. "Though joint inspections are conducted, there seems to be no unified approach to solve the problems," the planner added.

Ram Shankar, coordinator of the Save Water and Recharge Aquifers Network (SWARAN), emphasised that builders need to implement RWH systems independently, and residents must demand these structures be put in place to ensure easier enforcement.

Meanwhile, a senior official stated that show-cause notices would be issued to buildings flouting norms, and a Metro Water official confirmed that an underground sewage system would be implemented across OMR by the end of 2026. "Projects in areas like Okkiyam Thoraiakkam, Kottivakkam, Palavakkam, Neelangerai, Uthandi, and Semmenchery will be completed by 2026, while services are being provided for the rest of the area," the official said.



resulted in water stagnation and flooding during heavy rains, reported.

The sewage system is also underdeveloped. "Many high-rises follow the norms; the defaulters are mid-rise buildings," the CMDA official reiterated. Poor enforcement and a disconnect between development approvals and infrastructure have exacerbated the

Secunderabad railway station redevelopment underway, 40% work complete

HYDERABAD. Railway authorities have commenced the demolition work on the Secunderabad railway station's main building, with the terminal's right end, including the RPF office, largely reduced to rubble by Friday.

An SCR official told TNE: "The work is being done in phases to avoid passenger inconvenience. The existing structure had several structural issues, making redevelopment necessary." The project, costing around ₹20 crore, aims to modernise the station with a ground-plus-three-floor building.

Built in 1874 during the Nizam era, the 151-year-



old building once served as the principal terminal of Nizam's Guaranteed State Railway (NGSR). Following the Nizam Railways'

merger with Indian Railways in 1951, a major renovation was completed in 1952. While platform one remains operational, some trains will shift to the Cherlapalli terminal next month. Earlier, a 100-metre section near the Ganesh Temple was demolished for a multi-level parking complex, now under construction. A temporary booking office has been set up, and a new RPF building is complete.

On the south side, 90% of basement construction is done. The ground floor will serve as a drop-off zone, while basement levels will provide parking for 200 vehicles. "Nearly 40% of the total redevelopment work is complete, with the project slated for completion by November this year," said the official.

ED attaches assets worth rs 6.47 crore in Go Rural India money laundering case

HYDERABAD. The Hyderabad Zonal Office of the Directorate of Enforcement has provisionally attached immovable properties worth ₹6.47 crore under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA), 2002. This action is part of an investigation into the alleged misappropriation of funds by a company named Go Rural India. The probe was initiated based on two FIRs filed under the IPC, 1860, against Go Rural India Pvt Ltd (GRIPL) and its promoters. The complaints were lodged by the Secunderabad and Hyderabad divisions of the TSRTC (now TGSRTC) for non-payment of dues amounting to Rs 21.72 crore. These dues were accrued from the display of advertisements on the buses.

Go Rural India had entered into a contract with TSRTC to display advertisements on its buses. As per the agreement, the company was required to pay the contractual amount specified in the agreement. However, after securing the contract, Go Rural India conducted its advertising business not only through the designated entity but also through other companies, including GRIPL, Poster Town India Pvt. Ltd., Go Transit Media Pvt. Ltd., and Lime Lite Advertising Pvt. Ltd. These companies, managed and controlled by the accused, were not authorised to carry out the advertisement display business. The ED investigation further uncovered that the accused collected significant sums from clients into their bank accounts, violating the terms of the contract. Instead of remitting the dues to TSRTC, they diverted the advertisement revenue for personal gains. The funds were allegedly used for purposes such as repaying loans, purchasing jewellery, vehicles, immovable properties, and covering other personal expenses. This diversion of funds resulted in a default of ₹21.72 crore to TSRTC.

Kerala HC orders Vellayani Lake boundary demarcation; Rs 96 crore revival project launched

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM. The long-pending demand to conserve and protect the Vellayani lake -- the second largest freshwater lake in the state -- is finally set to become a reality with the High Court directing the State Wetland Authority of Kerala (SWAK) to complete the demarcation of the boundaries of the lake's wetland within three months.

Besides, after years of impasse, the state government has launched a Rs 96-crore project to revive the lake which is the only source of drinking water for Kalliyoor, Venganoor, Vizhinjam and Kovalam areas in the state capital. With the Vizhinjam port all set to become fully operational, the conservation of Vellayani lake is crucial as it is the main source of water for the port operations.

A SWAK official said the demarcation of the lake's boundary has been done in association with the Kerala State Remote Sensing and Environment Centre (KSREC).

"We have placed the brief for approval from the technical committee and we will be notifying the draft document in the gazette soon, after consultation with the local body," the source said.

The High Court recently came out with such a directive in connection with a case filed by the Kalliyoor panchayat against the granting of building permit renewal for a private party. Advocate R Gopan, who fought the case for the panchayat, said the petition was moved challenging the directive of the tribunal.

The HC has asked the SWAK to determine the boundaries of the lake and demarcate the 50-metre buffer zone to ensure the protection of the lake.

According to the SWAK report, the Vellayani lake has a wetland spanning over 268.68 hectares. It is learnt that the lake is included in a list of 40 wetlands

in the state that are in the process of being notified under the Wetlands (Conservation and Management) Rules, 2017. The area of the lake has shrunk dramatically with widespread encroachment affecting the ecosystem adversely.

The first phase of the Vellayani lake conservation project, granted administrative sanction back in 2021, had taken off recently. "The protection and conservation of the lake is crucial. Because of silt accumulation, we are unable to ensure a continuous supply of water to the panchayat areas. Water is supplied only twice a week.

Once we remove the silt and clean up the reservoir, the storage capacity will go up and we will be able to supply water every day," Kalliyoor panchayat president M Somasekharan Nair said.



"The Vellayani lake is yet to be notified as a wetland and hence the tribunal ordered the local body to give the permit, and we challenged it in the HC. As per the settlement register of 1924, the lake has an area of around 750 hectares. Now the lake has shrunk to almost nothing and this order could be crucial for the protection of what is left of the lake," Gopan said.

KCBT metro link with elevated road to cost Rs 5,000 crore more

CHENNAI. In a significant move to enhance connectivity, Chennai Metro Rail Limited (CMRL) has submitted a revised Detailed Project Report (DPR) to the state government for extending the metro rail from Chennai airport to Kilambakkam bus terminus. The updated proposal, integrating the metro line with an elevated road, comes at an estimated cost of Rs 9,335 crore -- Rs 5,000 crore higher than the initial projection.

CMRL managing director MA Siddique presented the DPR for the 15.46 km stretch, which will feature 13 stations, to K Gopal, additional chief secretary to the government, Special Initiatives Department.

The original DPR, submitted earlier, was revised following instructions to incorporate an elevated road along with the metro corridor. As per the new plan, the metro line will be constructed at Level-2 while the elevated road will be at Level-1, ensuring



seamless connectivity to the Kilambakkam bus terminus. Additionally, intermediate ramps near Tambaram will facilitate access to the Outer Ring Road. The elevated road will extend directly to the Kilambakkam bus stand, with provisions for a future extension to Chengalpattu. The proposed metro

extension will traverse major suburban areas, including Pallavaram, Chrompet, Tambaram, Perungalathur and Vandalar.

This alignment will significantly enhance connectivity between key transport hubs such as Kilambakkam bus terminus, Chennai International Airport and Tambaram railway station, offering commuters a more efficient transit option.

The feasibility study for the airport-Kilambakkam metro line was conducted in 2019 by Larsen & Toubro Infrastructure Engineering. However, the preparation of the DPR faced delays, with CMRL submitting the initial report in early 2022.

A major hurdle was the state highways department's plan to construct an elevated corridor up to Tambaram, which conflicted with the proposed metro route.

After extensive discussions, both agencies reached an agreement regarding the metro viaduct's level and the height of the elevated corridor. During the feasibility study, CMRL

evaluated three possible alignments.

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NEWS BOX

OpenAI board unanimously rejects Elon Musk's \$97.4 billion takeover proposal

SAN FRANCISCO. OpenAI says its board of directors has unanimously rejected a \$97.4 billion takeover bid by Elon Musk.

OpenAI is not for sale, and the board has unanimously rejected Mr Musk's latest attempt to disrupt his competition," said a statement Friday from Bret Taylor, chair of OpenAI's board. OpenAI attorney William Savitt, in a letter to Musk's attorney Friday, said the proposal "is not in the best interests of OAI's mission and is rejected." Musk, an early OpenAI investor, began a legal offensive against the ChatGPT maker nearly a year ago, suing for breach of contract over what he said was the betrayal of its founding aims as a nonprofit. OpenAI has increasingly sought to capitalise on the commercial success of generative AI. But the for-profit company is a subsidiary of a nonprofit entity that's bound to a mission—which Musk helped set—to safely build better-than-human AI for humanity's benefit.

OpenAI is now seeking to more fully convert itself to a for-profit company but would first have to buy out the nonprofits' assets. Throwing a wrench in those plans, Musk and his own AI startup, xAI, and a group of investment firms announced a bid Monday to buy the nonprofit that controls OpenAI. Musk, in a court filing Wednesday, further detailed the proposal to acquire the nonprofit's controlling stake.

Savitt's letter Friday said that the court filing added "new material conditions to the proposal. As a result of that filing, it is now apparent that your clients' much-publicised 'bid' is in fact not a bid at all."

In any event, "even as first presented," the board has unanimously rejected it, Savitt said.

Musk has alleged in the lawsuit that OpenAI is violating the terms of his foundational contributions to the charity. Musk had invested about \$45 million in the startup from its founding until 2018, his lawyer has said.

He escalated the legal dispute late last year, adding new claims and defendants, including OpenAI's business partner Microsoft, and asking for a court order that would halt OpenAI's for-profit conversion.

Musk also added xAI as a plaintiff, claiming that OpenAI was also unfairly stifling business competition. A judge is still considering Musk's request but expressed scepticism about some of his claims in a court hearing last week.

Jaishankar Meets Ukrainian Counterpart On Sidelines Of Munich Security Conference

Munich. External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar on Saturday met his Ukrainian counterpart Andrii Sybha on the sidelines of the Munich Security Conference and discussed the resolution of the Ukraine conflict.

"Good to meet FM Andrii Sybha of Ukraine on the sidelines of #MSC2025 today (Friday). Discussed ongoing efforts towards the resolution of the Ukraine conflict. Also spoke about further advancement of our bilateral cooperation," Jaishankar said on X. The minister, who is here to attend the Munich Security Conference 2025, met several world leaders and joined Norway PM Jonas Gahr Store, Michigan Senator Elissa Slotkin, and Warsaw Mayor Rafal Trzaskowski in a panel discussion on 'Live to Vote Another Day: Fortifying Democratic Resilience' at the event. Highlighted India as a democracy that delivers. Differed with the prevailing political pessimism. Spoke my mind on foreign interference," Jaishankar said in another post on X.

Jaishankar also participated in Ananta Aspen Centre's 'Coming of Age: Evaluating Rising India's Security Challenges' session at the conference and 'shared India's thinking on global engagement, regional strategy and key bilateral partnerships'.

The minister also met Bavarian Prime Minister Markus Soder here and discussed cooperation in economy and technology between the two countries.

"Exchanged views about the international situation. Look forward to welcoming him to India," Jaishankar said in another post on X. Jaishankar also met Germany's Defence Minister Boris Pistorius on Friday and discussed bilateral cooperation and the Ukraine development during the meeting.

Abortions To Resume In Missouri After A Judge Blocks Restrictions

Kansas City. Abortions are set to resume in Missouri after a judge blocked regulations that had restricted providers even after voters approved enshrining abortion rights into the state's constitution. Friday's ruling came after a Kansas City judge ruled last year that abortions were now legal in the state but kept certain regulations on the books while a lawsuit by abortion-rights advocates played out. One regulation required abortion facilities to be licensed by the Missouri Department of Health and Senior Services. Planned Parenthood said most of its facilities could not comply with some of the licensing rules, including "medically irrelevant" size requirements for hallways, rooms and doors. Planned Parenthood argued that the licensing law required providers to give "medically unnecessary and invasive" pelvic exams to anyone receiving an abortion, including medication abortions, according to court documents. The plaintiffs also said some of the regulations on Planned Parenthood centre were so strict, "most health centre or doctors' office simply do not meet" them.

Jackson County Circuit Judge Jerri Zhang said in her ruling that the licensing requirement is "facially discriminatory because it does not treat services provided in abortion facilities the same as other types of similarly situated health care, including miscarriage care." Voters approved the measure adding abortion rights to the constitution in November. That amendment did not legalise abortion in the state outright but instead required judges to reconsider laws that had almost completely banned the procedure.

Trump's reciprocal tariffs will overturn decades of trade policy

WASHINGTON. President Donald Trump is taking a blowtorch to the rules that have governed world trade for decades. The "reciprocal" tariffs that he announced Thursday are likely to create chaos for global businesses and conflict with America's allies and adversaries alike.

Since the 1960s, tariffs — or import taxes — have emerged from negotiations between dozens of countries. Trump wants to seize the process. "Obviously, it disrupts the way that things have been done for a very long time," said Richard Mojica, a trade attorney at Miller & Chevalier. "Trump is throwing that out the window ... Clearly this is ripping up trade. There are going to have to be adjustments all over the place." Pointing to America's massive and persistent trade deficits — not since 1975 has the U.S. sold the rest of the world more than it's bought — Trump charges that the playing field is tilted against U.S. companies. A big reason for that, he and his advisers say, is because other countries usually tax American

exports at a higher rate than America taxes theirs. Trump has a fix: He's raising U.S. tariffs to match what other countries charge.

The president is an unabashed tariff supporter. He used them in his first term, and three weeks into his second he has already slapped 10% tariffs on China; effectively raised U.S. taxes on foreign steel and aluminum; and threatened, then delayed for 30 days, 25% taxes on goods from Canada and Mexico. Economists don't share Trump's enthusiasm for tariffs. They're a tax on importers that usually get passed on to consumers. But it's possible that Trump's reciprocal tariff threat could bring other countries to the table and get them to lower their own import taxes. "It could be win-win," said Christine McDaniel, a former U.S. trade official now at George Mason University's Mercatus Center. "It's in other countries' interests to reduce those tariffs." She noted



that India has already cut tariffs on items from motorcycles to luxury cars and agreed to ramp up purchases of U.S. energy. What are reciprocal tariffs and how do they work? They sound simple: The United States would raise its tariff on foreign goods to match what other countries impose on U.S. products. "If they charge us, we charge them," the president told reporters on Sunday. "If they're at 25, we're

at 25. If they're at 10, we're at 10. And if they're much higher than 25, that's what we are too." But the White House didn't reveal many details. It has directed Commerce Secretary Howard Lutnick to deliver a report April 1 about how the new tariffs would actually work. Among the outstanding questions, noted Antonio Rivera, a partner at ArentFox Schiff and a former attorney with U.S. Customs and Border Protection, is whether the U.S. is going to look at the thousands of items in the tariff code — from motorcycles to mangos — and try to level the tariff rates out one by one, country by country. Or whether it will look more broadly at each country's average tariff and how it compares to America. Or something else entirely. "It's just a very, very chaotic environment," said Stephen Lamar, president and CEO of the American Apparel & Footwear Association. "It's hard to plan in any sort of long-term, sustainable way."

Zelensky seeks 'security guarantees' as US presses end to Ukraine war

MUNICH. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky said he sought "security guarantees" as he met with the US vice president on Friday to discuss the Trump administration's efforts to broker a truce deal with Moscow. Zelensky's sitdown with JD Vance at the Munich Security Conference comes as Kyiv scrambles to ensure it is not sidelined in Washington's push to wrap up the three-year war. President Donald Trump stunned allies and upended the status quo of US support for Ukraine this week when he announced he would likely soon meet Russian leader Vladimir Putin to start truce talks.

Speaking with reporters in Munich, Zelensky stressed the need to "speak more" with the White House before any endgame to the war is formulated. "We want peace very much but we need real security guarantees," he said after his first meeting with Vance. Zelensky's anxiety was also on display in



a preview of his interview with US media outlet NBC, saying Ukraine "will have low, low chance to survive without support of the United States". Vance meanwhile described "good conversations" with Zelensky, and acknowledged the administration's goal of bringing the war to a close. "We want to achieve a durable, lasting peace, not the kind of peace that's

going to have Eastern Europe in conflict just a couple years down the road," Vance said as the meeting wrapped up. Zelensky later wrote on X that an envoy from Washington would visit Kyiv. "We are ready to move as quickly as possible towards a real and guaranteed peace," he wrote. The Ukrainian leader has acknowledged that it was "not very pleasant" that his own phone call with Trump this week came after Putin's 90-minute call.

US officials have insisted that Ukraine will not be left in the cold after three years of battling Russia's invasion. Vance said ahead of the Munich meeting that the United States was prepared to pressure Russia, adding that Europe should "of course" be at the table. But he also told Europe to "step up" bolstering its own defence to allow Washington to focus on threats elsewhere in the world.

Anger, chaos and confusion take hold as US government workers face mass layoffs

NEW YORK. Workers across the country responded with anger and confusion Friday as they grappled with the Trump administration's aggressive effort to shrink the size of the federal workforce by ordering agencies to lay off probationary employees who have yet to qualify for civil service protections. While much of the administration's attention was focused on disrupting bureaucracy in Washington, the broad-based effort to slash the government workforce was impacting a far wider swath of workers. As layoff notices were sent out agency by agency, federal employees from Michigan to Florida were left reeling from being told that their services were no longer needed. In a sign of how chaotic the firings have been, some who received layoff notices had already accepted the administration's deferred resignation offer, under which they were supposed to be paid until Sept. 30 if they agreed to quit, raising questions about whether others who signed the deal would nonetheless be fired. On Friday evening, the Office of Personnel

Management, which serves as a human resources department for the federal government, acknowledged that some employees may have received termination notices in error and said the buyouts agreements would be honored. "This has been slash and burn," said Nicholas Detter, who had been working in Kansas as a natural resource specialist, helping farmers reduce soil and water erosion, until he was fired by email late Thursday night. He said there seemed to be little thought about how employees and the farmers and ranchers he helped would be impacted. "None of this has been done thoughtfully or carefully," he said. The White House and OPM declined to say Friday how many probationary workers, who generally have less than a year on the job, have so far been dismissed. According to government data maintained by OPM, 220,000 workers had less than a year on the job as of March 2024. OPM has given agencies until 8 p.m. Tuesday to issue layoff notices, according to a person familiar with the plan who requested anonymity because they were not

authorized to speak publicly. The probationary layoffs are the latest salvo in the new administration's sweeping efforts to reduce the size of the federal workforce, which are being led by billionaire Elon Musk and his Department of Government Efficiency. Trump, in an executive order Tuesday, told agency leaders to plan for "large-scale reductions" after their initial attempt to downsize the workforce — the voluntary buyout — was accepted by only 75,000 workers.

The layoffs begin
On Thursday night, the Department of Veterans Affairs announced the dismissal of more than 1,000 employees who had served for less than two years. That included researchers working on cancer treatment, opioid addiction, prosthetics and burn pit exposure, U.S. Sen. Patty Murray, a Democrat, said Thursday. Dozens were fired from the Education Department, including special education specialists and student aid officials, according to a union that represents agency workers.

Israeli hostages, Palestinian prisoners set for release after truce crisis

GAZA CITY. Gaza militants are due to release three Israeli hostages on Saturday in exchange for 369 Palestinians in Israeli custody, the sixth swap of a truce that came close to collapse this week. Israel and Hamas have traded accusations of violating the January 19 ceasefire, with the Palestinian group saying it would pause releases and Israel threatening the resumption of war in the Gaza Strip.

But on Friday both sides signalled that the hostage release scheduled for Saturday would go ahead. The office of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu named the hostages due for release as Israeli-American Sagui Dekel-Chen, Israeli-Russian Sasha Trupanov and Israeli-Argentinian Yair Horn, who have been held by Gaza militants since Hamas's October 7, 2023 attack on Israel that sparked the war.

The Palestinian Prisoners' Club advocacy group said that Israel was to release 369 inmates in exchange, with 24 of them expected to be deported. The vast majority, 333 people, are "prisoners from the Gaza Strip who were arrested after

October 7", the group said. After the crisis that appeared to bring the fragile truce to a breaking point, Hamas said on Friday it expected talks on a second phase of the ceasefire to begin early next week. US Secretary of State Marco Rubio, whose country is Israel's top backer and has been involved in mediation efforts during the war, is due to arrive in Israel late Saturday ahead of expected talks with Netanyahu on the Gaza truce.

Last week's release sparked anger in Israel and beyond, with the emaciated state of the freed Israeli hostages sparking concern over conditions in captivity.

Israeli-American hostage Keith Siegel, who was released in a previous exchange, said he was "starved and... tortured, both physically and emotionally" during his captivity. There were also fears for Palestinians in Israeli custody after some prisoners required medical treatment on their release. "Power games"

The ceasefire has been under massive strain since US President Donald Trump

proposed a takeover of the Gaza Strip under which the territory's population of more than two million would be moved to Egypt



or Jordan. For Palestinians, any forced displacement evokes memories of the "Nakba", or catastrophe — the mass displacement of their ancestors during Israel's creation in 1948. Arab countries have come together to reject the plan, and Saudi Arabia will host the leaders of Egypt, Jordan, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates

on Thursday for a summit on the issue.

Trump warned this week that "hell" would break loose if Hamas failed to release "all" remaining hostages by noon on Saturday.

Israel later insisted Hamas release "three living hostages" on Saturday or "the ceasefire will end". If fighting resumes, Defence Minister Israel Katz said it would not just lead to the "defeat of Hamas and the release of all the hostages" — Israel's stated objectives since the start of the war — but also "allow the realisation of US President Trump's vision for Gaza". Mairav Zonszein of the International Crisis Group said despite their public disputes, Israel and Hamas were still interested in maintaining the truce. "They're just playing power games," she said. Arab countries have put on a rare show of unity in their rejection of Trump's proposal for Gaza.

After the Riyadh summit, the Arab League will convene in Cairo on February 27 to discuss the same issue.

NEWS BOX

GHMC to launch rs 5,942 crore H-CITI project to ease Hyderabad traffic



HYDERABAD. The Greater Hyderabad Municipal Corporation (GHMC) is gearing up to launch the Hyderabad City Innovative and Transformative Infrastructure (H-CITI) programme, a major initiative aimed at reshaping the city's urban landscape.

The project will implement multiple infrastructure developments, including flyovers, underpasses, and road widening projects, to ease traffic congestion and enhance urban connectivity.

According to officials, H-CITI includes 38 projects across seven packages totalling Rs 5,942 crore. The initiative is based on a Comprehensive Traffic Study by the Hyderabad Metropolitan Development Authority (HMMDA), which identified critical congestion points and traffic bottlenecks across the city.

As part of Phase-I, GHMC will invite bids in February for the construction of 10 flyovers and underpasses spanning 13.56 km and six major road-widening projects covering 6.585 km, totalling 16 works across 20.145 km at an estimated cost of Rs 2,400 crore.

Brain-dead teacher's organ donation gives new life to four patients in Thiruvananthapuram

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM. In a remarkable act of generosity, the family of 52-year-old R Rajesh, a teacher at Amrita HSS Paripally, donated his organs after he passed away due to a brain haemorrhage.

The selfless act gave a new lease of life to four individuals. His family made the decision to donate his organs to critically ill patients undergoing treatment in various hospitals.

Two kidneys and two corneas were donated. One kidney was allocated to the Thiruvananthapuram Government Medical College hospital, while the other was sent to KIMSHEALTH. The corneas were donated to the Regional Institute of Ophthalmology in the city.

A native of Varkala, Rajesh was admitted to a private hospital on February 8. He was declared brain dead on February 13. His wife Sangeetha and sons, Harishanth and Sivashanth, consented to the organ donation, enabling the life-saving procedure.

The donation process and the allocation of recipients were coordinated by Kerala State Organ and Tissue Transplant Organization (K-SOTTO), part of the government's organ-donation initiative. Rajesh's funeral is scheduled to take place on February 15 at his residence in Varkala.

Plus-I student found dead in school in Thiruvananthapuram; family alleges harassment by clerk

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM. A Plus-I student of Government Vocational Higher Secondary School, Paruthipally was found dead in his school on Friday morning in what is being suspected as a case of suicide.

Benson Abraham, a resident of Erumakuzhy, was found dead when the school was opened on Friday morning. Benson's father Benny alleged that he was verbally abused by the office clerk of the school when he went to get his record book signed and that prompted his son to take the drastic step.

The last date for submitting the record book was Friday. After getting the signature of the teacher concerned, the boy went to the office to get the office seal. According to a friend of Benson, the clerk abused the boy when he went to the office. "Benson told us that the clerk asked him whether the seal belonged to his father," said a student, who sought anonymity. Principal Geetha Babu confirmed that Benson had told her about the incident and it was she who had asked him to bring parents to the school the next day.

"Whenever such incidents happen, we summon the parents," she said. The principal said she asked the clerk about the incident, but he did not reply. "He is like that. Later, by night the clerk sent me a message on WhatsApp saying he has gone on a leave," she said. The incident has snowballed and the family members of Benson and youth outfits, including DYFI, protested against the school authorities and sought action against the clerk. General Education Minister V Sivankutty has also intervened in the matter and ordered a department-level probe. The probe will be conducted by VHSE deputy director (Curriculum). The Kattakada police, meanwhile, said they will conduct an inquiry on the incident and will examine the veracity of the oral statements, which were reportedly given by the deceased to the principal and his parents. "We will take proper action if the allegation against the clerk is found to be true," said an officer.

Fort Kochi-Vypeen ferry gathers rust as Kochi corporation debates revival

KOCHI. For around two years now, Fort Queen, a ferry that once transported passengers between Fort Kochi and Vypeen, has been gathering dust and rust. Owned by Kochi corporation, the boat with the capacity to carry 150 passengers, was operated on the route when only one roll-on roll-off (Ro-Ro) service was available.

The corporation official added that a proposal to renew the licence, complete repair work and reroute the vessel had been submitted to the council.

According to an official with the corporation, the service was withdrawn due to lack of demand. "The ferry operated when there was only one Ro-Ro service on the Fort Kochi-Vypeen route. The ferry was junked when the Ro-Ro service was expanded to two vessels. Also, the boat needs repairs," said the official. Its licence has

also expired. Francis Chammany, president of the Vypeen-Fort Kochi Passengers Association, said that as the



Fort Kochi-Vypeen service is not possible, the ferry should be reintroduced on a new route. "For around two years now, the boat has not been

in service. It can be run between Fort Kochi and Goshree Junction. Since there is demand on this route, the service would prove to be profitable," said Francis, adding that if it is reintroduced and rerouted, it can be helpful for people in the region.

Meanwhile, Kochi mayor M Anilkumar said operating the ferry will not be economical for the civic body. "Even if we repair and reintroduce it, passengers will still rely on the jhankar service. It does not make economic sense," he stressed.

The corporation official added that a proposal to renew the licence, complete repair work and reroute the vessel had been submitted to the council. Francis added that if the corporation is not planning to operate the boat, it can be handed over to the Kerala State Water Transport Department (SWTD). "Discussions with nearby panchayats can help. For residents of these islands, introducing a ferry or boat service can be helpful," he added.

Four arrested as Vijayapura cops crack Harijan murder case

SP Police Laxman Nimbargi added that the murder was committed by a group of assailants, led by Prakash, who attacked Harijan with a pistol, axe, and machete.

VIJAYAPURA. Less than three days after the brutal murder of notorious criminal Bagappa Harijan, the Vijayapura police have arrested four accused. It may be noted that the murder had taken place in Madina Nagar under Gandhi Chowk Police Station limits on Tuesday night. "We have arrested four accused. All of them will be remanded to judicial custody. If needed, we will seek their custody from the court for further interrogation," said SP Police Laxman Nimbargi.

The arrested are Prakash alias Pintu Lakshmana Melnikeri (26); Rahul Bheemashankar Talakeri (20); Renuka Kamble (20); and Manikantha alias Gadigeppa Shankrappa Benakoppa (27). Weapons and vehicles used in



the crime have been seized, he said. He added that the murder was committed by a

group of assailants, led by Prakash, who attacked Harijan with a pistol, axe, and machete. Based on a complaint filed by the deceased's daughter, Gangubai Harijan, a case has been registered. Detailing the incidents that led to the murder, he said Harijan had financial dealings with advocate Ravi Malinakeri, who was murdered in Vijayapura City a few months ago.

"Following Ravi's murder, Harijan allegedly pressured Ravi's younger brother, Prakash Melikaeri, to transfer his brother's wealth to him. This angered Prakash to the extent that he decided to eliminate Bagappa," the SP added.

BBMP should frame rules on mosquito control, impose fines on violators: Karnataka HC

BENGALURU. The Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike (BBMP) should evolve a continuous mechanism to check and control the breeding of mosquitoes which is the primary cause of dengue, the Karnataka High Court said. Any individual, residential society or hub, if found to be negligent in clearing water stored in containers, stagnant water or solid waste, which may result in the breeding of mosquitoes, should be subjected to heavy fines by framing proper rules, the court said.

A division bench of Chief Justice NV Anjaria and Justice KV Aravind made these observations in the order pronounced on a suo motu public interest litigation taken up after publication of a letter on the rampant spread of dengue, in the 'Letters to the Editor' column in a newspaper in July 2024.

The court said the state and civic authorities should not remain complacent in discharging their duties to deliver medicare for citizens, and control the spread of the disease. Whenever any disease or pandemic

poses a threat to public health, the measures directed by court could be applied to control the disease, and ensure citizens their right to health and a clean and disease-free environment, the court said.

It also said the purpose of this suo motu PIL was to activate the authorities in the wake of the spread of dengue, minimize fatalities due to the disease and keep the disease away from the common citizen. The court also took note of measures taken by the State government and BBMP, and figures which revealed that dengue was on the decline both in its intensity and spread. The number of patients, admissions and deaths had dropped, the court said, disposing of the petition.

Local self-government department tops vigilance corruption cases in Ernakulam

KOCHI. The highest number of government officials facing probe in corruption cases belongs to the local self-government department in the district, according to the data available with the Vigilance and Anti-Corruption Bureau (VACB) since 2021. In the last four months alone, as many as four officials of Kochi corporation were arrested by the VACB for accepting bribes.

As per VACB data, as many as 44 vigilance cases have been registered against government servants in Ernakulam district since 2021. Similarly, in eight cases officials were caught red-handed while accepting bribes. As many as 11 corruption cases were registered against officials of LSG institutions. This is followed by the cooperative department with five cases, and forest and police departments with four cases each. VACB registered three cases each against officials of Kerala State

Pollution Control Board (KSPCB) and revenue department. Two cases each were registered against officials of the civil supplies, excise, PWD, and mining and geology department.

Four cases were registered against officials of LSG bodies after they were caught red-handed. One trap case each was registered against officers of PWD, KWA, revenue and central labour department.

"In the last two months alone, we arrested four officials of Kochi corporation for taking bribes. All the officers were from the health wing. There are several business firms functioning in Kochi. As part of renewing licence, these firms have to obtain clearance from health inspectors. In one case, three health officials of Kochi corporation were arrested in a trap case after they demanded Rs 50,000 as bribe from a businessman who is running an accessory shop in West

Kochi," a VACB officer said. Since November 2024, VACB registered six trap cases in Ernakulam and arrested nine officers. The arrested officers belong to Kochi corporation, the central labour department, the agriculture department, KWA and the police. "A positive change is that more people are approaching us with complaints when government servants demand bribes from them. However, there is still a long way to go. We can nail officials who demand and accept bribes if people give us proper information. Even now, several people without hesitation give bribes to get various services from government offices," he said. Across Kerala, 393 cases were registered by VACB against government officials since 2021. Similarly, 146 trap cases were registered during the same time period. The highest number of vigilance cases was registered in Thiruvananthapuram

district (72) followed by Kozhikode (56), Ernakulam (44) and Thrissur (36). However, VACB does not encourage anonymous complaints as a majority of them turn out to be bogus during further inquiry. As per recent data, 81% of anonymous complaints received by VACB officers turned out to be bogus in Ernakulam district since 2016. As many as 673 anonymous complaints were received by VACB units in Ernakulam via mail and online since 2016. However, only 132 anonymous complaints were found worth proceeding with the investigation and the rest were found to be fake. "Most of the anonymous complaints are filed out of personal grudge against government officials. In some cases, complaints are filed against honest officials who take action against illegal activities. Some file anonymous complaints due to family feuds," an officer said.

JDS workers protest Metro fare hike in Bengaluru

They later tried to visit the Chief Minister's office in Vidhana Soudha to stage a dharna but were stopped.



BENGALURU. Political parties continued their opposition to the fare hike by Bangalore Metro Rail Corporation Limited (BMRL). Nearly 1,000 workers of the JDS took part in protests at different Metro stations and the CM's Office, with the demand for a full rollback of the hike.

On Friday morning, over 400 JDS workers took part in a protest inside Freedom Park, around 11am. They later tried to visit the Chief Minister's office in Vidhana Soudha to stage a dharna but were stopped.

"Our workers were detained well before they reached the venue," said HM Ramesh Gowd, former MLC and City president of JDS. Simultaneously, groups of around 150 people each, affiliated to the JDS, visited three Metro stations - Mallethalli, Rajarajeshwari Nagar and Baiyappanahalli -- to stage a dharna. A small group of students of Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad staged a protest outside Kempegowda Interchange Metro Station.

"They held placards and raised slogans for some time. They were not allowed inside the Metro station," said a source.

Fare calculation updated BMRL on Friday updated the Fare Calculator facility on its website with the revised fares. "As soon as one visits the home page of its portal and feeds in specifics related to the boarding station and destination station, the fare is calculated automatically.

Wedding crasher thief nabbed again in Bhubaneswar, Rs 10 lakh stolen ornaments recovered

Posing as guests, they went in and stole a bag consisting of ornaments and Rs 1.20 lakh cash from the venue.

BHUBANESWAR. Quietly trailing a 20-year-old youth who crashed weddings to steal valuables, Bhubaneswar police nabbed him from his hometown in Madhya Pradesh with burgled gold and diamond ornaments worth about Rs 10 lakh.

Two days after the accused Rajesh Sisodia walked out of jail on bail, police followed him to Rajgarh district in MP and recovered all the stolen ornaments from his possession. He was brought to Bhubaneswar and remanded in judicial custody on the day.

Investigation revealed Sisodia and his two associates had arrived here earlier in February. They visited a hotel located within Maitri Vihar police limits on February 2 when a wedding was underway. Posing as guests, they went in and stole a bag consisting of ornaments and Rs 1.20 lakh cash from the venue. A complaint in this regard was

lodged by the bride's father Saroj Mishra and police registered a case. However, not satisfied with the spoils, the wedding crashers went to another wedding venue at a hotel in Puri the same evening.



However, their luck ran out as locals caught hold of Sisodia though his associates managed to escape. Baliapanda police arrested the accused and he was sent to jail.

On receiving information about Sisodia's possible involvement in theft in Bhubaneswar, the city

police questioned him when he was lodged in Puri jail. However, the thief managed to secure bail after two days and left for his hometown in Madhya Pradesh. The city police wasted no time and followed him to Rajgarh district where they carried out raids at his house.

"All the stolen ornaments were seized from Sisodia's house and he was arrested. Efforts are on to nab the other culprits involved in the thefts," said a police officer.

Police said the gang members used to travel to different parts of the country during wedding seasons. The accused collected information about prominent hotels from the internet and trespassed if they noticed any wedding was underway. They would dress elegantly and target mostly the bride's family before escaping in their car after committing the theft, said the police.

SAD's control over SGPC and fate of jathedars

THE Shiromani Akali Dal established itself in the political dynamics of Punjab after spearheading the Gurdwara Reform Movement in the early 20th century. With this powerful movement, the SAD built a strong cadre base, one that could be mobilised for Sikhs' religious issues. During the period of Constituent Assembly debates from 1946 to 1949, issues concerning the Sikh community were raised by some leaders, particularly Hukam Singh, and fiercely debated. The SAD never abandoned the movement mode since it was playing pressure politics as also keeping the support base intact. In electoral politics, the SAD gained significance only in 1962, when it became the official opposition party. After the formation of the Punjab Suba in 1966, the SAD headed the coalition government and Gurnam Singh became the Chief Minister in 1967. The intra-party dynamics of the SAD can be traced to this year. Understanding the internal politics of the SAD at present requires two sets of forces which work in two distinct situations -- when SAD is in power and when it is out of power. In both situations, there is a struggle for power among top leaders. The 1967-72 period was the beginning of what became the signature image of the SAD. During this time, there were three chief ministers. First, Lachhman Singh Gill toppled Gurnam Singh and then, Parkash Singh Badal replaced Gurnam Singh. A similar process was seen in 1986 when Surjit Singh Barnala was reduced to minority as some MLAs rebelled, led by Parkash Singh Badal. It was in 1997 that Parkash Singh emerged as the undisputed leader of the SAD and remained so till his death in 2023.

The SAD has had such strong leaders as Master Tara Singh, Sant Fateh Singh and Harchand Singh Longowal, who influenced and shaped the Akali politics. Except for Master Tara Singh, who was discredited for ending his fast unto death without getting the Sikhs' demands accepted by the Government of India, the others remained at the citadel for long periods of time. Parkash Singh Badal faced challenges from strong leaders like Gurcharan Singh Tohra and Jagdev Singh Talwandi. The SAD had realised quite early that to remain in power, resources were needed and for this, the SGPC was the most important source. Over time, the SGPC came under the control of the SAD. Thus, with Tohra, who remained the SGPC president for a record 27 years, there emerged two centres of power, both competing and cooperating with each other. Since 1997, Parkash Singh began to control the entire machine. With politics dominating the SGPC, the position of takht jathedars also came under the influence of the SAD. The recent removal of the Jathedar of Takht Damdama Sahib, Giani Harpreet Singh, is not unprecedented. The major reason for such ousters is SAD's domination. The appointments of takht jathedar are done keeping political pragmatism and interests in mind. The control over religious institutions through the SGPC is the major source of political power to the SAD and is done in such a way that both reinforce each other.

Giani Harpreet Singh's removal is crucial in light of the crisis faced by the SAD, which has politically shrunk. To rejuvenate itself, the SAD recently approached the SGPC and conceded that its party leaders had committed mistakes in the past. The Five Singh Sahiban pronounced punishment to the Akali leaders for their mistakes and they accepted it. The title of Panth Rattan Fakhr-e-Qaum that was awarded to Parkash Singh Badal in 2011 was taken back as punishment. It was a danger signal for the Akalis. By getting Giani Harpreet Singh removed through the SGPC, the Sukhbir Badal-led SAD has tried to manage the crisis created by the Five Singh Sahiban's verdict. It is believed that the current crisis that the SAD is facing is mainly due to certain incidents of sacrilege that occurred in Punjab. They include the Bargari incident and the Behbal Kalan police firing which led to the death of two Sikh protesters in 2015. When it became clear that the sacrilegious were committed by some Dera Sacha Sauda followers, its head Gurmeet Ram Rahim Singh came under fire.

Post-Pulwama lessons for India, Pak

India's demographic dividend is a fleeting opportunity that must be used in time. A few states have attempted a skill census, but the scale and complexity of a national one demand a concerted effort

SIX years ago, on February 14, 2019, a CRPF convoy was attacked by a vehicle-borne suicide bomber in Pulwama, Jammu and Kashmir, resulting in the tragic loss of 40 personnel. Pakistan-based terrorist organisation Jaish-e-Mohammed (JeM) claimed responsibility for the attack. It released a video of the assailant, Adil Ahmad Dar, who had joined the outfit one year earlier. Indian strategic planners viewed the suicide bombing as an unacceptable provocation that demanded a strong response. In the early hours of February 26, 2019, a formation of Indian Air Force (IAF) Mirage 2000 aircraft crossed into Pakistani airspace and struck a JeM camp at Balakot, located in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province. This was a striking departure from previous engagement patterns, where operations remained confined mainly to areas along the Line of Control (LoC). The next day, Pakistani fighter jets launched a retaliatory strike in the Jammu sector. In the ensuing aerial engagements, India claimed to have downed an F-16 fighter, while an Indian MiG-21 was shot down, and its pilot, Wg Cdr Abhinandan Varthaman, was captured by Pakistani forces.

The capture of a serving IAF officer raised the stakes, and there was a brief period of heightened tensions, with reports that India was readying for a missile launch into Pakistan. The situation eased when Pakistan announced that it was releasing Abhinandan as a 'peace gesture'. Ajay Bisaria, who served as Indian High Commissioner to Islamabad during that time, writes in his book that the release of the pilot was due to India's "coercive diplomacy, backed by a credible resolve to escalate the crisis".

Both India and Pakistan claimed victory in the Balakot affair. India had shown that it would not demonstrate passiveness in response to major terror strikes on Indian soil by Pakistan-sponsored terrorists. Pakistan's nuclear blackmail had run its course, and India would use the military instrument to impose costs on Rawalpindi. Pakistan's retaliatory strike, named Operation Swift Retort, was also celebrated as a victory. On the first anniversary of the operation, the Director General of Pakistan's Inter-Services Public Relations tweeted: "February 27 commemorates the resolve of Pakistan Armed Forces against any aggression. The way we responded on this day is a proof that any misadventure by enemies of Pakistan will always be defeated."

As both sides made victorious declarations, there was no incentive to escalate, and the crisis rapidly subsided. However, even in this brief episode of hostilities, there are some important lessons for future crises. How adversaries view the results of their actions will determine how they behave in the future. The Indian political leadership is determined that it must use its conventional military superiority to deter Pakistan from using terrorism as an instrument of state policy. This now



includes the use of airpower, which was considered highly escalatory earlier.

In 2020, then IAF Chief, Air Chief Marshal RKS Bhaduria, declared, "Balakot was a clear demonstration that there exists a space within the sub-conventional conflict boundary wherein the Air Force can be used for targeting and yet have escalation control." Using precision, stand-off weapons, the employment of airpower carries lesser risks than physically sending soldiers across the strongly held LoC, as was done in 2016.

Pakistan, on the other hand, states that it has a 'Quid Pro Quo Plus' strategy, implying that it would retaliate against India's limited military action with a response that is slightly more potent or escalatory while remaining below the threshold that could spark an all-out conflict. If this strategy is to be credible, Pakistan must be prepared to employ its military forces to mount quick, targeted operations. While India discounts Pakistan's nuclear bluff, the latter puts it on a higher pedestal. Speaking at an IISS-CISS Workshop in London on February 6, 2020, Lt Gen Khalid Kidwai (ret) stated that the Balakot crisis "amply demonstrated" that "Pakistan's nuclear weapons continue to serve the purpose for which they were developed... It is precisely the presence of these nuclear weapons that deters, and in this specific case, deterred India from expanding operations beyond a single unsuccessful airstrike."

These perceptions on both sides of how Balakot played out mean that there is likely to be lesser restraint on using military force in the event of a crisis between the two countries. With diplomatic channels being almost absent,

there is a risk of misunderstandings or misinterpretations that can lead to unintended escalation. International mediation can help in a crisis, but India rejects any third-party role in responding to national security threats.

The problem is also exacerbated due to the public rhetoric surrounding events like the Balakot strikes. With a strongman image at stake, social media-driven mass sentiment could put pressure on political leaders to take swift, decisive military action. As Henry Kissinger points out in his book, World Order, "The temptation to cater to the demands of the digitally reflected multitude may override the judgment required to chart a complex course in harmony with long-term purpose. The distinction between information, knowledge and wisdom is weakened." Does this throw up scenarios of an India-Pakistan crisis quickly ascending the escalation ladder, bringing nuclear weapons into play? While some Western observers feel that this is a possibility, the reality is different. The scope for the use of military force by India in response to terrorist attacks has indeed widened, but there is also a very deliberate effort by both sides to control the escalation through public messaging.

Following the Balakot airstrikes, the Indian Foreign Secretary issued a statement calling it a "non-military pre-emptive action" with the target selection being "conditioned by our desire to avoid civilian casualties." The Pakistan Foreign Office statement after their retaliation said the strikes were on "non-military targets, avoiding human loss and collateral damage... We have no intention of escalation but are fully prepared to do so if forced into that paradigm."

Justice delayed

SC calls out lax prosecution in 1984 riot cases

OVER four decades have passed, but for the victims of the 1984 anti-Sikh riots, time has not dulled the wounds of injustice. The Supreme Court's remarks on Monday questioning the Delhi police's laxity in prosecuting cases -- especially their failure to challenge acquittals -- highlight a troubling reality: justice for the victims remains elusive. Out of the 650 registered cases, charge-sheets were filed in only 362 cases, and convictions secured in a mere 39. The rest -- more than 300 -- resulted in acquittals, many unchallenged by the prosecution. The apex court's observation that "prosecution must be carried out seriously, not just for the sake of it" underscores a decades-long pattern of neglect. When the Justice Dhir Committee -- which was set up following a PIL filed by former Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee member Gurlal Singh Kahlon -- found in 2020 that several investigations had been derailed, there was a flicker of hope for accountability. Yet, even now, the appeals against acquittals seem more perfunctory than purposeful.



For survivors, the trauma is not just about the horror they

witnessed but also the systemic betrayal that followed. Statements given in court paint a grim picture -- families torn apart, homes burned and a justice system that remains indifferent. The Supreme Court's intervention offers a chance to correct past wrongs, but will it amount to real action? The Delhi police's excuse of "lack of evidence" after nearly four decades is an indictment of their own inefficiency, if not complicity.

Justice cannot be an afterthought or a delayed formality. The court's scrutiny must translate into concrete steps -- proper legal representation, fresh investigations where needed, and, above all, an unwavering commitment to ensuring that the guilty do not walk free. Until then, the victims of 1984 will continue to wait for a closure that seems forever out of reach.

Trump-Modi bond faces trade test in second term

Trump's 'America First' trade agenda -- which clashes with Modi's 'Make in India' initiative -- threatens to undermine India's status as the world's 'back office'.

The last time Donald Trump was president, ties between the United States and India flourished. But the bilateral relationship began to fray during Joe Biden's presidency, owing not least to divisions over the Ukraine war. Will Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's latest meeting with Trump at the White House mark the first step toward restoring this critical relationship? Trump has made no secret of his conviction that personal bonds between leaders can underpin stronger bilateral relationships. And he and Modi certainly share an affinity: both are nationalist politicians who love little more than to please a roaring crowd with elaborate theatrics. In September 2019, the two came together for a public rally in Houston, attended by 50,000 Indian-Americans and several US legislators. The following February, Trump addressed more than 1,00,000 people in Ahmedabad. "America loves India," he declared. "America respects India, and America will always be faithful and loyal friends [sic] to the Indian people."

The US-India relations took a turn for the worse after Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022. The Biden administration mobilised America's allies and partners to join its campaign to punish Russia -- and, ideally, compel it to change its behaviour. But far from joining this effort, India stayed neutral and seized the opportunity to secure cheap Russian oil. There were other points of contention, as well. The Biden administration sought to weaken Myanmar's military junta by imposing stringent sanctions on the country and sending "non-lethal aid" to rebel groups -- a policy that has contributed to instability in India's border state of Manipur. Biden also coddled Pakistan's military-backed regime, including by approving a \$450-million deal in 2022 to upgrade the country's fleet of F-16 fighter jets.

Similarly, Biden welcomed the interim government that Bangladesh's military installed following the overthrow

of the country's India-friendly government last August. Bangladesh's rapid descent into lawlessness and Islamist violence since then has raised serious security risks for India, which is already home to millions of illegally settled Bangladeshis. America's approach to Sikh separatist leaders on its soil has also raised India's hackles. Under the Biden administration, the US carried out a criminal investigation into India's alleged involvement in supposed assassination plots against Sikh militants in the US and Canada.

Last September, just days before Biden met with Modi in Delaware, senior White House and US intelligence officials met with Sikh separatists to assure them that they would be protected from "transnational repression". The following month, the US charged a former Indian intelligence officer in an alleged failed plot to kill a New York-based Sikh militant, who is on India's most-wanted list.

Against this backdrop, it is easy to see why Trump's victory in last November's presidential election raised hopes in India for a reset in bilateral relations. It helps that Trump has repeatedly pledged to negotiate a quick conclusion to the Ukraine war, meaning that India's choice not to pick a side in that conflict would no longer matter. A few weeks into Trump's second presidency, however, there are reasons to doubt this rosy scenario. So far, Trump has done nothing to spare India from his frenetic push to implement his campaign promises, from raising tariffs to deporting undocumented immigrants. When the Trump administration sent more than 100 Indian nationals back to India on a military aircraft -- a 40-hour ordeal -- their hands and feet were shackled. Modi said nothing.

In fact, far from standing up to Trump, Modi has pre-emptively slashed tariffs on US imports, hoping that this

would keep India out of the "Tariff Man's" sights. But a dissatisfied Trump, who has called India a "very big abuser" of tariffs, has not spared India from his steel and aluminium levies. He wants India to wipe out its \$35-billion bilateral trade surplus by buying more oil and petroleum products, and more weapons, from the US. India is the world's third-largest primary energy consumer, after China and the US, and the largest source of oil demand growth. That makes the country a highly

mutually beneficial. Regarding India, his plan may well be to use the threat of tariffs to compel Modi's government to accept the trade deal of his choosing. That is what he did to Japan during his first presidency. He also tried to do it to India, but failed, so he stripped India of its special trade status instead, prompting India to impose retaliatory tariffs on some US products. If Trump ends up slapping more tariffs, the Indian economy could slow down, at least marginally. More broadly, Trump's "America First" trade agenda -- which clashes with Modi's "Make in India" initiative -- threatens to undermine India's status as the world's "back office", providing extensive IT and business services to US companies. Where trade is concerned, Trump treats friends and foes alike. But it matters that India is a friend -- and Trump should want to keep it that way. The US-India strategic partnership helps advance the two countries' shared interests in the Indo-Pacific region, the world's emerging economic and geopolitical hub, including strengthening maritime security and supporting a stable balance of power. Already, the two countries are working to deepen military interoperability, and the US has overtaken Russia as India's leading weapons supplier, new contracts show.

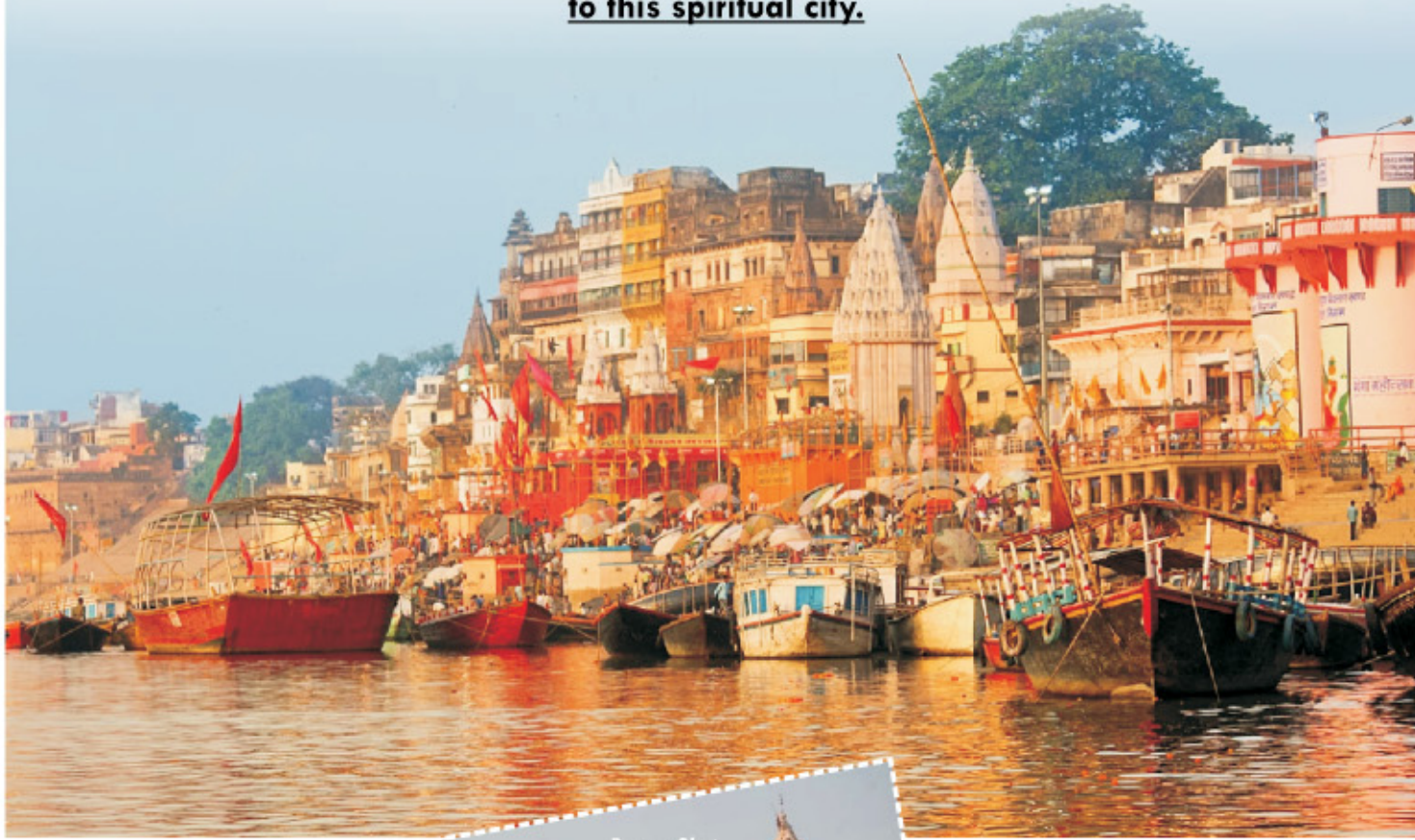
As Trump and Modi build on their rapport, both should recognise that India is America's most important partner in countering China's hegemonic ambitions. It is thus in shared interest to restore and deepen bilateral ties, including by strengthening collaboration on critical and emerging technologies, from AI to biotechnology. Warm personal relations are an added bonus.



attractive market for a US administration that is committed to increasing domestic oil and gas production. It also means that Trump's commitment to pushing down oil prices, including by applying pressure on OPEC leader Saudi Arabia, would benefit India's economy. But Trump has never been particularly concerned about ensuring that his trade agreements are

48 hours in Varanasi

One of the oldest living cities in the world, Varanasi is situated on the western banks of the Ganga and extends beyond the riverbank into a labyrinth of alleys. Filled to the brim with temples and teeming with pilgrims, the city is a magnet for travel enthusiasts. From witnessing vibrant evening prayers at Varanasi's oldest ghat to touring one of the most significant Hindu temples in India—here is a guide to making the most of your two-day trip to this spiritual city.



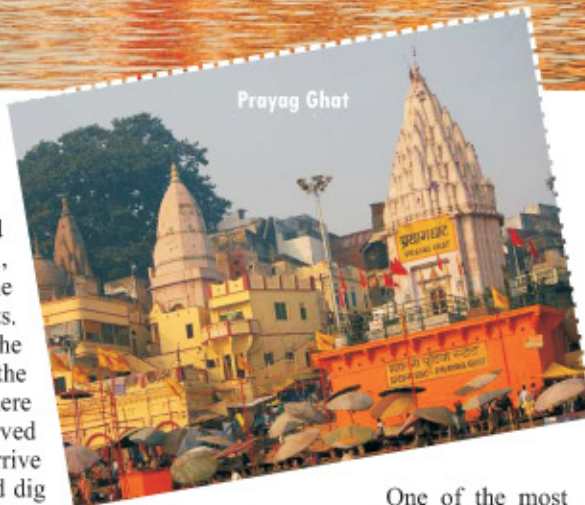
Breakfast at Kachauri Gali

Dotted with weathered, blackened cauldrons bubbling with hot oil, Varanasi's Kachauri Gali is one of the city's main landmarks near the ghats. The Vishwanath Gali transforms into the Kachauri Gali as soon as you pass the famous Vishwanath temple. This is where the famous kachauris are fried and served fresh with chana and imli chutney. Arrive as early as 7 AM to beat the rush and dig into the hot fried kachauris. Make sure you are not too late, as the street falls into a lull soon after breakfast.

Visit Prayag Ghat

Overflowing with devotees that come to offer their prayers day and night, the Prayag Ghat is another significant ghat in Varanasi. Located on the immediate left of the Dashashwamedh Ghat, it was built by Balaji Bajirao in 1778 and is a replica of the Prayag holy city in Allahabad. Fortune tellers, seated under rattan umbrellas, read fortunes for the visiting pilgrims.

Watch the rituals at Manikarnika Ghat



One of the most unique aspects of the city of Varanasi is that the cremation grounds at Manikarnika Ghat are located in the city itself and in the vicinity of some of Varanasi's most sacred temples. Piles of firewood line the shore and the fires continually burn as a stream of dead bodies, each wrapped in cloth, is carried through the lanes on makeshift stretchers. It was said that Lord Shiva gave Lord Vishnu a boon, that whoever dies in Kashi would be liberated from the endless cycle of birth and death and his soul would be set free.

Head to Assi Ghat

Situated at the confluence of Ganga and Assi rivers, Assi Ghat is the southernmost Ghat in Varanasi, where pilgrims bathe before paying

their homage to Lord Shiva in the form of a huge lingam situated under a peepal tree. To most visitors to Varanasi, it's known for being a place where long-term foreign students, researchers and tourists live. It was at Assi Ghat where the famous Indian poet, Tulsi Das had written the much-celebrated Ramcharitmanas and the ghat can accommodate about 22,000 people at once during festivals like Shivratri. In the evenings, around 7 pm, a full-fledged aarti takes place here and many visitors prefer watching it from the boats that can be hailed from the ghat.

Catch evening prayers at



Dashashwamedh Ghat

One of the oldest and most important ghats, the Dashashwamedh Ghat is also Varanasi's liveliest. Two Hindu mythologies surround the ghat, one being that Lord Brahma created it to welcome Lord Shiva and another where he sacrificed ten horses during the yajna performed here. Around dusk the Dashashwamedh Ghat comes to life with the evening Ganga Aarti. Performed by young pundits dressed in saffron, the aarti is an elaborate ceremony complete with puja, dance and fire. The riverbank lights up with flaming lamps and the smell of sandalwood envelops the ghat. Close to the ghat, overlooking the Ganga, lies the Jantar Mantar—an observatory built by Maharaja Jai Singh of Jaipur.

Breakfast at Phulwari

A gang of playful monkeys keeps you company till the food arrives at Phulwari. Situated in the backdrop of an ancient kaali temple with massive graffiti on the main wall, Phulwari is as much a visual delight as a culinary one. The pizzas and yoghurt muesli are especially delicious.

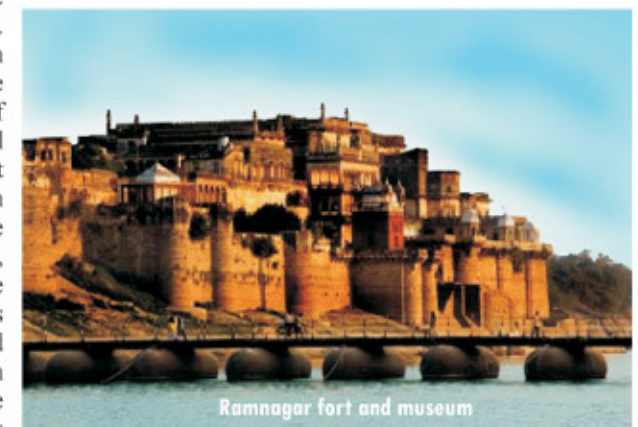
Head to the Sri Kashi Vishwanath Temple

Not far away from the Ganga is one of the oldest temples in Hinduism, Sri Kashi Vishwanath Temple. Deriving its name from the city Kashi, the temple was built in 1780 by the Late Maharani Ahilya Bai Holkar of Indore and is one of the twelve Jyotirlingas, the holiest of Shiva temples. The main deity housed within its premises is known by the name Vishwanath or Vishweshwara, both translating to mean 'ruler of the universe.' The temple is also the starting point of the sacred Panchkoshi

Yatra—a 88.5 km long barefoot walk encircling Kashi.

Explore the Ramnagar fort and museum

A repository of the history of the kings of Varanasi, the Ramnagar fort and museum is located opposite Varanasi's Tulsi Ghat. This crumbling 17th century fort and palace on the eastern banks of the Ganga is a beautiful place to watch the sunset over the river. Built with red sandstone by the Maharaja of Banaras, the fort houses a temple and a museum within its compound. Carved balconies, open courtyards and intricate pavilions highlight its



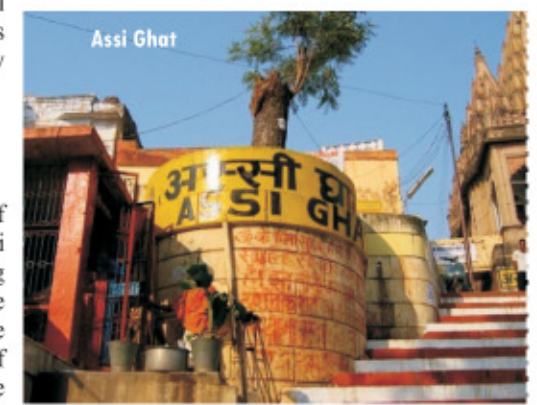
Mughal style of architecture and the most important construction inside the fort is the famous 'Durbar hall' which is a hall dedicated to the public audience.

Lunch at Shree Café

If you're staying close to Dashashwamedh ghat, this is going to be your constant choice for meals. The cosy cafe dishes out the most delicious Indian, Middle Eastern, Chinese and continental vegetarian fare. The owner, Santosh Ji's interest in photography has resulted in the cafe's bright walls being adorned with brilliant Varanasi themed pictures. You can never go wrong with ordering the lemon nana and the special thaali.

Sarnath

The Buddhist pilgrimage, Sarnath lies 10 km from Varanasi, and is yet another attraction that appeals to people from all around the world. This is the place where Gautam Buddha first gave his sermons on Dharma. The main deer park complex and



a number of other Buddhist temples can be seen here. The Mulgandha Kuti Vihar temple, the Archaeological Museum, the Dhamek Stupa, the Chaukhandi Stupa and ruins of monasteries are the key highlights here. Other modern structures like the Japanese & Korean temples have been added to the Sarnath topography in the last few decades. Go early so you can beat the rush of tourists through the day and enjoy the tranquil ambience of these Buddhist relics.

24 hours in Agra

Drawing in hordes of tourists on a regular basis, Agra is perhaps one of the most visited cities in India for both Indian and global travellers. Although tourists mostly flock to the Taj, there are several other places of significance which are worth visiting when you're in the city. For visitors who have only a day to spare, we highlight the top attractions for you to fit into your itinerary. From touring the Taj Mahal to sampling delicious local cuisine—pack it all into a day without missing out on a thing. Here's how you can make the most of your 24 hours in Agra.

Kick-start your day with the Taj Mahal. The Taj Mahal is considered by many, to possess architectural beauty unsurpassed by any other structure in the world. Constructed over a period of 22 years, employing twenty thousand workers, it was completed in 1648 C.E. and cost a whopping 32 million Rupees. Built entirely of white marble, it almost seems to glow in the moonlight, with the shimmering Jamuna river situated just across. The Muslim emperor Shah Jahan built this monument in the memory of his wife Mumtaz, whose grave is housed within the premises at the lower chamber. The grave of Shah Jahan was added to it later. The Taj stands tall and regal on a raised, square platform, forming an

unequal octagon with its four truncated corners. The architecture uses the interlocking arabesque concept, where each element is singular in its entirety, but integrates seamlessly with the whole. The central dome spans 58 feet in diameter and soars to a height of 213 feet. It is flanked on four sides by smaller domed chambers, and four slender minarets rising to a lower height of 162.5 feet. The entire mausoleum is decorated with an inlaid design of

flowers and calligraphy using precious gems like agate and jasper, and the main archways are carved with passages from the Holy Qur'an.

Take a guided tour of Agra Fort

Aside from the Taj Mahal, Agra has one of the finest Mughal forts in India, the Agra Fort. A massive red sandstone structure located on the banks of the Yamuna River, construction on the fort was started in 1565 by the Mughal Emperor Akbar, and further additions in white marble were subsequently made up till the reign of his grandson Shah Jahan. Originally built for military purposes, it was later used as a palace, and eventually even served as a prison where Shah Jahan was confined for 8 years by his son Aurangzeb, who seized power in 1658. The fort runs along a length of 2.5 kilometres within enclosed walls, it encompasses several exquisite

palaces such as the Shah Jahani Mahal, Jahangiri Mahal, Khas Mahal, audience halls named Diwan-i-Am and the Diwan-i-Khas, a Fish Pavilion, the Nagina Masjid, Garden of Grapes and the Pearl Mosque. A world heritage site, it is a testament to architecture which deserves a visit.

Drive out to Fatehpur Sikri

Fatehpur Sikri is a town located about 40 kilometres from Agra, and has been given the status of a World Heritage site by UNESCO. Founded in 1569 by the Mughal emperor Akbar, this was the Mughal capital from 1571 to 1585, during which the empire reached its pinnacle of success. The site was chosen to honour the Sufi saint Salim Chishti and the city within was built to honour the birth of his child, Salim.

The construction of this walled city took almost 15 years to complete, and the complex included several royal palaces, a harem, courts and a mosque. The buildings have been made from red sandstone and have been designed in keeping with Persian architectural concepts, although the overall style is Mughal.

Shopping at Sadar Bazaar

This is the best place for shopaholics, and probably one of Agra's most popular shopping areas. In close proximity to the Taj Mahal and Agra fort, Sadar Bazaar is a bustling marketplace that houses hundreds of tiny shops selling everything from ethnic clothes and accessories to leather goods and shoes.

Dinner at Dasaprakash

Something of an institution in the city, Dasaprakash dishes out the most authentic and delicious south Indian cuisine. Despite being jam-packed with both locals and tourists at all times of the day, the service is quick and the food's served hot and fresh. You could go with the dosa-idli combination, or alternatively try the thali, which is loaded with south Indian staples.



Pariksha Pe Charcha: "Be Smarter Than Smart Phone," Sadhguru Tells Students

Sadhguru told students to be smarter than their smart phones, while urging them to not treat exams as a "challenge to their intelligence".

Speaking to students during Pariksha Pe Charcha, he said that exams are just a step to evaluate if students are fit to go to the next step of education. "If you look at the grass or that motorcycle, you should think what is the physics, math and chemistry of it. Education gives you fundamentals and eventually an access to life. To find this access, one aspect is active dynamic intelligence," he said. Addressing a student's query on addiction to social media and the phone, he said that a person should decide how to use a smart phone, not the other way round. He also said that there is no such thing as overthinking, as one must think beyond to be able to do something worthwhile. "You may call it stress or anxiety, but the problem is that you don't know how to keep your mind aligned. What is not well aligned will cause friction, further causing stress," Sadhguru said.



Emphasising the power of meditation, the spiritual leader said studies have shown that when the Shambhavi Mahamudra is practiced, a large part of the brain lights up. "This is what needs to happen, that everything is lit up. The more you activate your intelligence, the more access you have to everything that you see. If your body is well-exercised, you can function better. Then why is that not true with your mental faculties?" he asked. Sadhguru also warned against comparing

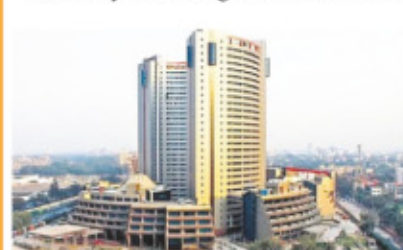
the intelligence of people. "Am I as intelligent as this person or that person? There is no such thing. It's a farce that's been spread in the world. Everybody can sparkle and do things that others cannot imagine. Only thing is, because there is no striving, that sparkle doesn't happen," he told students. Nutrition and health experts Shonali Sabherwal, Rujuta Diwekar and Revant Himatsingka shed light on the importance of healthy eating habits and the crucial role of quality sleep in academic success during a special session of Pariksha Pe Charcha. On Wednesday, actor Deepika Padukone shared tips on stress management while opening up about her own struggles with depression. Pariksha Pe Charcha is an annual event in which Modi interacts with students appearing for board examinations. During this, he also answers students' queries related to exam stress and other issues.

Will ensure MCD areas are as clean & beautiful as NDMC zones: L-G

NEW DELHI. L-G VK Saxena on Friday, while emphasising the vital role of sanitation workers in maintaining Delhi's cleanliness, said the MCD areas would be made as clean and beautiful as NDMC zones. Addressing Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD) sanitation officials and swachhta sainiks during his Samvaad interaction, he asserted that transformation in leadership will positively impact both the city and people. Calling sanitation workers the backbone of the city, the L-G acknowledged their hard work and dedication, particularly during crises like the COVID-19 pandemic, Yamuna floods, and the G-20 summit. "You are the backbone of Delhi, and without you, a clean city is unimaginable," Saxena said, commending their efforts. However, he noted that despite significant progress, more needs to be done to achieve a fully clean and green Delhi. He said while some areas, particularly those under the New Delhi Municipal Council (NDMC), are well-maintained, others required improvement. Reflecting on the recent Delhi Assembly elections, Saxena said the true impact of the newly-elected government would be visible only when the capital achieves complete cleanliness. He also stressed the need for sanitation workers to redouble their efforts, ensuring every corner of the city is well-maintained. The L-G highlighted the MCD's responsibility in keeping Delhi clean, acknowledging its good work in several areas but pointing out that many localities still require special attention. "Sanitation workers are like soldiers who never retreat from their duty. From today, special drives should be initiated in neglected areas to make Delhi garbage-free," he urged. Delhi mayor Mahesh Khichi, also present at the event, praised the MCD's sanitation workforce for their dedication and tireless efforts in improving the state of hygiene in the capital.

After Vidhan Sabha, all eyes on MCD bypolls

NEW DELHI. After 11 councillors were elected to the Delhi Assembly in the recently-concluded elections, and a seat was vacated councillor-turned-MP Kamaljeet Sehrawat, the city gears up for by-elections in twelve Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD) wards, likely to be held in late April or the first week of May. Elated with the marginal increase in vote share, the grand old party now eyes to increase its strength in the MCD. The party currently holds eight seats in the MCD and aims to



increase its tally in the House. Senior Congress leaders have initiated plans to mobilise workers and focus on ward-level election

preparations, party sources said. However, the Congress faces stiff competition from the BJP and the AAP, both of which are also preparing vigorously for the upcoming polls. So far, Congress functionaries have refused to participate in any alliance with AAP. "Even though marginally, our vote share has increased which suggests that people are again placing their trust on us. There is no question of an alliance so far," a senior Congress leader said.

Chandni Chowk, Chandni Mahal, Dakshinipuri, Mundka, Shalimar Bagh B, Ashok Vihar, Dichaon Kalan, Narayana, Sangam Vihar, Greater Kailash, Vinod Nagar, and Dwarka B wards go to polls.

Congress' Major Reshuffle In Key States After Delhi Drubbing, Haryana Loss

NEW DELHI. The Congress effected a major reshuffle of its office-bearers on Friday, appointing former Chhattisgarh Chief Minister Bhupesh Baghel as general secretary in charge of Punjab and party MP Syed Naseer Hussain as general secretary in charge of Jammu and Kashmir and Ladakh. The party appointed new incharges in several states. The new appointments were made by Congress chief Mallikarjun Kharge.

Former general secretary BK Hariprasad has been appointed incharge of Haryana, Krishna Allavaru of Bihar, Rajani Patil of Himachal Pradesh and Chandigarh and Harish Chaudhary of Madhya Pradesh. Bihar will go the polls next year.

Congress leader Ajay Kumar Lallu will be incharge of



Odisha, K Raju of Jharkhand, Meenakshi Natarajan of Telangana and Girish Chodankar of Tamil Nadu and Puducherry.

Party leader Saptagiri Sankar Ulaka will be incharge of Manipur, Tripura, Sikkim and Nagaland. He has relieved Dipak Babaria, Mohan Prakash, Bharatsinh Solanki, Rajeev Shukla, Ajoy Kumar and Devender Yadav of their responsibilities.

The other general secretaries will continue to serve in their designated capacities, party release said. Syed Naseer Hussain has been relieved from his role attached to the Congress president. Most of new incharges are senior leaders with organisational experience.

The reshuffle has taken place after a string of poor results faced by the Congress. The party bungled its prospects in Haryana, won a few seats in Maharashtra assembly polls and again failed to open its account in Delhi, third time in a row.

Amid outage row, discoms say power supply 'reliable' in Delhi

The BJP has accused Atishi of "spreading lies" to "mislead" the people after her party was ousted from power in Delhi.

NEW DELHI. While the outgoing Chief Minister Atishi claimed of outages after AAP's departure from power in Delhi, BSES discoms on Friday said they are ensuring "reliable, seamless" supply in their areas.

The BSES discoms are committed to ensuring reliable and quality power supply and have set up dedicated war rooms for real-time monitoring of power supply situation, said a statement of the company. "To maintain a sustainable and eco-friendly power supply, up to 2000 MW of renewable energy is significantly contributing to meeting BSES' winter power demand," it said. Atishi alleged on Thursday that several parts of the city were experiencing power cuts and hit at the BJP that has now come to power in Delhi, saying it would turn the city into Uttar Pradesh experiencing



hours of outages. The BJP has accused Atishi of "spreading lies" to "mislead" the people after her party was ousted from power in Delhi.

Delhi BJP president in a letter to L-G VK Saxena said it should be ensured that Atishi while in office as the acting chief minister does not issue "misleading" statements. The BSES statement said

according to State Load Dispatch Centre (SLDC) Delhi data, the city's peak power demand has remained stable, ranging between 4200-4500 MW since February 8.

"BSES discoms are ensuring a seamless, reliable and quality power supply, successfully meeting Delhi's winter electricity demand," the statement claimed.

The war rooms led by senior officials enable swift decision-making and response. Additionally, BSES field teams remain on high alert, ready to address any exigencies promptly, it said.

Despite proactive preparedness, in case of any disruption or local fault, consumers can easily reach BSES through multiple platforms, it said, adding that the company is committed to serve over 50 lakh consumers and two crore city residents.

"Some Big Concerns...": Shashi Tharoor On PM Modi-Donald Trump Meeting

Congress MP Shashi Tharoor expressed happiness over the meeting of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and US President Donald Trump in US.

Bengaluru. Expressing happiness over Prime Minister Narendra Modi's meeting with US President Donald Trump, Congress MP Shashi Tharoor said on Friday it looks like big concerns have been addressed and called the US commitment to sell us F-35 stealth aircraft "very valued".

Speaking to reporters in Bengaluru, on the sidelines of the Global Investors' Meet (GIM), Mr Tharoor said, "On the defence front, the commitment to sell us F35 stealth aircraft is very valued. That's the state-of-the-art aircraft and certainly, we already had the Rafael, now with the F35, the Indian Air Force would be in very good shape."

"If you look at the main issues, we have heard about so far, I am very encouraged and I look forward to more details when the Prime Minister and his team are back and expect a briefing from the MEA in the standing



committee," he said. Mr Tharoor further stated, "The press statements by Prime Minister Narendra Modi and US President Donald Trump are encouraging. It looks like some of the big concerns we have had been addressed for example on the question of trade and tariffs they have decided to sit down and hold serious negotiations that would conclude by the fall which is September and October of this year. I think that's a very good outcome because the fear

was there might be some hasty decisions made in Washington which would affect our exports."

"This way there is time to negotiate and I welcome that. Secondly, on the illegal immigration issue, the only thing missing there on what Prime Minister Narendra Modi said, was the question of manner of those persons were treated and sent back."

Otherwise his stand was absolutely correct. These are misled youths who had been encouraged or induced to migrate illegally and they should be taken back. They are Indian citizens and they belong in the country and we take them back," he noted. "But, I hope something there was said behind closed doors not perhaps in the press conference inside privately this manner of doing it, the handcuffs, mistreats, insults, the military aircraft should be avoided in future. And I am sure that if the Prime Minister has done that the American would want to listen," he said.



Mani, Naveen Jindal, Anurag Sharma, Congress MPs Deependra Hooda, Benny Behanan, Trinamool Congress MP Mahua Moitra, and Nationalist Congress Party (SP) legislator Supriya Sule, among others.

The committee will have to submit its report in the next session (monsoon session), said sources. The new Income Tax bill is designed to simplify and overhaul the present Income Tax Act of 1961.

The current law has faced criticism for being too complicated and difficult for regular taxpayers to understand. The new bill aims to simplify things, featuring 23 chapters, 16 schedules, and around 536 clauses. This is a notable reduction from the existing act, which spans 823 pages, includes 23 chapters, 14 schedules, and 298 sections. The new Income Tax Bill is expected to provide a clearer tax framework while keeping the fundamental tax structure unchanged. By simplifying the language and restructuring provisions, the government aims to make tax compliance easier for individuals and businesses.

Ready to jail Tahawwur Rana once extradited: Maharashtra Chief Minister

The chief minister's comments came after US President Donald Trump announced that his administration has approved the extradition of the 26/11 Mumbai attack plotter.

NEW DELHI. Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis on Friday said the state government is prepared to lodge the 26/11 Mumbai terror attacks accused Tahawwur Hussain Rana in jail once he is extradited from the United States.

The chief minister's comments came after US President Donald Trump announced that his administration has approved the extradition of "very evil" Rana, wanted by Indian probe agencies for his role in the 26/11 Mumbai terror attacks, "to face justice in India." "We kept Kasab, what is the big deal here? We will keep him for sure," Fadnavis said here when asked about Maharashtra's preparedness once Rana is extradited. The CM, who also handles the home portfolio, emphasised Mumbai's security infrastructure was capable of handling high-profile criminals. "The case is in Mumbai so he (Rana) will be brought to Mumbai. We handled Ajmal Kasab. We had got Rana's

online statement due to which Pakistan's involvement was proved (in 26/11). He was in American protection at that time. Rana was India's criminal and should face the law here. We will get final justice in the 26/11 case," the CM asserted. Ajmal Kasab, one of the 10 terrorists involved in the November 26, 2008, Mumbai terror attacks, was arrested from one of the carnage sites in Mumbai.

He was lodged in jails in Maharashtra during his trial for four years and hanged in Pune's Yerwada central jail in 2012. Fadnavis said during the investigation, Pakistan's role in the terror attack was exposed and established.

He thanked Prime Minister Narendra Modi for his efforts to bring Rana to India for trial. "I want to profusely thank Prime Minister Narendra Modi for his (Rana) extradition. We all wanted that the person who conspired against us, the mastermind



of the Mumbai terror attack, to be handed over to India," he said.

The chief minister said initially America was reluctant to hand over Rana to India and wanted to protect him but due to the initiative of the Prime Minister, extradition of the key 26/11 accused has been in a way cleared by America and its President Trump. "I believe this is very significant for India. Because it is very important that the criminals should get punishment through our judicial and legal

process," he said. Fadnavis noted the Trump administration's approval to extradite Rana was an "important development" to ensure "final justice" in the case. Those who conspired against India must face the country's legal system, he maintained. Rana, a Canadian national of Pakistani origin, is currently lodged at a metropolitan detention centre in Los Angeles. He is known to be associated with Pakistani-American terrorist David Coleman Headley, one of the key conspirators of the 26/11 attacks. Speaking at a joint press meet along with Prime Minister Modi in Washington on Thursday, President Trump said, "Today I am pleased to announce that my administration has approved the extradition of one of the plotters and very evil people of the world, and having to do with the horrific Mumbai terrorist attacks, to face justice in India. So, he is going back to India."



North Delhi for Heritage lovers

Ambedkar University Campus

This is not your usual university campus with a main building surrounded by graffiti-ridden walls and some academic blocks. The single-storeyed sprawling building that serves the Ambedkar University today is steeped in history and has been witness to all its turmoil. It's age-old trees have an impressive canopy of their own and can boast of many a historical figures taking sanctuary under their branches. Built in the 1900s, the building was initially the IG Block in British rules India. As the British were looking to develop more structures of governance, before the Parliament was built, Civil Lines, beginning from Kashmere Gate right up till Majnu Ka Tila, was going to be the scene of action. As a result, since the time of the British and after that, this campus has housed many educational institutions including the Kashmere Gate Polytechnic, the Woodcraft Institute and the Delhi College of Engineering, the latter has now moved to Bawana.

William Fraser's Bungalow

Referred to as a 'white mughal' by noted author William Dalrymple, William Fraser was a civil servant in the times of British ruled India and the reign of the last Mughal ruler, Bahadur Shah Zafar. His bungalow, today the site of the Railway office, was built next to the Yamuna in 1803 when he was the deputy resident of Delhi. Fraser was murdered outside this bungalow and has been buried in the grounds of the neighbouring St. James' Church. The rather well-maintained structure of William Fraser's bungalow is also the recipient of DDA's Adaptive Urban Heritage award in 1998. The building comprises of two separate structures that have been joined together. Architecture is in the Indo-Saracenic style, also known as Indo-Gothic or Hindu-Gothic. The building was greatly damaged during the revolt of 1857 and has since then been restored hence the alteration in architectural styles. What is most interesting is that the building stands on a tykhana, or a dungeon, that has three tunnels, one leading up to Red Fort, the other to the Yamuna river and the third to a corner of the bungalow's huge campus. This network of tunnels was meant to facilitate clandestine passage of sepoy as well as prisoners, not to mention their execution. Often, prisoners were sent from the Red Fort, decapitated in one part of the dungeon and their bodies thrown into the nearby Yamuna river without anyone getting to know. The Yamuna river's waters came right up to the dungeons at the time that the waters had not receded. This is probably why these dungeons reek of a dank odour even today. A part of the tunnel accessible from behind

the bungalow has some lighting for people to be able to walk along a portion of this. Since most of the elaborate tunnel networks under Red Fort are either broken down or inaccessible, this tykhana is an interesting opportunity to explore if you'd fancy a peek into history and the scandalous crimes that could have taken place here. An alert for single women tourists, go in large groups if you plan to explore the

tunnels.

How to reach

If you are planning to take the metro, take the Kashmere Gate exit and ask a three wheeler or a cycle rickshaw (plenty available) to the St. James' Church. The building is right behind the church.

Dara Shikoh's Library

The more well known and revered son of emperor Shahjahan, Dara Shikoh was known to have keen intellectual pursuits. The library established by him in the year 1637, stands in the grounds of the Ambedkar University to this day, a testimony for this interest, although few of the prince's original works are accessible. Dara Shikoh was involved in the translation of the Upanishads and had already completed the translation of 50 Upanishads from Sanskrit to Persian in a bid to bring these

ancient scriptures within the reach of Persian scholars. A lot of his own texts reflect a confluence of both Sufi and Vedantic schools of thought. The library building is a short drive into the Ambedkar University campus, accessible on weekends as well. In the British period, the building served as the residence of the Mughal Viceroy of Punjab, Ali Mardan Singh. Thereafter, the Government College, the District School and the Municipal Board School operated from these premises. The building has a huge lawn on the back side of the premises that probably served as a play area for the children at that time. Today, the Department of Archaeology of Ambedkar University operates from here.

Old Post Office

The oldest post office of Delhi dating back to 1885; this is where the story of India Post began. Despite the age, the building is in good shape due to adequate maintenance and the fact that this is still an operational post office.

Its double-storeyed structure is located a quick walk down from the Ambedkar University entrance, on the way from Kashmere Gate to Red Fort. The Old Delhi Railway Station is a stone throw's away, a convenient location for all the post coming in at the time when snail mail was the only way of communication. The building has five bays with semi-circular arched doorways, typical of architecture of this time. There are semi-circular tapering pilasters between each bay. Once you are in the area, you can also check out some other British era buildings in the vicinity; the St. James' Church, Ambedkar University building that was earlier used as the IG Block during the British governance and houses Dara Shikoh's library and William Fraser's Bungalow that is today the Railway office.

Bara Hindu Rao Hospital

Overlooking a quaint roundabout on the North Delhi Ridge, with the Ashokan Pillar on one side and the Delhi University North Campus to the other, stands the Hindu Rao Hospital. The sprawling campus of the biggest hospital of the North Delhi Municipal Corporation has quite a few shards of history tucked away in various

corners. As per the official version of the Hindu Rao Hospital, the main building of the hospital goes back to 1911. It was built by Sir Edward Cole Brook as a 16 bedded nursing home. However, other accounts of this structure, particularly those of noted author William Dalrymple have referred to the Hindu Rao House as a structure built by William Fraser in the early 19th century who also resided here. After his death in 1835, the house was acquired by Hindu Rao, a Maratha nobleman and brother in law of Maharaja Daulat Rao Scindia of Gwalior and the name has since stuck. The house premises was turned into the British head quarters during the time of the 1957 Revolt, probably because of the vantage point that it offers, thanks to its elevation and thick green cover. Incidentally, this was also the spot where Timur the Lame camped and looted Delhi in 1398.

Qudsia Bagh and Masonic Lodge

The Qudsia Bagh complex that separates IBSB from Civil Lines has been in and out of news for various reasons. The story goes back to the 18th century when the palace of Qudsia Begum-mother of mughal emperor Ahmad Shah Bahadur and wife of Mughal king Mohammed Shah Rangila, stood at this very point. After the revolt of 1857, much of the palace was destroyed and what remains today is a mosque, an archway and a hunting lodge and some remains of the corner facade of the erstwhile palace.

The mosque is an ASI protected monument. Built with lakhori bricks, the ASI is still working to restore this to its days of glory. Some of the initial work has been patchy and looks as if sepiat paint has been slapped on the structure in a hurry. The mosque is already giving in to encroachment despite notices prohibiting the same.

In the same complex is the Masonic Club and the mason's lodge. While the club is now closed since it would attract mostly those who would come across to enjoy highly subsidised liquor, the mason's lodge has recently been painted and restored, freed of all the broken furniture that had been piled up here for decades.

The historical structures notwithstanding, the real story lies in the resurrection of the park complex itself. Built in the char-bagh style, the Qudsia lawns sprawling over 50 acres were dishevelled and gradually deteriorating into a den for miscreants. Ever since the upkeep of these lawns was taken over by the Qudsia Bagh Welfare society, a body comprising mainly of local residents, the area has been converted into a walker's and horticulturist's paradise. A neat 1-km walk-way has been carved out of the lawns' periphery so that even the remote corners are now accessible to all. Almost 550 trees, 42,500 shrubs and 450 bamboo plants were planted recently.

This has only added to the already existing green treasures of this area; a few 200 year old Pipal trees that were probably planted in the Mughal era, two of the largest specimens of Cycus Palms in the city going back almost 80 years and many other old trees that are now neatly labeled for those who care to observe as they go about their morning walk. The complex is flanked by the ring road on one side and Palna-an orphanage-on the other side.

Way back in the 18th century, when the palace of Qudsia Begum stood on this grounds, the river Yamuna was flowing right next to the mosque. The river has now receded many metres and is barely visible from here today. However, you must pay a visit to the area and witness the wonders that can materialize when ownership comes from the ground up, from residents and not just an alienated municipal body.



Gold Delivered Higher Returns Than American And Indian Stock Markets In Last 25 Years: Report

NEW DELHI. Gold Returns In India: Gold has emerged as a strong performer in terms of returns since 2000, surpassing major stock market indices such as the S&P 500 and Nifty 50 over the last 25 years, according to a report by Aequitas.

The report highlighted that gold has consistently delivered higher returns than both the American stock market index S&P 500 and India's benchmark Nifty 50. It said, "Gold has outperformed both S&P 500 and Nifty 50 in the last 25 years since 2000". In USD terms, gold has grown 9.99 times since 2000, significantly outperforming the S&P 500, which has grown 4.34 times during the same period. This indicates that gold has more than doubled the returns of the S&P 500 over 25 years. The S&P 500 is a stock market index in the United States that tracks the stock performance of 500 of the largest companies listed on stock exchanges in the United States. Similarly, in Indian rupee terms, gold has also outperformed India's Nifty 50 index. Over the last 25 years, gold's value has increased 19.32 times, while Nifty 50 has grown 15.67 times. The findings highlight the long-term strength of gold as an investment option, particularly during uncertain economic conditions. Gold has often been viewed as a safe-haven asset, and its consistent growth over the years highlights its reliability for investors looking for stable returns. "Gold prices continued their upward momentum, driven by a weaker dollar index and sustained support from US tariff policies. In MCX, (On Friday) gold rose by Rs 475 to Rs 86,280, while Comex gold gained USD 18 to trade at USD 2,935. The focus now shifts to upcoming US Retail Sales and Core Retail Sales data, which could influence the next move in gold.

The trend remains positive, with Rs 85,750 acting as a support zone and Rs 87,000 emerging as the next resistance level" said Jateen Trivedi, VP Research Analyst - Commodity and Currency, LKP Securities. With gold surpassing both major stock indices in performance, it continues to remain a preferred asset for investors globally.

US visa interview waiver rules: Wait could get longer for tourists, H1B seekers

Kolkata. The United States seems to have changed eligibility rules for Visa Interview Waiver, which could pave the way for a longer wait for those seeking visa to visit the US as tourists and for work on H1B. This facility of interview waiver is popularly often referred to as dropbox facility. The new rules are believed to have already come into effect and according to the new rule, visa applicants can use the facility if they are applying for renewing a visa in the same nonimmigrant category which expired in past 12 months in place of the 48 months that was being followed in the past few years. Simply put, the new rules are drastically reducing the time window by one-fourth and would adversely impact nonimmigrant visa holders including H-1B and applicants for B1/B2 category. However, according to reports, no formal announcement has been made so far. The National Law Review has said that Visa Application Centers are already declining applicants who fail to meet the new

The shrinking of the dropbox window has come at a time when the appointment period in different visa centres of the US are unusually lengthy. The wait is more than 400 days everywhere — more than 440 days in New Delhi and Mumbai, 436 days in Chennai, 429 days in Hyderabad and 415 days in Kolkata which is the shortest. Incidentally, the US government stretched the dropbox facility to 48 months in 2022, when the waiting period for B1/B2 visa interview rose to more 1,000 days.

What changed and what applicants can do

According to the post 2022 practice, if any applicant had a visa that expired in the past 48 months could try to renew visa through dropbox facility without personal interview. But now only those who visa has expired in the past 12 months can do so. This would mean longer personal interview queues. Experts are saying that one should plan for delays and longer time for visa processing. H-1B visa holders could perhaps attempt premium processing for extensions.

Bitter chocolate: High prices pinch pockets on Valentine's Day

MUMBAI. For consumers, love may have come at a cost this Valentine's Day. Chocolates, the go-to gifting choice for the season have become more expensive on the back of soaring global cocoa prices, nudging several companies to take price hikes. This essentially means that the price increases which have been taken over the past few months have now hit the markets and consumers are paying more to buy the same pack of their favourite chocolate. Amul, for instance, took a price hike of about 20%-30% for its chocolates around August 2024. "Global cocoa prices are trending at \$10,000 per metric ton. We haven't seen such price rise in the last 50 years. The situation doesn't look good but we have to live with it," Jayen Mehta, MD at Gujarat Cooperative Milk Marketing Federation, which owns the brand Amul, told TOI. The company remains watchful of the situation, Mehta said, not ruling out further price hikes if the situation warrants. Global cocoa prices which have been on the boil for quite some time due to scarce supply reached nearly \$13,000 per metric ton in December last year, hitting a record high.

Chocolate prices have surged by nearly 50% compared to Valentine's Day last year, said Ashwin Rathi, chief financial officer at Smoor Chocolates.

BSNL reports profit of Rs 262 crore in third quarter, first in 17 years

BSNL expects revenue growth to improve further, exceeding 20% by the end of the financial year.

NEW DELHI. State-owned Bharat Sanchar Nigam Limited (BSNL) on Friday reported a net profit of Rs 262 crore in the third quarter ending December 2024. This marks the first time the telecom service provider has turned profitable since 2007. For nearly two decades, BSNL struggled

with declining subscriber numbers and operational losses, largely due to intense competition from private telecom service providers in the country. However, the government intervened with a nearly Rs 3,22,047 lakh crore relief package over the past three years, providing a much-needed lifeline to the ailing telco. Communication minister Jyotiraditya Scindia said this is an important day in the journey of India's telecom sector.

"BSNL, a government-owned telecom service provider, has posted a quarterly profit of close to Rs 262 crore for the first time in 17 years," said Scindia. Robert J Ravi, Chairman and MD of BSNL, attributed this growth to the company's focus on innovation, customer satisfaction, and aggressive network expansion.

BSNL expects revenue growth to improve further, exceeding 20% by the end of the financial year. Revenue from Mobility,

FTTH, and leased lines has increased by 15%, 18%, and 14%, respectively, over Q3 of the previous year. Additionally,



BSNL has successfully reduced its finance cost and overall expenditure, leading to a decline in losses by over Rs 1,800 crore compared to last year. Despite this positive development, the government has infused significant capital to support the ailing telco. BSNL

and Mahanagar Telephone Nigam Ltd (MTNL) have received another relief package worth Rs 6,000 crore for the expansion of their 4G rollout plans.

This is the fourth revival package from the government, totaling Rs 3,22,047 crore so far. The first revival package for BSNL/MTNL, approved in 2019, totalled Rs 69,000 crore. In 2022, the government approved an additional Rs 1.64 lakh crore to provide financial support for capital expenditure, viability gap funding, and debt restructuring. In June 2023, Rs 89,047.82 crore was infused for the allocation of 4G/5G spectrum through equity infusion. However, despite these relief packages, BSNL has seen a major drop in its customer base. In December 2024, nearly 8 lakh subscribers ported out to other networks, while only 3 lakh new subscribers joined the network.

India slashes import duty on bourbon whisky to 100% after Trump's criticism

NEW DELHI. India has slashed tariffs on bourbon whisky to 100% from 150%, a move that will benefit imports of brands like Suntory's Jim Beam, after US President Donald Trump's criticised "unfair" levies in the South Asian market. Trump, who met Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi at the White House this week, has railed against the climate for American businesses in India and unveiled a roadmap for reciprocal tariffs on countries that put duties on US imports. The tariff notification by the Indian government was dated Feb. 13 but gathered media attention only on Friday. It said the basic customs duty on bourbon will be 50%, with an additional levy of 50%, bringing the total to 100%. Previously, such imports were



taxed at 150%. There will be no change on imports of other liquor products, which are also taxed at 150%. The move would primarily benefit imports from the United States, said Pratik Jain, a partner at PwC India. "It signals that the Indian government is willing to explore

changes in tariff items for strategic partner countries," he added. Many foreign liquor companies such as Diageo, opens new tab and Pernod Ricard, opens new tab operate in India's \$35 billion spirits market, and industry executives have often criticized India's high tariff regime for such imports. Vinod Giri, director general at Brewers Association of India, said tariffs on bourbons, like motorbikes, had high optics value, adding the move was designed to reassure the US of India's intent and to pre-empt any retaliatory action. "As India seeks to integrate into global economy, there is an increasing acknowledgment that the import duties in India on alcohol are high and need to be reduced in line with other duties," he said.

A lowdown on simpler, shorter, crisper Income Tax Bill, 2025

MUMBAI. The New Income Tax Bill 2025, which will replace the 1961 Act, is an attempt at simplifying the tax rules. While the Bill is shorter and crisper, the language has been simplified. The Bill has nearly halved the sections (819 to 536), and the number of chapters to 23 from 47. In terms of word count, the reduction is nearly 50% to 2.6 lakh words from 5.12 lakh running into 622 pages, down from 1,647 pages. Another key change is doing away with the 1,200 provisions and the 900 explanations - each change in taxation laws have been passed by Parliament and become part of existing Act - in the new Bill presented in the Lower House on Thursday. Here are some of the important changes/mentions that may affect the common taxpayers:

Salaried class
The new Bill consolidates all salary-related provisions into one place for easier understanding, so taxpayers no longer have to refer to separate chapters while filing. Deductions earlier allowed under Section 10, which deals with gratuity, leave encashment, commutation of pension,

compensation for VRS and retrenchment compensation, are included in the salary chapter. Some allowances like HRA are listed in Schedule II of the Bill, referenced in



salary provisions. The goal is to improve readability by including tables and formulas. While taxability of perks remains in the Bill, valuation, conditions and exceptions are moved to Rules section as they don't apply to every taxpayer. The Bill simplifies the definition of incomes to be taxed as salary. Any income earned by a taxpayer is taxed

under different heads now but in new Bill, there are five heads of income, including salary. Other heads are income from house property, profits and gains of business or profession, capital gains and income from other sources. The list of income to be considered as salary in the Bill are wages, annuity or pension, gratuity, fees or commission, perquisites, profit in lieu of, or in addition to, any salary or wages, advance salary, leave encashment, contribution to provident fund beyond tax-free limit, contribution by central government or other employer to employee's pension scheme accounts. Salary, bonus, commission or remuneration due to, or received by, a partner of a firm from the firm will not be considered for tax calculation under head "salary".

TDS & TCS
Tax deducted at source (TDS) and tax collected at source (TCS) provisions are made easier to comprehend by providing tables.

US to deport 119 more Indians as Trump's immigration crackdown continues

This is the second round of deportations, following last week's repatriation of 104 illegal Indian migrants who were also flown back in a US military transport aircraft

NEW DELHI. The US is set to deport 119 Indian nationals as part of President Donald Trump's immigration crackdown. A US military C-17 aircraft will land at Amritsar International Airport on Saturday around 10 pm, carrying the deportees, according to reports.

This is the second round of deportations, following last week's repatriation of 104 illegal Indian migrants who were also flown back in a US military transport aircraft. The latest deportation includes 67 individuals from Punjab, 33 from Haryana, eight from Gujarat, three from Uttar Pradesh, two each from Rajasthan

and Maharashtra, and one each from Goa, Jammu and Kashmir, and Himachal Pradesh.

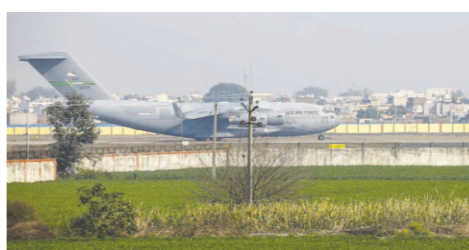
According to news agency PTI, the deportation flights will continue every two weeks until all illegal Indian immigrants in the US are sent back.

PM Modi and Trump's talks on immigration and human trafficking. The deportations come shortly after PM Narendra Modi's visit to the US, where he met President Trump to discuss key bilateral issues, including immigration. During a joint press conference, PM Modi reaffirmed India's commitment to accepting its citizens living illegally in the US, but also emphasised the need to combat human trafficking, which he said is a major factor driving illegal migration.

"They are shown big dreams and most of them are misled and brought here. We must attack this system of human trafficking. The US and India should work together to dismantle such an ecosystem so that human trafficking ends... Our bigger fight is against that

entire network, and we are confident that President Trump will fully cooperate with India in finishing this ecosystem," PM Modi said.

Controversy over treatment of Indian deportees



The treatment of deported Indian nationals has sparked outrage among the public and Opposition parties. Reports of deportees being handcuffed and shackled during their journey have led to strong criticism of the Indian government's handling of the situation. The US Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) has defended these measures, stating that they are standard

security protocols used to prevent escape attempts or disruptions during deportation flights. However, many have argued that shackling individuals who have not committed crimes beyond immigration violations is excessive and inhumane. Opposition leaders have called on the Indian government to take a stronger stand against the unfair treatment of its citizens abroad.

India engages with US on deportee treatment

External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar addressed the issue in Parliament, confirming that India is in discussions with US officials to ensure deportees are treated with dignity. He emphasised that while India respects immigration laws, it expects humane treatment for its citizens. As the Trump administration tightens immigration laws, thousands of Indians living in the US illegally are facing uncertain futures. The Indian government is now under pressure to strengthen border control measures and find diplomatic solutions to curb illegal migration.

Sensex, Nifty Fall For 8th Day As Relentless FII Selling Hits Market Sentiments

Mumbai. Equity benchmark indices Sensex and Nifty extended their downward trend to eighth day in a row on Friday as investors' sentiments were plagued due to persistent foreign fund outflows. Markets began the trade on an optimistic note but soon gave up initial gains and fell in the negative territory. The 30-share BSE benchmark Sensex dropped 199.76 points or 0.26 per cent to settle at 75,939.21. During the day, it tanked 699.33 points or 0.91 per cent to 75,439.64. The NSE Nifty declined 102.15 points or 0.44 per cent to 22,929.25. In eight trading days, the BSE benchmark has tumbled 2,644.6 points or 3.36 per cent, and the Nifty slumped 810 points or 3.41 per cent. From the 30-share blue-chip pack, Adani Ports dropped over 4 per cent. UltraTech Cement, Sun Pharma, IndusInd Bank, NTPC and Tata Steel were also among the laggards. Nestle, ICICI Bank, Infosys, Tata Consultancy Services and HCL Tech were among the gainers. "The risk-averse sentiment continues to rule investors' minds as corporate earnings are significantly lower than the market expectations during the start of the year, especially for mid and small caps. Muted earnings trend, INR depreciation along with external factors like tariffs are expected to keep the sentiments weak in the near term, which could further push FIIs outflows. Volatility is expected to stay elevated until there is clarity on tariffs and a recovery in corporate earnings," Vinod Nair, Head of Research, Geojit Financial Services, said. In Asian markets, Seoul, Shanghai and Hong Kong settled higher while Tokyo ended lower. European markets were trading on a mixed note. US markets ended higher on Thursday. India and the US have resolved to more than double the two-way trade to USD 500 billion by 2030 and begin talks for a bilateral trade agreement with a view to bringing down duties and increase market access. According to a joint statement issued after the meeting of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and US President Donald Trump in Washington, the two leaders have also pledged the bilateral trade relationship to promote growth that ensures fairness, national security and job creation. "To this end, the leaders set a bold new goal for bilateral trade - Mission 500 - aiming to more than double total bilateral trade to USD 500 billion by 2030. Recognizing that this level of ambition would require new, fair-trade terms, the leaders announced plans to negotiate the first tranche of a mutually beneficial, multi-sector Bilateral Trade Agreement (BTA) by fall of 2025," it said. Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) offloaded equities worth Rs 2,789.91 crore on Thursday, according to exchange data.

Katrina Kaif

Is Impressed With Vicky Kaushal's Performance In Chhaava, Says 'You Truly Are Outstanding'

Vicky Kaushal and Rashmika Mandanna starrer Chhaava has finally released today. The periodical drama has been creating a buzz for a long time. Well, the film has been getting an overwhelming response from the audience. Katrina Kaif has also reacted and praised Vicky's performance in the film. She has penned a long note and called the actor 'outstanding'. Taking to her Instagram handle, Katrina Kaif shared the poster of Chhaava featuring Vicky Kaushal and wrote, "What a cinematic experience and what a monumental task to bring to life the glory of Chhatrapati Sambhaji Maharaj. @laxman.utekar tells this incredible story in the most brilliant way, im in awe, the last 40 min of the film will leave you speechless. I've spent all morning wanting to go and rewatch it again. I'm lost for words at the impact of this film@vickykaushal09 you truly are outstanding, every time you come on screen, every shot, the intensity you bring on screen, you are a chameleon the way you transform to your characters, effortless and fluid, I'm so proud of you and your talent.....#DineshVijan what is there to sayyou are a true VISIONARY...you support and put your conviction in what you believe in and a carving a new trail of brilliance. The entire cast are phenomenal.... This is a film for the big screen ... so proud of the whole team."

At the premiere of Chhaava, Vicky Kaushal made a striking entrance, flanked by his wife Katrina Kaif, by his side. The couple, hand in hand, walked down the red carpet, immediately becoming the cynosure of all eyes. Vicky looked dashing in a sleek black suit accented with subtle sequin embroidery along the shoulders. Meanwhile, Katrina was resplendent in a powder blue sequin saree.

Vicky Kaushal and Katrina Kaif are one of the most adored couples in Bollywood. Recently, the diva took to her Instagram stories and shared a video of her husband Vicky Kaushal. The clip shows Vicky Kaushal having a small laugh. After this, he tells his "Vichitra kintu satya praan hai aap (You are a strange but honest creature)." The 'Namaste London' actress captioned the clip, "My dear hubbys description of me", along with an angel emoji.

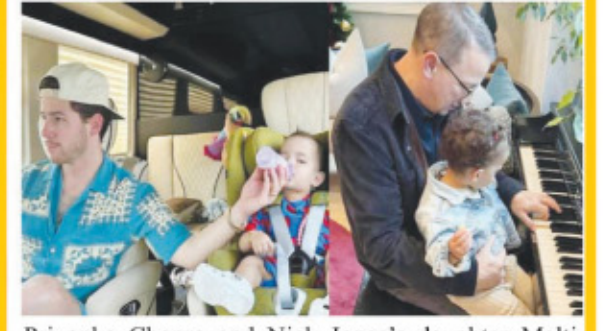
Directed by Laxman Utekar, "Chhaava" will see Kaushal in the role of Maratha emperor Chhatrapati Sambhaji Maharaj, who was the son of Maratha empire founder Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj. It is produced by Dinesh Vijan of Maddock Films. For Kaushal, the movie marks the third time he is stepping into the shoes of a historical character, after playing revolutionary Udhm Singh in "Sardar Udhm" and India's first Field Marshal Sam Manekshaw in "Sam Bahadur"



wife,



Nick Jonas Shares An Unseen Pic Of Daughter Malti Marie Enjoying Piano With Grandfather Kevin Jonas



Priyanka Chopra and Nick Jonas's daughter Malti Marie is one of the most famous star kids. Her photos have always gone viral on social media. Today, also Nick Jonas shared another unseen photo of his daughter to wish his father Kevin Jonas happy birthday. Taking to his Instagram stories, Nick shared a photo in which we can see Malti sitting on Kevin's lap and enjoying the piano. She is happy and wears all winter wears. Nick wrote alongside, "Happy birthday @papakjonas, we love you so much." Earlier, Priyanka Chopra posted an adorable photo of the birthday boy embracing Indian culture. In the photo, he is seen donning traditional attire from Chopra's brother, Siddharth Chopra's wedding while he poses with his hand on his chest. "Celebrating you and your big 60 today. Keep shining brighter than ever. Lots of love, always," read the caption.

Priyanka Chopra was recently in India along with her family to attend her brother Siddharth Chopra's wedding festivities. Priyanka Chopra and Nick Jonas opted for a pastel-coloured ethnic ensembles. The couple posed for the cameras and greeted the paparazzi with folded hands. They gave a couple of adorable poses before they headed to a family event in Mumbai. Priyanka Chopra is currently shooting for her next film SSMB29 with Mahesh Babu. The film shooting is going on in Hyderabad. The official pooja ceremony for this SSMB29 was held on January 2. The ceremony was held strictly private, and no pictures or glimpses from the same were released by the makers.

Mahesh Babu and SS Rajamouli's highly anticipated film SSMB29 is officially underway. While the spotlight has been on this exciting pairing of Mahesh Babu and Priyanka Chopra, the film promises to bring together a diverse array of talented artists from around the world. However, the full list of cast and crew is yet to be revealed, leaving fans eagerly awaiting more updates. SSMB29 is set to be produced in two parts, with the first instalment expected to release in 2027 and the second instalment by 2029. Mahesh Babu will be playing the male lead.

Bipasha Basu, John Abraham Had 'Lots Of Issues' During Billo Rani Shoot, Broke Up Days Before: Vivek Agnihotri



Bipasha Basu and John Abraham used to be in love with one another and starred in films like Jism, Goal and Madhoshi among others. The song, Billo Rani, from Goal, is among their most remembered songs together. Recently, director Vivek Ranjan Agnihotri took to X and recalled the song's shoot and 'history'. Vivek wrote, "This song has a history. Producers didn't want it. Javed Saab was against the hook 'Billo Rani', Pritam wasn't sure about the qawwali style. John and Bipasha had a break-up just a couple of days before it so there were lots of issues. But only the Late Saroj Khan believed in me. She said this will become the biggest hit and it did. Big salute to Pritam, Javed saab and Saroj ji."



Bipasha and John dated for nine years. Their relationship reportedly started around the time they were shooting for the 2003 film Jism, which had become quite controversial during the time of its release for its bold content. Fans were almost certain that the relationship would culminate into marriage, as they were always seen together at several events. But, after almost nine years of dating, they decided to mutually part ways. The exact time or reason behind their split is still not known, with most reports claiming they had parted ways in 2011. The reason behind the split has also given rise to speculations, as the estranged couple never elaborated on it publicly. Bipasha, in an interview with TOI, had said that the break-up was "definitely not amicable." John, in an interview, claimed that it was "very amicable and there was nothing ugly about it." Meanwhile, John Abraham is all set to be seen in a politically intense thriller The Diplomat. The trailer has finally been released and looks like it has also impressed fans. The film also stars Sadia Khateeb, Sharib Hashmi, Revathy, and Kumud Mishra. The trailer pays homage to her pivotal efforts in 2017, supporting Indian diplomat JP Singh in bringing 'India's daughter' back home.

Diana Penty

Channels Her Inner Shehzadi Zinat-un-Nissa For Chhaava Screening

The much-awaited period drama Chhaava has hit the screens, and the team hosted a special screening recently in Mumbai. The event was attended by many popular faces from the industry along with the cast members of Chhaava. Diana Penty, who plays the role of Shehzadi Zinat-un-Nissa in the film, was also seen at the screening. Her character was revealed a day before the film's release and fans have been looking forward to seeing her in this new role.

For the screening, Diana Penty opted for a silk sharara set. The kurta featured a V neckline with embroidery on the edge and red floral print on the hem. She paired it with a matching flared bottom. The dupatta had a similar floral pattern and was left loose on one side. The actress accessorised the dainty look lightly and left her hair open.

Just a day before the release of Chhaava on the big screen, Maddock Films surprised fans by revealing the cast members' appearances. One of the posters showed actress Diana Penty looking lovely in a royal outfit. Dressed in a pink Anarkali suit and traditional jewelry, the actress exuded a graceful charm with passion in her gaze. "Grace, intellect, and quiet rebellion—meet Shehzadi Zinat-un-Nissa," read the caption.

The historical drama Chhaava stars Vicky Kaushal, Rashmika Mandanna, Ashutosh Rana, Divya Dutta, Akshaye Khanna,

Vineet Kumar Singh, and Santosh Juvekar in pivotal roles. The film is based on the life of Chhatrapati Sambhaji Maharaj, the eldest son of the Maratha Empire's founder. The film, directed by Laxman Utekar and produced by Dinesh Vijan, promises to tell a captivating story about the valour and legacy of one of India's most respected



kings. Next, Diana Penty has Mithun Gangopadhyay and Nishant Nayak's project Daring Partners. The series, which stars Tamannaah Bhatia and Nakuul Mehta, will be available for streaming on Prime Video. She will also appear in Diljit Dosanjh and Boman Irani's film Detective Sherdil. Before this, she was seen in Azaad with Ajay Devgn, Rasha Thadani, Aaman Devgan and others. The film was released last month and received mixed reviews.

