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## Haryana YouTuber arrested on charges of spying for Pakistan

**Sanjay Kumar**

Hisar, May 17: Travel vlogger and YouTuber Jyoti Malhotra, a resident of Hisar town, was arrested by the police on the charges of espionage for



Pakistan. Following inputs from Central Intelligence Agencies and an inquiry by the CIA staff of Hisar police, she was arrested from her residence at New Agarsain Extension. According to the FIR registered at Hisar Civil Lines Police Station, Jyoti — who operates a YouTube travel channel under the name 'Travel with Jo' — had developed contacts with Pakistani nationals and intelligence operatives during her

visit to Pakistan in 2023. As per the FIR, Jyoti reportedly disclosed that she had initially visited the Pakistan High Commission in Delhi to apply for a visa, where she met Ahsan-Ur-Rahim alias Danish. After the meeting, she stayed in contact with him and later travelled to Pakistan twice. During her visits, she met a person named Ali Ahwan, who arranged her accommodation and facilitated meetings with officers from Pakistan's intelligence and security agencies. The FIR stated that the accused also met two other persons identified as Shakir and Rana Shahbaz. She saved their contact information in her mobile phone under false identities. Upon returning to India, she remained in contact with them through social media platforms such as WhatsApp, Snapchat and Telegram. Significantly, the FIR also reveals that Ahsan-Ur-Rahim, with whom Jyoti maintained prolonged contact, had been declared persona non grata by the Government of India on May 13, 2025, for espionage-related activities.

## Rahul Gandhi slams S Jaishankar for 'informing Pakistan' of Operation Sindoor

New Delhi, May 17: Leader of the opposition in Lok Sabha, Rahul Gandhi, on Saturday hit out at the Narendra Modi government for "informing" Pakistan about targeting terror infrastructure as part of Operation Sindoor, saying it was a crime and asking who had authorised it. Rahul Gandhi slammed external affairs minister S Jaishankar for publicly admitting that the Centre had informed Pakistan of the action. He asked how many aircraft the Indian Air Force lost as a result of such information being shared with Islamabad. "Informing Pakistan at the start of our attack was a crime. EAM has publicly admitted that the GOI did it. Who authorised it? How many aircraft did our air force lose as a result?" the Rae Bareilly MP said in a post on X. He also shared an undated video of the EAM purportedly saying that India had informed Pakistan of the action against terror infrastructure on its soil. Did EAM S Jaishankar say that India informed Pakistan of Operation Sindoor? In the video shared by Rahul Gandhi, EAM S Jaishankar can be heard saying that the government had sent a message to Pakistan saying that the strikes are not on the military and just on the terror infrastructure.

## Tharoor on being invited to lead delegation on Operation Sindoor

**Navdeep Singh Sahni**

New Delhi, May 17: Congress MP Shashi Tharoor on Saturday stood by his decision to accept the Centre's invite to lead a multi-party delegation abroad to put across India's stand against Pakistan on terrorism, saying "I see no politics in it". At the same time, he denied any knowledge about any names being suggested by the Congress for the delegation, saying that it was between the party and the central government. Tharoor, speaking to reporters here, said that Union Parliamentary Affairs Minister Kiren Rijiju recently officially invited him to lead the delegation in view of his past experience in handling foreign affairs and "I immediately agreed". "I see no politics in it. According to me, politics become important when we have a nation. We all are Indians. When the nation is in crisis



and the central government seeks the help of a citizen, what other answer would you give," the Congress MP from Thiruvananthapuram said. He further

said that everyone saw the 88 hours long battle with Pakistan and therefore, "we all need to have a role in what the world is saying about us". "It is in that spirit I agreed to it," Tharoor added. On being asked by reporters whether the Congress was unhappy with his decision

recent events." "When national interest is involved, and my services are required, I will not be found wanting. Jai Hind!" he added. Asked about Tharoor's



inclusion as a representative of the Congress in the government's list of leaders to lead the delegations abroad, Ramesh told reporters, "Congress mein hona aur Congress ka hona mein zameen-aasmaan ka antar hai (There is a difference between being in the Congress and of the Congress)." In a democr-

ic system, when individual MPs are sent as part of an official delegation, MPs must seek the concurrence of the party. If the government wants to send him as part of a delegation, the MP should be asking the party, he said. "You (government) cannot include names of MPs (in delegations) without consulting the party," he said. "All of us belong to the party but they (government) need to consult the LoPs." According to normal practice and a good democratic system, when MPs are sent on official delegations, they should seek the concurrence of the party concerned, he further said. Asked if there would be any further action on the matter, Ramesh said the government had asked for four names from the Congress and it had sent those four names. There will be no change of names from the Congress' side, he added. "The ball is in the government's court now," he said, adding that no names were discussed during Union minister Kiren Rijiju's conversation with Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge and former party chief Rahul Gandhi. The BJP, on the other hand, questioned the Congress' choice of leaders for the delegations, wondering if it did not nominate Tharoor because he outshone the party high command.

## Previous govts drowned Punjab in darkness: Kejriwal

**ST Correspondent**

New Delhi, May 17: AAP chief Arvind Kejriwal on Saturday accused previous governments of drowning Punjab in darkness by allowing the drug menace to flourish in the state, and said his party government is undertaking a war against drugs. Kejriwal was addressing a gathering at Jalandhar here as part of the state government's ongoing 'Yudh Nashian Virudh' campaign. "Drugs (menace) did not come in 5-10 days. Previous governments drowned Punjab in such a darkness that it seemed that no hope was left," he said. "But I am happy that the 'Yudh Nashian Virudh' campaign has been rolled out...action is being taken against drug smugglers, their premises are being demolished, they are being arrested," said the former Delhi chief minister.



De-addiction centres are being opened, he further said. Kejriwal also said people are taking responsibility to keep their villages and areas drug-free. Each village will have to take responsibility in this regard, he said, assuring them all help from the state government. Kejriwal highlighted that over 13,000 villages in Punjab are now being equipped with sports grounds to keep youth engaged and away from drugs. "Every village will have facilities for games like volleyball and football, along with gyms. Five sets of sports equipment are being distributed in each village," he added. Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann, addressing the gathering, also slammed the past governments over the drug menace. Mann commended the people of Jalandhar village for their initiative in reclaiming their youth from addiction. "Those who've recovered and are now helping others are the best coaches we could ask for. If anyone in the village still struggles with addiction, help them get admitted to a de-addiction centre," he said. Outlining his vision for Punjab, Mann said, "We want to bring back Punjab known for kabaddi, wrestling, brave soldiers, and vibrant 'bhanga'. Our youth deserve clean water, jobs, industry, and we will provide all that." He also called on village sarpanches to submit detailed presentations identifying locations for playgrounds, ponds, roads, libraries in schools, and health centres.

## Justice Varma's defence in plea rests on proof of money stash

**Tejinder Kaur Babbar**

New Delhi, May 17: That immortal pop-history line forms a pillar in the defence of justice Yashwant Varma, according to people familiar with the matter and excerpts from the 55-year old judge's submission to the committee set up by the then Chief Justice of India Sanjiv Khanna to look into the allegation that a huge amount of cash was discovered in his house. HT reviewed parts of the judge's submission. Two months after a mysterious fire broke out in an outhouse at the residence of Varma, then a Delhi High Court judge, the money remains at the heart of the arguments of both sides. While the committee's report, submitted to the CJI on May 4, has not been made public, parts of it have been reported in the media, citing people familiar with the contents. These claim that on the day following the fire on March 14, there was a clean-up exercise, with the contents from the outhouse being moved by unknown individuals. Justice Varma's

defence, on the basis of the details shared by people familiar with the matter and the excerpts seen by Hindustan Times, would appear to be that there was no money at all. To be sure, justice Varma, now a judge at the Allahabad high court, could become the first judge of a constitutional court to be removed. Earlier this month, Chief Justice of India Sanjiv Khanna initiated the process for justice Varma's removal by writing to President Droupadi Murmu and PM Narendra Modi, stating that the allegations of recovery of cash at the judge's residence were serious and warranted initiation of proceedings for his removal under the Constitution. Justice Varma's defence, articulated in 105 pages, and including a detailed floor plan of his house and outhouse, questions the absence of CCTV footage, and the lack of any forensic analysis of the burnt debris. The only evidence of the money in the public domain is the still photographs and the video clip shared by the Supreme Court on March 22 that show burnt currency notes

on the floor of a room. There has never been any confirmation of the amount of money found, just unofficial reports that it ran into several crores. The three-member



committee comprising Punjab and Haryana high court Chief Justice Sheel Nagu, Himachal Pradesh high court Chief Justice GS Sandhawalia, and Karnataka high court judge justice Anu Sivaraman concluded in their report that since the cash was found in Varma's official bunga-

low, he must be held accountable. The committee's report, after examining officials including the Delhi Police and Delhi Fire Service chiefs, concludes that the cash remains were probably cleaned out the morning after the fire on the night of March 14. There is a reference to the clean-up in Delhi high court Chief Justice Devendra Upadhyay's March 21 letter to justice Varma where he says, "The Commissioner of Police also informed me that as per the security guard posted at your residence, some debris and half burnt articles were removed in the morning of 15.3.2025." Varma's defence questions all of this. For starters, according to the excerpts seen by HT, he questions the identity of the police officer who sent a WhatsApp message to Delhi Police Commissioner Sanjay Arora which was then forwarded to Delhi high court Chief Justice Upadhyay on March 16, two days after the fire.

## Nirav Modi making farcical claims for bail

**Naresh Malhotra**

New Delhi, May 17: Fugitive diamondaire Nirav Modi, whose bail plea was rejected for the 10th time in the UK on Thursday, has been making "farcical" claims to seek bail such as renting an apartment in London or getting a job to show he won't flee Britain, but all these have been successfully contested by Indian agencies, officials familiar with the development said. To ensure that he does not get relief, the Enforcement Directorate (ED) and the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) have been sending their officers to London to assist the UK Crown Prosecution Service each time he approaches the courts for bail, officials added. "Nirav Modi has been making ludicrous claims in his bail applications that he will rent an apartment in London, or has got a job, has his family in the UK and that he is ready to stay in the house arrest to say there is no way he will flee the country," an official said, declining to be named. "He has also made claims that he would be killed if sent to India or cited human rights violation, but all his assertions have been rejected by judges agreeing that he is a flight risk," the official added. ED said in a statement on Friday that "the bail hearing (on Thursday) was comprehensively



heard, wherein the government of India (through CPS counsel team and officials of ED and other agencies) strongly opposed the granting of bail to Nirav Modi, leading to favourable outcome for go-

vernment of India." "After thorough deliberation of arguments of Modi with counter arguments of prosecution (India), written submissions made by ED (highlighting the money laundering aspects by using shell companies to launder the proceeds to even outside jurisdictions including the UK) and keeping in view the sheer quantum of fraud (part of which has already been attached/seized by ED and restituted to the victim banks), the UK high court rejecting the application, denied bail to Nirav Modi," it added. ED further said that the fugitive businessman had earlier made several attempts to obtain bail from the UK Westminster magistrate court on six occasions and three times from the UK high court. "However, bail to Nirav Modi was denied on each such occasion from the respective UK courts," ED said. Earlier, on Thursday evening, CBI said that "the bail arguments were strongly opposed by the CPS advocate who was ably assisted by a strong CBI team consisting of investigating and law officers who travelled to London for this purpose". "CBI could successfully defend the arguments which resulted in rejection of the bail," it added. Modi, who is accused of cheating Punjab National Bank (PNB) of ₹6,498 crore [the total fraud is worth ₹13,578 crore out of which around 7,000 crore is linked to his uncle Mehul Choksi], is lodged at Wandsworth prison on the outskirts of London since March 19, 2019, after he was arrested based on India's extradition request to the British authorities.

## Pakistan has become threat to humanity: Owaisi

**ST Correspondent**

Hyderabad, May 17: AIMIM leader Asaduddin Owaisi said on Saturday that Pakistan with its long history of sponsor-



ing terrorism has become a threat to humanity, affirming that this will be the heart of his message to the international community as a member of one of the all-party delegations the government is sending to world capitals. In an interview to PTI Videos, the Hyderabad MP said the world will have to be told about the slaughtering

of innocent citizens by Pakistan-sponsored terrorists for a long spell of time. He said, "India has been a big victim of Pakistan-sponsored terrorism. We all have seen the tamasha, slaughtering of people since the time of Zia-ul-Haq." Owaisi, however, added that he is yet to be briefed by the government about the details of the diplomatic drive. The firebrand parliamentarian said it is necessary to call out Pakistan over its projection of itself as an Islamic country in its confrontation with India. "This is nonsense. Nearly 20 crore Muslims live in India. This too must be conveyed." Asserting that destabilising India, fomenting communal divide and stalling the country's economic rise is part of Pakistan's unwritten ideology, Owaisi said this has always been the objective of the Pakistani deep state and its military. India should have understood Pakistan's design long back when it had sent tribal invaders into Jammu and Kashmir after its independence in 1947, he said.



## NEWS BOX

## Class XI pass rate rises to 92.09 per cent in Tamil Nadu, girls shine

**CHENNAI.** A total of 8.07 lakh students appeared for the Class 11 examinations this year, of which over 7.43 lakh cleared the exams, registering a pass percentage of 92.09. This marks a 0.92 percentage point increase from last year's 91.17%. Of the candidates, 4,03,949 were girls and 3,39,283 were boys. Girls recorded a pass percentage of 95.13, while boys achieved 88.70, with girls outperforming boys by 6.43 percentage points. Last year, the difference was 7.43%. A total of 11,025 students were absent for the exams. Among the 7,558 higher secondary schools, including 282 government schools, 2,042 registered a 100% pass rate.

The pass percentage stood at 87.34% in government schools, 93.09% in government-aided institutions, and 98.03% in private schools. Students secured the highest number of centums in Computer Science (3,535), followed by Mathematics (1,338). Overall, there were 8,446 centums, and 582 students scored full marks in at least one subject. Science stream students recorded the highest pass percentage at 95.08, followed by Accountancy (87.33%), Arts (77.94%) and Vocational (78.31%) streams. Among 9,205 students with disabilities who took the exams, 8,460 (91.91%) passed. Of the 125 jail inmates who appeared for the test, 113 cleared the exam. However, only 950 of the 4,326 private candidates passed, registering a low pass percentage of 21.96.

## Karnataka's PU II Exam-two pass rate falls below 32%, hits 3.98% dip

**BENGALURU.** The pass percentage for the second Pre-University Exam-II dropped to 31.27% this year, with just 60,692 of the 1,94,077 students clearing the exam, marking a nearly 4% decline compared to 2024. Among the 1,53,620 freshers, 54,168 cleared the exam, recording a pass percentage of 35.26. Additionally, 71,964 students took the exam to improve their scores, and 41,719 managed to improve their marks, while 28,617 students scored lower compared to their marks in Exam-I. Among freshers, the Arts stream had the highest number of candidates with 61,185 appearing. Science with 47,402, while Commerce had the lowest with 45,033. Despite the higher turnout, Arts recorded the lowest pass percentage at 28.43%, while Commerce achieved the highest at 41.29%. The pass percentage for Science stood at 38.35%. The overall pass percentage for freshers, combining Exam I and Exam 2 results, stands at 81.94%, while the overall pass percentage (freshers, repeaters and private students included) is 77.96%.

Girls outperformed boys in the Exam-II, achieving a pass percentage of 36.38% compared to 34.34% for boys. Repeaters from previous years secured a pass percentage of 16.21%, while private candidates with attendance shortages had a mere 6.91% pass rate. Physics saw the highest number of students attempting subject-wise improvement, with 46,270 appearing and 26,518 achieving better scores. However, Chemistry had the maximum number of improved scores, with 31,974 students successfully enhancing their marks.

## Spotlight from pageant raises hopes of weavers amid design piracy fears in Hyderabad

**NALGONDA.** Handloom weavers in Bhoodan Pochampally are hopeful that the recent visit of Miss World contestants will give a much-needed boost to the marketing and global recognition of their products. On Thursday, 25 contestants from various countries visited the village, toured weavers' homes, and participated in a catwalk showcasing a variety of handloom textiles. The event drew international media attention and generated widespread publicity. A Pandu, a leader of the district's handloom weavers' community, expressed optimism that the exposure would lead to increased exports and business expansion. Despite their hopes, the weavers voiced serious concerns about ongoing challenges, particularly the duplication of their designs by various companies. These imitations, often sold online at much lower prices, are cutting into their already fragile earnings.

"The sarees we painstakingly design and produce cost around Rs 6,000, but some businesses are selling online duplicates of the same design for just Rs 1,500 to Rs 2,000," lamented one weaver. V Biksham, a handloom weaver, shared his distress over the declining state of their traditional trade. Of the 3,500 families in Bhoodan Pochampally that rely on weaving, many are beginning to abandon the craft due to diminishing profits. He fears that their generation may be the last to carry on the tradition, as younger members of their families are unlikely to continue in the profession. The weavers attribute the decline to competition from machine-made designs, online retail platforms, and door-to-door delivery services.

## Summer takes a back seat in Tamil Nadu: Widespread rain likely till May 20

Weather conditions are also being influenced by the early advancement of the southwest monsoon, which is expected to trigger systems over both the Arabian Sea and the Bay of Bengal - cutting short the summer spell.

**CHENNAI.** The summer heat has eased a little across Tamil Nadu with widespread rains forecast to continue till May 20, bringing a much-needed respite from humid conditions. The Regional Meteorological Centre (RMC) has attributed the change in weather to an upper air circulation, which is likely to bring heavy rainfall to north districts and parts of the delta region.

Heavy rainfall is likely in Krishnagiri, Dharmapuri, Salem, Namakkal, Tirupattur, Vellore, Ranipet, Tiruvallur, and Tiruvannamalai on Saturday. On Sunday, rain is expected to shift to districts including Thanjavur, Tiruvallur, Mayiladuthurai, Nagapattinam, Pudukkottai, Ariyalur, Perambalur, Tiruchy, Salem, and Kallakurichi. The spell is likely to persist till May 20.

Weather conditions are also being influenced by the early advancement of the southwest monsoon, which is expected to trigger systems



over both the Arabian Sea and the Bay of Bengal - cutting short the summer spell.

Chennai, which often sizzles past the 40°C mark in May, has not recorded a single 40°C day so far this year. If the current weather holds, the city might entirely skip breaching the 40°C threshold this summer.

Weather blogger Pradeep John described this year as "one of the most unique" for Tamil Nadu.

"There's been no heatwave so far, and Chennai is unlikely to cross 40°C similar to 2022, 2018, and 2004," he said.

By the weekend, the upper air circulation is expected to move closer, with easterly winds falling over the north Tamil Nadu and Kancheepuram, Tiruvallur, Chennai, and Chengalpattu region, bringing good rainfall. Meanwhile, the RMC in a post on 'X' said the data till May 15 did not indicate cooler days over Chennai this season. While the mercury did not touch 40°C, temperatures hovered slightly above normal for a few days earlier this month, coupled with high humidity, making conditions uncomfortable during the first half of May. However, the RMC has forecast below-normal maximum temperatures for the coming week, thanks to persistent cloud cover and chances of light to moderate rainfall.

On Friday, Erode recorded the highest temperature in the state at 40.2°C.

## As tribals continue sit-in, Karnataka's Nagarhole relocation programme under scanner

**BENGALURU.** With a group of tribals claiming to be Jenu Kurubas staking claim over forest land in Nagarhole Tiger Reserve (NTR) since May 5, the issue has now caught the attention of the Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change. PA Seema, Director, NTR, said that as on date, 1,800 families continue to stay inside NTR. "They have been given forest rights. But the 150-200 people who illegally entered NTR, on May 5, 2025, are not forest dwellers. They stay around coffee estates and now sit in protest in groups of 30-35 on rotation basis. All old applications demanding forest rights have been cancelled. Now 50 fresh applications are before Kodagu district administration," she said.

The Forest Rights Act came into existence in 2008. It recognises the rights for habitation/self-cultivation of tribals/ dwellers who were actual occupants of forest land as on December 13, 2005. These people have to be staying inside for at least 75 years. NTR data shows the last tribal relocation was done in 2016-17. Experts and forest officials admit to the gaps and ineffective implementation of the



voluntary tribal relocation programme over the years in NTR, which has led to the present situation.

They said that despite financial assistance offered to tribals under various schemes from central and state governments, many continue to remain deprived. "There is a lack of political and administrative leadership in NTR. There are no dwellers inside the Bandipur and Bhadra tiger reserves. A few haadis continue inside Kali Tiger Reserve, but there is no problem like in NTR. The recent statements of Chief Minister Siddaramaiah and district MLAs to

provide all facilities inside forests have further ignited the issue," admitted a forest department official, not wanting to be identified.

Rs 14,925.81 crore was allocated in the 2025-26 Union budget for the scheduled tribes. Also Rs 80,000 crore was allocated under Pradhan Mantri Adi Adarsh Gram Yojana, Rs 7,088.60 crore under Eklavya Model Residential Schools, Rs 335.97 crore under Pradhan Mantri Adi Adarsh Gram Yojana and Rs 300 crore for multi-purpose centre under Pradhan Mantri Janjati Adivasi Nyaya Maha Abhiyan supporting the Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTG). In Karnataka Jenu Kurubas and Koragas are listed under PVTG. As per the Scheduled Tribal Welfare Department (STWD), there are around 15,000 registered Jenu Kurubas and 35,000 Koragas. They reside in Chamarajanagar, Mysuru, Kodagu, Dakshin Kannada and Udipi.

Citing an example, Yogesh T, Director, STWD, explained if tribals get Rs 2.39 lakh from the central government, then Rs 2 lakh is added from the state for housing.

## EOW to seal BJD leader Raja Chakra's farmhouse on govt land grab charge

**BHUBANESWAR.** The Economic Offences Wing (EOW) of the Crime Branch has initiated proceedings to seal BJD leader Soumya Sankar Chakra alias Raja's farmhouse over allegations of encroaching upon the government land. Chakra, the state vice-president of Biju Yuva Janata Dal, was arrested in March over his alleged links with Gandhamardan Loading Agency and Transporting Cooperative Society Ltd, which is reportedly involved in a scam of Rs 150 crore. Addressing the press on Friday, EOW SP Dilip Tripathy said Chakra owns a farmhouse spread over 11.1 acre of land at Gopalpur in Keonjhar's Sadar tehsil. "Revenue department officials had carried out the measurement of his farmhouse and found out that he had encroached upon at least 7.4 acre of government land," he said.

EOW officers ascertained that Chakra's farmhouse legal area is over 3.7 acre of land and is registered in his wife's name. "Steps are being taken to restore the encroached government land. He was earlier booked in two cases by the police over similar offences," said Tripathy.

EOW officers said they have filed the preliminary chargesheet of the case but investigation is still continuing. "It is a massive scam and more arrests will likely be made in the coming days," they said. The EOW is also collecting sufficient evidence to make the case watertight. It had registered an FIR in this regard on February 7 after receiving a complaint of large-scale irregularities and misappropriation of funds by Gandhamardan society which was set up for the welfare of the villagers affected by Gandhamardan mines in Keonjhar.



## Publish SSLC results of students accused in Shahabas murder case: Child rights panel

The Kerala State Commission for Protection of Child Rights has directed authorities to publish the SSLC results of six students accused in the Thamarassery Shahabas murder case by May 18, citing a violation of child rights.

**KOZHIKODE.** The Kerala State Commission for Protection of Child Rights has demanded that the SSLC results of the students accused in the Thamarassery Shahabas murder case be published by May 18. The commission has also said that the action of withholding the examination results is against the Child Rights Act. The commission's order states that the persons serving jail sentences are allowed for higher studies, attend exams and receive the results of the exams. If the results are to be withheld, it should be due to an offence committed by them during the exam.

However, the commission observed that no such thing happened in the case of the six students of Thamarassery Government Vocational Higher Secondary School who were accused in the death of 15-year-old Muhammed Shahabas. Shabas was

beaten up by a group of students with nunchaku following a dispute at tuition centre on February 27. He died while undergoing treatment at the hospital. "The students accused in the death of Shahabas in Thamarassery were shifted

six accused students and debarred them from the SSLC exam for three years," said commission chairperson K V Manoj Kumar.

"Though the secretary of the Kerala Board of Public Examination indicated that the department took such a step based on government guidelines, the commission concludes that if the students were given the permission to appear for the exams, their results should be published as per the Article 21 (Right to Life)," he added.

The commission also mentioned that since the accused students' results were withheld, they could not apply for the Plus-I admissions that commenced on May 14 and will conclude on May 20. Therefore, it has instructed the general education department and the secretary of Kerala Board of Public Examination to publish their SSLC results by May 18.



to the Kozhikode Juvenile Observation Home ahead of the SSLC 2025 examinations. They attended the examinations like any other student at the observation home, who are also accused in different cases. However, the exam board withheld the results of the

## Kerala: Muthuvan family battles 'wild' odds to stay connected to its land

**IDUKKI.** Like all members of the Muthuvan tribe, Amrita Raj and his family also share a deep connection with their land. Despite umpteen challenges, including frequent raids on their crops by wild elephants and birds, and water scarcity, the family of four - Raj, his wife Santhi and two daughters Sangeetha and Sneha - religiously carry out farming on their five acres of land close to the forest at Kundala near Munnar in Idukki. For them, the land is their mother and source of livelihood. "Ever since I settled at Kundala (Kundala Muthuvan Kudi) in 2001, farming has been our source of livelihood. While the Kundala reservoir is nearby, we use its water only for drinking purposes. Water that flows down from the nearby shola forest is used for irrigation," he said. During

summer, Raj manages to store the water from the stream in an artificial pond that he created in the middle of his farmland. Raj largely cultivates butter beans, which is in high demand, besides other varieties, including bush and red beans.

In the past, in addition to the selection of crops that were suitable to their soil and weather, collaborative farming and direct marketing helped tribal farmers in Kundala earn good income.

Back then, the families worked together in the fields to cut down on labour expenses. Moreover, sale of their produce used to be carried out via 'Krishithanal', a collective of tribal farmers, which sold the beans directly in markets.

We bear losses due to fluctuation in prices



and carry on: Farmer

"Barring Rs 2 per kg of beans charged as transportation cost, the rest of the money made after selling the produce went directly to farmers," said Raj, who was secretary of the collective. However, crop raids by wild animals and birds, and water scarcity,

## Massive devotee turnout marks second day of Saraswati Pushkaralu in Telangana

**BHUPALPALLY.** The spiritual energy was palpable on Friday as thousands of devotees flocked to Kaleshwaram in Jayashankar Bhupalpally district to take part in the ongoing Saraswati Pushkaralu. On the second day, the 12-day religious event witnessed a remarkable turnout, with over 1.2 lakh pilgrims participating in various ceremonies at the Triveni Sangam and Saraswati Pushkar Ghat.

Deputy Chief Minister Mallu Bhatti Vikramarka visited the temple along with his family and took a holy dip at the confluence of the Godavari, Pranahita and Saraswati rivers. He also performed spiritual rituals and offered harathi at the Pushkar Ghat.

Following the rituals, the deputy CM visited the Kaleshwaram Mukteswara Swamy Temple, where he offered prayers to Lord Shiva. Speaking to the media later, he praised the arrangements for the event, noting the seamless coordination and increasing daily footfall.

"The coming ten days are crucial for the Saraswati Pushkaralu," he said. "The tent city is a model of thoughtful planning, and the efforts made to ensure cleanliness, safety, and smooth crowd management at the ghats are commendable." He also emphasised the spiritual depth of the event, highlighting that each day a revered spiritual leader participates in the holy bath and conducts rituals at the temple, enhancing the religious significance of the festival.

Vikramarka was accompanied by Minister Sridhar Babu, MLAs Maken Singh (Ramagundam), Gandra Satyanarayana Rao (Bhupalpally), District Collector Rahul Sharma, SP Kiran Khare, Additional Collector Ashok Kumar, and other senior officials.

District Collector Rahul Sharma inspected the arrangements on Friday, ensuring that pilgrims face no inconvenience during their visit. He reviewed facilities at the Saraswati Ghat, temporary tents, and various public utility stalls. Special attention was given to sanitation, availability of showers at the ghats, and overall hygiene.

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Advocate Pooja Bhaskar Sharma



# 'Teachers overburdened, students didn't attend classes': 18 govt schools in Haryana record zero passes in class 12th boards

**GURGAON.** After the class 12 board exam results were declared earlier this week, 18 govt schools in Haryana have come under scrutiny. No student passed from any of these schools.

Of these, six are in Nuh, four in Faridabad, and one each in Gurgaon, Hisar, Jhajjar, Kamal, Palwal, Rohtak, Sonapat and Yamunanagar.

The zero-pass record isn't the only concern. These schools are among 100 govt institutions that performed poorly in the boards, overshadowing the overall pass percentage of 85.7. In 82 schools across Haryana's 22 districts, the pass percentage was below 35, prompting officials to refer them to the education directorate and the ministry of education for corrective measures. Nuh has the highest concentration of underperforming schools, accounting for 62 of the 100 lowest-performing institutions. Faridabad followed with 12 schools in the bottom 100. There were 59 students who appeared for the Class 12 boards from these 18 schools. Of them,

Hindu Girls Senior Secondary School in Yamunanagar had the highest number of candidates at 23.

63 of 100 worst performing schools in Haryana boards from NuhNuh has the highest concentration of underperforming schools, accounting for 62 of the 100 lowest-performing institutions. Faridabad followed with 12 schools in the bottom 100. There were 59 students who appeared for the Class 12 boards from these 18 schools. Of them, Hindu Girls Senior Secondary School in Yamunanagar had the highest number of candidates at 23.

There were several schools that had one candidate appearing for the Plus 2 boards. Principal Dheer Singh Nagar of Nambardar Public School in Jasana, Faridabad, confirmed no student had passed the Class 12 boards. "It's partly due to issues with board exam eligibility. Around 8-10 students received permission to sit for the exams late, or not at all. Several students, even those



initially eligible, were not attending classes," he added.

Rajneesh Bhardwaj, principal of Bharat Bharti Public School in Saran (Faridabad), said only two students appeared for the boards, but could not clear it. Govt Senior Secondary School in Otha (Nuh) also registered a zero pass score. Its principal identified teacher shortages as the primary reason for this dismal performance. "Our students faced difficulty with English mostly. The PGT

English post has been vacant for nearly three years," he said. The principal noted that none of the 13 students who appeared passed, and six received a compartmental in English. "Clearing that would have boosted the school's pass rate to around 40%. Vacant posts have severely harmed students' chances. There is also a need for greater parental awareness. Such issues are regularly reported through official channels, including the system's management information portal, but to no avail," he added. Teachers agreed about these challenges. They observed that frequent teacher vacancies, especially in critical subjects like English, hindered an effective instruction process. They also claimed that many students did not attend classes regularly, which compounded difficulties. "Teachers are being assigned extensive non-teaching duties, such as booth level work and more. They are so overburdened with non-academic tasks whose mental strain is immense," a teacher said.

## Two officials skip Gurgaon MLA's cleanliness drive, transferred

**Gurgaon.** Two senior civic officials in Rewari learned the hard way that skipping cleanliness drives can sweep their positions away. Their consistent absence from the weekly 'Jhadu Lagao Abhiyan' resulted in their immediate transfers. Local BJP MLA Laxman Yadav, who has been championing the cause of a "cleaner Rewari", expressed unhappiness against executive officer Sandeep Malik and executive engineer Praveen Raghav after coming to know they had been delegating their responsibilities to junior staff during the Saturday cleanliness campaign.

Launched in Oct last year, the 'Jhadu Lagao Abhiyan' has evolved from a modest initiative into a significant community drive. What started with a handful of volunteers now draws over 300 participants every week, many of them local residents, NGO members, and municipal staff. Yadav personally leads these drives, recognising and encouraging sanitation workers for their dedication. While Malik has been transferred to Patnaudi, Raghav will now serve in Gurgaon. Their successors, Sushil Bhukkal and Ankit Vashisth, have already assumed their new roles. "Rewari deserves officers who share our commitment to public service," Yadav said, hinting at possible action against non-performing officials.

The transfers weren't solely because of absenteeism. Yadav cited mounting public grievances and the officials' apparent disinterest in addressing basic civic issues. "People's complaints fell on deaf ears, and there was a clear lack of dedication to service," the MLA noted, pointing to delays in sanitation tenders and other municipal operations. Officials described the transfers as routine administrative changes. Malik and Raghav could not be reached for comment.

Yadav, now a two-time MLA, won the 2024 assembly election from Rewari by defeating Congress candidate Chiranjeev Rao, who is also the son-in-law of Lalu Prasad Yadav. He earlier served as an MLA from Kosli and held positions in BJP's state and national-level committees.

## Agencies ask for more time, MCG set to miss its June deadline to process Bandhwari trash

**Gurgaon.** The two agencies engaged in legacy waste processing at the Bandhwari landfill have sought an extension till Dec, suggesting that MCG might not meet its June target for clearing legacy waste. MCG commissioner, Pradeep Dahiya, said the request will be sent to the state govt for approval. "The agencies should have reached a capacity of processing 20,000 metric tonnes per day, while they're currently processing 4,000 metric tonnes a day. We are trying to get a land parcel for fresh waste so that we can seal the Bandhwari landfill," said the MCG commissioner. The agencies were recently fined Rs 2.7 crore for sluggish work. According to the affidavit submitted by MCG to the National Green Tribunal (NGT) on April 9, 11.03 lakh MT of waste at the landfill is still unprocessed. After MCG failed to meet the deadline of Dec 31 last year, urban local bodies (ULB) commissioner and secretary, Vikas Gupta, at a review meeting on March 10, instructed MCG to finish processing legacy waste by June 30, 2025, with a directive that this deadline must be adhered to without any



extensions. Reported on May 8 that the waste processing at Bandhwari showed very slow progress with only 3% completion of the total legacy waste target, 14 lakh MT. At an MCG meeting, an MCG engineer submitted that only 27,483 MT and 17,715 MT of legacy waste had been processed so far, respectively. This is around 3% of the total quantum allotted to both agencies, the

MCG officials said. One private agency was tasked with processing five lakh MT of legacy waste, and another was hired for treating nine lakh MT of legacy waste. The companies were required to finish their assigned tasks by July 3 this year. The authorities issued letters of interest to both agencies on Feb 11, followed by work orders on Feb 22. MCG officials said the waste processing started on March 24.

## Waterlogging and sanitation top priorities, will hold officials accountable for work: MCG chief

**Gurgaon.** New MCG commissioner Pradeep Dahiya said that over the next three months, he anticipated administrative reforms that emphasised accountability. Dahiya said officials should not presume their positions are guaranteed indefinitely. During his introductory interaction with reporters, Dahiya said that following a review of the civic body, it became evident there was a lack of accountability, replaced by a sense of privilege. The commissioner said his top priorities were resolving waterlogging in the city, strengthening the sanitation system, disposing of legacy waste effectively, and providing timely services to citizens.

Several executive engineers were

transferred out, and future appointments will prioritise individuals demonstrating strong work ethics, genuine commitment, and diligence, he said, adding that evaluation of junior engineers revealed their insufficient commitment to their duties.

"I hope that in three months, there will be changes on the administrative side, focusing on accountability, without any sense of entitlement. No one should assume that they have always been here and will remain here. The state govt has clearly communicated to us that work must be done with accountability," said Dahiya. "There appeared to be a complacent attitude among MCG employees, believing their mere presence

was sufficient. It has been clearly communicated to the JEs that they must fulfil their responsibilities, as every team member is required to contribute effectively," he added.

Data was collected from various sources to identify the locations that faced persistent waterlogging in previous years, Dahiya said, adding that this data, based on feedback from the media, police, GMDA, public representatives, and citizens, was analysed.

He added that teams comprising junior engineers and staff related to cleaning and sewerage have been formed at potential waterlogging sites to ensure proper drainage management before the monsoon.

# NHAI calls for one agency to clean drains that flood Delhi-Gurgaon expressway

**Gurgaon.** Frustrated with the lack of a permanent solution to waterlogging on the Delhi-Gurgaon expressway, particularly near Narsinghpur, the National Highways Authority of India (NHAI) chairperson Santosh Kumar Yadav wrote to the Haryana chief secretary, Anurag Rastogi, urging him to appoint a single agency to handle drainage issues along the corridor.

In a letter to the state govt last week, NHAI pointed out how the multiplicity of agencies, such as NHAI, GMDA, MCG, district administration, and HSIIDC, led to poor coordination and shifting of responsibilities during the monsoon, severely affecting drainage management after every spell of rain.

It proposed that one local agency, either MCG, GMDA, or HSIIDC, be tasked with managing the drainage works in and around NH-8 during the monsoon to ensure accountability and avoid coordination hurdles.

"Despite regular discussions on various forums, no permanent solution has been effectuated to date by the local administration, which would solve the problem of waterlogging along NH-8, especially at Narsinghpur. As a result, we will have to revert to the deployment of

pumps for discharging the water, which is not an efficient solution," the letter states.

NHAI assured that it will bear its share of the cost incurred by the designated agency for tackling the drainage issues.

In the past, GMDA blamed NHAI for not maintaining the surface drain along the Delhi-Gurgaon expressway, while NHAI pointed the finger at MCG for not being able to manage garbage disposal, which ends up in the drains, choking them. Similarly, GMDA officials said the responsibility for resolving the waterlogging issue on the highway lies with NHAI, but the latter blamed the local civic authorities for failing to provide an outfall for the surface drain.

"Year after year, we are stuck in the same situation with multiple agencies involved in the drainage management.

To avoid such a scenario, the authority proposed that a single local agency should be appointed to handle the drainage management. We are ready to bear our share of the cost," said a senior



official of NHAI. The Narsinghpur stretch of NH-48 turns into a bottleneck during rains, with frequent waterlogging causing traffic snarls and pedestrian inconvenience. While short-term measures, including

the deployment of pumping machinery and installation of pipelines, were taken over the years to address the issue, the absence of a permanent solution is still lacking.

Last year, NHAI and GMDA jointly deployed 12 pumping machines on the Delhi side of the expressway. Earlier, GMDA planned to construct a 750-metre drain connecting the highway with the Badshapur drain, but the project remains stalled due to land hurdles. Subsequently, Haryana's chief secretary directed the district administration and HSIIDC to explore acquiring 1,750 square metres of land under the Disaster Management Act, 2005, to build a drain and address the persistent waterlogging problem on the expressway.

## 'Red' alert: Noida maps illegal bldgs across 5 villages

**Noida.** The Noida Authority has launched a crackdown on illegal constructions on notified land across the city. As part of the drive, nearly 20 structures in areas like Gadhi Chaukhandi, Barolla, Salarpur, Basai, and Bhangel were found built without requisite approvals. These buildings have been marked in red paint with the word "illegal," and official notices have been pasted to warn current occupants and prospective buyers. So far, nearly 10,000 sqm of land, worth an estimated Rs 30 crore, have been freed from encroachment.

Noida Authority CEO Lokesh M said officials from Circles 1 to 10 have been directed to conduct detailed surveys to identify unauthorized constructions. "The surveys aim to pinpoint encroachers and assess illegal developments. Those found guilty will be classified as land grabbers and face strict action," he said. The Authority also warned the public against dealing with middlemen while purchasing land. Officials said that development on notified land will be permitted only under official guidelines.

In the past two days, demolition drives were carried out in Barolla, Salarpur, and Hajipur villages. "We demolished several under-construction houses and shops built illegally on notified land," said a senior official.

The ongoing campaign is part of Noida's broader strategy to expand its landbank. Currently, the Authority has 66,867 square meters reserved for industrial use, 3 lakh square meters for institutional projects, 9,686 square meters for residential development, 91,820 square meters for group housing, and 10 lakh square meters for commercial use. Officials have been directed to act tough against those involved in illegal constructions, many of which are linked to organized encroachments.

## 'Can't force': AOA's question Noida's flowerpot FIR order

**Noida.** A Noida Authority directive asking residents to remove flowerpots from balcony parapets to prevent accidents has put the onus on RWAs, AOA's and developers of a high-rise society, besides the flat owner, in the event of a mishap. While residents' associations say it was a step in the right direction, they rue the decision to lodge FIRs against AOA presidents or secretaries when they did not have any enforcement powers. RWA federation maintains that enforcement of such an order should be the responsibility of Noida Authority or the district administration, and has written to the DM and Noida CEO on the matter.

The directive, issued by Noida CEO Lokesh M on May 13, days after a minor died when a planter placed on the balcony of a Pune high-rise society crashed on his head, stated: "...all housing societies in Noida are required to take immediate action to remove flowerpots from balcony parapet walls. In case of a similar accident, the Noida Authority will file an FIR against the AOA president, secretary, or the builder and flat owner." Nikhil Singhal, president of Noida Highrise Federation (NHRF) 100x sectors that represents over two dozen high-rises, said AOA's in Noida play a limited role in setting guidelines for residents' safety.

While many AOA's have already instructed residents to refrain from keeping flowerpots on balconies or lobby parapet walls, implementing these guidelines poses a challenge due to the lack of administrative powers vested with AOA's. "The issue is critical as it can lead to serious accidents. In most cases, residents' irresponsible behaviour is the primary cause of such incidents. Despite repeated reminders, several residents fail to adhere to AOA guidelines. That's because AOA's lack the necessary administrative tools to effectively address these situations," said Singhal. Ashutosh Rai, AOA secretary of Gaur Grandeur Apartment in Sector 119, said the apartment owners' associations had become "easy targets" for the Authority.

## It's no monkey business: HC seeks answers from govts on simian crisis

**Ghaziabad.** A college student from Sanjay Nagar got multiple stitches after she was attacked by a monkey earlier this year. Another woman, a Raj Nagar resident, spent over Rs 1 lakh to repair the electrical wiring after a group of monkeys raided her house when she went to meet her son in the US last Dec.

Man-monkey conflicts are many and frequent in Delhi-NCR. In 2014, New Delhi Municipal Corporation (NDMC) had to hire 40 men in ape suits to drive away monkeys from the parliament complex—a decision that inspired an OTT series 'Mamla Legal Hai'. But 11 years later, nothing has changed, except for the simian population.

On May 6, Allahabad high court issued notices to Animal Welfare Board of India, ministry of environment, forest and climate change, UP govt and others on the rising population of monkeys, increasing man-monkey conflict, hunger and loss of food to monkeys, their starvation and cruel/inhuman conditions the monkeys are living in. The court directed the central and state govts to explain by July 10 what are the steps in place to deal with monkey menace and what action plan is proposed in that regard. The division bench comprising chief justice Arun Bhansali and justice Kshitij Shailendra also issued notices to the UP state animal welfare board, Ghaziabad district magistrate, GMC, nagar palika parishads of Loni, Modinagar, Muradnagar, Khoda Makanpur, society for prevention of cruelty to animals and Ghaziabad Development Authority (GDA) in the matter.

It was hearing a PIL filed by BTech student Prajakta Singhal and social worker Vineet Sharma, both from Ghaziabad, seeking directions for preparing an urgent action plan, infirmaries, veterinary care centres, transport and rescue vans, provisions of food and setting up a 24x7 grievance helpline portal to tackle monkey menace. It also sought a direction to the govt agencies to capture and relocate monkeys to forests or forest-like setup in Ghaziabad. Sharma said monkey attacks increase during summer when there is a dearth of food and water in the habitats where they usually live. "People can't go for walks in parks, and children cannot play in school playgrounds out of fear of being attacked by monkeys," Sharma said.



## NEWS BOX

## Leaving to protect republic: Ex-South Korean President Yoon quits Conservative Party

Seoul. South Korea's ousted former President Yoon Suk Yeol said on Saturday that he is leaving the conservative People Power Party (PPP), according to his Facebook post. The announcement comes as the PPP's presidential candidate is badly trailing liberal Democratic Party candidate Lee Jae-myung in the polls before the June 3 snap election. According to a Gallup Korea poll released on Friday, some 29 per cent supported PPP presidential candidate Kim Moon-soo, compared to 51% for frontrunner Lee.

Yoon, whose December surprise martial law and subsequent ouster by impeachment brought about the snap presidential election, had been called by party members to leave the party in an effort to muster more support from moderate voters who negatively view his actions.

"I am leaving the People Power Party to fulfil my responsibility to protect the free Republic of Korea... Please lend your support to Kim Moon-soo," Yoon said in his post, referring to South Korea's official name. Candidates Lee and Kim are set to face off in their first televised debate on Sunday.

## 2 killed, 3 injured after gunman opens fire at Las Vegas gym



Las Vegas. There was a shooting Friday afternoon inside a gym, killing two people and injuring at least three others, Las Vegas police said.

One person died as gunfire erupted at the Las Vegas Athletic Club on the city's west side, Las Vegas Metropolitan Police Undersheriff Andrew Walsh said. There was no longer a threat to the public, Walsh said. Heavy police presence was seen lined along North Rainbow Boulevard. In a social media post, police said the suspect in the shooting was confirmed dead at a local hospital. Three people who were injured were transported to local hospitals, with one in critical condition, a spokesperson with the police department said in a press conference.

Officials said they are still investigating a motive.

"They said get out, get out, get out," Claudio Vigani, a witness who was at the gym when the shooting started, told KLAS-TV. "Then I saw the dead guy next to the machine." The Associated Press was not able to reach the athletic club for comment. The University Medical Centre confirmed it had received four patients, with one in critical condition.

## UK Foreign Secretary welcomes India-Pakistan ceasefire during Islamabad visit

world. In a diplomatic balancing act, UK Foreign Secretary David Lammy managed to praise both India and Pakistan in the same breath during his visit to Islamabad on Friday, calling the recent ceasefire agreement between the two nuclear neighbors a "positive step" toward lasting regional peace.

The Foreign Secretary applauded New Delhi and Islamabad for agreeing to cease hostilities, describing the images of recent cross-border clashes as "deeply distressing," especially for "the millions of Brits with Indian and Pakistani heritage," according to ANI. "The images of conflict between India and Pakistan were distressing for all of us in Britain," Lammy said. "But in particular the millions of Brits with Indian and Pakistani heritage, and the many British nationals living in both of these countries."

Meeting Pakistani Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif and senior officials during his visit, Lammy reaffirmed the UK's "strong ties with both India and Pakistan" and highlighted the emotional toll the conflict took on diaspora communities in the UK.

"The British Pakistani and British Indian diasporas would particularly welcome news of the ceasefire and increased stability," he noted. Lammy also condemned the "horrendous terrorist attack in Pahalgam" and said the UK had been doing all it could "to play a supportive role to reduce tensions, get to a ceasefire and condemn terrorism."

According to the UK's Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office, Lammy praised "the steps taken by both Pakistan and India to secure an agreement to cease hostilities" and emphasized the importance of sustained regional stability. "Because of the deep and historic links between our populations and our governments," he said, "we are determined to play our part to counterterrorism and ensure this fragile ceasefire becomes a durable peace." The UK diplomat also met British consular staff stationed in Islamabad and commended them for providing real-time support and accurate information to British nationals during the crisis.

He confirmed ongoing dialogue with Indian officials and said he planned to visit New Delhi soon as part of efforts to reinforce UK-India ties — an essential part of Britain's broader Indo-Pacific engagement.

While tensions had peaked with India suspending the Indus Waters Treaty and launching Operation Sindoor, the breakthrough came on May 10, when both countries reached an understanding following backchannel talks supported by international allies, including the UK.

# New Jersey transit trains shut down after workers' wage strike, a 1st in 40 years

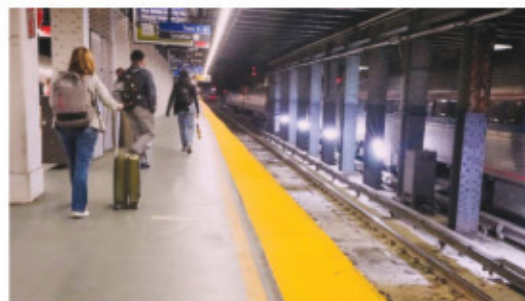
**New Jersey Transit engineers  
launched the first strike in  
over 40 years, halting all train  
service and stranding  
350,000 commuters amid a  
heated wage dispute with no  
resolution in sight.**

world. Train engineers for New Jersey Transit (NJ Transit) trains went on strike, bringing the state's bustling rail network to a grinding halt and stranding an estimated 350,000 daily commuters who rely on the service between New Jersey and New York City. The walkout, New Jersey's first transit strike in over four decades, comes after a marathon 15-hour negotiation session on

Thursday failed to yield a contract deal. Union leaders said talks broke down just two hours before the strike deadline.

"We presented them the last proposal; they rejected it and walked away with two hours left on the clock," said Tom Haas, general chairman of the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers and Trainmen (BLET).

The impasse has already led to sweeping disruptions, including cancelling NJ Transit train service and even bus routes for large-scale events like the Shakira concerts at MetLife Stadium this week. The shutdown affects crucial connections such as Penn Station in New York and Newark Liberty International Airport, news agency Associated Press reported. NJ Transit CEO Kris Kolluri tried to strike a hopeful tone despite the deadlock. "I certainly expect to pick back up these conversations as soon as



possible," Kolluri said during a late-night press conference alongside Governor Phil Murphy. "If they're willing to meet tonight, I'll meet them again tonight. If they want to meet tomorrow morning, I'll do it again. Because I think this is an imminently workable problem. The question is, are they willing to come to a solution?"

Governor Murphy acknowledged the strain on commuters and the state's budget. "We need to reach a final deal that is both fair to employees and at the same time affordable

to New Jersey's commuters and taxpayers. Again, we cannot ignore the agency's fiscal realities," he said.

At the heart of the dispute is wages. The union is pushing for pay parity with engineers at nearby railroads, proposing an average salary of \$170,000 annually. BLET claims its members earn around \$113,000 annually and steadily leave NJ Transit for better-paying opportunities elsewhere. NJ Transit counters that engineers already average \$135,000, with some exceeding \$200,000.

"The issue isn't just the wage bump for one group," Kolluri said. "It's whether that agreement triggers a cascade of similar demands from other unions, creating a financial cliff NJ Transit cannot survive." Currently, about 450 engineers are left, down from 500 just a few months ago. The union warns that attrition will only worsen without a competitive pay scale.

## US considering reality TV show for immigrants to compete for citizenship

**The US is exploring a reality TV  
show where immigrants  
compete to win citizenship as  
the prize. This new concept aims  
to combine entertainment with  
immigration opportunities.**

Washington. The US Department of Homeland Security (DHS) is considering taking part in a reality TV show in which immigrants would compete for American citizenship, the department confirmed on Friday. Asked about the reported idea, DHS responded with a statement that said the pitch "has not received approval or rejection by staff," and that "each proposal undergoes a thorough vetting process prior to denial or approval." "We need to revive patriotism and civic duty in this country, and we're happy to review out-of-the-box pitches," Assistant Secretary for Public Affairs Tricia McLaughlin said in the statement.

The Wall Street Journal reported that the proposed show — which was pitched by



a Canadian American named Rob Worsoff — would see contestants face off to prove they are the most American. "This isn't 'The Hunger Games' for immigrants," the newspaper quoted Worsoff as saying — a reference to a dystopian novel and subsequent movie about children forced to kill each other in a televised competition for survival. "This is not, 'Hey, if you lose, we are shipping you out on a boat out of the country,'" he said.

The Journal reviewed a 36-page slide deck from Worsoff's team about the proposed program, which would see contestants compete in one-hour episodes.

This could include a gold rush competition to see who can retrieve the

most precious metal from a mine, or one in which contestants would work in teams to assemble the chassis of a Model T car, according to the newspaper. The show would start with an arrival at Ellis Island — the traditional entrance point for immigrants to the United States — and would see one contestant eliminated per episode. The news comes as former reality show star President Donald Trump's administration has moved to end temporary protected status (TPS) for various groups of immigrants it had shielded them from deportation.

Federal law permits the government to grant TPS to foreign citizens who cannot safely return home because of war, natural disasters or other "extraordinary" conditions.

Since taking office, Trump has sought to strip TPS protections from citizens of countries including Afghanistan, Haiti and Venezuela as part of his broader crackdown on immigration. That crackdown — led by DHS — has included immigration raids, arrests and deportations.

## Libya protests erupt in Tripoli as calls grow for PM Dbeibah's resignation

world. Hundreds of Libyan protesters called on Friday for the ouster of the internationally-recognised prime minister and his government said one security force member was killed when some protesters tried to storm his office. At least three ministers resigned in sympathy with the protesters, who want Prime Minister Abdulhamid Dbeibah to quit.

The demonstrators gathered in Martyrs' Square in Tripoli, chanting slogans such as "The nation wants to topple the government" and "We want elections." They later marched to the main government building in the city center. "We won't leave until he leaves," one protester said. The demonstrators carried pictures of Dbeibah, national security adviser Ibrahim Dbeibah and Interior Minister Emad Tarbuli with



their faces crossed out in red. State-oil firm NOC said in a statement that its operations at oil facilities are proceeding as normal, with oil and gas exports operating regularly. National oil output in the past 24 hours was at 1,376,415 barrels.

Dbeibah, who leads the divided country's Government of National Unity, came to power through a UN-backed process in 2021. Planned elections failed to proceed that year because of

disagreements among rival factions, and he has remained in power. The government media platform said in a statement that one security member of its building protection force was killed, posting video footage showing the building's fence destroyed with rocks on the ground. "Security forces thwarted an attempted storming of the Prime Minister's Office by a group embedded among the demonstrators," it said in the statement.

On Friday, businessman Wael Abdulhamed said: "We are (here) today to express our anger against Dbeibah and all those in the power for years now and (who) prevent elections. They must leave power." Calls for Dbeibah to resign increased after two rival armed groups clashed in the capital this week in the heaviest fighting in years.

## Asim Munir woke me up at 2.30 am: Pak PM confirms India strikes on key airbases

**India conducted precision  
strikes on Pakistani military  
sites, including Nur Khan Air  
Base, on May 10 as part of  
Operation Sindoor. The strikes  
were in retaliation to the April  
22 Pahalgam terror attack, in  
which 26 people were killed.**

world. Pakistan Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif confirmed India's precision strikes at their key airbases as part of Operation Sindoor in the early hours of May 10 in what is the first such video of him talking about the recent four-day escalation. Addressing a ceremony held at the Pakistan Monument on Friday, Sharif said

that he was woken up at 2.30 am by Army Chief General Asim Munir, moments after the Indian operation began. "General Munir called me personally at 2.30 in the morning to inform me about the strikes. It was a moment of grave concern," Sharif told reporters in Islamabad. Amit Malviya, the head of the BJP's National IT Department, sharing the video on X, described the event as a testament to the boldness and efficiency of Operation Sindoor.

"Pakistan PM Shehbaz Sharif himself admits that General Asim Munir called him at 2.30 a.m. to inform him that India had bombed Nur Khan Air Base and several other locations. Let that sink in — the Prime Minister was woken up in the middle of the night with news of strikes deep inside Pakistan. This speaks volumes about the



scale, precision, and boldness of "Operation Sindoor," Malviya wrote.

Pakistan had earlier claimed that its JF-17 fighter jets destroyed the S-400 air defence system at Punjab's Adampur Airbase. However, Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to the base dismantled Pakistan's disinformation campaign in one decisive move. Pakistan also claimed that India's strikes targeted its civilians. However, the

Chief Minister of Sindh province confirmed that the Bholari Airbase was hit, killing six air force personnel — supporting India's claim that it targeted military sites, not civilians. India's strikes were a response to the deadly April 22 terrorist attack in Pahalgam, Kashmir, which killed 26 people. Indian officials had blamed Pakistan-based groups for the assault and vowed retaliation.

Over the next three days, Pakistan attempted to target Indian military bases in retaliatory drone and missile strikes on May 8, 9, and 10. Indian forces responded with overwhelming firepower, targeting multiple Pakistani military installations in what was described as "measured but decisive retaliation." India and Pakistan reached an understanding on May 10 to end the military confrontation after four days of intense cross-border drone and missile strikes.



## NEWS BOX

## Justice PC Ghose Commission likely to submit Kaleshwaram probe report by month-end

**HYDERABAD.** Justice PC Ghose Commission, constituted to investigate irregularities in the execution of the Kaleshwaram Lift Irrigation Scheme, is likely to submit its report to the state government by the end of this month. According to sources, Justice Ghose has prepared a 400-page report. However, the Commission reportedly decided not to summon politicians for cross-examination.

Initially, the Commission planned to summon former chief minister K Chandrasekhar Rao, former irrigation minister T Harish Rao and former finance minister Eatala Rajender, who is currently a BJP MP. But it decided against summoning them as it is of the view that the available documentary evidence and the contents of the cross-examination were sufficient to establish responsibility.

The Commission examined the final report of the National Dam Safety Authority, the Vigilance report and other key documents. It cross-examined over 100 witnesses, including incumbent officers, retired engineers and IAS officers. The replies given by them were sufficient for the Commission to fix responsibility, the sources said, and added that the Commission may submit its report any day after May 22.

## Rs 4 crore scam surfaces as dozens of used cars vanish from dealership in Rourkela

**ROURKELA.** Multiple dozens of used cars vanishing from the stockyard of an authorised Kia Motors dealer in Rourkela have brought to light a scam the volume of which could be to the tune of Rs 4 crore.

The used vehicles were received as part of exchange offers for sale of Kia brand cars. A preliminary claim suggested that 50-60 used cars disappeared from the showroom's stockyard at Vedvyas under Brahmani Tarang (BT) police limits here. The authorised dealer blamed a well-knit racket of its former employees and police on Thursday arrested 47-year-old Md Daud charging him with selling the used cars in connivance with others.

Based on a complaint filed by Rishab Agarwal, partner of Sheeta Auto Cares, a limited liability partnership (LLP) and authorised dealer of Kia Motors, a case under sections 306, 316 (2), 336 (2), 336 (3), 339 and 314 of BNS was registered on February 25. According to Rishab's complaint, the dealer made detailed verification of books of accounts, sales ledgers and stocks which led to the missing used cars with manipulation of amounts and bank statements.

## Erratic spells of rain do little for groundwater levels in Telangana

**HYDERABAD.** While the recent spells of rain across Hyderabad did offer some relief from the sweltering heat, groundwater levels in the city remain largely unaffected.

The reason? Widespread concretisation that hindered rainwater infiltration, causing most of the runoff to drain into stormwater systems rather than replenishing underground aquifers.

Between May 1 and 15 this year, over 1.14 lakh water tankers were booked by consumers through the Hyderabad Metropolitan Water Supply and Sewerage Board (HMWSSB), with a daily average exceeding 7,610 bookings — similar to previous years. Officials confirmed that the rains had minimal impact on groundwater recharge, with most water flowing into drains instead of soaking into the soil. The groundwater in Hyderabad is classified as overexploited. Authorities have pointed to the lack of rainwater percolation due to urban development and inadequate implementation of Rain Water Harvesting Structures (RWHS). Though about 45-50% of houses and apartments have RWHS pits, many have become defunct due to poor maintenance. As borewells dry up during summer, the dependency on tankers continues.

Officials said that any noteworthy recharge would require 10 to 15 consecutive days of rainfall. This means that occasional spells of rain are insufficient to restore groundwater levels. Recharge wells, or injection wells, are also being considered as a solution for direct percolation into deeper aquifers. HMWSSB has been promoting RWHS and public awareness on their benefits.

The HMWSSB has urged the Greater Hyderabad Municipal Corporation to enforce stricter compliance under the WATA Act, particularly by verifying RWHS construction before granting Occupancy Certificates for buildings over 200 square metres. HMWSSB has also offered technical assistance for RWHS installation.

## RWHS mandatory in state for buildings in 200 sq m or more

The state government has made it mandatory under Section 17(2) of the Water, Land & Trees Act, 2002, for all premises over 200 sq m to construct and maintain RWHS to aid groundwater recharge. Officials attributed the falling water table to human activity, including encroachment of buffer zones and constructions over tank beds and FTLs of water bodies.

## Now, travel in Third AC at the fare of sleeper

With Railways deciding to prioritise filling seats in AC coaches through auto upgrades, such CB vacancies are unlikely to become available in AC coaches, except in very rare situations.

**CHENNAI.** In a key policy shift, Indian Railways have issued instructions to fill all vacant seats and berths in AC coaches of trains through the "auto upgrade" facility with holders of confirmed tickets from lower classes like Sleeper Class (SL) and Second Sitting (2S) during the preparation of the first chart, which is usually done four hours before the departure of a train from its source.

The move is likely to make the Current Booking (CB) facility unavailable in AC coaches, such as Chair Car (CC), Third AC (3A), Second AC (2A), and First AC (1A). However, the CB will be available for SL and 2S.

The CB facility was introduced for last-minute bookings, if there are any vacancies after the preparation of the first chart. It is allowed usually up to 30 minutes before departure. Seats will be available under the CB category for any train only if there are vacant seats — after emergency quotas and different types of waitlists are processed — available after

the preparation of the first chart.

With Railways deciding to prioritise filling seats in AC coaches through auto upgrades, such CB vacancies are unlikely to become available in AC coaches, except in very rare situations when

also enhance the chances of confirmed tatkal ticket holders in SL and 2S to get upgraded to 3A or CC, respectively.

The Railway Board has also ordered that upgrades can be done only up to two levels. For example, SL can be upgraded to 3A and 2A. Similarly, 2S tickets may be upgraded to Vistadome 2S or CC. Upgrades to 1A and Executive Class are, however, restricted to only one level below, that is, from 2A to 1A or from CC to EC. For instance, a person with confirmed ticket in 3A cannot get upgraded to 1A. Auto upgrade — such as from SL to 3A and from 3A to 2A — facility was introduced in 2006. However, this facility is limited to passengers who paid the highest fare in their class, which would mean those who paid tatkal fare or full fare of the tickets without availing of any concessions. An official from the

Southern Railway stated, "Currently, most AC seats and berths get fully booked across the zone. However, during off-peak periods, on trains with higher AC seat availability, passengers with non-AC tickets might receive upgrades."



seats remain vacant even after upgrades.

The new changes communicated by the Railway Board to Southern Railway and all other zonal railways on Thursday will not only ensure that all the seats and berths in AC classes get occupied to the maximum extent possible but

## Eight hospitalised after drinking 'contaminated' water in Nellai

**THIUTHUKUDI.** More than 20 residents of Vallanadu Kasba village suffered food poisoning, and eight of them were rushed to a private hospital in Tirunelveli on Thursday evening, allegedly after consuming contaminated water from the Thamirabarani River. The victims had also allegedly eaten non-vegetarian food during a temple festival.

Dr M Yazhini, district health officer, told that the victims might have used the same water from the river, which was allegedly used by others to take a bath and defecate in. She added, "Eight people suffered food poisoning, of whom three returned home after receiving outpatient treatment. Five others were admitted to a private hospital, and three of them were discharged on Friday. Our officials visited the



others." The district administration in a statement said, "Chlorinated drinking water was supplied through the Tamil Nadu Water Supply and Drainage Board (TWAD) and local water sources to Vallanadu Kasba village to meet the basic needs of the public. When the

Thambiratti Amman temple festival was held in the village, some people reportedly consumed water from a nearby waterbody instead of the chlorinated water. It also came to light that a few of them had also eaten leftover mutton from the festival."

The statement added that, based on instructions from the collector, TWAD, rural development, health department, and food safety department officials visited the village to inspect the water consumed and the quality of the food. Additionally, a medical team has also been stationed in the village to provide necessary treatment to those affected.

Some locals also claimed that some people who drank water that was supplied to their houses by the TWAD Board also suffered from food poisoning.

## Won ISKCON's long fight for Prabhupada's legacy, says temple president Madhu Pandit Dasa

**BENGALURU.** After the Supreme Court ordered that the famous Hare Krishna Hill temple in Rajajinagar belongs solely to the ISKCON-Bangalore Society and not to ISKCON-Mumbai, Sri Madhu Pandit Dasa, President of ISKCON-Bangalore, said the internal ISKCON battle was never



just about property — it was a long fight to uphold the spiritual legacy of Srila Prabhupada, the founder acharya of ISKCON. "They can no longer expel thousands of devotees who wish to accept only Srila Prabhupada as the sole acharya of ISKCON," he said, reiterating that Prabhupada had set up a Ritvik system

where all devotees would remain his disciples even after his passing.

The Supreme Court's verdict on Friday marks the end of a 24-year legal and ideological battle between the ISKCON societies of Bengaluru and Mumbai. The apex court upheld ISKCON-Bangalore's independent legal identity and confirmed that the temple land had been allotted to it by the Bangalore Development Authority (BDA) in 1988. The court also barred ISKCON-Mumbai from interfering in the administration or affairs of the Bangalore society. What triggered the dispute was the question of spiritual succession within ISKCON after Srila Prabhupada's Maha Samadhi in 1977. ISKCON-Bangalore has long

opposed the idea of self-appointed successors or "gurus" leading the organisation. According to them, Srila Prabhupada had clearly outlined a Ritvik initiation system, under which he would remain the sole initiating spiritual master for all time, with representatives performing ceremonies on his behalf.

## Experts urge alternatives to Bengaluru-Tumakuru Metro plan

**BENGALURU.** Mobility experts suggest finding alternative transport models to Bangalore Metro Rail Corporation Limited's (BMRL) proposed Metro line from Bengaluru to Tumakuru. However, BMRL officials have already submitted the feasibility report of the 56.6 km stretch to connect the two cities. "The distance between Bengaluru and Tumakuru is over 70

may prove to be a white elephant.

Ashish Verma, professor of transportation systems engineering at IISc, also voiced the same concern. "The Bengaluru-Tumakuru corridor falls outside Bengaluru Metropolitan region. Metro trains' average speed is 30 km/h due to frequent stops, meaning travel on this route could take 2.5-3 hours, making it unsuitable for daily commuters. Suburban



trains or semi-high-speed systems can cover the same distance in 60-75 minutes with speeds of 100-160 kmph and limited halts. Public transport expansion is welcomed, but an analysis of

alternatives, comparing metro, suburban rail, and RRTS, is essential to identify the most efficient and cost-effective solution for this stretch," he said. The DPR has been submitted to the State Government and awaits approval. After state clears it, the project will require Central Government's nod.

## Postpartum haemorrhage top maternal death factor in Kerala

## Hypertensive disorders &amp; sepsis also significant contributors to mortality rate

**KOLLAM.** Despite Kerala's achievements in healthcare, postpartum haemorrhage (PPH) remains the leading direct cause of maternal deaths in the state, according to the Confidential Review of Maternal Deaths conducted by the Kerala Federation of Obstetrics and Gynaecology. Though PPH, or excessive bleeding after childbirth, continues to be the chief concern, experts warn that hypertensive pregnancy disorders and sepsis are also emerging as significant contributors of maternal deaths.

Of the 609 maternal deaths recorded between 2020 and 2024, 70 were attributed to obstetric haemorrhage, including five cases where women died en route to hospital care. From 2021 to 2024 alone, among 522 recorded maternal deaths, 38 were caused by hypertensive

disorders of pregnancy, such as preeclampsia—making it the second leading



cause of maternal mortality after haemorrhage.

The review further flagged that 22 of those 38 hypertensive cases progressed to eclampsia, a severe condition involving

seizures in pregnant women with high blood pressure. Additionally, 13 cases were associated with HELLP syndrome, a life-threatening complication considered a variant of hypertensive pregnancy disorder.

Maternal sepsis — defined as life-threatening organ dysfunction resulting from infection during pregnancy — was cited in 16 of the 522 deaths. "PPH is still the most common cause of maternal deaths. However, hypertensive pregnancy disorders and sepsis have become dangerous emerging trends. We are seeing increased incidence of high blood pressure among young women, which was rare in the past. This could be due to unhealthy lifestyles, poor diet, lack of exercise, and stress," said

Dr Leema R, senior gynaecologist at Women and Children Hospital, Thiruvananthapuram. Dr Leema stressed the need for robust diagnostic protocols and

rapid interventions. "Prompt and effective management of high blood pressure is crucial to avoid complications like cerebral haemorrhage, the most common cause of death in preeclampsia patients," she said.

On sepsis, she added, "It can result from postpartum infections, so maintaining hygiene throughout pregnancy is critical. We are also seeing more cases where standard antibiotics are ineffective due to growing resistance. This area needs further research."

Dr Unnikrishnan, a senior gynaecological surgeon based in Kollam, said proper management of labour is key to reducing maternal mortality. "PPH can often be prevented with active management during delivery. But this requires skilled staff and infrastructure," he said. He said while local representatives demand labour facilities in taluk hospital and primary health centres, this is not always feasible. "Unfortunately, most taluk hospitals lack the necessary infrastructure and trained staff. Strengthening these facilities should be a priority," he noted.

## Nedumbassery road rage: Accused CISF personnel acted with intent, say police



**KOCHI.** The police have deemed two Central Industrial Security Force (CISF) personnel ramming their car into a 25-year-old youth in Nedumbassery an intentional act of murder.

The incident which occurred around 11 pm on Wednesday near Nayathode led to the death of Ivin of Thiruvoor near Angamaly. He was working as a chef with CAFS airline caterers.

The accused — Vinay Kumar Das, 28, and Mohan Kumar, 31, both hailing from Bihar — had claimed the death was accidental. However, the police said CCTV footage, mobile phone videos, and forensic evidence paint a different picture.

"This cannot be treated as an accident," a police officer involved in the investigation told.

"The CCTV footage and mobile phone recordings we have recovered clearly show that the accused intentionally struck Ivin with their car. He clung to the bonnet and pleaded for help, but the accused dragged him for nearly a kilometre before applying sudden brakes.

When he fell, they ran the car over him. The autopsy report supports our assessment."

The altercation began after the CISF personnel, in their vehicle, honked aggressively and attempted to overtake Ivin's car. A minor collision occurred, leading Ivin to block their vehicle and confront them near the Government HSS at Nayathode.

When he began recording the incident and calling the police, the CISF personnel accelerated their car, causing Ivin to fall onto the bonnet. Instead of stopping, they continued to drive with him on the car before fatally running him over.



Indo-Pak standoff: PM Modi has come up trumps

PRIME Minister Narendra Modi was touring Saudi Arabia when terrorists struck in Pahalgam on April 22. He immediately cut short his visit and returned to New Delhi to take charge of the situation. Reflecting on the terror attack and India's response, we can safely say that Modi has come up trumps and is today the true monarch of all he surveys. The cards he held were played very carefully, with all possible calculations. His was the winning hand.

Operation Sindoor has consolidated the BJP's hold on the electorate. The ruling party is likely to win the next few elections. Most of the people I know have appreciated Modi's leadership at this critical juncture. The Centre's contention that abrogating Article 370 and bifurcating Jammu & Kashmir would end the scourge of terrorism has been proven wrong. I was attending a lecture in the Indian Merchants Chamber in South Mumbai when this decision was announced in 2019. Journalists present there sought my views. I told them that had I been a police officer in J&K at that time, my work would have become easier for a while, but eradicating terrorism and dealing with disgruntled locals would remain a challenge till they were won over by the Central Government.

After decades in the police force, there is one truth that officers would of necessity learn: There is no substitute for the active cooperation of the people for policing to be effective. The Pahalgam attack could not have happened without inputs from a few recalcitrant elements among local residents. The J&K administration promptly destroyed houses of some suspects, probably taking a cue from the Yogi Adityanath-led government in Uttar Pradesh. That was uncalled for. Kashmir residents were already annoyed with terrorists for having targeted tourists, whose presence is essential for their livelihood. The government should have taken advantage of the people's anger to win them over to its side. That opportunity was lost once the authorities began razing houses with explosives, even of those suspected of collaborating with terrorists. It is surprising that there were no sane voices in the administration at the meeting that must have been called to plan the response.

Fortunately, much of the lost ground was retrieved when the Indian armed forces launched precision strikes on terrorist camps in Pakistan and PoK. The strikes on the Jaish-e-Mohammed headquarters in Bahawalpur were particularly welcome.

Jaish chief Masood Azhar was one of the three big terrorists released by our government in exchange for the passengers of Indian Airlines 814, which was hijacked in December 1999. After his release, he became Pakistani spy agency ISI's biggest asset and was responsible for the death of many more civilians than were freed during the exchange.

The strikes on his hideouts killed several members of his family, some of whom were actively involved in his mission of hate and mayhem.

Our government made it abundantly clear that we would hit only established terrorist sites and that too at night when civilians were not likely to be around. Yet, the Pakistani armed forces attempted to retaliate by targeting our military installations. In the course of two days of hostilities, both sides got to test the efficacy of their drones and missiles, sourced from different nations. The Turkish drones used by Pakistan were found to be relatively useless. Our BrahMos missiles, the product of an India-Russia joint venture, were lethal. They were used to target Pakistan's airbases. News channels in India and Pakistan have given contrasting accounts of the air battles. That is to be expected during hostilities. Reading between the lines, it is apparent that we, too, have suffered loss of aircraft, but not of men who fly them. The truth will emerge but slowly, very slowly. Whether the US brokered the ceasefire or not is irrelevant. The fact that there has been no incident of cross-border firing this week needs to be noted. Neither Pakistan nor an economically advanced India can afford a war. Our economy, which Modi is valiantly trying to raise to \$5-6 trillion by 2030, will suffer to some extent. It will take two-three years to put things back on track.

The Prime Minister gave a rousing speech to the nation on Monday, reiterating his resolve to not allow acts of terrorism to go unpunished.

China reroutes trade while Washington plays catch-up

For China, the idea is not to win the trade war by returning to old terms, but to make the war irrelevant by building new coalitions and supply chains that dilute US leverage.

ON the face of it, the May 2025 "total reset" in US-China trade relations might appear as a historic de-escalation of one of the most contentious economic confrontations in modern geopolitics. In reality, it may amount to little more than diplomatic show business, as US President Donald Trump often likes to point out. From Beijing's vantage point, this reset is unlikely to significantly rewire the global trade architecture or alter China's strategic calculus. If anything, it reinforces a critical trend observed in previous trade conflicts: trade usually finds new channels. The 90-day suspension of 24 per cent points worth of US tariffs, bringing the effective rate down from a peak of 245 per cent to 10 per cent, may read like détente. China's reciprocal moderation of its retaliatory tariffs, previously reaching 125 per cent, adds to the narrative of reconciliation. But under the surface, not much has changed. Neither side has abandoned its zero-sum lens. Both are manoeuvring within a relationship marked by interdependence and mutual suspicion. Such resets tend to adjust only tactics not objectives.

To interpret this reset as a fundamental change is to ignore the very structure of US-China trade relations, which have evolved beyond bilateral quirks into a systemic economic interlock. Pre-2025, bilateral trade volumes surpassed \$600 billion annually, with a US goods trade deficit of \$295 billion. Such figures are the outcome of decades of integrated supply chains and comparative advantage. A 90-day tariff rollback does not unwind them, nor does it address core ideological clashes around China's state capitalism, intellectual property enforcement or industrial subsidies. From Beijing's perspective, the real measure of the "reset" is its marginal utility in reducing near-term economic pain, not a gateway to restored trade normalcy, and even that is debatable. For a while, China has been battered by the cumulative effects of Trump's tariffs, but the country has proven adept at absorbing external shocks. It has turned to monetary tools, slashed interest rates and funnelled liquidity into its banking system, even as exports continued rising in April, driven largely by trade redirection. It is difficult to assess the reset without revisiting the Trump-era tariff policy that preceded it. The rationale was to force structural reforms in China's economic behaviour by inflicting economic pain through extreme tariffs. The cost,

however, has been largely borne by American households and producers. The Tax Foundation estimates a 1.3-per cent hit to long-run US GDP. Moreover, even as the US sought to punish China, its own exporters, especially in agriculture, suffered \$27 billion in retaliatory losses between 2018 and 2019 alone. In scaling up these tariffs in 2025, Trump did more than revive a failed strategy; he escalated a cycle that inflicted widespread collateral damage. While the Geneva talks may validate that this pressure forced Beijing to the table, they equally underscore the limitations of using blunt-force tariffs to negotiate complex systemic issues. China, for its part, never engaged in a purely retaliatory tit-for-tat. It leaned into diversionary strategies, using third-party states to maintain trade continuity, and deepened regional



integration through initiatives like the RCEP. Nowhere is this adaptation more evident than in Vietnam. During the 2018-2019 trade war, Vietnamese exports to the US surged from \$47.58 billion to \$136.6 billion by 2024. A closer inspection reveals a more intricate picture. Roughly 16 per cent of these exports were, in fact, rerouted Chinese goods, using Vietnam as an intermediary to circumvent tariffs. The irony is that China, while ostensibly under siege, leveraged its own regional supply networks to retain market access. This pattern has only deepened in the current trade climate. China understood that while direct trade could be throttled, the architecture of global commerce would inevitably recalibrate and, often, to its benefit. Also, this diversion does not represent a net loss for global trade. Rather, it reflects its re-routing. When Trump weaponised tariffs to contain China, he did not so much dam the river as force it into new tributaries.

US-China rollback is welcome, but trade chaos far from over

The world is not yet free of jitters since there is no final settlement, and the pause is only for 90 days. India would do well to clinch a deal with the US at the earliest

In an unexpected turnaround that has pulled the US from the brink of recession, the Trump administration and China have agreed to pause their mutually devastating tariffs. The US will now reduce import duty on Chinese goods from the absurdly high 145 percent to 30 percent, while China will scale down on US goods from 125 percent to 10 percent. The declaration of the world's two largest economies that they "are in agreement that neither side wants to decouple" has come as a shot in the arm to weakening economies round the world. Retail prices in the US had already begun to creep up as Chinese ships stopped berthing at American ports. Manufacturers scrambled and supply chains began to teeter. In China, factory output slowed as firms laid off workers after US orders began drying up. As investors cheered, equity markets rebounded. As trade between the two giant economies begins to flow again, there will be a multiplier effect on other economies,



too. However, those countries that did not retaliate with reciprocal tariffs have been left with a raw deal. For instance, Vietnam and Thailand, which had accepted tariffs at 46 and 36 percent, respectively, could now see manufacturers targeting the US markets, move to China where tariffs are down to 30 percent.

However, the world is not yet free of jitters since there is no final settlement, and the pause is only for 90 days. In all the Trump-induced chaos, it is China that has emerged as a far more reliable trading partner. For India, which currently faces a baseline 10 percent tariff on exports to the US, the scaling down of hostilities between US and China is, in a way, a setback. China getting priced out of the US market was a huge opportunity for Indian exporters; but for now, that edge has vanished. Trump's move to slash pharmaceutical prices in the US will also hit Indian exporters who supply about 40 percent of the US's generic drug needs. At a broader lever, this puts a question mark on the China+1 formula—the business strategy of multinationals shifting to alternative hubs in Mexico, Vietnam or India, to cushion against the volatile tariff regime China faces. The tumult in global trade is far from over, and India would do well to clinch a deal with the US at the earliest.

Why hooch tragedies keep recurring in Punjab

Punjab rakes in over Rs 10,000 crore annually through liquor excise. This fiscal dependency breeds a wilful blindness.

ONCE again, Punjab is mourning another devastating hooch tragedy, which claimed the lives of dozens of innocent individuals who fell victim to spurious liquor tainted with methanol. These victims, primarily from the society's most vulnerable sectors, unknowingly consumed the tainted liquor. These are not mere accidents; they epitomise a betrayal by a system that repeatedly turns a blind eye, sustained by a corrupt nexus of profit, patronage and administrative apathy. Hooch tragedies are far from a new phenomenon in Punjab. Since 2010, numerous incidents have rocked regions such as Tarn Taran, Amritsar, Gurdaspur, Sangrur and Mansa. During the catastrophic events of 2020 alone, over 120 lives were lost. These recurring tragedies consistently target the same demographic: the impoverished, the landless, the addicted - individuals the state is sworn to protect but continuously neglects.

At the core of this crisis lies a vast, well-coordinated empire of illicit liquor. This black market stretches from production to wholesale to street-level sale, frequently operating under the watchful gaze of the authorities. Punjab's liquor economy is predominantly controlled by a select few powerful syndicates, shielded — either tacitly or actively — by politicians and local officials. This unholy alliance facilitates the proliferation of lethal alcohol, particularly in rural and economically distressed regions. The tragedy is exacerbated by warped economic incentives. Punjab rakes in over Rs 10,000 crore annually through liquor excise, making it the state's second largest source of non-debt revenue. This fiscal dependency breeds a wilful blindness. When both legal and illegal profits flow upward through the same shadowy networks, the state becomes a silent accomplice in the slow poisoning of its people.

For many rural households, licensed liquor remains prohibitively expensive. A 750-ml bottle can cost Rs 300-Rs 400, far beyond the reach of daily wage workers. Illicit hooch, available at a mere fraction of that price, becomes the default choice. Yet, affordability is only a part of the issue at hand. Punjab grapples with a



widespread substance abuse crisis. What was once a component of cultural celebration has decayed into rampant alcoholism, especially among the youth. Over the years, illicit distillation has increased and drug-related crimes have surged by over 30 per cent. Entire communities, deprived of mental health care, meaningful employment and adequate infrastructure,

find themselves vulnerable to addiction. In this dire context, liquor — whether legal or illegal — transforms into both a refuge and a trap. Each tragedy follows a painfully predictable script: media outrage, arrests and hastily convened inquiry committees. Yet, year after year, no lessons are learnt and requisite structural reforms remain an elusive goal. While low-level

bootleggers are apprehended, the masterminds — often shielded by political connections — escape scrutiny. FIRs are subjected to delays or diluted. Compensation for victims' families tends to serve as a mechanism to silence dissent rather than deliver genuine justice. Public memory fades swiftly, but the system's memory is sharp — it knows how to protect itself, yet cannot correct its failures. One of the most formidable barriers to reform is the monopolisation of Punjab's liquor trade. Over the past decade, a handful of persons — many linked to both ruling and opposition parties — have cornered the rights to liquor manufacturing and distribution. These monopolies, solidified through opaque auctions and manipulated licensing processes, stifle competition and accountability. In many districts, the police serve less as enforcers of the law and more as protectors of the liquor empire. Excise inspectors, often silenced by fear or complicity, remain ineffectual. Even honest officials find themselves powerless within a system fortified by money, muscle and political influence. Reform must be both urgent and radical, ensuring lasting impact. Punjab requires a comprehensive overhaul of its excise policy, placing public health and safety at the forefront. Affordable, regulated alternatives to illicit hooch must be made available in rural markets. The state must also diminish its over-reliance on liquor revenues, seeking ethical and sustainable sources of income.

An independent, judiciary-monitored task force should be established to investigate the intricate nexus of political, administrative and business interests that perpetuate this deadly trade. Licensing procedures must be rendered fully transparent, subjected to public audits and insulated from political manipulation. Until these crucial structural changes are implemented, hooch tragedies will persist as distressing reminders of a deeper moral decay. Punjab deserves far better than this relentless cycle of death, denial and delay. It is time to dismantle the nexus and reclaim the fundamental rights to life, dignity and justice for all citizens.



# Simple ways to Freshen up your home

Here are some more easy ways to bring the best of the season into your home. Take out any dark accessories like velvet pillows, wool throws, and even that dark leather club chair and ottoman. Don't worry! You can bring them back in when the weather changes. Nothing brings freshness like a casual decor. Use wicker, rush, iron, or painted white garden furniture in place of heavy upholstered pieces. Add colourful pillows. Sheer, pretty curtains keep a room feeling cool and open while offering some privacy. White is always a good choice, but don't shy away from some of the new citrusy pastels. Subtle colour and texture make a big difference to mind and body. Colour choices such as white, almond, soft shades of orchid, dusky blue and corn silk yellow can turn your bedroom into an oasis of calm.

Don't forget to bring the outdoors in. Toss out leggy, brown plants that you're trying to nurse. Bring in fresh, flowering new ones. Flowers bring freshness into any room. Choose your favourite glass vase or colourful ceramic jug and keep it full of fresh cut stems from your garden, the neighbours, or the flower market. Add fresh flowers and plants to your guest room or bedroom. Enjoy colourful, cheery, summery new flowered bed linens. Layer sheer, frothy fabrics on tables, as a second layer on a bed skirts, and even make a sheer pillow cover for a dark pillow. Add a touch of whimsy with

embroidered sheer fabric. When you enter a home, the first scent you smell makes a significant impact on you. You may quickly formulate impressions or opinions about the home, even if you are not conscious of this occurring. Make sure you fill your own home with inviting and pleasant scents, both for your own enjoyment and the enjoyment of guests. Make a



**The first rule of contemporary decorating is - lighten up! It's not necessary to change every room or throw out all the old furniture, but there are lots of ways to lighten up and freshen up your home for a wonderful seasonal change.**

homemade liquid potpourri to simmer on your stove top. Revive your home and perk up your senses with homemade liquid potpourri. A few items from your cupboard or refrigerator are all you need to create an aroma that is pleasing. Use potpourri in the bathroom or bedroom to create a mood. Potpourri mixes can be purchased from stores, but you can experiment with different combinations of fruits and spices until you find the perfect fragrance for your home.

Don't ignore your kitchens. Invest in a kitchen chimney, which will keep the heat and smoke of cooking out of the home. Kitchens with steel partitions instead of wooden ones ensure proper ventilation and retard heat and dampness. While you may not be able to decorate every room in the house, there are numerous ways to add flair to your living space. Lighten up your colours, accessories, and decorate your home with less. Pare down, and let the air circulate. Now sit back and sip a cool pinacolada.

## Choose the perfect colour combo for Your house



Using the perfect combination for the colour story of the walls, floor and ceiling can complete a room. Here's how colour changes perception...

- For a wider look in your room, use a dark floor with pale walls and ceiling.
- When you have a dark floor and ceiling, it widens the room and also cuts short the height of the room.
- If you want to emphasise the horizontal lines, then have dark walls, but keep the floor and ceiling light.
- When your floor, ceiling and back wall are light, while the other three walls are relatively darker, the room will look narrower, deeper and higher.
- In order to decrease the depth of space in a room, you need to have a dark back wall with pale side walls and a pale floor.
- For a basement-like effect, keep the colour of the ceiling light. The floor and all four walls of your room could be dark.
- If you have a pale and light floor and a similar back wall, but dark side walls and ceiling, then you could end up creating a tunnel effect in a room.
- Psst...
- If you opt for an all-dark look, the space may lose its personality and shape. An all-light floor and walls may look spacious, but would give off an impersonal aura.



## Give your bedroom a romantic touch

Bedroom decor should have a romantic essence to it, don't you think?

Considering that we spend a major part of our lives in our bedrooms, we should make it one of the most comfortable zones in our homes. It should be a room that spells romance and makes you feel good as soon as you step inside — a space that stimulates your senses. So, what do you need to make your boudoir a cosy love nest? Read on to find out some tips...

**Make it look great**  
The way your bedroom is lit, can make or break the look you want to create. Interior designer Ketki Passi says, "The right kind of lighting can help create a romantic ambience."

Candles can work wonders — they are what romance is all about. The mysterious light and shadow effect of a candle can give a very special aura to your bedroom. Bright, harsh bulbs are a big no-no. For the ideal romantic look dim, soft lights are key. Use heavy curtains to escape the glare of harsh street-

lights. Of course, table and floor lamps are indispensable.

**Make it comfortable**  
A bed that looks comfortable is a basic essential here. Four-poster beds look romantic. Use light fabric drapes in pastel shades around the bed to get a soft look. When it comes to bedspreads and covers, avoid rough and uncomfortable fabrics — soft, smooth and comfortable ones like satin, silk and very good quality airy cotton are essential. Using sexy colours makes your room look, well, sexy. Choose bright bold colours like red, orange or rust.

Place plush pillows on the bed of different sizes to make it look comfortable and inviting. Two large pillows, four medium rectangular pillows and around four to five smaller square cushions. A fluffy and soft comforter can add to the romantic look.

**Prioritise privacy**

Curtains spell romance — pretty, flimsy, sheer curtains that sway with the breeze, light ones in lovely pastel shades that leave you feeling calm and relaxed. Of course, you should also have those heavy drapes to guard your privacy. Indulge the senses Romance is about titillating the senses and the sense of smell is important. Spraying room freshener is passe. **Opt for fragrances** of incense sticks, scented sachet, aromatic candles in lavender, vanilla, and camomile etc. Go and have fun doing up your bedroom!



# How to choose the best Furniture

**Look for furniture that is ample in size. To see if the seating space in a chair is roomy, park yourself in it.**

Try to lift the chair you like and see how it feels. A good quality chair, table, sofa, or chaise will have more raw materials including springs, frame, and cushion; such pieces are usually heavier than average quality models.

**Observe the finish**

The piece should have a rich and deep finish or paint that hasn't been applied to cover flaws. A translucent finish would ideally be even and the wood's grain would show through. An opaque finish will again have even consistency sans any bubbles or remnants of brush strokes. As for items made from wicker and rattan, they won't have any splinters or loose ends, while the weaves will be uniform.

**Mind the cushions**

The perfect cushion is neat, has well-defined corners if angular or curves if rounded, comes with buttons and detailing that are rock solid, and inconspicuous seams. Other key elements of quality cushions are plump contours; a squashed cushion is a sign of inadequate stuffing. A cushion that leaks feathers has not been properly sewn and lined.

**Turn the piece over**

Lift the furniture or look beneath the

surface to gauge its construction. Watch out for inaccuracies like badly sewn padding and loose screws, uneven support, and unprotected springs. You can't expect perfection since you will be looking at a raw sample at the department store but this trick will give you an idea about how carefully the item was made.

**Examine the details**

The hallmarks of good quality furniture are

impeccable sanding and finishing, discreet welding, straight welting and details that hide hardware. The nuts, screws and bolts must be painted in a colour that matches the furniture.

**Plan by location**

It's not enough to find good quality furniture. Think about where you will place the piece and what it will be surrounded by. If your chair is going to sit in front of a window, its fabric might fade over time due to exposure to the sun. So, buy one that has a simple print and few colours. If the table is for the study where your boisterous kids also solve puzzles, look for one with a tough finish.





# Justice Bela Trivedi spends last day at Supreme Court. Her notable judgments

**Although Justice Bela Trivedi's official retirement is scheduled for June, she wrapped up her duties ahead of time.**

**New Delhi.** Justice Bela Trivedi spent her last working day at the Supreme Court of India on Friday, bringing an end to an illustrious tenure at the top court. Although her official retirement is scheduled for June, she wrapped up her duties ahead of time. Justice Trivedi was one of the three women who took an oath as judges of the Supreme Court and was among the nine new appointees. Justice Trivedi is also the first woman judge from the Gujarat High Court to be appointed as a Supreme Court judge.

## NOTABLE JUDGMENTS AS SUPREME COURT JUDGE

In a landmark 2024 judgment, a 6:1 majority ruled that states can create subclassifications within Scheduled Castes (SCs) to allocate reservations for more disadvantaged groups. Justice Trivedi was the sole dissenter, asserting that such subclassification by states was unconstitutional. In a judgment pronounced a day before her last working day, a Justice Trivedi-led bench flagged the inadequacy of the number of exclusive courts for Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO)



cases. The court stated that it was therefore expected that the Union of India and the state governments would take appropriate steps to ensure POCSO courts were created and cases were decided on time.

Justice Trivedi was also part of the bench that upheld the constitutional validity of the "power to arrest" provisions under the Customs and GST Acts while also laying down the pre-conditions and when and how the power of arrest is to be exercised. A bench led by Justice Trivedi had dismissed an appeal filed by sitting Trinamool Congress MP, Abhishek Banerjee,

challenging the summonses issued to him by the Enforcement Directorate under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA), 2002. Her bench also dismissed appeals filed by AAP leader Satyendar Jain against denial of bail in the money laundering case and directed Jain, who was on interim bail, to surrender before the Special Court.

A bench which also had Justice Trivedi on the dais heard an appeal against a high court order refusing to quash an FIR registered against Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister Nara Chandrababu Naidu. The bench gave a split verdict on the aspect of interpretation of Section 17-A of the Prevention of Corruption Act, 1988.

Justice Trivedi was part of the 5-judge Constitution bench which upheld the constitutional validity of the Constitution (One Hundred and Third Amendment) Act, 2019, which provides for 10 per cent reservation to economically weaker sections to posts under the state and in admissions to educational institutions.

## "India Has Launched Missiles": Pak PM Shehbaz Sharif Recounts 2:30 AM Asim Munir Call

**New Delhi.** Pakistan's Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif in a rare public admission confirmed Indian ballistic missiles struck the Nur Khan Airbase and other targets inside Pakistan during the early hours of May 10. Speaking at a ceremony in Islamabad, Mr Sharif recounted a 2:30 AM call from the Chief of Army Staff, General Syed Asim Munir, informing him of the missile attacks launched by India.

"In the intervening night of May 9-10, around 2:30 AM, General Asif Munir called me through a secure phone and told me India has launched its ballistic missiles. One has landed at the Nur Khan airbase and some at other areas," Prime Minister Sharif said in a public address.

The Nur Khan Airbase, located between Rawalpindi and Islamabad, is a strategic military facility long central to Pakistan's air operations. Previously known as Chaklala Airbase, it was also targeted by Indian forces during the 1971 Indo-Pakistan war.

"Pakistan PM Shehbaz Sharif himself admits that General Asim Munir called him at 2:30am to inform him that India had bombed Nur Khan Air Base and several other locations. Let that sink in - the Prime Minister was woken up in the middle of the night with news of strikes deep inside Pakistan. This speaks volumes about the scale, precision, and boldness of #OperationSindoor," BJP spokesperson Amit Malviya wrote on X, sharing a video of the Pakistani Prime Minister's address. The Indian strikes came under Operation Sindoor, a retaliatory military action launched on May 7 in response to the April 22 Pahalgam terror attack, which claimed 26 Indian lives. According to government sources, around 100 terrorists affiliated with terror groups such as Jaish-e-Mohammed, Lashkar-e-Taiba, and Hizbul Mujahideen were eliminated during this operation.

The campaign involved the Indian Air Force (IAF), Indian Army, and Navy working in tandem to strike at terror infrastructure and strategic military installations across Pakistan and Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (PoK).

## Delhi parking crisis: Daily drama of honks, hustle and no space

**NEW DELHI.** The national capital's growing parking crisis has turned the city's streets into daily battlegrounds, where drivers engage in a relentless struggle for scarce parking spaces.

From residential areas to bustling markets, the lack of space has led to honking, tempers flaring, and fuel being wasted as vehicles circle the blocks in search of vacant spots. While Resident Welfare Associations (RWAs) call for stricter control over vehicle sales, claiming that the rapidly increasing number of cars is outpacing the city's ability to accommodate them, market associations are pushing for the creation of multi-level parking facilities to ease the traffic congestion.

## Sarajini Nagar Market: A Case of Missed Opportunities

At Sarajini Nagar Market, a shopping hub that attracts between 40,000 and 50,000 visitors daily, the parking situation has become untenable. The footfall doubles on weekends, creating a chaotic environment for both shopkeepers and customers alike. Despite the completion of a multi-level parking facility with the capacity to house 650 vehicles, it remains unopened, months after the work was finished.

Ashok Randhawa, head of the Sarajini Mini Market Traders Association, voiced his frustration over the delay. "Although the National Buildings Construction Corporation (NBCC) completed the parking project four months ago, it remains non-operational. Despite repeated inspections by senior NDMC officials, the reason for its non-opening remains unclear," Randhawa said.

He added that while there are three parking lots in the market, and another multi-level facility nearby, people tend to avoid the latter due to the delays caused by lifts and the extra time required to park. Once functional, Randhawa believes that the new parking facility near Metro Gate No. 1 will provide much-needed relief.

## 4K sanitation workers in Delhi to get PPE kits with 42 safety items

**NEW DELHI.** As the monsoon approaches, the Delhi government has announced the distribution of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) kits to nearly 4,000 manual scavengers across the city, a first-of-its-kind initiative aimed at improving safety conditions for sanitation workers. The move comes under the Centre's 'Namaste' (National Action for Mechanised Sanitation Ecosystem) scheme, launched in 2023-24 to promote secure, mechanised and dignified sanitation practices. Each PPE kit will contain 42 safety items, including gas masks, helmets with lights, gloves, gumboots, protective suits, and barrier creams designed to guard against hazardous gases and skin infections. The kits are expected to be distributed before the onset of heavy rains, when manual sewer and septic tank cleaning becomes most dangerous. Delhi's Social Welfare Minister Ravinder Indraj Singh said that directives had been issued to ensure all sanitation workers are also enrolled under the Ayushman Bharat health insurance scheme. Departments have been instructed to speed up training and rehabilitation programmes and establish Emergency Response Sanitation Units. District magistrates have been told to settle all pending compensation cases related to sewer deaths in a time-bound manner. "The safety of every sanitation worker is our priority. They must have access to PPE kits and health insurance before the monsoon," Singh said.

## Gurugram Techie Admits To Cops Why He Was Living In Hiding In Ayodhya

**New Delhi.** A 42-year-old manager at a Gurgaon-based IT multinational company, who went missing under mysterious circumstances last week, has been found alive in Ayodhya in Uttar Pradesh, police said on Friday. The man had allegedly staged his disappearance to escape mounting financial liabilities, they said. His car was found abandoned and unlocked near a drain in southwest Delhi's Kakrola area, triggering fears that he may have jumped into the water body, officials said.

A PCR call had informed the police about the vehicle, following which a search and rescue operation was launched, involving the fire department and other emergency teams. Investigation revealed that the man had formatted his mobile phone a day before going missing, which raised suspicion. Eventually, his location was traced to a dhamshala in Ayodhya, where he was found living in hiding, the officer said.

During questioning, he told police that he was under heavy debt and faked his disappearance to escape the financial burden, the officer added.

## Azadpur Mandi halts fruit and vegetable trade with Turkey

**NEW DELHI.** Asia's largest fruit and vegetable market, Azadpur Mandi, has decided to halt trade of fruits, especially apples, and vegetables from Turkey. The move comes in the wake of Turkey backing Pakistan and condemning India's precision-strikes on terror camps in the neighbouring country and Pakistan-occupied Kashmir. Pakistan used Turkish drones during the military conflict with India.

Meeta Ram Kriplani, president of the Chamber of Association of Fruits and Vegetable traders at Azadpur, on Thursday said that no new orders of fruits and vegetables would be placed to Turkey. "We (traders) at the

Azadpur Mandi have decided to halt the trade of apples from Turkey. We have supported Turkey a lot in the past. As much as 1,16,000 tonnes of apples were imported in 2024, but it did not support India in the recent conflict against Pakistan," he said.

The Azadpur Mandi has always given priority to Turkey, but the stand adopted by the country towards India has caused immense disappointment, he said. "Turkey's behaviour has hurt us a lot. That's why we have decided that we will not import apples or any other fruits or vegetables from Turkey," he added.

Talking to reporters during her visit to the Azadpur Mandi, CM Rekha Gupta thanked the traders for boycotting Turkish apples. "If any nation is against India, the people of the country will boycott them. I thank the traders for boycotting the import," she said.



# 1st major bureaucratic reshuffle in Delhi since Rekha Gupta formed government

**New Delhi.** In a major bureaucratic reshuffle in Delhi, the first since the Rekha Gupta government was formed in February, several top bureaucrats of the Arunachal Pradesh-Goa-Mizoram and Union Territory (AGMUT) cadre were transferred to other states by the home ministry on Friday.

Among those transferred was the additional chief secretary of the Finance and Revenue departments of the Delhi government, Ashish Chandra Verma, who was transferred to Jammu and Kashmir. A 1995-batch IAS officer, Anil Kumar Singh, Additional Chief Secretary, Environment and Forest, was also shifted to Jammu and Kashmir, while a 1999-batch IAS officer, Sudhir Kumar, Vigilance Department's Principal Secretary, was transferred to Mizoram.

Also, Special Secretary of Home, KM Uppu of the 2009 batch, and Special Secretary of Transport, Sachin Shinde



of the 2008 batch, were transferred to Puducherry and Andaman and Nicobar, respectively. Apart from this, 2005-batch officer Vijay Kumar Bhiduri, serving as divisional commissioner in J&K, has been called to Delhi. Likewise, 2000-batch officer Dilraj Kaur has also been asked to return to Delhi, where she earlier held various offices, after her transfer from Andaman and Nicobar.

Additionally, Chanchal Yadav (2008 batch), Vinod Kavle (2008 batch) and

Navin SL (2012 batch) were also among the AGMUT cadre officers transferred from Delhi. In all, 42 senior AGMUT and DANICS cadre officers were transferred by the Delhi government in an interdepartmental rejig.

Meanwhile, Navin Kumar Chaudhary of the 1994 batch, who was the Additional Chief Secretary of Irrigation and Flood Control and General Administration departments, has now been appointed as the new ACS of the Public Works Department.

Additional chief secretary (ACS) Industries, Bipul Pathak of the 1992 batch, has been given the additional charge of ACS Environment and Forest. Nikhil Kumar of the 2002 batch will be the new health secretary and also hold the additional charge of IT secretary. Neeraj Semwal of the 2003 batch, awaiting posting, will hold the charge of secretary revenue-cum-divisional commissioner.

## In Major Bureaucratic Reshuffle, 42 Delhi Government Officers Transferred

**New Delhi.** Several top bureaucrats of the Delhi government, including two additional chief secretaries and a principal secretary, were shifted to other states and Union Territories in a major reshuffle of the AGMUT cadre by the home ministry on Friday. Ashish Chandra Verma, a 1994 batch IAS officer of the Arunachal Pradesh-Goa-Mizoram and Union Territory (AGMUT) cadre serving as additional chief secretary of the Finance and Revenue departments of the Delhi government, was transferred to Jammu and Kashmir.

Additional chief secretary, Environment and Forest, Anil Kumar Singh was also transferred to Jammu and Kashmir, while Principal Secretary of the Vigilance Department, Sudhir Kumar, was transferred to Mizoram. Singh is a 1995 batch officer and Kumar a 1999



batch officer.

Special secretary of Home, KM Uppu of 2009 batch, and special secretary of Transport Sachin Shinde, a 2008 batch officer, were transferred to Puducherry and Andaman and Nicobar, respectively.

Meanwhile, Vijay Kumar Bhiduri, a 2005 batch officer, who served as divisional commissioner in Kashmir, was transferred to Delhi, while Dilraj Kaur, a 2000 batch officer, will return to the national capital, where she

earlier served in various capacities, after her transfer from Andaman and Nicobar. Other AGMUT cadre IAS officers transferred from Delhi included Chanchal Yadav, Vinod Kavle -- both 2008 batch officers -- and Navin S.L., a 2012 batch officer.

The Delhi government, in line with the reshuffle, carried out interdepartmental transfers and postings of 42 senior AGMUT and DANICS cadre officers.

Bipul Pathak, a 1992 batch officer, holding the charge of additional chief secretary (ACS) Industries was given the additional charge of ACS Environment and Forest. Prashant Goyal, a 1993 batch officer, who was the ACS-cum-commissioner of Transport will now be the additional chief secretary of Urban Development, said an order issued by Services Department.

# Anti-terror agency raids 15 locations of Babbar Khalsa terrorist group in Punjab

**On the NIA radar were the premises of suspects linked with US-based BKI operative and gangster Harpreet Singh alias Happy Passian and his associates.**

**New Delhi.** Intensifying its crackdown against the banned Khalistani terror group, Babbar Khalsa International (BKI), the National Investigation Agency on Friday raided 15 locations linked to gangster Happy Passian, who is connected with Pakistan-based

Khalistani terrorist Harwinder Singh alias Rinda, in connection with the grenade attack on a police station in Gurdaspur district in December last year. The anti-terror agency seized incriminating materials, including mobile and digital devices, and documents in searches conducted in Punjab's Gurdaspur, Batala, Amritsar and Kapurthala districts, officials said.

On the NIA radar were the premises of suspects linked with US-based BKI operative and gangster Harpreet Singh alias Happy Passian, and his nodes Shamsher Singh Shera alias Honey, along with others based in various countries.

A key aide of Pakistan-based BKI terrorist Rinda, Happy Passian, has been found to be responsible for orchestrating

numerous recent grenade attacks on various police stations and police posts in Punjab and Haryana. The NIA investigation into the case relating to the



hand grenade attack on a police station in Gurdaspur revealed that the arrested accused involved in the attack were acting on the directions of Happy, along with Shamsher and their other

accomplices.

As per the NIA, BKI's operatives, based in various countries, were engaged in a criminal conspiracy to recruit and train

India-based associates, provide funds, weapons and explosives to the field operatives of the terror outfit.

These activities were carried out through their associates and acquaintances, also based abroad, including those in Pakistan. The conspiracy by the foreign-based designated terrorists and handlers was aimed at carrying out terror acts on Indian soil.

NIA is continuing its investigation into the case registered against BKI operatives at the direction of the Ministry of Home Affairs under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, 1967 (UAPA).





A work desk not only sets up the mood of a working environment but is also a reflection of one's personality. Considering the space crunch with piles of paper and stationery on the desk, decking up your workstation with minimal accessories is the way to go. And what's better than jazzing up your desk with table-top plants, making the place look lively.

To know more about the plants which would be ideal for an office environment, we spoke to Sanya Ahuja, Founder & CEO of Greenish- a plant gifting company. "Table-top plants require minimal maintenance and do not occupy a

# 5 ideal Table top Plants

to make your work desk lively



lot of space—they are less than half-a-foot tall, thus making them suitable for the office desk. An ideal plant is chosen on the basis of whether it acts as an air purifier i.e., absorbs toxins from the environment, beautifies or is easy on maintenance. They are mostly priced between INR 450-600," said Ahuja.

Read to know more about the five ideal table top plants, according to Ahuja, and pick the one which would make your desk look lively at work:

**1. Golden Pothos**

Golden Pothos belongs to the money plant family and is very easy to maintain too. This is an air purifying plant which means it absorbs toxins from the air apart from producing oxygen. They are

tolerant of low light conditions and erratic watering—they need to be watered only when its soil starts to dry. It needs to be kept in the sunlight only once a week. The beauty of this plant lies in the texture of its leaves.

**2. Syngonium**

There are six to seven shades of Syngonium of which pink and green have a greater demand. These air-purifying plants are preferably grown using organic manure instead of soil. Organic manure is light in weight, has more nutrients than plain soil and it also tends to retain moisture for a longer time. Thus, this plant needs to be watered and kept in the sunlight only once a week, making them an ideal choice for the busy bees.

**3. Philodendron**

The beauty of this plant lies in the 'cut' of its leaf—the fast growing Philodendron hybrid has red leaves and extremely attractive foliage. It requires bright but indirect exposure to sunlight once a week to get the best foliage colour and should be watered only when the soil dries up. The brown leaves could be cut or trimmed as per the need.

**4. Sansevieria**

Interestingly known as mother-in-law's tongue, these are air purifying plants and are available in different types like straight, golden and green. These plants have hard-textured leaves and hence are perfect for beginners. Sansevieria needs to be watered once in few days and are also ideal to be kept in bedrooms as they are known to produce oxygen even at night.

**5. Chlorophytum**

This again is an air-purifying plant. They have dark green leaves with white margins and are extremely tolerant to harsh conditions— thus making them an ideal choice for beginners or forgetful owners.



## Helpful ways to make your home eco-friendly!

With the rising temperatures, global warming is making its presence felt, making it the right time to develop an eco conscience.

Did you know that small modifications at home can make your living space eco-friendly? TOI helps you go green with these simple tips...

**Switch to CFL lights**

They may not be as soothing as incandescent lights, but CFL bulbs save a lot of energy. For those who complain about them being too bright, there are several options available in the market these days so that you get the effect you desire. What's more, CFL bulbs are light on your pocket.

**Plant a herb garden**

Many of us like having potted plants at home, but instead of growing decorative flowers, plant a herb garden. They don't require a lot of effort since they are easy to grow. Plus, it's great to know that your herbs are pesticide-free and that what you are eating is healthy.



**Make a compost bin**

Composting is a great way to turn household trash into nutrient-rich supplement for plants. Take a bin (such as an old bucket) and make a couple of holes on the side and bottom. Layer this with broken bricks and sprinkle some water. Now place bagasse (the residue of sugarcane once the juice is squeezed out) and place it on the bricks. Sprinkle more water. Add a fistful of compost and the pit is ready.

**Stop using plastic bags**

The reason you have to pay for plastic bags at stores is to discourage its use. Keep a reusable bag in your handbag or car so that it comes in handy whenever you go shopping -be it at the grocery store or the mall.

**Use cloth instead of paper to clean**

Find yourself always reaching out for kitchen towels or tissues to clean up a mess? Break the habit and use cloth instead. And you don't have to go out and buy fancy towels either; simply recycle and make rags out of old T shirts or towels.

**Use low flow shower heads**

Replace your existing shower heads with low flow ones as this can save around a 100 litres of water a day (depending on use). Also ensure that your water heater is insulated well to save energy, or replace it with a solar heater.

**Switch off all lights at home**

Most Indian families leave at least one light on at night as people believe that a house must not be draped in darkness. But this is a criminal waste of electricity and is really not required.

**Plug leaks**

Have a leaky faucet? Get it fixed! You may think that the single drop of water that drips every few seconds isn't some thing that you must bother about, but that single drop accumulates into several litres a day. Pay a plumber a nominal fee to fix a leak and to save water and see a marked difference in your water bill.

**Live an unplugged life**

Electric appliances like TVs, computers and iPod docks continue to consume large amounts of energy even when they are in standby mode. So ensure that you switch them off completely and even take the socket out of the plug point.



# Vodafone Idea's future hangs on AGR relief: Stock surges on Supreme Court hearing

New Delhi. Vodafone Idea shares are back in focus after the debt-ridden telecom operator informed the Telecom Department that if the government doesn't come ahead with a timely support on Adjusted Gross Revenue (AGR), the company will not be able to operate beyond FY26 as the bank funding discussions will not move forward. Vodafone Idea has written a letter to the Telecom Department on April 17, 2025, requesting to intervene and make a strong case for a lifeline, saying if the support doesn't come it will lead to a point of no return.

"Without GoI's (Government of India) timely support on AGR, VIL will not be able to operate beyond FY26 as the bank funding discussions will not move forward," VIL CEO Akshaya Moondra wrote in a letter to the DoT secretary.

Vodafone Idea shares gained 1.66 percent to settle at Rs 7.35 on May 17, 2025. In a sign of relief, the Supreme Court has agreed to hear a fresh petition filed by Vodafone Idea seeking waiver of around Rs 30,000 crore AGR dues. Senior lawyer Mukul Rohatgi, appearing for the telecom operator, led the arguments before a bench comprising Chief Justice B R Gavai and Justice Augustine George Masih, that the plea needed an urgent hearing. The top court bench is expected to hear the plea on May 19. In its letter to the DoT department, Vodafone Idea stated that without debt disbursement from banks, the investments it planned will not take place. "Resultantly, operational performance improvement will be stalled."

More importantly, the funds raised by the company will be utilised soon and the entire capex cycle will come to a halt. In such a case, the entire fundraising done over the last 12 months and investment done so far by the company, as also the equity stake of the government including the recent conversion, will lose value," VIL said.

## PPF calculator: Rs 1 crore corpus is easier than you thought; see how

Kolkata. When PPF (Public Provident Fund) was launched in 1968, the objective was to channelise small contributions from households into long-term investments. Even those who did not have any employment, could hope to build a neat corpus with this instrument. Investment experts have advised for long that anyone looking for a safe investment option to earn guaranteed returns with the advantage of tax saving should opt for PPF. The initial lock-in period of PPF account is 15 years. One of the features of PPF is that one can open it for a minor too. If the minor continues it after he/she grows up, it can keep multiplying the investments for a really long period of time. But even if one opens a PPF account after he/she begins earning, one can reach Rs 1 crore with ease. The only requirement: disciplined investment down the years.

### How do you get Rs 1 crore in PPF

It is difficult to believe that one can accumulate more than Rs 1 crore in PPF — an instrument that lacks the high returns sometimes one can make in equities or mutual funds. However, if you throw in a liberal dose of discipline in PPF, it can produce very definite results. And since the instrument carries guaranteed returns and a sovereign guarantee, you can do it with certainty. Let's see how. Will you believe that if one can invest a modest Rs 4,000 a month in a PPF account, one can accumulate Rs 1,05,31,091 in 40 years. If you can raise the investment a bit to Rs 5,000 and continue it for 37 years, the amount in the PPF account will be Rs 1,05,47,231.

Consider another scenario. The parents of a child opens a PPF minor account in the very first year of a child. Assume the parents invest Rs 2,000 only in it every month. Let's also assume that the child continues the investment after he/she grows into an adult and starts earning. Would you believe that with this meagre investment, the PPF account will accumulate more than Rs 1 crore — Rs 1,08,12,158 actually — after 50 years, or when the child turns 50. The long period of compounding does the trick. In fact, even Rs 1,900 a month in a PPF account can generate more than Rs 1 crore in 50 years.

## DA Hike Alert: This State Increases Dearness Allowance To 55% Under 7th Pay Commission

New Delhi. The Bihar government has announced a 2 percentage points hike in dearness allowance (DA) for its employees and pensioners. The decision was taken on May 16, 2025, at a meeting of the state cabinet, chaired by Chief Minister Nitish Kumar.

With this hike, employees and pensioners in the pay scale of the 7th Pay Commission will get DA and Dearness Relief (DR) of 55 per cent. Additional Chief Secretary (Cabinet Secretariat) S Siddharth said.

"A hike of 6 percentage points has been approved for those in the pay scale of the 6th Pay Commission. This will raise their DA and DR to 252 per cent. For those in the pay scale of the 5th Pay Commission, the DA and DR have been raised by 11 percentage points to 466 per cent," he said. The hike will benefit more than 5 lakh employees and over 6 lakh pensioners, officials said. It will be effective from January 1, 2025, they said.

"A hike of 6 percentage points has been approved for those in the pay scale of the 6th Pay Commission. This will raise their DA and DR to 252 per cent. For those in the pay scale of the 5th Pay Commission, the DA and DR have been raised by 11 percentage points to 466 per cent," he said.

The hike will benefit more than 5 lakh employees and over 6 lakh pensioners, officials said. It will be effective from January 1, 2025, they said.

# Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana Registration Deadline Extended; Check Eligibility, Documents, And How To Apply Online

## The Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (PMAY) is divided into two main parts: PMAY-U (Urban) and PMAY-G (Gramin/Rural), addressing housing needs in cities and villages respectively.

New Delhi. Good news for those who dream of owning a house under the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (PMAY). The deadline for PMAY registration has now been extended till December 2025 for both Urban and Gramin beneficiaries. This flagship housing scheme by the Indian government offers financial assistance to economically weaker

sections for building their own homes.

The Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana scheme benefits Scheduled Castes (SCs), Scheduled Tribes (STs), and families below the poverty line by providing subsidised housing in both rural and urban areas. According to official data from the PMAY website, more than 92.61 lakh houses have been completed under this scheme, transforming the lives of many who previously did not have a pucca home.

**Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana Urban: Eligibility**

Households with an annual income of up to Rs 3 lakh, and those earning between Rs 3 lakh and Rs 6 lakh, are eligible for the scheme if they do not own a pucca house anywhere in India. Families with annual incomes between ₹6 lakh and ₹9 lakh without a pucca house are also covered. Adding further, those currently living in slums or informal urban settlements qualify for benefits under the scheme, making it inclusive for various



economically weaker and low-income groups.

**Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana Gramin: Eligibility**

Families listed in the SECC data who either don't own a house or live in kucha houses are eligible for the scheme. However, certain categories are not eligible. These include individuals who own a pucca house, possess a motorcycle, car, tractor, or agricultural equipment, or have a Kisan Credit Card (KCC) with a limit of Rs 50,000 or more. Adding further, income tax or professional taxpayers, government employees, and those owning a refrigerator, landline

phone, or large landholdings are also excluded from the scheme.

**Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana Rural: Documents Required**

To apply for the scheme, the following documents are required: Aadhaar cards of self and all family members, Aadhaar-linked bank account details, valid income proof, and land ownership documents. These documents help verify eligibility and ensure that the benefits reach the rightful beneficiaries under the housing scheme.

**Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana Gramin: Documents Required**

Applicants need to provide several documents to avail benefits under the scheme. These include an Aadhaar card, MGNREGA job card, bank account details, and Swachh Bharat Mission (SBM) number. Additionally, an affidavit confirming that the applicant does not own a pucca house is also required. These documents are essential for verifying eligibility and ensuring that the support reaches genuinely deserving families.

## ITR filing 2025: Is digital Form 16 a game-changer for salaried taxpayers

CHENNAI. Gold prices on the Multi Commodity Exchange (MCX) have experienced a significant fall. The June 2025 gold futures closed at 92,480 per 10 grams on Friday, marking a 7.4% drop from the all-time high of 99,358 reached earlier this year. This represents a 7,347 decrease from the peak. Technical analysts suggest that if prices remain below 94,000, the next support level could be around 89,500. A sustained break below this level might lead to further declines toward 85,000.



COMEX Gold: Traded at approximately \$3,216.30 per ounce on May 16. The decline is attributed to easing US-China trade tensions, a stronger US dollar, and the absence of immediate dovish signals from the US Federal Reserve. These factors have diminished gold's appeal as a safe-haven investment.

**Global Market (COMEX & Spot Gold)**

Spot Gold: Closed at \$3,210.19 per ounce on May 16, down 0.9% for the day and over 3% for the week, marking its worst weekly performance since November 2024.

US-China Trade Truce: The agreement to temporarily reduce tariffs has spurred investor risk appetite, leading to a shift away from gold.

Stronger US Dollar: The US dollar index is on track for its fourth consecutive weekly gain, making gold more expensive for holders of other currencies and dampening demand.

**Federal Reserve's Stance:** The Fed's current policy, with no immediate interest rate cuts, has reduced the urgency for investors to seek gold as an alternative investment.

**Outlook**

Analysts suggest that the easing of global risk concerns and a firm dollar may continue to pressure gold prices in the short term. Technical indicators point to potential further declines if key support levels are breached.

## Apple blocks Fortnite globally on App Store as Epic Games feud escalates

PARIS. Hit game "Fortnite" was unavailable on Apple's digital App Store around the world on Friday, in the latest episode of a battle between the tech titan and publisher Epic Games. While Fortnite with its millions of daily players was already unavailable to iPhone users in the United States, the block on downloads of the cartoonish multiplayer shooter now affects the entire globe. "Apple has blocked our Fortnite submission... sadly, Fortnite on iOS will be offline worldwide until Apple unblocks it," Epic posted on X.



Apple did not immediately respond to AFP's request for comment. Epic has for years battled tech giants over the commissions they charge for software downloaded through the official stores on operating systems like Apple's iOS and Google's Android. These are historically the only way for most users to install programs onto their devices. Although it has secured wins in US courts and European Union digital regulations, Epic on Friday effectively accused Apple of slow-

walking the vetting process it enforces before making an app or game available for users to download. Epic said last week that it had submitted "Fortnite" for review for listing in the App Store in the United States. As well as being "blocked" there, the publisher added that "Fortnite" was also unavailable in the European Union. Fans there can usually download the game through the company's own app store as the EU's Digital Markets Act (DMA), which went into effect last year, requires Apple and other US tech giants to open up their platforms to competition. Epic did not immediately respond to

AFP's questions about why "Fortnite" was unavailable in Europe.

**'Junk fees'**

"Fortnite" is a heavyweight of the gaming world, with Epic claiming around 500 million users in 2023. But players have grown used to upsets as the publisher has filed legal cases against both Apple and Google over what it calls "junk fees". Apple's commissions for App Store purchases, which can range as high as 30 percent, come "at the expense of consumers and developers", the company wrote on X last week. Epic has faced off against Apple in US courts since 2021, when "Fortnite" was banned from the App Store over what Apple said was an attempt to get around the iPhone maker's payment system. A judge found that the App Store was anticompetitive as it forbade developers from offering alternative avenues for payment. But the conflict has endured past the US court order and the EU's requirement that Apple and Google allow third-party app stores on their operating systems.

# India's Private Capex Growth Remained Robust Over FY21-FY25E, Reported 19.8% CAGR: Report

## States such as Uttar Pradesh, Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Gujarat, and Odisha were the main contributors to state capex growth.

New Delhi. The private capital expenditure (capex) growth in India remained robust over the last five years, from FY21 to FY25E, reporting a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 19.8 per cent, according to a report by HDFC Securities. The report highlighted that while private capex growth was strong during this period, it did not reflect in the credit growth of the banking system. This was because almost the entire capital expenditure was financed through strong

cash flows from operations, reducing the need for bank credit.

The report stated: "Private capex growth has been robust from FY21 to FY25E, reporting a CAGR of 19.8 per cent..."

Private capex growth wasn't reflected in the credit growth of the banking system as almost the entire capex was financed by strong cash flows from operations during this period, thus limiting the need for bank credit.

The report further added that capital expenditure by the top 250 listed private companies increased significantly from ₹4,833 billion in FY21 to ₹8,426 billion in FY24. It is further expected to rise to ₹9,951 billion in FY25E. This growth, at a CAGR of 19.8 per cent, was driven by key sectors such as oil and gas, power, automobiles, and commodities. The report also noted a strong rise in central

government capital expenditure during the same period. Central capex grew from ₹4,263 billion in FY21 to ₹10,184 billion in FY25E, marking a CAGR of 24.3 per cent. Major contributors to this growth

increased from ₹4,223 billion in FY21 but at a slower CAGR of 11.9 per cent over FY21 to FY25E. While it grew by 28 per cent, 11 per cent, and 26 per cent in the following three years, it declined by

20 per cent year-on-year so far in FY25E, reaching 6,075 billion (till February 2025). States such as Uttar Pradesh, Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Gujarat, and Odisha were the main contributors to state capex growth. The report further mentioned that the top 250 private companies (excluding BFSI) spent a total of ₹29.6 trillion on capex between FY20 and FY24, which was only about 57 per cent of their total cash flow from operations (₹52.7 trillion)

during the same period. This indicated that companies had sufficient internal resources and surplus cash to carry out their investment plans without adding to their debt burden.



were ministries related to road transport, railways, defence, and capex-related transfers to states.

However, state government capital expenditure lagged behind. State capex



## NEWS BOX

## Roston Chase replaces Kraigg Brathwaite as new West Indies Test captain



**New Delhi.** Roston Chase has been named the new captain of the West Indies men's Test team, marking a surprising yet significant shift in leadership. The 33-year-old allrounder, who last featured in a Test match over two years ago, will take over the reins from Kraigg Brathwaite, who stepped down from the role in March after a three-year tenure.

Chase's first assignment as captain will come against Australia in a three-match home series slated for June and July. The opening Test in Bridgetown, Barbados — Chase's home ground — will be a landmark moment, as it also marks his 50th Test appearance since debuting in 2016. Over his Test career, Chase has scored 2265 runs at an average of 26.33, including five centuries. With the ball, he's proven handy too, picking up 85 wickets, including a memorable 8 for 60 against England in 2019 at Kensington Oval.

Cricket West Indies (CWI) selected Chase after a rigorous evaluation process, which included psychometric testing and interviews with a panel comprising head coach Daren Sammy, Director of Cricket Miles Bascombe, and Enoch Lewis, Chairman of the Cricket Strategy and Officiating Committee. The final shortlist included John Campbell, Tevin Imlach, Joshua Da Silva, Justin Greaves, and newly appointed vice-captain Jomel Warrican.

"I fully endorse this appointment. Our new captain has earned the respect of his peers, understands the responsibility that comes with the role, and has shown the leadership qualities we need to take this team forward. I urge fans across the region to rally behind him—we're building something special," Head coach Darren Sammy said. "This selection process is one of the most comprehensive and forward-thinking we have undertaken. I am deeply impressed by the professionalism, objectivity, and strategic thinking that shaped the final decision. It sets a new benchmark for leadership appointments in West Indies cricket," CWI president, Kishore Shallow, said.

RCB vs KKR, IPL 2025  
Preview: Predicted XI, team news and Bengaluru pitch conditions

**New Delhi.** Royal Challengers Bengaluru and Kolkata Knight Riders are once again set to face off in the Indian Premier League, this time in the restart of the 2025 season. In the opening fixture earlier this year, RCB mauled KKR by 7 wickets. It was Virat Kohli's first T20 appearance since retiring from T20Is, and he delivered a riveting display of his enhanced skill set — a performance that has gone on to define RCB's campaign this season.

All eyes will once again be on Kohli, who recently announced his retirement from Test cricket — a decision that stunned fans and experts worldwide. The legendary cricketer, who revitalized Test cricket viewership in India during the mid-2010s, bids farewell to the format that he held so dearly.

Kohli's retirement came under tricky circumstances. After an extended period of patchy form in whites, he gave up his baggy blue just before the high-profile tour of England — a country where he had previously led India to some iconic victories.

Now free of the demands of Test cricket, could Kohli become even more driven to finally win an IPL title with Royal Challengers Bengaluru? This isn't a question of his commitment to the side — which has never been in doubt — but more a consideration of what his sharpened focus could mean for the franchise. Kohli has been a consistent performer for RCB, leading them to the finals three times. Yet, the elusive IPL trophy has always slipped away for one reason or another. The season opener marked Kohli's first outing as a two-format player (ODIs and Tests) after stepping away from T20Is in 2024. Now, as the league restarts in 2025, Kohli enters as a single-format international player, having retired from Tests on May 12.

Could this be the final push that tips the scales in RCB's favour? Will Kohli's renewed focus — combined with the team's strong form — drive the franchise to its first-ever IPL title?

## Relief, then fire: Neeraj Chopra's 90m mark breakthrough lights a fresh fuse

**After years of near misses, Neeraj Chopra finally broke the elusive 90-metre barrier in the Doha Diamond League on Friday, marking a historic milestone. Yet, with fierce rivals rising, this breakthrough signals just the beginning of a new, fiercer battle ahead.**

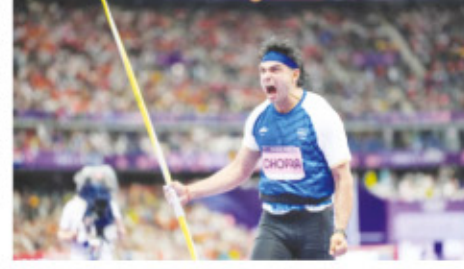
**New Delhi.** Neeraj Chopra didn't let out a celebratory roar. There was no fist pump into the warm Doha air, no theatrical flourish as he finally conquered the elusive 90-metre mark. Instead, he simply shook his head and allowed himself a wry smile. Relief, not rapture, coloured his expression. The monkey was off his back at last.

On Friday, Neeraj became just the 25th man in history to breach the coveted 90-metre barrier in men's javelin. It was a milestone years in the making. Ever since he unleashed

a stunning 86.48m throw as a teenager at the U20 World Championships in 2016, he had been earmarked for greatness—and he delivered. Two Olympic medals, including a historic gold, a World Championship title, and the Diamond League trophy—he had won it all. Yet one achievement continued to slip just out of reach for India's golden boy from Panipat.

Wherever he went, the 90-metre question followed. Statistically, he has been the most consistent javelin thrower of the modern era, recording 14 throws between 88 and 90 metres since his Olympic triumph in Tokyo. But a nation wanted more — it wanted magic. It wanted 90. He came agonisingly close. At the Stockholm Diamond League in 2022, he fell just six centimetres short. At the Olympic final in Paris, with only one legal throw, he reached 89.45m. Later that year, in the Lausanne Diamond League Final, he edged even nearer—just four centimetres shy.

"A lot of people kept asking whether I'd ever throw 90 metres—because I hadn't done it despite competing at the top level since 2018," Neeraj told RevSportz, moments after his landmark throw in Doha. "I'd hit 88, 89... but never 90. Finally, not just for me, but for all Indians, the weight has lifted. And I



feel like I can go even further," he said, speaking for a nation he once again made proud.

## THE IRONY IN DOHA

Ironically, the Doha Diamond League was perhaps the first competition in recent memory where the 90-metre question wasn't raised in the customary pre-event press conference. From his new coach Jan Zelezny to India-Pakistan sporting tensions, Neeraj fielded a range of questions—but not that one. Yet, come Friday evening, as he stepped out for warm-ups, there was a quiet certainty about him. Calm, composed, and purposeful, Neeraj looked like a man on a mission. He reportedly warmed up by casually flinging the spear beyond 80 metres—an early sign of what was to come.

Clad in his signature sky-blue kit, the now-

iconic headband in place and the support belt snug around his hips, Neeraj lined up for his first attempt. The javelin cut through the night sky and landed at 88.44m — a world-leading mark at the time. He looked pleased. It was only his opening throw, in his first major outing of the season.

## THE VISIBLE MINOR TWEAKS

In the build-up to Doha, Neeraj had hinted at feeling sharper and injury-free after many years. He was able to overcome a nagging groin injury in the off-season. He had spoken about good rhythm in warm-ups, and the impact of working with Zelezny—the legendary Czech world-record holder—since February. Though their partnership was still new, Neeraj acknowledged technical tweaks and routine changes they had begun to implement. He spoke candidly about finding his feet with Zelezny after five successful years under former coach Klaus Bartonietz. The decision to shake things up was deliberate and bold. The changes were visible in his very first attempt.

He wasn't getting quite as side-on as before, and after braking and releasing, his posture looked more balanced than he was more balanced than ever before.

## Shubman Gill, Shreyas Iyer or Rishabh Pant? Gavaskar picks his next India captain



**New Delhi.** Legendary batter Sunil Gavaskar believes Shubman Gill, Shreyas Iyer, and Rishabh Pant all possess strong leadership qualities, but he backed Gill as the frontrunner to become India's next Test captain.

Following Rohit Sharma's retirement from Test cricket on May 7, the captaincy role remains vacant. India must appoint a new leader ahead of the Test series against England, which begins on June 20 at Headingley in Leeds. Gavaskar noted that Gill, Iyer, and Pant each have distinct captaincy styles, but felt Gill appears to be the most involved on the field.

"It would take a couple of years (to groom future leaders) to get to the level of our super captains (MS Dhoni, Rohit, Virat). All of them brought a different approach to captaincy," Gavaskar told PTI on Star Sports Press Room. "When you see Gill, Iyer and Pant, three main pretenders to Indian captaincy you see an amalgamation of all three (Dhoni, Rohit, Virat). Gill probably is more competitive, when there is a decision, he is asking the umpire right away. He is probably a lot more involved," Gavaskar said. "Though Pant is behind the stumps, he is also very involved. Iyer too has been superb. All three have brought a lot of positivity in the way they have been captaining," Gavaskar added.

The 25-year-old Shubman Gill has previously captained India in five T20Is during the tour of Zimbabwe last year. He is currently in his second season as captain of the Gujarat Titans (GT) in the Indian Premier League (IPL). Gill made his international debut in 2019 after being part of India's U19 World Cup-winning squad in 2018, and went on to represent Kolkata Knight Riders (KKR) in the IPL before joining GT.

## Suryakumar Yadav's pens heartfelt tribute to Rohit Sharma on Wankhede stand honour

**Suryakumar Yadav shared a heartfelt tribute to ODI skipper Rohit Sharma after the Wankhede Stadium named a stand in his honour, celebrating the Mumbai legend's legacy and achievements in the presence of dignitaries and family.**



Suryakumar, taking to social media, praised Rohit not just for his achievements on the field, but also for the humility and leadership he brought to Indian cricket. "Good things happen to good people," Suryakumar wrote, adding that Wankhede had become "even more iconic" because of the honour bestowed on his teammate and long-time friend.

"Congratulations @ImRo45 on achieving incredible things on the cricket ground, from finisher to opener to our captain. You have been an inspiration and our pride in every role... Very rarely comes a leader who leads from the front, and changes the game for better. You are that leader, who has changed not just the game, but the approach, the attitude, the dressing room atmosphere, the

team and redefined the role of a captain," Suryakumar Yadav wrote on his post.

"Like I have said before, good things happen to good people, and you deserve it all and more. Wankhede just got even more iconic," he added. The ceremony took place amidst a period of reflection in Indian cricket, coming shortly after Rohit announced his retirement from Test cricket — just 11 months after he stepped away from T20Is following India's T20 World Cup 2024 triumph. Despite the timing, the event turned into a celebration of Rohit's monumental contributions, with Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadnis, NCP-SCP chief Sharad Pawar, and other dignitaries in attendance.

Rohit, who has been one of Mumbai's most decorated cricketers, has led India to two major ICC trophies in recent years — the T20 World Cup in 2024 and the Champions Trophy in 2025.

Since making his debut in 2007, he has represented India in 159 T20Is, 273 ODIs, and 67 Tests. During the emotional event, Rohit thanked his family — his parents, wife, and brother — for being his constant support through highs and lows.

## Jannik Sinner sets up blockbuster Carlos Alcaraz final after huge scare in semis

**New Delhi.** World No.1 Jannik Sinner made his way through to the final of the Italian Open 2025 after beating a resilient Tommy Paul in the semis. On Friday, May 16, Sinner rallied back from a set down to beat his American opponent 1-6, 6-0, 6-3 on Centre Court. With the win, Sinner also set up a blockbuster final against Carlos Alcaraz, who beat Lorenzo Musetti earlier in the day.

Sinner looked in all sorts of trouble in the first set after dropping his serve twice and not getting a single chance to break Paul's serve. But once he went 2-0 up in the second set with his first break of the match, Sinner became unstoppable. He earned four more breaks to finish the match in an hour and 43 minutes.

**"Tried to stay there mentally"**



After the match, Sinner admitted that he had trouble initially while trying to adjust to the "colder" conditions. He said that he tried to keep his composure despite being broken very early in the match.

"I tried to stay there mentally. The conditions were completely different. It's much colder

today. The ball is a bit heavier. I struggled with that a bit. He broke me straight away so that's a straight punch in my face. But I tried to stay there mentally. Trying to understand what might work better," Sinner said in the on-court interview. "I stayed there in the first set. Winning 1 game for me was very important for me. Tennis can change quickly. That's what I said yesterday with Casper. Every moment is very crucial. Very happy to be in the final," Sinner added.

With his win, Sinner became the first Italian man to reach the final in Rome since 1978. He also became the youngest man to reach 7 consecutive finals since Ivan Lendl in 1982. Sinner has gone through to the finals in Cincinnati, U.S. Open, Beijing, Shanghai, ATP Finals, Australian Open and Rome.

## 'Mentally stronger' Sneha Rana eyes World Cup after record-breaking India return

**In an exclusive chat with India Today Digital, Sneha Rana spoke about her incredible ODI comeback in the Sri Lanka tri-nation series where she picked up 15 wickets and won the Player of the Series award. On Thursday, Rana also found her way back into India's T20I team for the tour of England.**

**New Delhi.** The world seemed like a beautiful place for India's Sneha Rana when she became only the second Indian bowler, after Neetu David, to take eight wickets in a Women's Test innings — achieving the feat during the only Test against Laura Wolvaardt's South Africa at the MA

Chidambaram Stadium in Chennai last year.

However, limited-overs cricket told a different story. Rana lost her place in the ODI team following India's home series against Australia in December 2023. Earlier that year, she was dropped from the T20I squad after India's exit in the T20 World Cup semis in South Africa. To add to her woes, she went unsold in the Women's Premier League (WPL) 2025 auction after being released by the Gujarat Giants.

The stars have begun to align for 31-year-old Rana in 2025. In February, she earned a contract with the Royal Challengers Bengaluru (RCB) after 2024 Purple Cap winner Shreyanka Patil was sidelined due to injury. In five matches, Rana claimed six wickets at an economy rate of 8.22, with best figures of 3/26 against the UP Warriorz.

However, it was her explosive batting performance against the Warriorz in Lucknow that grabbed headlines. Smashing 26 runs off just six balls, she struck at an



astonishing strike rate of 433.33 — second only to Chloe Tryon's 457.14 against India in 2018 amongst Women's T20 innings of 25 or more runs. While RCB lost the match, Rana etched her name into the WPL record books with the most runs scored in a single over, taking the attack to Deepti Sharma. After making her WPL comeback for the 2024

champions, she became unstoppable. She earned an ODI recall after nearly a year and a half and justified her selection by becoming the Player of the Series in the tri-nation tournament in Sri Lanka. In five matches, Rana took 15 wickets at an economy rate of 4.73.

She claimed her maiden five-wicket haul in a crucial match, helping India snatch victory from the jaws of defeat against South Africa. Rana finished with figures of 10-0-43-5, pulling India out after the 140-run opening stand between Wolvaardt and Tazmin Brits with the Proteas chasing 277. She also impressed with a four-wicket haul in the final, where India defeated Sri Lanka by 97 runs.

Rana broke Nooshin Al Khadeer's 22-year-old record (14) for the most wickets in a single triangular and quadrangular ODI series. She also shined as a captain, leading India D to victory in the Senior Women's multi-day Challenger Trophy, taking 11 wickets in three games, including a five-wicket haul.



‘Miracle, Magical’

# Dia Mirza

Shares Wholesome Post On Son’s Birthday

Dia Mirza is soaking in the joys of motherhood as she celebrates her son, Avyaan Azaad Rekhi’s 4th birthday. Sharing a bundle of adorable photos on Instagram, the actress poured her heart out in a caption that left fans teary-eyed and smiling in equal measure. In an emotional caption, she wrote, “Happy 4th Birthday our miracle, magical, musical, master. Thank you for choosing us. We love you forever and beyond. Mamma and Papa,” alongside the touching tune A Thousand Years playing in the background. Dia Mirza and Vaibhav Rekhi’s love story began not on film sets or in the glare of paparazzi but during the 2020’s lockdown. The two met and found comfort in each other during uncertain times, eventually deciding to marry in a simple, serene ceremony in early 2021. Their marriage



symbolised new beginnings — both had been previously married and had parted ways from their past partners. Dia was earlier married to Sahil Sangha, while Vaibhav was married to wellness expert Sunaina Rekhi, with whom he shares a daughter, Samaira. Embracing this modern, blended family, Dia welcomed Samaira with open arms, making her an integral part of their new journey together. Dia and Vaibhav were blessed with a son, Avyaan, in May 2021.

Over the years, she has shared glimpses of their life together and let her fans witness the tender moments she cherishes as a mother. Earlier this year, Dia posted a delightful set of pictures from a family getaway to the stunning Taj Lake Palace in Udaipur. The images showed her and Avyaan soaking in the natural beauty of the place — from a peaceful boat ride to candid shots of Avyaan enjoying his surroundings.

While Dia’s family life has taken center stage in recent years, her career hasn’t taken a backseat. She burst into the spotlight with

her debut in Rehnaa Hai Terre Dil Mein, and went on to charm audiences in films like Tumko Na Bhool Paayenge, Dus, Parineeta and Kyun! Ho Gaya Na...

In recent years, Dia has gracefully transitioned into the world of OTT. She was most recently seen in Season 2 of Made in Heaven. On the big screen, she was last seen in Nadaaniyan alongside Ibrahim Ali Khan and Khushi Kapoor.



Vishal Bhardwaj’s Son Aasmaan Gets Engaged; Arjun Kapoor, Maanvi Gargoo Congratulate



Filmmaker Vishal Bhardwaj and singer Rekha Bhardwaj’s son, Aasmaan Bhardwaj, is engaged to his girlfriend, Anoushka Sharma. Aasmaan, who made his directorial debut with the 2023 film Kuttey — featuring Tabu, Arjun Kapoor, and others — shared the joyful news on social media, posting lovely photos from the proposal. Soon after he posted the pictures, Arjun Kapoor, Shweta Basu Prasad, Maanvi Gargoo, Lin Laishram and others congratulated the couple. Vishal Bhardwaj and Rekha Bhardwaj also showered love on the lovebirds. Aasmaan Bhardwaj took to his Instagram to share heartfelt pictures from the proposal. The couple is seen in an empty movie theatre, where Aasmaan popped the question to his ladylove. In the first picture, Aasmaan is down on one knee, slipping a ring onto Anoushka’s finger. Another photo captures the couple sharing a sweet kiss, while another one shows them proudly flaunting their rings, beaming with joy. According to her Instagram bio, Anoushka is a writer and an aspiring filmmaker.

Aasmaan announced his engagement to Anoushka, sharing that she said yes at the movies- where their relationship first began. “Today, my best friend said “yes” to join me in this journey of life. At the movies, where it began, where we fell in love 14/05/2025,” he wrote.

Lin Laishram commented, “Congratulations Aasmaan and Anoushka,” while Arjun Kapoor dropped a red heart and a high-five emoji. Maanvi Gargoo, Shweta Basu Prasad, and many others congratulated them. Meanwhile, Vishal Bhardwaj also took to his Instagram to announce the news of his son’s engagement. Sharing a picture of Aasmaan and Anoushka, he wrote, “Dua karo ki ye paudha sada hara hee lage..I am overflowing with love for both of you.” Meanwhile, Rekha Bhardwaj also shared her happiness and wrote, “Hamare dil ke tukde aankhon ka noor khush raho hamesha.. Ashkum Anoushka.”

Arjun Kapoor Gives Shoutout To Shanaya Kapoor’s First Global Collaboration



Shanaya Kapoor, daughter of Sanjay Kapoor and his wife Maheep Kapoor, has already stepped into the world of music with a remarkable global collaboration. She teamed up with Moroccan-American rapper French Montana and Indian singer-songwriter Guru Randhawa in T-Series’ latest release, Vibe. Well, as the actress can’t stop brimming with happiness, her cousin Arjun Kapoor extended his best wishes.

On his Instagram Stories, Arjun Kapoor reposted the teaser video of Shanaya Kapoor’s recently released global anthem, Vibe, for T-series alongside a meaningful note. The doting cousin brother wrote atop it, “Vibes are (fire emoji),” adding, “My Favourites,” while tagging Shanaya and Guru Randhawa. This subtle shoutout from Arjun was enough to reveal his honest opinion about the recently released music video.

Coming to Shanaya Kapoor’s first global collaboration with rap sensation French Montana and Indian pop singer Guru Randhawa in Vibe, the music video has indeed been grabbing much attention on social media. Banked by Bhushan Kumar’s T-Series, the high-voltage summer song features the diva aching some of the coolest moves in the video.

Dressed in blingy outfits, the debutant actress can also be seen lip-syncing with some of the lines. Moreover, with a few glimpses of the futuristic Vegas Sphere shining bright in the background, it seems that the music video was shot in Las Vegas, with the diva stealing the show with her appearances. She shared the teaser video on Instagram with the caption that read, “My heart’s in this track. My first global collab - Vibe is OUT NOW! #tseries @tseries.official #BhushanKumar @gururandhawa @frenchmontana @shanayakapoor02 @gesuz @guybergman @adilchoreographer @djshadowdubai @jslsingh.” The video instantly grabbed the attention of her close ones and fans alike, who flooded the comment section with their reactions. Mommy Maheep Kapoor wrote, “Vibbbbeeecezzzz,” punctuated by a series of dancing man, red hearts and evil eyes emojis. Sanjay Kapoor expressed his honest review and penned, “Wow,” followed by red hearts and evil eyes emojis. Anshula Kapoor said, “What a vibeeee.”

# Jacqueline Fernandez

Drops Glimpses From Cannes 2025 Women In Cinema Initiative

Jacqueline Fernandez has represented India at Cannes for the second time this year. The 78th Cannes Film Festival kicked off in France on May 13, and many popular celebrities from around the world will be in attendance over the days. Jacqueline joined the prestigious event as part of a special collaboration between the Red Sea Film Festival and Cannes 2025. Along with sharing a slew of pictures from the event, Jacqueline Fernandez expressed her gratitude at being invited to the film festivals. She wrote, “Cannes Day 1 with @redseafilm Delighted to be an honouree at the women in cinema initiative that champions female storytellers.” The pictures show her interacting with other honorary invitees with the French Riviera in the backdrop.

The Red Sea Film Festival, teamed with Cannes to host a dedicated showcase in 2025, seeks to promote cultural partnership and creative exchange. Speaking about Jacqueline’s presence at the event, a source told Bollywood Hungama, “She continues to shine globally, not just with her talent but with the grace she brings to every international platform she steps onto.” Jacqueline Fernandez will soon be seen in the web series Hai Junoon. This is a coming-of-age musical show set in Mumbai’s fictional Andersons College. Jacqueline takes up



the role of mentoring a group of misfits. Abhishek Sharma directed Hai Junoon, which stars the actress as Pearl and Neil Nitin Mukesh as Gagan. Sumedh Mudgalkar, Siddharth Nigam,

Yukti Thareja, Aryan Katoch, Priyank Sharma, Kunwar Amar, Mohan Pandey, Elisha Mayor, Sanchit Kundra, Sanatana Roach, Devangshi Sen, Anusha Mani, Bhavin Bhanushali and Arnab Magoo also play key roles. Hai Junoon is set to air on JioHotstar on May 16.

Apart from this, Jacqueline will soon be seen in Housefull 5. The film is directed by Tarun Mansukhani. The fifth installment promises to take the audience on a luxury cruise for a laugh-filled voyage full of surprising twists, rib-tickling comedy, and foot-tapping music. Housefull 5 will be released in theaters on June 6, and is produced by Sajid Nadiadwala under

Nadiadwala Grandson Entertainment.

