

# Seers cite Dharmasthala row, urge Amit Shah for law to protect saints, temples

**Seers and community leaders from across India have urged Union Home Minister Amit Shah to enact a law safeguarding saints and religious institutions, citing Dharmasthala, Palghar and Belagavi incidents as alarming examples.**

**New Delhi. (Agency)**  
Seers and community leaders from across the country have submitted a detailed memorandum to Union Home Minister Amit Shah, demanding urgent protective legislation to safeguard saints, religious institutions and places of worship from what they described as

repeated assaults, both physical and digital. The seers referred to developments at Dharmasthala, describing them as "the most painful and intolerable incident" and "a sham" that was an assault on the tenets of Sanatana and Jain Dharma. They urged the government to identify and punish those behind the attacks on Dharmasthala's temple head Veerendra Heggade and his family in a manner that would serve as an example for the future.

Citing instances of violence, the seers pointed to the murders of Swamijis in Maharashtra's Palghar and the mysterious death of Acharya Shri Kamakumar Nandi Maharaj in Karnataka's Belagavi in 2023, which they said highlighted the lack of adequate safeguards for religious figures who had renounced everything for Dharma. They also raised concern about repeated cases of idol vandalism, desecration of temples and attacks on pilgrimage centres,



describing them as crimes against the very soul of the Hindu and Jain communities.

The memorandum, issued under the banner of "Sanatana Santa Niyoj" on September 3, urged the Union

The memorandum further highlighted defamation on digital platforms. The seers accused certain YouTubers, vloggers and influencers of mocking and insulting revered saints, spreading misinformation and tarnishing reputations through derogatory videos. "Freedom of expression cannot be allowed to become freedom of defamation," the appeal stated. They demanded legal provisions to ensure removal of defamatory content against saints within 24 hours, with penalties for both the content creator and the hosting platform. As part of their appeal, the seers sought a new law modelled on the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act. They called for criminalisation of insults, harassment, violence and defamation, both offline and online, against saints and leaders, alongside strict protection of temples, idols and pilgrimage sites. They also pressed for the creation of fast-track mechanisms to ensure speedy justice in such cases.

## Vasundhara Raje's Closed-Door Meet With RSS Chief Sets Political Circles Abuzz

**Agency Jodhpur.**

Former Rajasthan Chief Minister Vasundhara Raje's closed-door meeting with Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) chief Mohan Bhagwat in Jodhpur has set political circles abuzz. Ms Raje, who is on a two-day tour of Jodhpur, met Mr Bhagwat at Adarsh Vidyashala in Lal Sagar area, on her way to the shrine of Ramdeora near Jaisalmer. The meeting lasted about 20 minutes. What exactly transpired in the meeting - if they discussed politics or something else - is not known yet since her close associates, like former district president Bhopal Singh Badla, former RAJSICO



Mr Bhagwat is in Jodhpur for an all-India coordination meeting of the RSS and its affiliate organisations on September 5-7, which will likely be attended by around 300 senior office-bearers from 32 RSS-linked organisations.

After meeting the RSS chief, Ms Raje visited two shrines in Jodhpur, Bada Ramdwar in Surasagar and Jugaljodi Temple in Raika Bagh, where she met Senacharya Achalanand Giri Maharaj. She also visited the shrine of Ramdeora near Pokhran.

## A Historic Step Towards Modernising and Strengthening the Judiciary: CM Rekha Gupta

**The SikhTimes**

New Delhi, 4 September: Delhi Chief Minister Rekha Gupta yesterday attended a landmark programme at the Delhi High Court, where several major projects aimed at digitally and technologically strengthening the judiciary were launched. In the distinguished presence of Honourable Justice Vikram Nath (Chairperson, e-Committee) of the Supreme Court, Honourable Chief Justice Devendra Kumar Upadhyaya of the Delhi High Court, and Honourable Justice Prathiba M. Singh, the Delhi High Court Mobile App, e-HRMS Portal for Judicial Officers, e-Office Pilot Project, onboarding of the MCD Appellate Tribunal and JJBs on e-Courts, as well as the Digital Preservation of Judicial Records were inaugurated. Chief Minister Rekha Gupta said that this initiative marks a historic step towards making India's judicial system more robust, transparent and time-bound. She emphasised that the enhanced use of digital platforms will play a transformative role in ensuring accessible and speedy justice for citizens. She added that the shared resolve of the judiciary and the executive is what strengthens democracy, and with such innovations, Delhi and the nation's judicial system will become more



modern, transparent and effective. The Chief Minister described it as an emotional moment to share her thoughts in the company of such distinguished judicial luminaries. She made special mention of Honourable Justice Vikram Nath's historic judgment, which highlighted the sensitivity of juvenile justice. Drawing inspiration from that decision, she explained, the Delhi Government

has adopted a new approach in its reform homes focusing not on punishment for juvenile

Contd.....Page-3

## "Pro-Poor, Growth-Oriented Decision": Chandrababu Naidu Praises GST Reforms

**The Telugu Desam Party (TDP) President took to X to welcome the announcement made by Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Wednesday night after the GST Council meeting.**

**Amaravati.(Agency)**

Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister N. Chandrababu Naidu hailed the Goods and Services Tax (GST) reforms approved by the GST Council as "pro-poor" and "growth-oriented". The Telugu Desam Party (TDP) President took to X to welcome the announcement made by Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Wednesday night after the GST Council meeting.

"We welcome the GST reforms with revised slabs across daily essentials, education, healthcare, and agriculture. This pro-poor, growth-oriented decision will benefit all sections of society, from farmers to businesses," posted Chandrababu Naidu, a key partner in the BJP-led NDA government at the Centre.

"I congratulate Hon'ble Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi Ji and Union Finance Minister Smt. Nirmala Sitharaman Ji on this transformative step. As announced by PM Modi Ji on Independence Day, these next-generation GST reforms mark a strategic and citizen-centric advancement of our tax framework, ensuring a better quality of life for every Indian," said Mr Naidu.

The reforms left only two GST slabs -- 5 and 18 per cent. The new structure will be implemented from September 22. Ms Sitharaman announced the sweeping GST rate cuts after the 56th meeting of the GST Council in New Delhi.

With the majority of items coming in 5 and 18 per cent slabs and several items facing zero per cent tax, this is expected to help the common man save money. This, the government hopes, will be routed into the economy, giving it a significant boost and having a revenue implication of Rs 48,000 crore.



## Maharashtra To Amend Laws For Longer Private Sector Work Hours

**Mumbai.(Agency)**

The Maharashtra cabinet on Wednesday gave its approval to amend laws that will allow increasing the maximum daily working hours for private sector employees from the present nine to 10 hours.

The move is aimed at attracting investments, generating employment and safeguarding workers' rights, an official statement said. The state cabinet, during its meeting presided over by Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis, cleared the changes recommended by a central task force, bringing Maharashtra in line with states like Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Telangana, Uttar Pradesh and Tripura,

which have already implemented similar reforms.

The amendments will be done to the Factories Act, 1948 and the Maharashtra Shops and Establishments (Regulation of Employment and Conditions of Service) Act, 2017, it said. The amendments will allow industries to function without disruption during peak demand or labour shortages while ensuring that workers receive proper overtime compensation. With this, the limit of daily working hours in industries will increase from nine to 12 hours, while rest breaks will be allowed after six hours instead of five. The legal overtime cap will rise from



115 to 144 hours per quarter, with mandatory written consent from workers. Weekly work hours will also be extended from 10.5 hours to 12 hours, it said.

Similarly, under the amended Shops and Establishments Act, daily working

hours will be raised from nine to 10, overtime limits from 125 to 144 hours, and emergency duty hours will be extended to 12. The changes will apply to the establishments having 20 or more workers.

Establishments employing fewer than 20 workers will no longer need registration certificates but must notify authorities through a simple intimation process. According to the government, the move is expected to facilitate ease of doing business, attract new investment, promote job creation, and simultaneously ensure wage protection and improved rights for workers, including double pay for overtime.

## "Welcome But Too Late": Congress's P Chidambaram On GST Reforms

**P Chidambaram further questioned the government's timing for the reforms, speculating on the possible reasons behind the sudden change.**

**New Delhi. (Agency)**  
Senior Congress leader and Rajya Sabha MP P Chidambaram has welcomed the Centre's recent GST rationalisation and rate cuts but criticised the move as being "8 years too late". In a post on X, Mr Chidambaram said the current GST design and rates should not have been introduced in the first place, adding that the opposition had repeatedly warned against these issues for years, but their pleas were ignored.

"The GST rationalisation and the reduction in rates on a range of goods and services are WELCOME but 8 years TOO LATE. The current design of GST and the rates prevailing until today ought not to have been introduced in the first place. We have been crying hoarse for the last 8 years against the design and rates of GST, but our

pleas fell on deaf ears," he wrote. Mr Chidambaram further questioned the government's timing for the reforms, speculating on the possible reasons behind the sudden change. He suggested multiple economic and political factors that may have influenced the decision after eight years of delay, including the tariffs imposed

on Indian goods to the US, as well as elections in Bihar that are to be held later this year.

"It will be interesting to speculate on what drove the government to make the changes: Sluggish growth? Rising household debt? Falling household savings? Elections in Bihar? Mr Trump and his tariffs? All of the above?" he added. Senior Congress leader and Rajya Sabha MP P Chidambaram has welcomed the Centre's recent GST rationalisation and rate cuts but criticised the move as being "8 years too late".

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## News box

## Gurgaon rains: Rapido rewards 'hero' driver; braved jam for 7 hours, dropped passenger safely

**Gurgaon. (Agency)**

Rapido has rewarded one of its drivers, Suraj Maurya, after he was praised for ensuring a passenger reached home safely during severe waterlogging and a seven-hour traffic jam in Gurgaon. Deepika Narayan Bhardwaj, who booked a Rapido ride from Preetampura metro station to Sector 46, said her one-hour journey stretched to nearly seven. Yet, Maurya remained calm and patient throughout. "Suraj is an absolute gem. He stayed calm through the chaos, never once losing his patience. And when we finally reached home, he just smiled and said, 'Ma'am, pay whatever extra you want'. People like him restore your faith in humanity," Bhardwaj said.

Maurya, 24, originally from Uttar Pradesh, explained why he continued despite the extreme conditions. "It was such a situation that I couldn't leave my passenger in the middle of nowhere. It was raining heavily, traffic was stuck, and waterlogging made it impossible to move. I thought, 'Okay, I can't leave the passenger in the middle of this,'" he said. Rapido later recognised Maurya's "heroic service" for his commitment during one of the city's worst nights of flooding and gridlock.

## Man held overnight in police detention after row over dog feeding turns ugly in Noida society

**NOIDA. (Agency)**

A resident of a Sector 75 society was detained overnight after a neighbour alleged that he had chased a stray dog feeder with a bat and threatened her — marking the latest incident in a series of conflicts between RWAs and animal lovers in NCR. A Noida police officer said on Wednesday that the two groups in Gardenia Gateway have been clashing for months on the issue of feeding stray dogs. "There were regular arguments between the two parties," he said. The officer said Bhavna Khatri, a resident of the society and member of People for Animals (PFA), approached police alleging that another resident Jatin Narang chased a man hired by her to feed the dogs on Aug 31. "He allegedly threatened Khatri, after which we detained him under BNSS Section 170," the officer said. Narang could not be reached for comment till Wednesday night. On Wednesday, Khatri told TOI that the RWA backs Narang and has continuously trying to stop her from feeding the dogs. "I moved to this society around a year ago. There has been continuous harassment of feeders by the RWA members. Earlier, it was decided that the feeding would be done at the main gate, but as per AWBI rules, it's not allowed. One can't feed dogs on a moving road. It has traffic, and the movement of cars is frequent," Khatri said. Norms issued by the Animal Welfare Board of India (AWBI) in 2015 state that RWAs cannot impede animal lovers from feeding stray dogs, though it advised residents to reach a consensus and decide a feeding point. The feeding points, guidelines say, should not be at the entrance of houses and in areas where children and the elderly frequent often. Khatri said that another argument broke out on Aug 1, when she tried to tell the RWA that a green belt behind the society would be an ideal spot to feed the dogs. "But residents have illegally created a cricket field in that area without any permission and cut down trees. We also offered that we would create a shelter, so that the residents and dogs, both would be safe," she said, showing some images of the purported field.

## It's a crawl: Auto, e-ricks refuse to ply, commuters wade through wastewater

**Ghaziabad/Noida. (Agency)**

An intense spell of rain hit Delhi-NCR on Wednesday, keeping the air cool. However, it triggered traffic snarls and waterlogging in some parts of the region.

Incessant rain over the last few days threw life out of gear for residents in Ghaziabad and Noida, with waterlogging reported at various spots across the two districts. On Wednesday afternoon, commuters bore the brunt of traffic jams on all major and arterial roads.

In Ghaziabad, recorded 26 mm rainfall on Wednesday, the GMC has issued a toll-free helpline number to report waterlogging issues. Swati Kumar, a resident of Supertech Icon in Nyay Khand-1, told TOI, "The road stretch from Sai Mandir to Himalaya Tower in Nyay Khand is completely submerged, and to add to the problem, drains along the stretch are dug up, which has only aggravated the problem."

"It has been raining continuously, and streets are waterlogged. We are in a state of lockdown or curfew-like situation. It is just not possible to set your feet out of the house, which is also not safe anymore as overflowing drain water has entered ground floor houses. One agency responsible for this is GMC, which, despite tall claims, has just not been able to get it together," said Pinky Mishra, a resident of Shastri Nagar.

According to DK Pandey, resident of Arijant Harmony in Indirapuram, all underpasses on the DME were waterlogged, along with the service roads in the area, leaving traffic crawling along. "On Hapur Road and Meerut tri-section, which is notorious for traffic jams, it is now taking at least two hours just to cover a distance of hardly 4km to Vasundhara."

At the Delhi border near Kaushambi, the situation is equally bad. "It has become common these days to wade through wastewater with slippers and shoes in hand to reach home. Today, e-rickshaws refused to take me to my apartment due to waterlogging after I deboarded the metro," said Sidharth Mishra.

## Child born with twin foetuses in a rare medical condition

**Gurgaon. (Agency)**

Doctors at a city hospital removed two "parasitic twins" from the abdomen of a one-month-old infant, in what medical experts describe as an exceptionally rare case of 'foetus in foetu'. The condition, occurring in approximately one in 500,000 live births, involves malformed foetuses developing inside a host sibling. The anomaly happens early in pregnancy when one foetal sac, or a baby, surrounds and traps another inside its body. The trapped foetus is then unable to grow and survive. In this case, the woman had conceived triplets, of which two foetuses were subsumed by one during the course of pregnancy. With fewer than 300 cases documented globally, doctors estimate that just one-tenth of them involve multiple parasitic foetuses, making the infant's case in Gurgaon even rarer.

The infant from Nuh was brought to Fortis Gurgaon on July 27 with a swollen abdomen. The baby, her family said, had problems with feeding and was irritable. Initial examination and imaging revealed abnormal growth within the infant's abdominal cavity, and it was later confirmed as two malformed foetuses in a

single sac. "When the baby was presented to us, she was malnourished and dehydrated because of inadequate oral intake. The foetuses were pressing on the infant's stomach and intestines, resulting in pain and reduced appetite," said Dr Anand Sinha, director of paediatric surgery at Fortis Memorial Research Institute, Gurgaon. The baby's condition, Dr Singh explained, needed to be stabilised with intravenous nutritional supplements before the surgery. After this, doctors performed the complex procedure to remove the parasitic foetuses on July 30. The two-hour operation required absolute precision, with the major challenge being the intact removal of the parasitic twins without damaging the baby's organs, including the intestines, pancreas, stomach, liver, kidneys and key blood vessels. "This was a rare and challenging case both in terms of diagnosis and surgical management. To find not one, but two malformed foetuses



enclosed in a single sac inside a one-month-old infant was truly exceptional. The biggest challenge was operating on such a young newborn with absolute precision," said Dr Sinha. The surgical team, with over 15 years of experience in critical newborn cases, employed advanced techniques and neonatal equipment alongside a specialised paediatric anaesthetist.

"For instance, we use heating pads under the baby to ensure that body temperature

doesn't change. Similarly, we have dedicated small-sized operating tables, neonatal arterial lines and ECG leads. For the surgery too, a pediatric surgeon operates with magnifying loupes (a form of glasses used by surgeons) and all instruments are micro-sized," the doctor added. The infant was discharged from the hospital on Aug 8 and is recovering well.

Dr Sinha emphasised that unlike tumorous growths, foetus in foetu is normally non-cancerous with extremely low recurrence rates once removed. "These are malformed foetal structures that do not divide uncontrollably (unlike malignant growths). This case adds to global medical literature and reaffirms the importance of advanced paediatric surgery facilities in India," he said.

Asked about diagnosis, Dr Sinha said ultrasounds scans during pregnancy can pick up such abnormalities.

"These should be encouraged. Parents should be made aware of any symptoms because timely consults and treatment are key," he said.

## Maximum temp in Gurgaon rises 2.8°C, more showers likely, IMD sounds alert

**Gurgaon. (Agency)**

The city witnessed a slight uptick in temperatures on Wednesday, with the minimum temperature recorded at 25.7 degrees Celsius, 1.3 degrees higher than the previous day.

The maximum temperature also rose to 30.5 degrees Celsius, marking a 2.8-degree increase. The city experienced humid conditions throughout the day, with intermittent cloud cover offering brief respite from the heat. Meanwhile, IMD has extended "yellow" alert for heavy rainfall in isolated parts of Haryana, including Gurgaon, for Thursday. The alert signals possibility of intense showers in isolated areas, urging residents to remain cautious, especially in low-lying zones prone to waterlogging. The deluge, driven by a vigorous monsoon system over central and southern Haryana, flooded residential colonies and disrupted traffic across major thoroughfares.

On Wednesday, though the district administration recorded very light showers (8 mm from 8.30 am to 5.30 pm), waterlogging persisted in some areas like Rajiv Chowk subway, Pataudi Chowk, and Udyog Vihar Phase 4. The weather department has not issued any alerts for the following four days, suggesting a temporary lull in rainfall activity across the region. However, the yellow alert is set to return on Sept 9, once again warning of heavy rain in isolated pockets of Haryana. Experts suggest that the fluctuating weather patterns are typical during the tail end of the monsoon season, with sporadic showers and temperature swings expected.

Residents are advised to stay updated with local forecasts and take necessary precautions during alert periods. The recent rainfall has helped ease water scarcity concerns in some districts, but has also led to traffic disruptions and minor flooding in urban areas. Civic authorities have been directed to remain on standby to address any emergencies arising from the forecasted downpours.

## Haryana's most wanted gangster Mainpal Badli who fled on parole & opened disco in Cambodia deported

**Gurgaon. (Agency)**

Sentenced to life terms in three murder cases, Haryana's most wanted gangster who jumped parole and started a new life as owner of a discotheque in Cambodia was landed in jail again after seven years. The dramatic escape story ended tamely this Tuesday when Mainpal Badli was escorted to the custody of the special task force (STF) after being deported to India from Siem Reap. In all, there are 22 cases in Haryana against Badli, alias 'Dheela', which include murder, attempt to murder, dacoity and criminal intimidation.

Lodged in Hisar Central Jail at the time, Badli was granted six weeks' parole in July 2018. He never turned himself in and managed to flee to Bangkok from Kolkata on July 7, 2019, on a fake passport and carrying Rs 1.1 crore in cash. "Badli fraudulently acquired an Indian passport (no. T3218793) in the name of Sonu Kumar, son of Ranvir Singh, resident of H. No. 898, Sector-18, Sarhol village, Gurgaon," IGP (STF) Satheesh Balan said on Wednesday. Investigators found that there was no one by the name Sonu Kumar and the Gurgaon

address on the passport was fake. After reaching Bangkok, Badli went to Mauritius and Indonesia, but finally settled in Siem Reap as 'Sonu Kumar'.

There, he became father to three children, born out of a live-in relationship. "He stayed away from criminal activities there and opened a disco, which he operated with his partner's help. The woman was unaware of his criminal past and original identity till he was detained," the IGP said. In Cambodia, Badli managed to learn the local language and had applied for citizenship too, police said. Badli was a tractor mechanic in Jhajjar till his foray into the world of crime in 2007.

He allegedly killed an uncle over a dispute, and was charged for two more murders the same year. In 2010, he was put behind bars and was eventually convicted and awarded life imprisonment in all three murder cases. The gangster was lodged in Bhondsi district jail in Gurgaon in 2014, when he allegedly killed a rival.

Balan told TOI that Haryana Police picked up intelligence that the gangster, a proclaimed offender, was living lavishly in Cambodia. "Interpol and other concerned agencies were used to then share information with Cambodian law enforcement about the presence of the fugitive in Siem Reap. The STF team led by SP Waseem Akram established Badli's identity, and he was detained there by local agencies around 45 days ago," the IGP said. Earlier this week, the STF accompanied by DSP Madan Singh and SI Sandeep Kumar took custody of Badli in Phnom Penh and brought him back to India, Balan said. Now in STF's custody, the gangster will face trial in the pending cases and serve time for the sentences.



## 51-hour outage leaves 1,200 families stranded in Gurgaon's Signature Global Solera

**Ghaziabad. (Agency)**

A 51-hour outage left over 1,200 families in Signature Global Solera with no electricity till 6.30pm Wednesday. Residents said power went out around 3pm on Monday, barely hours after the city was submerged under knee-deep water. Many decided to work from home, but with no power backup, the housing society in Sector 107 was cut off from nearly all essentials for over two days, with no means to attend online classes or work remotely. Ashok Kumar, a 37-year-old electrical engineer, worked from home on Tuesday until his laptop battery began to wear out by evening. Soon, the inverter gave up, and Wi-Fi shut down as power went off. With

all lights out, the society soon came to a standstill. "We are living on candlelight. Even basic household chores are being done in the dark," he said, adding that his son missed school for the second consecutive day. A fault in the feeder line tripped a transformer at the Sector 107 substation during heavy rain on Monday, resulting in the outage. To make things worse, the society was surrounded by waterlogged roads, prompting residents to manually pump out the water from the society's entrances. Their efforts didn't yield much result as water from the adjoining stretch kept gushing back in. "We can't even step out to buy milk or groceries because both society entrances

are submerged under three feet of water. Deliveries have stopped as there is severe waterlogging at both entrances," Ashok added. "We even put up mud barriers to stop the water, which didn't help. People were forced to stay inside their homes, while the power supply was only restored after 51 hours," said Santosh Mathur, RWA general secretary. Residents said numerous distress calls and posts on social media drew no response from authorities. "For three days, we were left on our own, with no power, no mobility, no support. It's unacceptable for an entire housing complex to be cut off like this with no intervention," said Rachit Pandey, a resident.

## 10km jams daily due to potholes at Gurgaon's Bilaspur Chowk, police tell NHAI

**Gurgaon. (Agency)**

Gurgaon: Traffic police have written to National Highways Authority of India (NHAI), highlighting the "extremely poor" condition of Bilaspur Chowk stretch on Delhi-Gurgaon Expressway. In a letter to NHAI, cops have pointed out how pothole-riddled expressway is leading to traffic jams stretching up to 10km every day. Also, police claimed the stretch has been witnessing huge snarls for the past 10 days, leaving commuters, schoolchildren and emergency vehicles stranded. "The stretch is riddled with craters, but no effective repair work has been undertaken by NHAI or the contractor despite repeated complaints. This is most unfortunate and irresponsible," the letter stated. The move came after DCP (traffic) Rajesh Mohan conducted an inspection at Bilaspur Chowk along with ACP (traffic) Satyapal Yadav on Wednesday. Manbir Singh, sarpanch of Bhor Kalan, told TOI, "We are experiencing snarls stretching up to 10km. From Bilaspur to Sidhwan, the highway is completely choked. Service roads are in a bad condition, and the situation has gone from bad to worse

for the past two years, we have been facing problems because of slow construction of the flyover. There is no effective planning while implementing traffic diversions. This stretch is a lifeline for commuters from Bilaspur and people face huge difficulties while commuting from Manesar to Pataudi." Meanwhile, other lapses contributing to daily congestion, like no crossing for pedestrians at the junction and missing warning signages which were leading to frequent vehicle

collisions, were also mentioned in the letter. The traffic police stated that in the event of any fatal accident, vehicle damage, or any ambulance getting stuck in the jam, leading to death during the "golden hour" revision in estimates and financial constraints of the contracted firm brought the project to a standstill. In Oct 2024, NHAI despatched the stalled work and floated a fresh tender in Dec. In May this year the agency was appointed

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# 'Tech-savvy' beggars now seek alms using QR codes

## The Sikh Times

New Delhi: "Cash nahin hai [no cash]," says a hurried shopper in Nehru Place, waving off a child beggar with a dhol in her hand. Without missing a beat, 13-year-old Muskan swings her dhol to the side, revealing a QR code pasted neatly on its skin. "Ispe kardo [pay here]," she insists, often turning a moment of refusal into a digital transaction. Muskan's parents work in a circus but are rarely around. She admits that performing on the streets is part performance, part begging. Her use of QR codes mark the strange convergence of old survival strategies and new technology. Nearby sits 40-year-old Bhanwarlal, who once sold toys but turned to begging after a motorcycle accident left him unable to walk properly. "I used to sell toys with a QR code for payments. Now I can no longer sell, but the QR continues to work," he said. He survives on around Rs 250 a day, sometimes less, sleeping under a bridge in south Delhi. His younger brother sells toys, while their mother "roams the streets picking garbage." Begging in India is not new, but the rise of digital payments is changing how it is done. Transgender persons, too, are increasingly requesting alms through QR codes. Rashmi, a transgender person near the Hazrat Nizamuddin railway station, said digital payments reduce daily arguments with commuters who say they carry no cash. "Earlier people would say 'cash nahin hai,' now we ask them to scan," she said. Courts have repeatedly

underlined the need for rehabilitation instead of punishment. In 2018, the Delhi High Court decriminalised begging, observ-



ing that people beg not out of choice but compulsion. The Supreme Court echoed this in 2021: "We cannot take an elitist view and remove all beggars from the streets. The only solution is rehabilitation—education, employment and a humane approach." Beggars remain on the streets in growing numbers in the city. The 2011 Census recorded 2,187 beg-

gars in Delhi. A decade later, a 2021 survey by Delhi's Social Welfare Department and the Institute for Human Development found a

nearly ninefold increase, estimating 20,719 beggars in the city. East Delhi had the highest concentration (2,797), followed by Shahdara (2,666), North West (2,572) and Central Delhi (2,422). The Delhi Government launched a pilot vocational training programme covering house painting and handicrafts, with many participants showing initial commitment.

Policy responses have often been short-term—such as ahead of the G20 Summit in 2023, when over 4,000 beggars and homeless persons were relocated to shelters in Rohini and Dwarka. At the national level, the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment launched the Support for Marginalised Individuals for Livelihood and Enterprise (SMILE) scheme in 2022, with a sub-scheme aimed at identifying, profiling and rehabilitating people engaged in begging. According to official records, of 9,958 persons identified, 970 had been rehabilitated by December 2024, including 352 children. The government allocated Rs 100 crore for the programme for 2023-26. But as of December 2024, only Rs 14.71 crore had been spent. The scheme's stated aim is to make "identified urban spaces, mainly religious, tourist and historical cities free from beggary," with local government agencies and municipal bodies tasked to survey, counsel and rehabilitate people, and then support their resettlement. However, activists say the gap between policy and implementation remains wide. "The government assumes all homeless people are beggars, but that is not the case," said Sunil Aledia, national convener of the National Forum for Homeless Housing Rights, an organisation working on homelessness. "There has not been a proper study on how many actually ask for money for survival. The SMILE programme looks good on paper, but on the ground there is limited capacity in shelters and duplication of efforts," he said. He added that urbanisation and large-

scale demolitions were pushing more people into homelessness and begging. "We are talking about Digital India, and now even beggars are resorting to QR codes. It shows where we have reached. But unless there is a policy-level intervention, this will only increase," he said. As the government pushes digital welfare schemes and cashless transactions, Delhi's beggars too are adapting. QR codes on dhols, bowls and phone screens are becoming part of the city's street economy—an uneasy blend of survival and technology.

## 2 youths drown in Yamuna; bodies yet to be traced

Gurugram: Two youths drowned in the Yamuna at Kidawali village near Faridabad on Sunday afternoon. The police and SDRF teams are still searching for their bodies. The victims, Ayush and Dharmendra, along with six others, had gone to the village to celebrate a birthday party. The duo entered the river to take a bath, their feet slipped and they were carried away by the strong current. Their friends then informed the police about the same. "Due to the strong flow in the Yamuna, the police could not do anything. The SDRF team was informed about the accident. Officials are searching for the youths but their bodies are yet to be traced," Inspector Sangram Dahiya, SHO of the Bhupani police station, said.

## A Historic Step Towards Modernising and Strengthening the Judiciary: CM Rekha Gupta

Contd.....Front page

She informed that in this year's budget, allocation for the judiciary has been doubled. Of this, nearly Rs 200 crore has been earmarked for hybrid courts and around Rs 540 crore has been set aside to address the housing needs of judicial officers. The Chief Minister further announced that the Delhi Government will now provide four law researchers to each judge to assist with case studies, and their honorarium has been increased to Rs 80,000. She also stated that a permanent provision has been introduced for household help for retired judges. In addition, free Wi-Fi facilities will be made available across all court complexes in Delhi.

## Lawyer among 3 held for filing false rape case to extort man

Gurugram: In a honey trap case, the Gurugram police have arrested three persons—a lawyer and two women—for allegedly demanding money from an elderly man after implicating him in a false rape case. One of the accused is said to be working at Nari Niketan, Delhi, while the lawyer was practicing at a Gurugram court. The accused were identified as Kanchan (24), a resident of Rohtak; Asha (47), a resident of Rani Vihar, Delhi and advocate Kuldeep Malik, a resident of Bhiwani. The women befriended the man over the phone and later indulged in a physical relationship with him. Following this, the woman filed a rape case against the man, and to settle the case, the three demanded Rs 10 lakh from him. However, the accused later finalised the deal at Rs 6.50 lakh. But the victim's daughter approached the police. "The women demanded Rs 10 lakh and when my father did not listen to them, they filed a rape case against my father on June 18. When the family came to know about the case, I approached the police," the complainant said. His daughter met DCP Karan Goel and apprised him of the matter.

## Heavy rains lash Delhi-NCR, waterlogging hits normal life

New Delhi: Delhi witnessed moderate to heavy rainfall on Monday afternoon, leading to widespread waterlogging and severe traffic jams across the city, particularly during peak evening office hours. While the downpour provided respite from the heat, it triggered massive disruption on the roads. Waterlogging and long traffic snarls were reported across Delhi, Noida and Ghaziabad, with gridlocks stretching for kilometres. South Delhi witnessed the worst impact, with congestion on Mahatma Gandhi Road, NH-48, Captain Gaur Marg and Press Enclave Marg. At Saket, an ambulance remained stranded near Max Hospital for over half an hour. The disruption was widespread, affecting key stretches such as Bahadurgarh Road.

## PUBLIC NOTICE

It is for general information that I, NOOR MOHAMMAD S/o LATE ZAHIR AHMED R/o T-99, NEAR NAFISA MASJID SARAIF KALE KHAN, HAZRAT NIZAMUDDIN, SOUTH DELHI, DELHI-110013 declare that name of mine has been wrongly written as NOOR MOHD in my minor daughter ZAKIYA aged 14 years in her 9th class educational documents. The actual name of mine is NOOR MOHAMMAD, which may be amended accordingly. It is certified that I have complied with other legal requirements in this connection.

## PUBLIC NOTICE

I, BHAWNA MOHANDEEN R/O D-2208, SERVANT QUARTERS WEST KIDWA NAGAR, SOUTH WEST, DELHI-110023, hereby undertake that I, BHAWNA want to change my name to AARISH SINGH and gender as Male, I, BHAWNA henceforth be known as AARISH SINGH S/o MAHENDER SINGH. The above statement made by me is true and correct to the best of my knowledge and belief. If any legal issue arises in this regard at any stage, I will be personally responsible for the same and the department of publication will not liable for any consequences arising therefore.

## NAME CHANGE

I, hitherto known as T S NANDHINI D/O D POORNIMA R/O 194, 2ND FLOOR, SECTRO-36, NOIDA, GAUTAM BUDDHA NAGAR, UTTAR PRADESH-201301 have changed my name to SUNITA MISRA Permanently

## NAME CHANGE

I, MUKESH KUMAR AGGARWAL S/o NANHE MAL R/o 2132A, GALI NO.11, THANSINGH NAGAR, ANAND PARBAT, DELHI-110005 have changed my name to MUKESH KUMAR for all future purpose.

## NAME CHANGE

I, Meenakshi D/o Rajesh R/o 2051, Mukin Pura, Malka Ganj, Delhi-110007 have changed my name to Meenakshi Rajoriya for all future purposes.

## Crowded, rashly driven e-rickshaws, vans put school students' lives at risk



nearby ninefold increase, estimating 20,719 beggars in the city. East Delhi had the highest concentration (2,797), followed by Shahdara (2,666), North West (2,572) and Central Delhi (2,422). The Delhi Government launched a pilot vocational training programme covering house painting and handicrafts, with many participants showing initial commitment.

provide transportation facilities, saying a specific area does not fall within their bus routes. "My son goes to a school in Model Town. The school management told me that Gupta, member of the Srian Parents' Association. Gupta said transportation was one of the ways where schools commercialise and earn profits. "Transportation should be provided at a concessionary rate so that students do not risk their lives while commuting to and from schools," he mentioned. Demanding a strict vigilance from the Traffic Police and the Department of Education, Gupta said: "The authorities should intervene to make my area is not in their bus route. So, the child has to be sent to the school either by a private van or by someone from the house," he added. Diksha Pandey, a resident of Burari, said, "My daughter takes an e-rickshaw to a government girls' school. The school does not provide transportation facility. Most of the times, I drop her to the school either by

Demanding a strict vigilance from the Traffic Police and the Department of Education, Gupta said: "The authorities should intervene to make my area is not in their bus route. So, the child has to be sent to the school either by a private van or by someone from the house," he added. Diksha Pandey, a resident of Burari, said, "My daughter takes an e-rickshaw to a government girls' school. The school does not provide transportation facility. Most of the times, I drop her to the school either by

DTC bus or other modes of transportation such as e-rickshaw."

## PUBLIC NOTICE

This is to hereby give to public at large that my client Mr. Amit Bhatnagar is purchasing the Western Portion, area measuring 75 sq. yds., "said portion" built on Property Bearing No. 58, area measuring 200 sq. yds falling in Khasra No. 8/13, 8/14, situated in the revenue estate of village Matiala, Delhi State Delhi known as colony, New T-Block, Part-1, Utam Nagar, New Delhi from Mrs. Anju who is the owner of the property vide GPA, Agreement to Sale & WILL Dated 24.09.202 and Intend to mortgage the said property with Aditya Birla Housing Finance Ltd. any person(s) has/have any objection(s) or claim(s) with respect to the right title or interest in the said property may please contact us within 07 days from the date of the notice on the number & address mentioned herein below, failing which my client(s) shall not be held responsible in any manner whatsoever.

Khatan & Khatan

A-38 Kalash Colony

New Delhi-110048,

Ph. No: 011-49774545

## PUBLIC NOTICE

This is to hereby give to public at large that my client Mr. Nisha Vohra, wife of Mr. Navin Kumar Vohra, intends to purchase the first floor (without roof rights) of the third floor, R/Hs portion, with roof rights, having a flat area of 810 sq. ft. in property No. D-61, built on land measuring 500 sq. yds., out of Khasra No. 185, situated in the area of Village Asalpur, Khadar, now known as Chanakya Plaza, Part-1, New Delhi-110059 from Mrs. Shashi Mehta, The original owners of the property were (1) Mr. Dabla Singh, (2) Mr. Dabat Singh, (3) Mr. Hari Singh, (4) Mr. Mouji Ram, (5) Mr. Kure Mai, (6) Mr. Subbir Singh, (7) Mr. Virend Singh, and (8) Mr. Mir Singh, who sold the property to Mr. Chander Kant Khanna through a Sale Deed dated 07.01.1981. Thereafter, he transferred the property to his brother, Mr. Anil Khanna, through a registered General Power of Attorney in blood relation (brother to brother) dated 03.11.1987. Subsequently, Mr. Anil Khanna transferred the property to Mr. R.C. Mehta alias Mr. Ramesh Chand Mehta passed away on 10.05.2021, leaving behind his only legal heirs, namely (1) Mr. Rajesh Mehta (son), (2) Mr. Ritesh Mehta (son), (3) Mr. Rupesh Mehta (son), and (4) Mrs. Shashi Mehta (wife). Thereafter, Mr. Rajesh Mehta, Mr. Ritesh Mehta, and Mr. Rupesh Mehta released their respective shares in favor of their mother, Mrs. Shashi Mehta, through a Reinstatement Deed dated 01.07.2021. As a result, Mrs. Shashi Mehta is now the absolute owner of the said property. Please note that the property is further proposed to be sold to Mr. Bajaj Housing Finance Ltd. If any person(s) has/have any objection(s) or claim(s) with respect to the said property, kindly submit a written objection within 07 days from the date of the notice in writing. The said objection may be kindly sent to the undersigned by way of the Registered Post on the address given below and by E-mail, failing which the claim as per aforesaid shall be treated as null and void in respect of the subject property.

## ASHVANI KUMAR

Advocate

Chamber No. 122,

Tehsil Compound, Ghaziabad, UP.

## NAME CHANGE

It is for general information that I, SANGETA SINHA, daughter of VIDYA VINDO SHARMA, residing at HOUSE NO. E-509, VIVEK VIHAR, SECTOR-82, NOIDA, GAUTAM BUDDHA NAGAR, UTTAR PRADESH-201304, declare that the name of mine has been wrongly written as PRERNA SCRUTI, in my AADHAR CARD NO-2140 5813 8629, and PRERNA SCRUTI, wrongly written in my PAN CARD NO-GVLP51456N and PRERNA SHRUTI, wrongly written in my VOTER ID CARD NO-ZYH564685. The actual name of mine is SANGETA SINHA which may be amended accordingly. It is certified that I have complied with other legal requirements in the connection.

## NAME CHANGE

I, INDERJEET SINGH S/O SOHAN SINGH R/O CD13 A/LIG FLATS HARI NAGAR, SOUTH WEST DELHI-110064 HAVE CHANGED MY NAME TO INDERJIT CHHANJ CHAHAL

## NAME CHANGE

I, Puja Lekhi W/O Mohit Shah R/O 33 Ctg Flats Pocket C Ashok Vihar Phase III, New Delhi 110052 HAVE CHANGED MY NAME TO Puja Shah

## NAME CHANGE

I, Rizwanul haq, S/O Mohibul Haque, R/O AB 430, Amar Puri, Nabi Karim, Pahar Ganj, Central Delhi, Delhi-110055, have changed the name of my minor son m/s Akhlaad aged 14 years and he shall hereafter be known as Mohd. Akhlaad

## NAME CHANGE

I, PREETI W/O Hitesh Kumar, R/O NO.43, EXT. 2, B. NANGLOI, Noida, West Delhi, Delhi, 110041, have changed the name of my minor daughter Aradhya aged 13 years and she shall hereafter be known as ARADHYA VASHISTH.

## RAIL RENEWAL WORKS

AT ALIPURDUR DIVISION

E-Tender Notice No.: 77/W-2/APD

Dated: 01-09-2025. E-Tenders

are invited by the undersigned for

the following works: Tender No. 1.

Name of work: Construction & Other Ancillary Works at KATIAR DIVISION

Tender Notice No.: KIR/Engg./54 of

Dated: 01-09-2025. E-Tenders

are invited by the undersigned for

the following works: Tender No. 2.

Name of work: Construction & Other Ancillary Works at KATIAR DIVISION

Tender Notice No.: KIR/Engg./54 of

Dated: 01-09-2025. E-Tenders

are invited by the undersigned for

the following works: Tender No. 3.

Name of work: Construction & Other Ancillary Works at KATIAR DIVISION

Tender Notice No.: KIR/Engg./54 of

Dated: 01-09-2025. E-Tenders

are invited by the undersigned for

the following works: Tender No. 4.

Name of work: Construction & Other Ancillary Works at KATIAR DIVISION

Tender Notice No.: KIR/Engg./54 of

Dated: 01-09-2025. E-Tenders

are invited by the undersigned for

the following works: Tender No. 5.

Name of work: Construction & Other Ancillary Works at KATIAR DIVISION

Tender Notice No.: KIR/Engg./54 of

Dated: 01-09-2025. E-Tenders

are invited by the undersigned for

the following works: Tender No. 6.

Name of work: Construction & Other Ancillary Works at KATIAR DIVISION

Tender Notice No.: KIR/

## NEWS BOX

## Instagram Launches iPad App With Reels At The Center, Aims to Challenge TikTok

**world. (Agency)**

Instagram launched a dedicated iPad application on Wednesday, placing its short-form video feature Reels at the center of the redesigned interface as parent company Meta intensifies competition with TikTok. The app addresses longstanding complaints about Instagram's iPad experience, which previously required using a scaled-up iPhone version with blurry visuals and missing features. The new app, available globally on devices running iPadOS 15.1 and later, opens directly to a Reels feed - a nod to what Instagram calls 'lean-back entertainment' - with Stories pinned at the top and one-tap access to messaging. Reels, which accounts for more than 20% of time users spend on Instagram, represents a central pillar in Meta's strategy to boost engagement across its platforms in the competitive short-form video market. The iPad app adds a Following tab with multiple viewing options, including recommended posts, content from mutual followers and chronological feeds. Users can reorder feed options to prioritize preferred content.

The interface supports multitasking layouts that show messages and notifications side by side, and lets comments expand without interrupting video playback. The app is available for free on Apple's App Store. Instagram said an optimized version for Android tablets will be released soon.

## Google Must Pay \$425 Million In Class Action Over Privacy, Rules Court

**Washington, N.C. (Agency)**

A federal jury determined on Wednesday that Alphabet's Google must pay \$425 million in a class action lawsuit that accused it of continuing to collect data for millions of users who had switched off a tracking feature in their Google account, a spokesperson for the plaintiffs' lawyer said.

The verdict comes after a trial in the federal court in San Francisco over allegations that Google over an eight-year period accessed users' mobile devices to collect, save, and use their data, violating privacy representations under its Web & App Activity setting. The consumers had been seeking more than \$31 billion in damages. The class action, filed in July 2020, claimed that Google continued to collect users' data even with the setting turned off through its relationship with apps such as Uber, Venmo and Meta's Instagram that use certain Google analytics services.

## 15 Killed, 18 Injured After Streetcar Derails In Lisbon

**Lisbon. (Agency)**

An electric streetcar that is one of Lisbon's landmarks and a big draw for tourists derailed Wednesday, killing 15 people and injuring 18 others, emergency services said. Five of the injured are in serious condition, and a child is among the injured, the National Institute for Medical Emergencies said in a statement. An unknown number of the injured are foreigners, it said. Authorities called it an accident, the worst in the city's recent history.

The yellow-and-white streetcar, which goes up and down a steep downtown hill in tandem with one going the opposite way, was lying on its side on the narrow road that it travels along, Portuguese television channels showed. Its sides and top were partially crumpled, and it appeared to have crashed into a building where the road bends. Several dozen emergency workers were at the scene but most stood down after about two hours. Eyewitnesses told local media that the streetcar careened down the hill, apparently out of control. Lisbon Mayor Carlos Moedas told reporters at the scene that the city was in mourning. "This was a tragic accident ... It's a tragedy of the like we've never seen," President



Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa offered his condolence to affected families. European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen also sent her condolences. "It is with sadness that I learned of the derailment of the famous Elevador da Glória," she wrote in Portuguese on X. The cause of the accident was not immediately known. It reportedly occurred at the start of the evening rush hour, around 6 p.m. An investigation into the causes will begin once the rescue operation is over, the Portuguese government said in a statement.

The streetcar, known as Glória, can carry more than 40 people, seated and standing. It is commonly used by Lisbon residents.

The streetcar, technically called a funicular, is known as Elevador da Glória. Two streetcars run parallel to each other as they shuttle up and down the hill on a curved, traffic-free road for a few hundred meters (yards). It is classified as a national monument.

Lisbon hosted around 8.5 million tourists last year, and the streetcar is a popular attraction. Long lines of tourists typically form for the brief ride on it.

**Nazrul said that political parties making statements about the timing of the elections is part of the political process.**

**BOSTON. (Agency)**

A federal judge in Boston on Wednesday ordered the Trump administration to reverse its cuts of more than \$2.6 billion in research funding for Harvard University, delivering a significant victory to the Ivy League school in its battle with the White House.

US District Judge Allison Burroughs ruled the cuts amounted to illegal retaliation for Harvard's rejection of the Trump administration's demands for changes to Harvard's governance and policies.

The government had tied the funding freezes to Harvard's delays in dealing with antisemitism, but the judge said the

university's federally backed research had little connection to discrimination against Jews. A review of the administrative record makes it difficult to conclude anything other than that (the government) used antisemitism as a smokescreen for a targeted, ideologically-motivated assault on this country's premier universities, Burroughs wrote. The country must fight antisemitism, she wrote, but it also must protect the right to free speech.

The ruling reverses a series of funding freezes that later became outright cuts as the Trump administration escalated its fight with the nation's wealthiest university.

The administration also has sought to prevent the school from hosting foreign students and threatened to revoke its tax-exempt status in a clash watched widely across higher education. The restoration of federal money would revive Harvard's sprawling research operation and hundreds of projects that sustained cuts. But whether Harvard actually receives the federal money remains to be seen.



The government plans an immediate appeal, White House spokeswoman Liz Huston said in a statement, calling Burroughs an activist Obama-appointed judge.

To any fair-minded observer, it is clear that Harvard University failed to protect their students from harassment and allowed discrimination to plague their campus for years, Huston said. Harvard does not have a constitutional right to taxpayer dollars. Harvard President Alan Garber foreshadowed potential battles to come even as he said the ruling validates Harvard's fight for academic freedom. Even as we acknowledge the important principles

affirmed in today's ruling, we will continue to assess the implications of the opinion, monitor further legal developments, and be mindful of the changing landscape in which we seek to fulfill our mission, Garber wrote in a campus message. Harvard's research scientists said they had been watching the case closely but feared their funding would not be restored anytime soon. Many of us are worried that the federal government is going to appeal this decision or find other ways to obstruct the delivery of research dollars, despite the judge's clear statement that the funding terminations were illegal, said Rita Hamad, director of a center that researches the impact of social policies on health. Beyond the courthouse, the Trump administration and Harvard officials have been discussing a potential agreement that would end investigations and allow the university to regain access to federal funding. President Donald Trump has said he wants Harvard to pay no less than \$500 million, but no deal has materialized.

## Putin says Trump not without 'sense of humour' after social media post

**BEIJING. (Agency)**

Russian President Vladimir Putin brushed off a social media post by his US counterpart Donald Trump on Wednesday that said he was conspiring with the leaders of North Korea and China against the United States. Asked about the post at a news conference in Beijing, the Russian leader told journalists, "the President of the United States is not without a sense of humour." "Over these four days, during negotiations of all kinds, both in formal and informal settings, no one has ever expressed any negative judgments on the current American administration," Putin said.



Putin arrived in China on Sunday for a four-day visit. He took part in a summit of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, held extensive talks with Chinese leader Xi Jinping, as well as a number of bilateral meetings with other leaders, and attended a military

parade marking 80 years since the end of World War II. North Korean leader Kim Jong Un was also present at the parade. Kim and Putin held talks after the event. Reacting to the meetings and talks, Trump posted in a social media message to Xi: "Please give my warmest regards to Vladimir Putin, and (North Korean leader) Kim Jong Un, as you conspire against The United States of America." Putin also said everyone with whom he had spoken during his visit to China had "supported our meeting in Anchorage," and expressed their hope that negotiations would end Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

## White House Quietly Drops WTO From Foreign Aid Cuts After Backlash

**The cuts announced on Friday are part of a broader push by Trump and his "Make America Great Again" political movement to reduce US spending abroad**

**World. (Agency)**

The White House has quietly dropped the World Trade Organization from a list of \$4.9 billion in foreign aid cuts announced last Friday after the move sparked concern among lawmakers, trade groups and the head of the global trade body. Democratic lawmakers said the administration's unilateral cuts were illegal because the funding had been authorised by Congress, and trade groups argued cutting funding for the WTO would cede territory to China.

WTO Director General Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala told Reuters in an interview on Tuesday that she had been working with the US Trade Representative's office - headed by Jamieson Greer -

and others in the Trump administration to resolve the issue. Friday's announcement noted \$29 million in WTO funding as an example of US contributions to international programs that violated President Donald Trump's America First priorities. The administration described the WTO as "toothless." By



Wednesday, the WTO reference was gone from the White House website. A trade source familiar with the matter said the WTO funding was no longer being cut, but gave no further details. The White House, USTR and WTO declined to comment. The cuts

announced on Friday are part of a broader push by Trump and his "Make America Great Again" political movement to reduce US spending abroad and focus on domestic priorities. They come after a government-wide review of US participation in international organisations was completed in August, though details have not been released.

Democratic and Republican administrations have been critical of the WTO for years, citing its failure to adjudicate trade conflicts or make progress on standards for global trade.

Trump has upended global trade with high tariffs imposed against nearly every trading partner, and separate bilateral trade deals that trade experts say undermine efforts to set binding multilateral rules for trade. A senior US official said the WTO reference was removed from the White House website to avoid confusion. The list referred to programs funded in the past, the source said, not line items facing fresh cuts.

## Trump hints at action if dissatisfied with Putin's response

**WASHINGTON. (Agency)**

US President Donald Trump hinted Wednesday at fresh Russia sanctions if it fails to end its Ukraine war, saying "you'll see things happen" if he's dissatisfied with President Vladimir Putin's response.

Trump will also speak with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky on Thursday, a White House official told AFP, after the Zelensky and European leaders said earlier that they expected a call.

"I have no message to President Putin, he knows where I stand, and he'll make a decision one way or the other," Trump told reporters in the Oval Office as he met Polish President Karol Nawrocki. "Whatever his decision is, we'll either be happy about it or unhappy. And if we're unhappy about it, you'll see things happen." Trump's comments came as Putin, who attended a huge military parade in Beijing with Xi Jinping of China and Kim Jong Un of North Korea vowed to carry on fighting in Ukraine if a peace deal cannot be reached. The US president's diplomatic efforts to secure a peace deal appear to have stalled.



Putin has shown little inclination to agree to a two-way meeting that Trump said he was arranging between the Russian and Ukrainian leaders. Trump meanwhile has remained vague on what he will do if Putin fails to play ball. But Trump rejected suggestions that he was soft on Moscow -- citing recent secondary sanctions on India for buying Russian oil, and indicating that more could be on the table. "You call that no action? And I haven't done phase two and phase three yet," added Trump, without elaborating. Trump is now set to speak to Zelensky and European leaders on Thursday. "I'm having a conversation with him very shortly and I'll know pretty much what we're going to be doing," Trump said in response to a question from an AFP reporter. A White House official later told AFP: "President Trump was referring to Zelensky. They will be speaking tomorrow." The Paris gathering will be held in a mixed format, some leaders attending in person and others via video link. The summit will be followed by phone talks with Trump, to begin at 1200 GMT, and a 1300 GMT press conference, the French presidency said. Zelensky said earlier Wednesday that he hope to push Trump for new sanctions.

## India Blocks Azerbaijan SCO Bid: How Baku's Loyalty to 'Big Brother' Pakistan During Operation Sindoor Hit Tourism and Diplomacy

**Baku. (Agency)**

Azerbaijan is in the spotlight after accusing India of blocking its attempt to join the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO). Officials and media in Baku say the move is retaliation for Azerbaijan openly supporting Pakistan in its military conflict with India in May. Far from a neutral actor, Baku has long cultivated close ties with Islamabad and condemned India's Operation Sindoor.

Now, economic and diplomatic consequences are following fast. During a meeting on the sidelines of the SCO Summit in Tianjin, China, Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev congratulated Pakistani Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif on what he called Pakistan's "victory" over India. He emphasised that despite India's actions in international forums, Azerbaijan will continue prioritising its "brotherhood" with Pakistan. He highlighted political, cultural and strategic ties and discussed expanding trade and economic cooperation through the Azerbaijani-Pakistani intergovernmental commission, according

to Turkish newspaper Daily Sabah. Sharif expressed gratitude to Aliyev on behalf of Pakistan, praising Azerbaijan's "solidarity" during the conflict. He also underlined the importance of the trilateral Azerbaijan-Turkey-Pakistan format, recalling his previous visits to Baku.

During Operation Sindoor, Azerbaijan, Turkey and China sided with Pakistan. The Azerbaijani Ministry of Foreign Affairs condemned India's military action, offering condolences to Pakistani civilians affected by the conflict and urging diplomatic resolution. Turkey similarly denounced India's "unprovoked aggression" and warned that the operation could escalate into full-scale war. Pakistan's use of Turkish-made Songar drones during the four-day operation added to regional tensions. This public support for Pakistan sparked outrage in India. Social media calls to boycott Azerbaijan and Turkey quickly translated into action. Indian travel operators cancelled packages and advisories warned tourists to visit "only if absolutely

necessary". EaseMyTrip, Ixigo and Travomint suspended bookings, while MakeMyTrip reported a 60% drop in trips and a 250% rise in cancellations to Azerbaijan and Turkey within a week, as



per

The impact is tangible. India has emerged as one of Azerbaijan's largest tourist sources, after Russia, Turkey and Iran. Tourist arrivals surged from 4,853 Indians in 2014

to 243,589 in 2024. Between January and April 2025, over 80,000 Indian tourists visited Azerbaijan, accounting for roughly 11% of all arrivals. With each visitor spending Rs 100,000-130,000, the boycott has dealt a significant economic blow just as Azerbaijan relied on Indian tourism. Azerbaijani media now claims India's SCO obstruction violates multilateral diplomacy, invoking the "Shanghai Spirit" principle that bilateral disputes should not spill into global forums.

Officials argue the SCO snub is tied to Baku's close ties with Pakistan. But the economic fallout and tourism decline illustrate the cost of choosing "brotherhood" over balanced diplomacy.

Baku's alignment with Islamabad shows that international loyalties have a price. In this case, standing with a "brother" country may have closed doors in one forum while hitting wallets in another.

## Medical admissions: increase in the number of seats available for UG after NMC approval

The NMC issued a notice on Wednesday informing about newly recognized or increased MBBS seats in medical colleges across the country for medical UG admissions for the academic year 2025-26.

### Mumbai .(Agency)

Amid ongoing medical admissions, there has been a considerable increase in the number of undergraduate (UG) seats, after the National Medical Council (NMC) approved a total of 2,720 new seats to be added in the seat matrix for the second round of admissions. Out of these seats, 350 are in Maharashtra which also includes seats from four deemed medical colleges and one new ESIC medical college offering 50 seats in Mumbai.

The NMC issued a notice on Wednesday informing about newly recognized or increased MBBS seats in medical colleges across the country for medical UG admissions for the academic year 2025-26. These seats will now reflect in the seat matrix to be released for the second round of medical UG admissions.

Among total new seats, there are 1,200 seats for new establishments of government medical colleges. This includes ESIC Medical College and Hospital in Mumbai's Andheri which had requested for approval for 50 seats and had been approved by NMC. The total number of new seats also includes approvals for increase in intake of existing medical colleges. Out of 1,520 newly approved seats under increase in intake, 970 are in government medical colleges and 550 in deemed university medical colleges. The latter includes four deemed medical colleges in Maharashtra – Datta Meghe Medical College in Nagpur (50 seats), Bharati Vidyapeeth University Medical College in Pune (100), Mahatma Gandhi Missions Medical College in Aurangabad (50) and Bharati Vidyapeeth Deemed University Medical College & Hospital in Sangli (100). A parent representative Sudha Shenoy, said, "The 50 seats in new ESIC to come up in Mumbai is not really a major relief, because 15 percent of those seats will go for All India Quota (AIQ) admissions and the remaining are for aspirants who are wards of ESIC insured persons only. Increase in Deemed university medical colleges will be a relief, although an expensive option.

## Gujarat: Dingucha primary school teacher's contribution to education recognised with state award

### Ahmedabad .(Agency)

Jignasa Prajapati, a 39-year-old primary teacher at Dingucha Primary School in Gandhinagar district, has been selected for the prestigious State Best Teacher Award.

With over 18 years of teaching experience, Jignasa has been making significant contributions to education in her community. Since joining the school in 2007, she has been instrumental in introducing innovative teaching methods, leveraging technology, and utilizing educational tools to ensure that all 300 students at the school receive a high-quality education. Her dedication and commitment to her



froze to death while attempting to cross the Canadian-US border illegally in 2022.

"During Covid, I ensured that the education of the children remained unaffected. So, when schools were closed during the lockdown, I prepared the learning material and went to their homes to teach them in small groups as everyone did not have an Android. For others I prepared and recorded 155

lessons which I posted on my YouTube channel. With the help of Samagra Shiksha Gandhinagar, 77 video episodes were recorded and aired on DD Girnar," Jignasa Prajapati told The Indian Express. Admitting the high migration rate, Jignasa said the

support to the school from the villagers has always been encouraging. Through public participation, the school managed to collect cash donations worth over Rs 20 lakh and various items useful to the school, said the teacher.

## Congress: Education dept has become epicentre of corruption in Gujarat

### Vadodara .(Agency)

Labelling the state education department as the "epicenter of corruption", the Gujarat Pradesh Congress Committee (GPCC) on Wednesday launched a "Shikshan Bachao" campaign while attacking the state government for neglecting infrastructure and recruitments in schools across Gujarat. Addressing a press conference in Vadodara, GPCC spokesperson Dr Manish Doshi said that the party will undertake dialogue and a sustained door-to-door campaign to spread the message to the voters.

Ahead of the upcoming civic body polls in the state, the Congress is urging stakeholders and citizens to join in the Shikshan Bachao campaign while slamming the BJP government for the "grave vacancies" across educational institutions in the state. Doshi said, "The

education department has become the epicenter of corruption in Gujarat. The state government and granted colleges have a deficit of 45% to 65% teaching staff... While the Congress government has given people the Right to Education, the BJP government is snatching it back..."

"Over 42,000 classrooms are in deficit in the government schools and 40,000 teacher posts are vacant. For over 15 years, librarians and physical trainers have not been appointed in schools," he said.

Doshi claimed that the Gujarat Common Admission Services (GCAS) has delayed the admission process across the state into undergraduate courses while Vadodara's MS University, which was among the top-ranked university in the country, has fallen off the charts to land at 176th position due to the "appointment of ineligible Vice-Chancellors" in the recent years.



Doshi said, "The Gujarat government considers expenditure on recruitment of teachers as non-productive expenditure".

"We will sit on dharnas and create awareness about this... Teachers should have equality of pay and work and the system of fixed pay... outsourcing and contractual employment should be done away with. The vacant posts should be filled and the private universities that are running an arbitrary show should be taken to task..." he asserted. Hitting back at Congress, a senior BJP leader said, "It is the frustration of the Congress that is making them peddle lies after lies. Educational reforms have been introduced and implemented under the BJP governments over the years in the state and more so after 2014 when Prime Minister Narendra Modi was elected at the Centre. The schemes of the Gujarat government have benefitted students in rural areas with the introduction of the model residential schools as well as renovations of several school buildings undertaken during the last few years..."

## Solving Crime: How reflective plate on a cycle led Mumbai police to suspect in child murder case

When a pavement dweller in Kandivali woke up and realised her four-year-old son was missing beside her, she suspected a family acquaintance—a man who wanted to take the boy on a joyride on his cycle.

### Mumbai .(Agency)

On a quiet weekend night in March this year, a four-year-old boy living on the streets of Mumbai went missing. Hours later, his lifeless body was found outside the gates of a building. The investigation led the Mumbai police hundreds of kilometres away to Gujarat, where the accused was arrested, uncovering a brutal crime.

On March 22, at around 3.30 am, a woman sleeping on the pavements in the Kandivali area of suburban Mumbai woke up to pacify her daughter. It was then that she discovered that her four-year-old son, who was sleeping with them, was missing. The family began a frantic search.

In less than an hour, the woman's sister found his body lying on the road. The family rushed him to the hospital with the help of an autorickshaw driver, but he was declared dead. He was allegedly drowned. The

grieving mother then approached the police and lodged a complaint.

In her complaint, the woman said she suspected a pavement dweller, her ex-husband's friend. He used to take the boy for bicycle rides and frequently visited the family, she said. The mother claimed that around 1.45 am on March 22, this man had asked if he could take the child for a ride, assuring her that he would bring him back. However, she told the police, she refused as the child was asleep and the man seemed drunk.

The police had a suspect. Soon, they recovered footage from CCTV cameras in the vicinity, which showed the man taking the child away on a bicycle. The police reviewed footage from over 200 CCTV cameras to stitch together the movement of the bicycle and the accused.

The cycle had a distinctive reflective plate,



which was visible in multiple night-time CCTV frames, allowing police to link the vehicle to the suspect. The police reached the bicycle rental shop and, with confirmation from CCTV images, identified the vehicle used in the crime. The rental bicycle shop owner also provided more details on the

accused, who was allegedly standing nearby but went unnoticed. After committing the crime, the accused stopped using his mobile phone. The police then relied on CCTV footage from railway stations and public areas, tracing the distinctive reflective plate, to follow the accused's escape route—from Kandivali to Santacruz and then to Virar, where he caught a train to Surat.

Based on the descriptions and trail circulated by the Mumbai police, their Gujarat counterparts detained the accused within a week and subsequently handed him over to police officials from Kandivali.

During the probe, as per the police, the man admitted he was a friend of the boy's stepfather but claimed he did not intend to kill the child, stating he drowned the boy in anger when he cried while being bathed.

## Pimpri Chinchwad police seizes 50 illegal firearms in special drive, arrests 111

### Pune .(Agency)

In a special three-week drive against illegal firearms and sharp weapons, Pimpri Chinchwad Police seized 50 illegal firearms, 79 live rounds, and 116 dangerous sharp weapons. A total of 111 individuals were arrested—45 for possession of firearms and 66 for sharp weapons. Police also took action against individuals displaying firearms and sharp weapons in social media posts and reels during the campaign.

Pimpri Chinchwad police commissioner Vinoy Kumar Choubey and directed all Crime Branch Units and police stations to undertake concerted efforts to confiscate illegal firearms, live rounds and dangerous sharp weapons. He had also ordered that the special drive be conducted against miscreants displaying firearms and sharp weapons in social media posts and reels. During this campaign, police registered 40 cases and arrested 45 accused, seizing a total of 50 firearms including pistols and 79 live cartridges. Action was also taken against individuals possessing sharp weapons, leading to 94 separate cases and the arrest of 66 accused. In these operations, police recovered 116 sharp weapons, including 91 sickles, 12 swords, four machetes, and six knives/daggers. Choubey has said that the actions will continue in the coming days. Notable actions among these cases included one by the Crime Branch Unit 4 which led to arresting of jail-released accused in MCOCA case Pawan Devendra Baneti (24), resident of Rajiv Gandhi Slum, Pimple Gurav, from whose possession two pistols and two live cartridges were seized.

Other key arrests included Ganesh Kamble alias Mad Ganya (23), resident of Niradhar Nagar, Pimpri, Rushikesh alias Shraya Raju Adagale (24), resident behind Padmavati Temple area, Urse, Baba Saif Shaikh (27), resident of Rajiv Gandhi Nagar, Pimple Gurav, Rahul alias Sonya Prakash Dhage (25), resident of Parkhe Vasti, Susgaon, Pratap alias Balu Hanuman Pawar (32), residing in Ganesh Nagar, Pirangut and Vaibhav Ramakrishna Vite (28), resident of Jagruti Chowk, Talegaon Station area.

## Gujarat: Up to 50% increase in municipalities' authority to give approvals to grants for development works

It announced an increase in the approval limits for municipalities by 50% for projects funded under Urban Development Department schemes and the state's Decentralised District Planning Programme.

### Ahmedabad .(Agency)

Municipalities in Gujarat will now be able to approve certain projects of an amount that is up to 50% higher than the acceptable limit so far. Responding to representations made by MLAs of urban areas and office-bearers of local self-government institutions, the Gujarat government on Wednesday increased the financial authority limits for municipalities.

It announced an increase in the approval limits for municipalities by 50% for projects funded under Urban Development Department schemes and the state's Decentralised District Planning Programme.

Chief Minister Bhupendra Patel, who declared 2025 as the Urban Development Year to foster smart and sustainable urban growth, said that to achieve this goal, the enhanced financial authority limits will help accelerate development works in cities and ensure quick implementation of urban civic amenities.

From Rs 50 lakh, the CM raised the approval limit for technical and administrative nod for

development works for 'A' category municipalities to Rs 70 lakh – an increase of Rs 20 lakh. Additionally, approval limits have been raised from Rs 40 lakh to Rs 50 lakh for 'B' category municipalities; from Rs 30 lakh to Rs 40 lakh for 'C' category; and from Rs 20 lakh to Rs 30 lakh for 'D' category municipalities. Further, once technical and administrative approval is granted by the municipal-level committee, the Regional Municipal Commissioner (RMC) office shall release the grant to the municipality concerned within five days of receiving the proposal, the CM added. "100% of such grants will be disbursed in two installments. This will help prevent delays in commencing development works in municipal areas and ensure optimal utilisation of grants. CM's decision will foster planned urban development, realise the vision of 'Earning Well – Living Well' and ensure timely, quality completion of public welfare and other development works in urban areas," the state government stated in an official release.

about this... Teachers should have equality of pay and work and the system of fixed pay... outsourcing and contractual employment should be done away with. The vacant posts should be filled and the private universities that are running an arbitrary show should be taken to task..." he asserted. Hitting back at Congress, a senior BJP leader said, "It is the frustration of the Congress that is making them peddle lies after lies. Educational reforms have been introduced and implemented under the BJP governments over the years in the state and more so after 2014 when Prime Minister Narendra Modi was elected at the Centre. The schemes of the Gujarat government have benefitted students in rural areas with the introduction of the model residential schools as well as renovations of several school buildings undertaken during the last few years..."

## Time India stops being America's subordinate ally

One should, ironically, thank Donald Trump for compelling the Narendra Modi government to undertake a long-overdue course correction in India's foreign policy. For nearly three decades—beginning with the Atal Bihari Vajpayee government, to the Manmohan Singh government, and then with accelerating speed during the Modi government—India was set on a course of becoming a subordinate ally of the United States. This was a strategic policy orientation which eroded the basis of an independent foreign policy and the scope for strategic autonomy. Till recently, the Modi government had proudly proclaimed that it had signed all the 'foundational' military agreements with the United States and aligned itself with its geopolitical strategy in the Indo-Pacific region. The QUAD (the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue between India, Australia, Japan, and the United States) was a manifestation of this emerging alliance. During the first term of the Trump presidency, India had meekly stopped buying oil from Iran, to our great detriment, falling in line with the unilateral sanctions imposed by Trump; this was followed by stoppage of buying oil from Venezuela. The second coming of Trump was seen as a heaven-sent opportunity for India to further cosy up to the United States banking on the personal friendship between Trump and Modi. Such an approach has led to the shameful silence on Israel's ongoing genocide in Gaza—a project that Trump actively supports and abets. Neither did India condemn the bombing of Iran's nuclear installations by the United States, an act of aggression against a friendly country, which was heightened by the danger of nuclear proliferation.

But Trump's ultra-nationalist stance and extremism in using tariffs as a weapon to bully India is something which even Modi and the BJP are unable to stomach. Nor can they countenance being treated on par with Pakistan. The reality is that the moment India and Pakistan became nuclear weapon states, any military conflict between them opens the way for the United States to act as the arbiter, given the strategic ties that bind both countries to America.

Even before Trump assumed the presidency this year, the United States under President Joe Biden had occasion to remind the Modi government of its obligations as a 'strategic partner'. When Modi visited Russia and met President Vladimir Putin in July 2024, the Biden administration made known its displeasure. The US ambassador to India, Eric Garcetti, warned, "Don't take the relationship for granted," and added: "I know India likes its strategic autonomy. But, in times of conflict, there is no such thing as strategic autonomy." There have been ample indications of India reducing its dependence on Russia for its defence supplies while substantially increasing the purchase of US weaponry and equipment—a demand that was made by successive US administrations and now being vociferously raised by Trump's cabinet ministers. The consequences of joining the American bandwagon in South Asia and the Asia-Pacific region have been unfolding over time. India's foreign policy is in shambles as a result. In South Asia, India has become isolated from its neighbouring countries as never before. Both the futile quest to counter China's rising influence in the region and the obsessive Pakistancentric policy have been the causes. The Hindutva worldview being imported into foreign policy and international relations have dented India's image and standing in the world. Now that the Hindutva ethno-nationalism has collided with the racist nationalism of MAGA, India's pro-US strategic and foreign policies are at a dead-end. MAGA + MIGA do not make MEGA.

## Signal from a Lankan island

President Dissanayake's Katchatheevu trip sends a quiet message to New Delhi and Tamil Nadu



WHILE India focused its eyes northwards, watching Prime Minister Narendra Modi demonstrate brotherly affection towards Presidents Xi Jinping and Vladimir Putin for the cameras at Tianjin in China, India's southern neighbour sent a quiet message to both New Delhi and Tamil Nadu. Sri Lankan President Anura Kumara Dissanayake, on his fourth visit to Jaffna in the Northern Province within a year—a record of sorts in itself—made an unannounced trip in a naval speed boat to Katchatheevu, becoming the island-nation's first head of government to set foot on the barren island doing so. President Dissanayake was clearly marking Sri Lankan territory. Katchatheevu is part of Sri Lanka. India accepted its neighbour's claim over this speck of land in the Palk Strait in 1974 with the "Agreement between Sri Lanka and India on the Boundary in Historic Waters between the two Countries and Related Matters" (this agreement then led to another in 1976, settling the maritime boundary between the two countries). Nonetheless, Katchatheevu, located between Rameswaram and Jaffna, has been a recurring point of friction in India-Sri Lanka relations. Though it was never demarcated on any map of India, either in the colonial era or in the post-Independence period, Tamil Nadu politicians frequently speak about "taking back" the uninhabited island to soothe the frayed tempers and nerves in the fishing jetties in Rameswaram. At the heart of the problem is the conflict over scarce resources between the Tamil fishers on either side of the waters. Simply put, unsustainable practices by Tamil Nadu fishers such as bottom trawling, purse seine and double net fishing have scraped up all but the dregs of marine resources on the Indian side of the Palk Strait. The Sri Lankan side, with more resources because Jaffna fishermen could not put out to sea due to the tough security restrictions during the 30-year civil war, seems more attractive. Near daily incursions by Indian fishermen into Sri Lankan waters sometimes end with their arrests by the Sri Lankan Navy, seizure of their boats and nets, and sometimes, even fatalities.

But instead of addressing the main challenge of creating alternative livelihoods or diversifying fisheries, leaders in the state have propped up the illusion that Katchatheevu is the answer to all their problems. Most recently, Tamil film actor Vijay, who has plunged into politics with a new party called the Tamilaga Vettai Kazhagam, has done his bit to perpetuate this myth. At a public rally in Madurai, by all accounts his biggest so far, he asked the government to "do just one small thing" for the state's fishermen: "reclaim this island so that our fishermen can be safe".

Over the years, the Tamil Nadu government has adopted four resolutions demanding the 'return' of Katchatheevu. There are also cases before the Supreme Court asking the agreement to be struck down as "unconstitutional".

Prime Minister Modi and External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar added fuel to the fire during the 2024 Lok Sabha campaign with remarks that the Congress "callously" gave away Katchatheevu to Sri Lanka.

But if taking back Katchatheevu could solve the problems of Tamil Nadu fishers, why do fishing boats from the state venture as far as the shores of peninsular Sri Lanka, and are spotted even farther away, on Sri Lanka's eastern coast? For the record, Sri Lankan Foreign Minister Vijitha Herath, responding to Vijay's remarks, has categorically ruled out any change in the status of Katchatheevu. For good measure, he also flagged the election in Tamil Nadu—Assembly polls are due next year—and asked Sri Lankans not to pay attention to "speeches made from election platforms". At home, Dissanayake's touchdown at Katchatheevu is sure to help his National People's Power (NPP) in its continuing public outreach in the predominantly Tamil Jaffna. A large section of Jaffna's people depend on the sea for their livelihood. Among them a perception has taken hold that their Tamil brethren across the sea, who generously helped Tamil militant groups during the war, are now pitted against them. Visiting the island was certainly imaginative of Dissanayake to send home the message that he stands with Sri Lanka's Tamil fishermen. It could also reverse a perceptible sag in Dissanayake's image over the last few months. The NPP government, which came to power promising sweeping economic changes, and more immediately, changes to the punishing terms of the IMF agreement, has so far managed only a holding operation. The loss of political ground was evident in the local elections earlier this year.

The government has, however, been acting on its other promise, of going after corrupt politicians and officials in previous governments. Former President Ranil Wickremesinghe, was the most high-profile politician to be arrested. He has been accused of misusing public funds to attend a ceremony in honour of his wife, an academic, at a British university. As the head of the nearly non-existent United National Party, Wickremesinghe was an easy target. The arrest (he has been released on bail) could raise expectations among the JVP-NPP base of more high-profile arrests. But it would be tougher for the government to go after, say, a member of the Rajapaksa family. Against such power play, Dissanayake's territorial assertion would certainly appeal to the government's core constituency of Sinhala nationalists, who believe fervently that every inch of the island from north to south is ordained for the preservation and protection of the Buddhist faith. Plus, Dissanayake has also sent a message to critics at home who accuse him of being too soft on India—he faced flak for a defence cooperation agreement, and a pact on 'digital transformation' has been challenged in court by a rival politician—that he can stand up for Sri Lanka's interests. Back in Katchatheevu, a small shrine to St Antony, the patron saint of seafarers, has stood on the island for over a century. Historically, fishers from both Rameswaram and Jaffna have gathered at Katchatheevu to celebrate the saint's feast day in March. After the end of the civil war, as Katchatheevu began to attract more pilgrims, the shrine was given a makeover. The nearby islands of Delft and Nainativu also draw tourists from the mainland. The word is that now Katchatheevu, just 1.6 km long and 300 metres at its broadest, may be turned into a tourist destination.

### 18th Lok Sabha set for rocky start; Opposition to target Centre on NEET, criminal laws, Deputy Speaker

All eyes on Lok Sabha Speaker election on June 26 as Centre remains secretive about its candidate; Opposition stands firm on its claim to the Deputy Speaker post.

With Congress objecting to BJP leader Bhartruhari Mahtab's appointment as pro-tem Speaker, the stage seems set for a contentious Parliament session from June 24 to July 3. The focus shifts to the critical election of the 18th Lok Sabha Speaker on June 26, even as the Opposition accused the BJP-led NDA government of disregarding convention while appointing Mahtab. And with both sides at odds over the appointment, prospects for consensus on the Speaker and Deputy Speaker nominees seem slim. On Friday, Congress leader Jairam Ramesh said that the BJP was confrontational even before the beginning of the special session and that the party hasn't overcome the mentality of 'Bulldozer politics,' referring to the pro-tem speaker appointment by ignoring the seniority of Congress' Suresh Kodikunil, who is an eight-term MP. "K Suresh is a Dalit. PM Modi's rejection of an eight-term MP sends a message that he is biased and is against the Constitution. The INDIA bloc will make sure that Parliament cannot be bulldozed anymore," he said. However, Parliamentary Affairs Minister Kiren Rijiju accused Congress of resorting to spreading lies and misleading everyone



through social media posts even before the start of the first session of Parliament. "K Suresh, though an eight-term MP, was not a member of the Lok Sabha in 1998 and 2004 and hence did not have an uninterrupted tenure in the Lok Sabha. We expected the Parliament proceedings to start on a good note. But Congress is resorting to spreading lies and misleading everyone through social media," said Rijiju. While the government remains secretive about its

Speaker candidate, the Opposition stands firm on its claim to the Deputy Speaker post. Speaking to TNIE, Congress MP Manickam Tagore said, by convention, the post of Deputy Speaker should be with the Opposition. "In the 17th Lok Sabha, the government went against constitutional norms by not appointing a deputy speaker. They never adhered to constitutional norms or conventions. The INDIA bloc will meet and decide the next course of action," said Tagore. Further, the debate on the Motion of Thanks at the President's address is expected to witness fireworks, with a resurgent Opposition attempting to pressure the government on various contentious matters, such as alleged irregularities in the NEET-UG medical entrance exam and UGC-NET exam, the implementation of new criminal laws, and the Kanchanjunga Express accident in West Bengal, among others. Congress leader Rahul Gandhi has declared that the INDIA bloc will exert pressure on the government in Parliament. Another point of contention will be the three criminal laws, as the TMC and DMK demand a postponement of their rollout scheduled for July 1.

## Elites assert themselves in Thai shadow play

Political power in Thailand remains in the grip of the military-royalty elites. The dismissal of two PMs in two years—including of Paetongtarn, scion of the Shinawatra dynasty—traces back to that power play. Claims over Hindu historical sites across the border also

On August 29, the Thai constitutional court, in a 6:3 ruling, dismissed the government of Prime Minister Paetongtarn Shinawatra, which had been in power for less than a year. The roots of the current crisis lie in the 2023 elections, following which Thailand's political fortunes have unfolded as a complex drama. Pita Limjaroenrat's Move Forward Party (MFP) delivered a major upset by emerging as the largest formation in an election where no one secured a clear majority. The MFP had earlier been in opposition from 2014 to 2023, when the government was headed by Prayut Chan-o-cha, a former military general who came to power following the 2014 coup d'état. Though the MFP won in 2023, it failed to find support in the senate and the house of representatives that selects the prime minister. With the MFP not getting the legitimacy to form the government, the Pheu Thai party founded by former PM Thaksin Shinawatra was in the reckoning. The adage that politics makes strange bedfellows was in play when the Pheu Thai allied with the conservative parties that are close to the country's powerful monarchy-military combination. This unusual alliance between erstwhile political rivals was not likely to offer long-term stability, but the short-term goal of keeping the MFP out of the ring and allowing for Srettha Thavisin to be anointed PM. As part of the alliance with military-backed groups, the return of Thaksin was a clear driver of Srettha's government. Thaksin's eight-year prison sentence was set aside,

and when Srettha himself lost the confidence of the conservatives, the rise of the Thaksin family with Paetongtarn as PM took the centre stage. Now, with Paetongtarn's dismissal, the nation's constitutional court has dismissed two PMs in two years on matters of 'unethical conduct', with Srettha's as the first. Srettha's selection of a minister with a criminal record and jail term led to his ouster in August 2024, after being in office for just about a year. For Paetongtarn, the court linked her removal to a phone call she had had with former Cambodian PM Hun Sen, father of the current PM Hun Manet. The call indicated that the Thai leadership was opposed by the military, which was the factor driving the deadly Preah Vihear conflict between the two countries. The call recording was leaked and Paetongtarn's stance was seen as antinational and unethical. On the surface, the cause behind both these dismissals addresses the issue of integrity and lack of ethics. However, a deeper understanding of the dynamics driving Thai politics shows two other causes: first, the tensions brewing along the border with Cambodia, and second, the Shinawatra factor that triggers deeper schisms in the military-monarchical political elite that remains at the core of Thailand's political authority. The border conflict began in July and continued for five days, with intense firing

resulting in casualties on both sides. The ceasefire, worked out in Kuala Lumpur, was merely an end to the armed conflict. But the Preah Vihear crisis is rooted in the domestic political dynamics of Thailand and its ramifications on Cambodia. Thaksin Shinawatra's support base



during his active political years—prior to his exile for 15 years—was mostly in the northeast of Thailand, which borders Cambodia. In the past, the country has witnessed protest movements by Thaksin's supporters, popularly called the Red Shirts, and the military-elite backed groups known as the Yellow Shirts. Thaksin's overreach into some areas the monarchy considered sacred led to the formation of a separate group under the leadership of Sondhi Limthongkul, who headed the Yellow

Shirts. Protests by these two groups paralysed Bangkok for days in the run-up to the 2006 coup. The military-backed conservatives and the monarchy are deeply entrenched, and the military has been part of the power structure for nearly a century. The rift between the Shinawatra family and the military runs deep, and the military resorts to its own machinations to control the political outcome. Preah Vihear has been a flashpoint for several years. To add to it, the Thai monarchy has coveted the Angkor Wat, the sprawling Hindu-Buddhist temple complex in Cambodia, linking the claim to its historical relations with the Angkor dynasty. In the pre-colonial times, the decline of the Khmer empire saw inroads from Siam, or Thailand. During this time, the provinces of Battambang and Siem Reap exchanged hands between the Siamese emperor and the Khmer kings. Later, European colonialists drew the boundaries, though Thailand was never colonised—leading to the continuation of territorial disputes in the post-colonial period. The dispute became even more complicated when, in 1962, the International Court of Justice stated that Preah Vihear belonged to Cambodia; but 4.6 sq km of land near it still remains contested. The regions around the Preah Vihear complex are seen as the historical base of the Shinawatra supporters, and civilian casualties in the area trigger sharp reactions among political groups in Thailand as well as Cambodia.

# BJP's Om Prakash Dhankar pens motivational book 'Give Your Best'

**Citing Buddha's middle path as the way to achieve equilibrium, Om Prakash Dhankar notes that "Perfection is not found at extremes but in the middle".**



**On Camera, UP Woman Jumps Off Roof. Her Husband Had Dared Her To**



**In a chilling video, the husband is seen repeatedly daring the woman to jump off, till she eventually does it. She lands hard on the ground and suffers injuries.**

**Aligarh (UP). (Agency)**  
A woman has been hospitalised in Uttar Pradesh's Aligarh after she jumped from the terrace of her two-storey home following an altercation with her husband. In a chilling video, the husband is seen repeatedly daring the woman to jump off, till she eventually does it. She lands hard on the ground and suffers injuries.

According to the police, the incident has been reported in Dakauli village in the Gonda area. Circle Officer Mahesh Kumar said, "The woman jumped off the roof after her husband dared her. She has been hospitalised and a medical examination has been conducted. We have recorded her statement and registered a case under relevant sections."

The video shows the husband repeatedly asking the woman to jump off. When she does and lands hard, a man is seen thrashing her again. A child is heard crying "mummy mummy".

Police have also stated that they are examining the video as part of the investigation.

## 5 Businessmen Killed In Bihar As Car Rams Truck

**Patna. (Agency)**  
In a tragic accident on Thursday, five businessmen were killed when their speeding car rammed into a truck on the Patna-Gaya-Dobhi four-lane national highway number 83 near Siuri Mor under Parsa Bazar police station in Bihar.

The accident happened around 12.45 a.m., and the collision was so severe that the front portion of the car was embedded into the truck. Locals, hearing the loud crash, rushed to the spot and alerted police. Police, with the help of gas cutters and a crane, managed to retrieve the bodies after nearly two hours of effort.

All five deceased were residents of Patna and



nearby districts engaged in the pesticide and agro-products business.

The victims were identified as Rajesh Kumar (50) – resident of Kurji Chashma Gali, Patna; Sanjay Kumar Sinha (55) – resident of Patel Nagar, Patna; Kamal Kishore (38) – resident of Patna; Prakash Chaurasia (35) – resident of Samastipur, currently living in Patna; and Sunil Kumar (38) – resident of Muzaffarpur, currently residing in Patna. Family members said the group had gone to Patna for business work and were returning to Patna late at night when the accident occurred. Rajesh Kumar reportedly ran a reputed agro agency with a wide network in the surrounding districts. Initial probe of the Patna Police said that the car was travelling at a very high speed. The truck was either moving slowly or parked by the roadside without proper signals.

### **Chandigarh. (Agency)**

Bharatiya Janata Party national secretary and former Haryana minister Om Prakash Dhankar has authored a book titled Give Your Best, aimed at inspiring individuals to lead meaningful lives.

Dhankar shares that he has been working on the book for the past 12 years. The book begins with a prayer he wrote: "the soul is free; let consciousness be free" – which he continued to refine over time before shaping it into a full-fledged book. "This is not just a prayer; it's a direction, a way of living. It is a heartfelt inner call, woven in words, inviting every human toward their highest self. It belongs to no sect, no single ideology; it's a voice of universal human consciousness – longing for the soul's freedom, clarity of intellect, and meaningful action," says Dhankar, also a social activist.

In one of the chapters, he writes, "Everyone should have a life mantra – a guiding principle, akin to the North Star, that consistently serves as a beacon in their life." He adds, "I call this a philosophy of life, which shapes one's worldview and

guides the direction of life. This philosophy determines the nature of your life's goal and the means and tools to achieve it."

Reflecting on balanced behaviour, the former agriculture minister notes, "Perfection is not found at extremes but in the middle," and cites Buddha's middle path as the way to achieve equilibrium. According to Dhankar, the book is a distillation of his personal journey, his experiences across different stages of life, and travels to various parts of the world.

During his tenure as national secretary of the Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad (ABVP), Dhankar published a black paper critiquing the 1986 education policy introduced by the then Rajiv Gandhi government.

He has also served as the national coordinator for the collection of iron and soil for Prime Minister Narendra Modi's ambitious Statue of Unity project.

Before entering politics, Dhankar spent 11 years as a geography lecturer, a role that laid the foundation for his intellectual and philosophical pursuits.

# Why boat shortage has hit flood relief ops: Punjab govt has 257 boats but only 114 engines

### **Ludhiana. (Agency)**

In flood-hit Punjab where currently boats are the only lifelines to rescue people and deliver basic aid in submerged villages, the shortage of government boats has severely hit the relief operations.

The NGOs and other philanthropic organizations working on the ground have alleged that most of the sarkari boats owned by the Punjab government were busy ferrying ministers, MLAs to flood-hit villages, so they were buying their own motorised boats to carry out relief works.

The data accessed by The Indian Express from Punjab government's department of revenue, rehabilitation and disaster management reveals that the state has 257 boats for 23 districts to respond to emergency situations but just 114 of them

can be motorized. This, even as the state has three perennial rivers (Ravi, Beas and Sutlej) and remains flood prone every monsoon.

A total of 257 boats translates to an average of 11 boats per district. However, since there are only 114 engines available with the government, only as much boats can be run in motorised mode which is a prerequisite in floods to ensure speedy rescue and relief operations.

Of 257 boats available with the Punjab government, 127 are made of metal and 83 fibre/other materials which the rescuers say are "heavy and get stuck often". The government has



just 47 inflatable boats which "work best in situations like floods."

"Manual boats without motors just can't work

## Rape Survivor, 15, Sent To Accused's Home By Officials. Assaulted Again

### **Panna. (Agency)**

A 15-year-old rape survivor from Madhya Pradesh's Panna district was allegedly sent by the local Child Welfare Committee (CWC) to the home of her accused, where she was subjected to further sexual assaults.

Chhatarpur Police have registered an FIR against 10 individuals, including the CWC chairman, members, and senior officials, for their roles in the case.

The ordeal began on January 16, 2025, when the minor, a resident of a village in Panna district, went missing after leaving for school. Her family filed a missing person report at the local police station.

She was traced and recovered from Gurugram, Haryana, on February 17, 2025, along with the accused, a man from a different village and caste.

He was arrested under the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act, charged with kidnapping and rape, and sent to jail. The case, initially filed at Panna Kotwali police station, was later transferred to Juhar Nagar police

station in Chhatarpur district.

The survivor was presented before the Panna CWC for rehabilitation and was initially placed at the One Stop Center (OSC) in Panna.

However, the committee allegedly bypassed mandatory procedures and sent her to the house of the accused's sister-in-law, who also happened to be the girl's cousin. After being released, the accused allegedly raped the minor again. He has since been arrested.

Investigators found that the CWC had not obtained a social investigation report from the Women and Child Development Department to assess the safety of this placement, a critical step required under the Juvenile Justice Act to ensure the child's best interests and protection from harm. Instead, the decision appeared to favour the accused, leading to repeated rapes during her stay.

The survivor's family, desperate for her return, lodged a complaint at the Panna Collectorate's public hearing. The district collector intervened, ordering the CWC to review its ruling.

### **Shimla. (Agency)**

The National Green Tribunal (NGT) has taken up the matter concerning the declaration of the Higher Himalayas in Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand, as an eco-sensitive zone, aimed at preserving fragile ecosystems, mitigating disaster risks, and promoting sustainable development in the region, and directed the Ministry of Environment, Forests & Climate Change (MoEFCC) to review affidavits filed by both these states.

In a detailed order issued on September 1, the Tribunal, headed by Justice Prakash Srivastava, Chairperson Dr A Senthil Vel and Expert Member Ishwar Singh, directed the MoEFCC to review the affidavits of Himachal Pradesh and

Uttarakhand, wherein the states described certain efforts on their parts, and to submit its reply within four weeks and fixed the next date of hearing November 28.

The Tribunal's direction came as it took suo-moto cognisance of a report that appeared in Current Science under the title "Need to declare the Higher Himalaya an eco-sensitive zone" in October 2023. The matter revolves around the need to protect ecologically vulnerable areas of Himachal and Uttarakhand, which are highly susceptible to natural disasters such as flash floods, landslides and glacial lake outburst floods.

In its order, the Tribunal mentioned the recommendations of a Joint Committee submitted on July 11, 2024 and the response of Himachal Pradesh and

lathicharge incident as well as the allegations over the validity of the law degree provided by the university. However, after the ABVP's protest, the SBSP said in a statement that while it does not justify the lathicharge on the students and demands a fair inquiry into the same, as well as allegations of anomalies in the university, it also demands a fair inquiry into the same, as well as accusations against the varsity.



"Those who pelted stones at the house of the minister shouted abuses, and even manhandled a woman police personnel, there should be strict action against them. No one has the right to take the law into their own hands. As there is a rule of law in Uttar Pradesh, whoever breaks the law should also face strict action," the SBSP statement said.

# From Shahrukh Khan to Sanjay Dutt, Bollywood stands tall with Punjab's fight against floods

## Diljit Dosanjh is adopting 10 villages for long-term rehabilitation, while Satinder Sartaaj is actively distributing essential supplies.

### **Chandigarh. (Agency)**

Punjab is reeling under one of the worst floods in decades. Swollen rivers have inundated entire villages, damaged thousands of homes, and left vast stretches of ripened paddy fields destroyed just weeks before harvest. Families have been displaced, cattle washed away, and livelihoods shattered. Amid this calamity, a wave of solidarity is pouring in – not just from Punjab's own artists but also from Bollywood, which has come forward to stand with the people of the state in their darkest hour.

Punjabi actor-singer Ammy Virk, who has pledged to rebuild 200 houses for affected families, has postponed the release of his film Nikka Zaildar 4 from September 2 to October 2. His decision, he said, was taken out of respect for the pain of Punjab's people. Punjabi stars leading on the ground

essential supplies. His manager Sonalika and her team are already on the ground in flood-affected villages.

Satinder Sartaaj himself was seen active on the field as he distributed ration, cattle feed, green fodder, etc in Ajnala, Ferozepur, Fazilka, etc areas, saying: "We must all become a pillar of strength for our people in these trying times."

Singer Jasbir Jassi was the first one to be on the ground as he came to his home district, Gurdaspur, to be with the affected people. He opened a helpline for flood victims to report urgent needs, such as fodder and drinking water, and stated that he had reached out to Bollywood actors like Salman Khan and Sanjay Dutt on this issue.

Gippy Grewal, a Punjabi singer-actor, sent trucks filled with silage to save cattle, which are the lifeline of many farming families, while Karan Aujla donated a motorboat to

support rescue work in submerged villages. Punjabi Actors Ranjit Bawa and Babu Mann have pledged their overseas tour earnings to



aid victims.

Young Punjabi artists like Resham Anmol, Love Gill, and Jas Bajwa are actively working on the ground to ensure that supplies reach

even the remotest areas. They can be seen wading through floodwaters, navigating motorboats, and helping in the villages as well.

**Bollywood stars express solidarity**  
Shah Rukh Khan posted on X: "My heart goes out to those in Punjab impacted by these devastating floods. Sending prayers and strength... The spirit of Punjab shall never break."

Sanjay Dutt wrote: "The devastation caused by the floods in Punjab is heartbreaking. I will support in every way I can. May Babaji bless and protect all in Punjab." Actor-comedian Kapil Sharma, who belongs to Amritsar, expressed grief:

"Feeling heartbroken seeing my Punjab suffering due to floods. My prayers are with all the families affected. Stay strong, we are with you."

# Donor Heart Arrives From Chandigarh To Delhi In Under 2 Hours Via Green Corridor

►A donor heart was transported from Chandigarh to New Delhi in just 1 hour and 55 minutes through multiple green corridors.

**Agency New Delhi.**

In a remarkable feat of medical expertise and coordination, doctors at a private hospital in Delhi successfully performed a life-saving heart transplant surgery on a 39-year-old man from Meerut, after a donor heart was transported from Chandigarh to New Delhi in just 1 hour and 55 minutes through multiple green corridors. The patient, a known case of dilated

cardiomyopathy with severe mitral valve leakage, had been struggling with worsening breathing difficulties for the past four years. In the last six months alone, he required intensive care unit (ICU) treatment twice in Meerut. When his condition deteriorated further in August, he was shifted to a Private hospital in Delhi.

"Initially stabilised in the ICU with advanced medications to support his heart, blood pressure, and kidney function, he was registered with the National Organ & Tissue Transplant Organisation (NOTTO) on August 9, 2025, for a heart transplant. A previous organ offered in Delhi was deemed unsuitable by the transplant team", stated the hospital.

The hospital further said, "On the night of August 26, NOTTO informed Sir Ganga Ram Hospital of a suitable donor heart available in Chandigarh. The hospital's retrieval team promptly left for Chandigarh, secured the organ, and

returned with it on a commercial flight. Green corridors were created in Chandigarh city, at both Chandigarh and Delhi airports, and across Delhi city,

(Anaesthetist), and Dr. Aman Makhija (Cardiologist), was already prepared to receive the organ.

The patient, who was on a heart-lung machine at the time, underwent the complex procedure where his diseased heart was removed and replaced with the donor heart. The transplant was successful, and the new heart began functioning satisfactorily. Following surgery, the patient's recovery has been smooth. He was weaned off the ventilator within 18 hours and shortly resumed normal meals as well as light exercise. Doctors are optimistic about his long-term recovery and overall prognosis.

"This transplant was made possible by the combined efforts of NOTTO, the retrieval and transplant teams, and the creation of seamless green corridors across two states. The fact that the heart reached us in under two hours played a pivotal role in the success of this surgery", said Dr. Sujay Shad.



ensuring that the heart reached Sir Ganga Ram Hospital in optimal condition within just 1 hour and 55 minutes." A team led by Dr. Sujay Shad, Senior Consultant & Director of Cardiothoracic & Vascular Surgery, along with Dr. Himanshu Goel (Cardiac Surgeon), Dr. Maheshwari

## CBSE, NCB to spread awareness against drug abuse



**Agency New Delhi.**

The Central Board of Secondary Education and the Narcotics Control Bureau (NCB) have joined hands to create a drug-free school environment and spread awareness against substance abuse. An agreement signing ceremony was held on Wednesday at CBSE board headquarters in New Delhi.

The agreement between the two will pave the way for joint initiatives, including quarterly awareness programmes, capacity-building workshops for teachers and counsellors, e-modules on drug prevention, community outreach, and counselling services for students and parents, the CBSE said in an official statement.

Shedding light on the government programmes to combat the menace of drugs in educational institutions, Himanshu Gupta, secretary, CBSE, said, "schools must provide students with a safe and supportive environment, in addition to academics. Timely intervention and government programs like Tele-MANAS, which is expanding access to mental health care across India, can be instrumental in this effort."

## International drug syndicate unearthed, meth worth Rs 21 crore seized

**Agency New Delhi.**

The Delhi Police's Crime Branch has busted an international drug syndicate with the arrest of six individuals, including two Nigerian nationals and seized nearly 7 kg of Methamphetamine worth around Rs 21 crore, officials said on Wednesday. The accused include Sujin (32) and Suhail AM (31) from Kerala; Tobi Nwoyeke alias Deco (35) and ChikwadoNnake Kingsley (29) from Nigeria; and Mohammad Zaheed alias Firoj (29) and Suha Fatima (29), both from Bengaluru.

Acting on a tip-off received on July 19, police arrested Suhail, wanted in multiple NDPS cases in Kerala, and Sujin from southwest Delhi, recovering 5.95 kg of methamphetamine. "Investigations revealed the duo supplied drugs from Delhi to Bengaluru and parts of Kerala," said Deputy Commissioner of Police (crime) Harsh Indora. Using a Nigerian number for communication, the syndicate's source was traced to Mohan Garden, Delhi. Following a search operation, Deco was arrested with 64 grams of methamphetamine, the DCP added.

Deco revealed that he previously operated in Bengaluru but shifted to Delhi due to increased police scrutiny. Further, 865 grams of methamphetamine were recovered from his rented room in Chhatarpur, the officer said. According to officials, Deco also disclosed that he received drugs via an African woman courier, under the command of a Nigeria-based kingpin. Subsequently, Fatima and Zaheed were arrested from Bengaluru, while Kingsley was nabbed in Greater Noida. Suhail admitted to starting meth use in 2019 after returning from Dubai, eventually turning to drug dealing. To evade stringent laws, he sold in non-commercial quantities and used dead drops for delivery.

His network expanded across South India before key members were arrested in 2024.

Sujin said he joined Suhail for quick money. Deco, who arrived in India as a student in 2018, targeted students and IT professionals. Fatima got into the trade through her first husband, an MDMA addict. Kingsley, who came to India for medical treatment in 2015, was introduced to drugs by two fellow Nigerians.

## GST On Bidis Drop To 18% But Cigarettes And Gutkha Rises To 40%. Here's Why

**The GST on bidis, which was previously 28 per cent, has been reduced to 18 per cent.**

**Agency New Delhi.**

While prices of cigarettes and other tobacco products, such as Gutkha, are set to rise after the GST reforms announced yesterday, the humble bidi will see a marginal drop in prices. The GST on bidis, which was previously 28 per cent, has been reduced to 18 per cent. The GST on tendu leaves used to make bidis has been reduced from 18 per cent to 5 per cent. Cigarettes and other tobacco products, which currently attract 28 per cent GST, will now be dearer after the reforms that have hiked the tax to 40 per cent.

The GST cut on bidis appears to be aimed at protecting the domestic bidi industry that employs over 70 lakh people. But the move has stumped social media users who have asked if cigarettes are harmful, but bidis are not. Some have linked it to the upcoming Assembly polls in Bihar.



Many have pointed out how bidis are more harmful than cigarettes and are consumed mostly by the underprivileged sections of society, making them vulnerable to serious ailments. There have been sarcastic takes too, with some saying the GST cut for bidi shows the Centre is working for the masses.

Earlier, several social organisations, including those linked to the BJP's ideological parent RSS, had urged the government to reduce the 28 per cent GST rate on bidis. This, they argued,

will aid workers. The Swadeshi Jagran Manch, which is linked to RSS, wrote to Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman that the 28 per cent GST has hit employment in the registered sector of bidi manufacturing. This has also caused hardships for workers in unregistered beedi production units, the Manch said.

In the past, a small amount of central excise duty was levied on bidis, the Manch said, adding that several states did not even levy sales tax on bidis, keeping the interests of beedi workers in mind. While the changes in GST rates will kick in on September 22, cigarettes, pan masala, gutkha, bidi, and other tobacco products will continue to be sold at the same rate till loan and interest payment obligations under the compensation cess account are discharged, the government has said.

## "Illegal Tree Felling In Hills": Supreme Court Notice To Flood-Hit States

**Agency New Delhi.**

The Supreme Court has turned its focus to illegal tree-felling in the wake of landslides and floods across northern India. Pointing to the videos of timber logs floating in the floodwaters of Himachal Pradesh, the court has observed that there has been illegal felling of trees in the hills. Several states are witnessing a dire flood situation across northern India, with Punjab facing its worst deluge in nearly four decades. Chief Justice of India BR Gavai has noted the situation as "unprecedented" while expressing concern over illegal tree-felling. "We have seen unprecedented landslides



along. Prima facie, it appears that there has been illegal felling of trees going on up hills," said CJI Gavai.

The remark came during a hearing on a Public Interest Litigation (PIL) on environmental degradation in the hills. The bench of CJI Gavai and Justice K Vinod Chandran stressed it is a serious matter and sought a reply from the centre and the states, Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Jammu and Kashmir, and Punjab, within two weeks.

It has also asked Solicitor General Tushar Mehta to contact the concerned authorities and find out the reasons for such a huge number of logs floating around in the water. Mr Mehta said that he will contact the Secretary of the Ministry of Environment and Forests and request him for detailed information.

## Delhi, Haryana Chief Ministers Hold Talks As Drain Breach Floods Villages

**Delhi government officials confirmed that Chief Minister Rekha Gupta spoke to her Haryana counterpart Nayab Singh Saini around midnight to coordinate an urgent response.**

**Agency New Delhi.**

A breach in the Mungeshpur drain near Bahadurgarh in Haryana's Jhajjar district has flooded parts of the Delhi-Haryana border, forcing the evacuation of nearly 2,000 people and triggering overnight repair and relief efforts. The breach, which occurred on Tuesday afternoon near the Najafgarh-Bahadurgarh stretch, sent water gushing into Delhi-side villages like Jharoda and nearby unauthorised colonies. Residents said water entered homes within hours, leaving many scrambling to move belongings to safer ground.

### Emergency Response Through the Night

Haryana government officials confirmed that Chief Minister Rekha Gupta spoke to her Haryana counterpart Nayab Singh Saini around midnight to coordinate an urgent response. Soon after, joint teams from both states began repair work at the

breach site. District Magistrate of South-West Delhi, Mekala Chaitanya Prasad, reached the spot and stayed through the night, monitoring operations until 4:30 a.m. Personnel from the National Disaster Response Force (NDRF) were also deployed to assist with evacuations and flood control.

### Evacuations and Relief Measures

On the Chief Minister's instructions, Divisional Commissioner Neeraj Semwal oversaw the evacuation of around 2,000 residents from the affected belt. DTC buses transported families to relief camps set up at Baba Haridas Temple and the MCD school in Jharoda, where food, water, and basic

supplies were made available. Local representatives, including MP Kamaljeet Sehrawat and MLA Neelam Pehlwan, remained in touch with

continued at the site with Delhi and Haryana engineers working together to plug the breach. NDRF teams stayed on the ground to support efforts and maintain safety in low-lying areas.

Chief Minister Rekha Gupta said work was progressing "on a war footing" and assured that all affected residents would receive immediate assistance. She expressed confidence that the situation would normalise soon.

### Situation Under Watch

Officials said water levels remain high in some pockets, and monitoring will continue until the breach is fully repaired. Both state governments have confirmed that joint operations will remain in place until the flow of the drain is stabilised.



officials and visited the flood-hit areas to track developments.

### Joint Operations at Breach Site

By Wednesday morning, repair work

## Delhi floods: Makeshift camps hotbed of viral infection, water-borne diseases

### Agency New Delhi.

Amid the trauma of losing their homes and belongings, families displaced from the Yamuna floodplains are now battling a new ordeal inside temporary relief camps—an acute shortage of medical care and the looming threat of disease.

In the makeshift shelters, inadequate facilities and poor sanitation have left people vulnerable to infections, water-borne illnesses and vector-borne diseases, raising fears of an outbreak. At one of the largest relief camps in Mayur Vihar, a tent marked as a medical unit stood nearly deserted. A small bag of medicines lay unattended, with no staff in sight. Civil defence volunteers claimed a separate facility had been arranged for healthcare, but residents said little help was available. "My elderly mother has been sick since last night, but she has not received any help here," said Sumit Kumar, who moved into the camp with his family two days ago.

Several others shared similar experiences. Raju, a shikhanji seller from the Old Iron Bridge, said he had been struggling with a persistent cough for days. "We came here from the Yamuna floodplain on Tuesday. Some people gave me syrup, but it is not effective. I am not able to sleep at night, and I cannot work. It is becoming difficult to manage our daily needs," he said. Apart from inadequate medical support, the camps have little by way of basic sanitation. Toilets are few, forcing many to rely on open defecation, further compounding the risk of contamination. Health experts have warned that such conditions could quickly spiral into a public health crisis. "The biggest risk is contamination of drinking water with sewage, which can lead to outbreaks of diarrhoeal diseases such as cholera, typhoid and gastroenteritis. Viral hepatitis A and E are also concerns in such settings," said Dr Neha Rastogi, consultant for infectious diseases at Fortis Hospital.

## 'Expecting baby anytime soon': Gurugram man's SOS amid floods

### Agency New Delhi.

Amid the flood chaos in Gurugram, desperate pleas for help are pouring in on social media. In one such post, a man sought urgent intervention for his pregnant wife on Monday evening, saying they could face life-threatening risks if an emergency arises, as floodwater and power outages have cut off access to hospitals.

"Seeing this condition, it would be very difficult to go to hospital in case of an emergency. It is a humble request to authorities to please act in this matter as soon as possible," read one of the posts on X.

Several complaints poured in from Sector 107 in Gurugram—Soleria and M3M societies—where residents said massive waterlogging and electricity issues demanded immediate attention.

For the past two days, Gurugram's roads and neighbourhoods have been submerged. Metro stations witnessed capacity crowds, while kilometres-long gridlocks paralysed movement. Commissioner of Police, Gurugram, Vikas Arora has been personally inspecting key points at night, directing departments, and deploying additional forces. According to police sources, over 1,110 officers were on duty at 120 junctions, with 32 cranes and three hydra machines clearing 288 stranded vehicles. The Gurugram traffic police helpline received over 570 calls in two days.

In one of the viral videos, two men in Gurugram were seen carrying their scooter over their heads, stepping over and weaving between stationary vehicles. The scooter might have broken down, or the men might have lifted it above the jam to bypass what seemed like unending traffic at the time.

## NEWS BOX

## Pakistan's Haider Ali cleared of rape allegations in UK after lack of evidence

**New Delhi. (Agency)**

Pakistan cricketer Haider Ali has been cleared of rape allegations in the United Kingdom after Greater Manchester Police (GMP) confirmed there was insufficient evidence to pursue the case, Geo News reported. The Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) also decided not to take the matter further, bringing the investigation to an official close. The 24-year-old batter was arrested on 4 August at the Spitfire County Cricket Ground in Kent following accusations from a British-Pakistani woman. According to reports, the woman alleged that the pair first met at a Manchester hotel on 23 July, where the alleged incident took place, and again in



Ashford on 1 August before she filed her complaint. Ali maintained his innocence throughout the investigation, calling the allegations "shocking" and "false," and emphasising that he knew the woman as a friend. He cooperated fully with authorities and was released on bail during the inquiry. The Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) confirmed that Ali received appropriate legal support during the proceedings. He was represented by criminal law barrister Moeen Khan, and the PCB stated that the cricketer's rights were safeguarded in accordance with the board's player welfare protocols and code of conduct. Born in October 2000 in Attock, Haider Ali is considered one of Pakistan's brightest white-ball prospects. He made his T20I debut against England in Manchester in 2020 and his ODI debut later that year against Zimbabwe. In 35 T20 internationals, Ali has scored 505 runs, including three half-centuries, at an average of 17.41 and a strike rate of 124.69. His ODI experience spans two matches, in which he has scored 42 runs at an average of 21.

## MS Dhoni returns to US Open, rocks denim-on-denim look

**New Delhi. (Agency)**

World Cup-winning former India captain MS Dhoni returned to the US Open with his friends and enjoyed a night of high-quality tennis action. Dhoni was seen watching Novak Djokovic's men's singles quarter-final against Taylor Fritz on Tuesday, 3 September. The former India skipper was seated at Arthur Ashe Stadium, soaking in the atmosphere during the late-night clash in New York. While Novak Djokovic entertained his faithful supporters with another masterclass, MS Dhoni stole the spotlight with his striking all-denim look. The Chennai Super Kings icon cut a dapper figure in an oversized denim shirt and blue jeans. Appearing trim and well-groomed, Dhoni sported a neatly maintained beard as he watched the action alongside his friend and businessman, Hitesh Sanghvi. Hitesh shared a video of Dhoni enjoying the contest from the stands of a packed Arthur Ashe Stadium. As Dhoni looked on, a man who continues to prove that age is just a number



turned back the clock once again. Ageless Novak Djokovic, 38, outclassed the 27-year-old Fritz in four sets. The Serb appeared in complete command throughout the contest, extending his dominance over one of the sport's rising stars. Djokovic now braces for a stern test, with a semi-final showdown lined up against No. 2 seed Carlos Alcaraz. Meanwhile, Dhoni has been a familiar face at major tennis tournaments such as Wimbledon and the US Open, making the most of his time away from cricket. He has also made it something of an annual ritual to spend time in the United States, indulging in golf and enjoying other sporting spectacles. A couple of years ago, Dhoni was spotted playing golf with friends, including fellow cricketer Kedar Jadhav.

**Asia Cup 2025: India were held to a 2-2 draw by Korea, who rolled back the years, playing man-to-man, cutting down on errors, and moving in only when they were convinced of space. India need to step up as they brace for tricky tests in the remainder of the Super 4s stage in Rajbir.**

## MS Dhoni and I will smoke hookah: Irfan Pathan shuts down troll as old clip explodes

**An old 2020 interview of Irfan Pathan has resurfaced on social media, sparking debate over his remarks about MS Dhoni and alleged favouritism in the Indian team. The former all-rounder, however, has clarified his stance, dismissing the chatter as "fan wars" and cheekily shutting down a troll with a "hookah with Dhoni" quip.**

**New Delhi. (Agency)**  
Former India fast bowler Irfan Pathan has addressed the chatter surrounding one of his old interviews from 2020, which has gone viral again after resurfacing on social media. Irfan took to his platforms to hint at "fan wars" and a "PR lobby", claiming that his statements about MS Dhoni in that interview were taken out of context. To provide clarity, Irfan was referring to his

2020 interview with India Today's sister channel, SportsTak. In a candid conversation, he spoke about the way his international career had ended, recalling exchanges with then-captain MS Dhoni. In what was seen as an underhanded dig, Irfan remarked that he did not have the habit of setting up hookah bars in a cricketer's hotel room in order to secure selection in the senior national team. Although Irfan did not name Dhoni directly when he made the hookah comment, social media buzzed with speculation that the former left-arm pacer was referring to the World Cup-winning captain, accusing him of having favourites in the side. Expressing surprise at the clip resurfacing and gaining traction years later, Irfan wrote: "Half decade old video surfacing NOW with a twisted context to the Statement. Fan war? PR lobby?"

The former all-rounder also shut down a social media user who attempted to poke him with the hookah reference. When the user posted the jibe under an unrelated message in which



Irfan was wishing Mohammed Shami on his birthday on Wednesday, Irfan hit back with a cheeky response: "Mein or @msdhoni satteh kar pieng (MS Dhoni and I will sit together and smoke)," he said. Irfan was one of India's key performers with the ball during the early years of Dhoni's captaincy. In the 2007 T20 World Cup triumph, he played a pivotal role and carried that form into major international tours, including India's landmark tri-series victory in Australia in 2008. However, injury concerns hampered his progress in the latter half of his career, and despite taking a five-wicket haul in what proved to be his final one-day international in 2012, Irfan was dropped from the side. In his 2020 interview, Irfan also reflected on conversations he had sought with Dhoni regarding his place and performances in the team. He further alleged that the media had misquoted Dhoni's critical assessment of his displays during the 2008 tri-series. Irfan featured in all 10 matches of that series, picking up 11 wickets.

"Yes, I asked him. During the 2008 Australia series, Mahi bhai's statement came out in the media that Irfan wasn't bowling well. So I thought I had bowled well throughout the series, so I went and asked Mahi bhai about this. Sometimes, the statements are twisted in the media, so I also wanted to clarify," Irfan said. "So Mahi bhai said, 'no Irfan, there is nothing like this, everything's going as per plans.' When you get a reply like this, then you believe that okay, you do what you can. But again in 2012, I wanted to clarify. But if you keep asking for explanations again and again after that, you hurt your self-respect. Self-respect is paramount for Pathans."

## Scottie Scheffler vs Rory McIlroy Set to Captain Golf Channel Games in December

**New Delhi. (Agency)**  
Golf fans will have something unique to look forward to this winter. World No. 1 Scottie Scheffler and World No. 2 Rory McIlroy will go head-to-head as captains in the Golf Channel Games, a new exhibition event set for Wednesday, December 17, at Trump National Golf Club Jupiter in Florida. This primetime broadcast will air on both Golf Channel and USA Network, which will give viewers a chance to see the game's two biggest stars in a very different format. It is noteworthy that the Golf Channel Games will not follow the traditional structure of a 72-hole tournament. The event will now feature a series of fast-paced challenges designed specifically to test a range of golfing skills under pressure. Each captain will lead a four-man team, and the contests are to be built around both precision and speed.

**WHAT'S NEW**  
One of the highlights will be the Timed Drive Chip and Putt, where players compete individually to drive a set distance, chip close to the pin, and sink putts as quickly as

possible. Another fan-friendly feature is the 14 Club Challenge, which is a closest-to-the-pin contest where players must use every club in their bag at least and exactly



once. This will ensure that the competition will not just be about power but also creativity and adaptability. The Timed Shootout adds another layer of strategy. It will be played as a four-player alternate shot across three holes, with teammates staged at different points namely on the tee, in the

fairway, and around the green. The objective is simple, to finish with the lowest score in the shortest time. Finally, the event will conclude with the Captains' Challenge, where Scheffler and McIlroy themselves will face a sequence of shots, including bunker escapes, wedge play, and long putts. Their combined performance will later help decide the overall outcome. While the exact team lineups have not yet been announced, the involvement of Scheffler and McIlroy guarantees that the Golf Channel Games will draw plenty of attention. Organisers are also expected to reveal the full rosters in the coming weeks, and there is speculation already building about which PGA Tour stars or rising talents might join them.

The timing of the event also matters. It will be held in December, and comes at a point when the main tours are winding down, offering fans something different during the off-season. For Scheffler and McIlroy, it is an opportunity to showcase their skills in a more relaxed, entertaining format while also keeping their competitive edge sharp as they head into the new year.

## Explained: Watching IPL live just got costlier thanks to new GST rules

**New Delhi. (Agency)**  
Cricket fans in India will now have to dig deeper into their pockets to watch IPL matches live, as the government has raised the GST on premium sporting events from 28% to 40%. The sharp increase places IPL tickets in the highest tax bracket, alongside casinos, race clubs, and luxury goods. According to official guidelines, the GST hike applies to "admission to casinos, the

clubs, any place having casinos or race clubs, or sporting events like the IPL." The new rates are part of a broader GST reform targeting high-value discretionary spending and are set to take effect from 22 September 2025. Under the previous structure, a ticket priced at Rs 1,000 attracted 28% GST, taking the total cost to Rs 1,280. With the revised 40% rate, the same ticket will now cost Rs 1,400—a Rs

120 jump for every Rs 1,000 spent, representing a 12% increase in effective cost. Here is a breakdown of how the GST hike impacts different ticket prices:

Rs 500 ticket: Rs 700 (up from Rs 640)

Rs 1,000 ticket: Rs 1,400 (up from Rs 1,280)

Rs 2,000 ticket: Rs 2,800 (up from Rs 2,560)

The uniform 40% tax applies to all IPL tickets and other high-value sporting events, treating them as non-essential or luxury entertainment.



**Cricket fans in India will now have to pay more to watch IPL matches live, after the government raised the GST on premium sporting events from 28% to 40%. A ticket that previously cost Rs 1,000 plus GST, bringing the total to Rs 1,280, will now set fans back Rs 1,400—a jump of Rs 120.**

**Rajbir. (Agency)**  
To some, the 2-2 draw against South Korea was a result, simplified to the last digit, of rampant missed opportunities. To others, it was a one-dimensional game, bordering on weariness. But if you step aside from the usual criticism, you'll see a spreadsheet of tactical mistakes that a focused Korean side forced the Indians to commit in their own backyard, before a raucous crowd, drenched to the skin from the pre-match showers.

It was a delayed start, but for purists and fans alike, the match was a delight. After a long time, Korea played like they used to, rolling back the years, playing man-to-man, cutting down on errors, and moving in only when they were convinced of space. Korea's strength, back when they virtually ruled the continent and won an Olympic silver in 2000, was built on grit, focus, and technical perfection. Very few teams, apart from the likes of Germany, trap as well as the Koreans. In Rajbir, over the first three quarters, they excelled. They

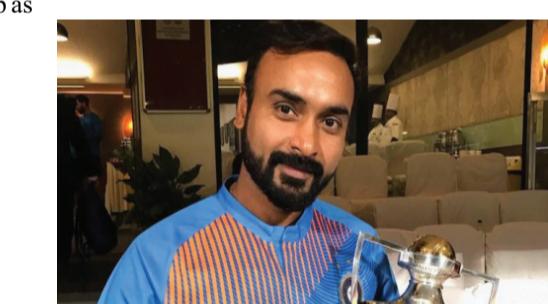


rarely missed a trap and hardly gave away momentum because of a deflection. India played like they usually do. Caught in the euphoria of an initial first-quarter burst, they expected Korea to cave in. It wasn't bad tactics; it was just a night where the Koreans hunkered down and decided to give India a run for their money. Yet again, the argument could be that India should have been runaway winners. In truth, Korea could have

## A night of frustration at Asia Cup: The 2-2 draw against Korea

walked away with the game too. In the end, hockey as a sport doesn't always favor the better attacking team, and there are no points for raids on the opposition goal. The scoreboard doesn't lie, and the 2-2 draw was justified. India, in the initial first and fourth quarters, was like a gale threatening to demolish the Korean defense. It was an orchestral performance, with each instrument in sync with the other; the final beat was the only piece missing. Four penalty corners flew by in the first seven minutes of the match. Then, Sukhjeet snatched a ball off Seung Min Bae, dispatching it to an overlapping Hardik Singh, ten meters off the striking circle. Hardik, as only he can, went past Seung Min Bae, drove on, slightly surprised by the space afforded, and slotted it past the Korean goalkeeper Jaehan Kim. It was a spectacular goal and should have opened the floodgates. On the contrary, Korea flipped the game, taking control of the midfield.

25 years, I announce my retirement from cricket — a game that has been my first love, my teacher, and my greatest source of joy. This journey has been filled with countless emotions — moments of pride, hardship, learning, and love. I am deeply grateful to the BCCI, Haryana Cricket Association, my coaches, support staff, colleagues, and most importantly, the fans, whose faith and support gave me strength at every step," wrote Mishra on his X account. "From the struggles and sacrifices in the early days to the unforgettable moments on the field, every chapter has been an experience that has shaped me as a cricketer and as a person. To my family — thank you for standing firmly by my side through the highs and lows. To my teammates and mentors — thank you for making this journey so special. As I close this chapter, my heart is full of gratitude and love. Cricket has given me everything, and now, I look forward to giving back to the game that made me who I am," he added.



## Goods and services under new 40% GST slab explained

### New Delhi.(Agency)

Even as the GST on most household and aspirational items has been reduced, some items have been assigned a special rate of 40%. This special rate is applicable only to a few selected goods, predominantly "sin goods" and a few luxury items. The special rate was introduced because many of these goods previously attracted a Compensation Cess in addition to the standard GST. To maintain a consistent tax incidence after the decision to end the Compensation Cess, the cess rate is being merged with the GST. For other goods and services, this special rate has been applied because they were already in the highest GST bracket of 28%. The list of goods and services subject to the 40% GST rate is as follows:

#### Pan masala

All goods (including aerated waters) containing added sugar, other sweetening matter, or flavoring.

#### Other non-alcoholic beverages.

Carbonated Beverages of Fruit Drink or Carbonated Beverages with Fruit Juice; Caffeinated Beverages.

Unmanufactured tobacco; tobacco refuse (other than tobacco leaves); Cigars, cheroots, cigarillos, and cigarettes, of tobacco or tobacco substitutes.

Other manufactured tobacco and manufactured tobacco substitutes; "homogenised" or "reconstituted" tobacco; tobacco extracts and essences; Products containing tobacco or reconstituted tobacco intended for inhalation without combustion; Products containing tobacco or nicotine substitutes intended for inhalation without combustion.

Larger passenger cars, SUVs, and high-end luxury vehicles.

#### Aircraft for personal use.

Yachts and other vessels for pleasure or sports.

Lottery tickets, betting, gambling, horse racing, and casinos. Admission to casinos, race clubs, any place with casinos or race clubs, or sporting events like the IPL.

## PF Withdrawal Rules Explained: How Often Can You Take Money Out While Still Working Find Out

### New Delhi.(Agency)

Planning for the future isn't just about earning but it's also about saving smartly. For most salaried employees, a part of their monthly income is automatically set aside as retirement savings through the Employee Provident Fund (EPF). This fund builds up over time and usually becomes a lump sum benefit when you retire at 58. But did you know that you don't always have to wait until retirement? Under specific conditions, employees are allowed to withdraw money from their EPF account earlier. When it comes to your Provident Fund, you don't always have to wait until retirement to access your savings. In some situations, employees are allowed to withdraw money while still working but there are rules. You must meet certain conditions, and even then, there are limits on both how often and how much you can withdraw. As per the EPFO guidelines, you can make multiple withdrawals from your PF account while still employed—there's no cap on the number of times. However, the catch is that you can't take out the full balance; only a portion is allowed under specific conditions. Also, if you choose to withdraw a lump sum before completing five years of service, a TDS (Tax Deducted at Source) will be applied to the amount. *Situations When You Can Withdraw From Your PF*

**Medical Emergency:** If you or your family face a medical emergency, you can withdraw up to six months of your salary or your own PF contribution with interest (whichever is lower). The best part—there's no waiting period for this withdrawal.

## IndusInd Bank Lands In A Soup: Former CFO Roots Out Decade-Old Irregularities, Seeks Board Chairman's Removal

### New Delhi.(Agency)

Private Sector Lender IndusInd Bank is in the middle of a storm, with a former top executive alleging treasury-related irregularities to the tune of Rs 2,600 crore over more than a decade.

It all began with a letter dated August 26, addressed to the Prime Minister's Office, by Gobind Jain, the bank's former Chief Financial Officer. In his communication, Jain claimed that serious irregularities have been going on in the bank's treasury operations for more than a decade. According to him, he was the only one to have flagged the alleged violations. In what he described as a "lone battle", Jain said he tried to expose the irregularities despite fear and resistance within the bank. Gobind Jain's story does not accuse the bank's top management of financial irregularities alone. He has alleged that some senior officials of the bank, especially board chairman Sunil Mehta and his close associates, created a "climate of fear" inside the institution. According to Jain, as soon as he raised these issues, he was deliberately targeted while the real culprits were protected. Matters escalated further when employees who supported him were also sidelined, according to Jain. "Baseless and motivated": IndusInd Bank's denial

IndusInd Bank has outrightly rejected all allegations made by Jain, calling them "baseless and motivated". The bank said it had already disclosed accounting irregularities in derivatives, microfinance, and other revenue streams to the stock exchanges between March and May 2025.

# From shampoo to small cars: What's cheaper and costlier under new GST

### The new simplified two-tier tax structure with rates of 5% and 18% is set to take effect from September 22.

### New Delhi.(Agency)

India's GST Council on Wednesday approved a simplified two-tier tax structure with rates of 5% and 18%, set to take effect from September 22. The decision was reached during the 56th meeting of the Council, addressing the issues of retail consumption, compensation cess and also the weakening exports due to global trade volatilities.

Here is a detailed look at the key changes in tax rates on essential, non-essential and luxury goods and services.

### WHAT IS CHEAPER NOW

Dairy, staples and packaged foods UHT milk, paneer, roti, paratha, sweets, chocolates, coffee, sauces, biscuits, pasta, cereals, dried fruits, nuts, confectionery, refined sugar, syrups, and vegetable oils will be tax free, a big cut from earlier rates.

### Healthcare items

Thirty-three life-saving drugs, diagnostic kits, medical oxygen, thermometers, glucometers, and health and life insurance policies are also fully exempted from GST. Some essential medicines that earlier attracted 5–12% tax have also been moved to the nil category.

### Insurance

GST on individual life and health insurance premiums has been reduced to zero.

### Daily essentials and personal care

Products like hair oil, shampoo, toothpaste, soap, toothbrushes, shaving cream, butter, ghee, paneer, and packaged snacks such as namkeen and mixtures will now



be taxed at 5%, down from 12–18%.

### Education and stationery

Maps, charts, globes, pencils, notebooks, erasers, and other stationery items will now be completely exempt from GST.

### Farming and agriculture equipment

Tractors, tractor parts, tyres, bio-pesticides, drip irrigation systems, sprinklers, and other farm machinery will be taxed at 5%, instead of 12–18%.

### Everyday vehicles

Small passenger cars (petrol/LPG/CNG up to 1,200 cc; diesel up to 1,500 cc; length up to 4 metres), two-wheelers up to 350 cc, three-wheelers, goods carriers, buses, and ambulances will now be taxed at 18%, down from 28% plus cess.

### Home appliances and electronics

Air conditioners, TVs larger than 32 inches, monitors, projectors, and dishwashers will now attract 18% GST, instead of 28%.

### Building materials and textiles

Cement is down to 18% from 28%. Footwear, textiles, handicrafts, man-made fibres, and yarn will now be taxed at just 5%.

### Renewable energy and others

Renewable energy components, some chemicals like sulphuric acid, and certain construction materials have been moved to the 5% slab. A few items have even become completely tax-free.

## SUVs, bigger cars to attract 40% flat tax with no cess under GST 2.0

### New Delhi.(Agency)

The government on Wednesday announced that the GST rate on all mid-size and large cars—vehicles with an engine capacity above 1500 cc or length over 4000 mm—has been fixed at a flat 40%. Similarly, vehicles such as Sports Utility Vehicles (SUVs), Multi Utility Vehicles (MUVs), Multi-Purpose Vehicles (MPVs), and Cross-Over Utility Vehicles (XUVs), with engine capacity above 1500 cc, length exceeding 4000 mm, and ground clearance of 170 mm or more, will also attract 40% GST, with no additional cess. This effectively lowers the overall tax burden on these vehicles, as the government has removed the earlier compensation cess by placing them directly under the highest GST slab of 40%.

According to a set of FAQs issued on Wednesday, mid-size and large cars currently attract 28% GST along with a compensation cess ranging from 17–22%, pushing the total tax incidence to 45–50%. Under the new structure, they will face a uniform 40% GST with no cess.



For small cars, the GST rate has been cut from 28% to 18%. For tax purposes, small cars are defined as petrol, LPG, or CNG cars with engine capacity up to 1200 cc and length up to 4000 mm, and diesel cars with engine capacity up to 1500 cc and length up to 4000 mm.

The GST rate on electric vehicles remains unchanged at 5%. Motorcycles with engine capacity up to 350 cc will attract 18% GST, while those above 350 cc will be taxed at a flat 40% with no cess. The revised rates, announced after the 56th GST Council meeting on Wednesday, will come into effect from September 22.

## Equities cheer GST reforms, rupee struggles to hold ground

### At 12.13 noon, the Sensex was up 265 points at 80,832 level, and Nifty50 was around 24,776.

### New Delhi.(Agency)

CHENNAI: Indian markets traded firm at midday on Thursday, September 4, with strong gains led by auto and FMCG stocks after the government's sweeping GST rate overhaul. In the early session on Thursday, the Sensex was up about 400 points, hovering near 80,970, while the Nifty gained around 117 points to trade at 24,831. Broader indices also saw support, with midcap and smallcap benchmarks rising close to 0.6 percent each. At 12.13 noon, the Sensex was up 265 points at 80,832 level, and Nifty50 was around 24,776.



three to six percent. Optimism around GST cuts, particularly for cars and consumer essentials, lifted sentiment ahead of the festive season. Market analysts noted that the rally will sustain only if the Sensex remains above 80,700 and the Nifty holds the 24,700–24,800 zone.

The rupee, meanwhile, remained under slight pressure despite softer global dollar trends. It opened at 88.08 against the U.S. dollar and hovered around 88.03 to 88.12 by noon, slipping marginally from the previous close. Import demand and weak foreign inflows continue to weigh on the currency, making it one of Asia's underperformers this year.

Exporters have been lobbying the Reserve Bank of India to allow conversion of overseas earnings at weaker rates to offset the hit from U.S. tariffs, a move that could further complicate currency management. Analysts expect the rupee to stay near 88.04 by end-September, with risks of weakening toward 90 if tariff concerns intensify. Overall, equities reflected confidence in policy reforms, while the rupee's struggle underscored India's external sector challenges. Investors will watch for U.S. economic data and global trade developments for the next big trigger.

## Property prices may decline by up to 5% as GST on cement slashed to 18%

### New Delhi.(Agency)

NEW DELHI: Property prices could fall by up to 5% following the reduction in goods and services tax (GST) on key construction materials. The GST on cement has been cut from 28% to 18%, while the tax rate on marble and granite blocks has been reduced from 12% to 5%. Anuj Puri, Chairman of ANAROCK Group said that the forthcoming GST changes, which will go into effect from September 22, 2025, will have a positive impact on the Indian residential, retail, and office real estate sectors. Puri added that reduced GST on construction materials like cement can reduce construction costs by as much as 3-5%. "Developers, especially those engaged in creating affordable housing, will get major relief in terms of cash flows and margins. The reduced construction

costs, if passed on to homebuyers, can boost demand in these segments," he added. Anshuman Magazine, Chairman & CEO of India, South-East Asia, Middle East & Africa at CBRE said with cement, steel, and other inputs typically accounting for nearly 40–45% of total construction costs, this reduction will meaningfully lower project expenses. Developers can now pass on part of these savings to homebuyers, improving affordability and stimulating demand across segments. This timely reform comes as a festive season boost, creating the right conditions to spur homebuyer sentiment and drive purchase decisions. The GST Council, led by Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman, on Wednesday gave its nod to a two-tier rate structure of 5 and 18% with the new structure set to be implemented

from September 22. As part of these changes, a special 40% GST slab has been introduced for "super luxury" and "sin" goods. Mohit Goel, Managing Director, Omaxe said that by reducing rates on key inputs like cement, granite and marble, the government has eased cost pressures in construction and simplified compliance, improving affordability for homebuyers, especially in the under-construction segment. "This reform comes at an important moment with stable interest rates, strong festive sentiment and rising demand for quality housing shaping a positive outlook. This balanced approach to taxation will not only benefit homebuyers but also strengthen the broader housing ecosystem, driving investment, employment, and confidence across Bharat's growing cities," added Goel.

## Farmers get GST breather: tractors, fruits and fertilisers turn affordable

### Following the latest GST announcement, farmers are expected to get relief as their cultivation costs will reduce. Farmers have long demanded lower taxes for the agriculture sector.

### New Delhi.(Agency)

The GST Council meeting brought major changes to the tax slabs. The central government has removed the 12% and 28% GST slabs, leaving only 5%, 18%, and 40%. Most items in the agriculture sector have now been placed under the 5% slab. Following this announcement, farmers are expected to get relief as their cultivation costs will reduce. Farmers have long demanded lower taxes for the agriculture sector. However, chemical pesticides will still attract 18% GST; only

bio-pesticides have seen a reduction. Farm machinery is a crucial partner for farmers, with tractors playing the most significant role. The era of ploughing with bulls is nearly over, and tractors have become central to modern farming. Rising tractor prices have always been a concern for farmers. Following the GST slab changes, tractors with engines below 1800 cc will now attract 5% GST, down from the earlier 18%. Other tractor parts, including tyres, tubes, hydraulic pumps, and various accessories, will also become cheaper. This move is expected to benefit small farmers by lowering their expenditure on tractors.

### Irrigation equipment gets a push

Farmers understand the importance of irrigation. The GST changes aim to promote modern irrigation methods like drip and sprinkler systems, helping save water and deliver the right amount to crops. Fixed-speed diesel engines under 15 HP, harvesting and threshing machinery, and composting machines have been moved from 12% to 5% GST. This can lead to significant price



reductions for these tools.

### Relief on fertilisers

The cost of key raw materials for fertiliser production has been reduced. Items like ammonia, sulphuric acid, and nitric acid have moved from 18% to 5% GST. Lower production costs prevent companies from passing price increases onto farmers, keeping fertilisers affordable and demand stable. Additionally, 12 bio-pesticides and micronutrients have also been shifted from 12% to 5% GST.

### Fruits, vegetables and food processing benefit

Processed food products have also seen tax

cuts. Items made from fruits and vegetables have been moved from 12% to 5% GST. This change is expected to benefit farmer producer organisations and small industries, potentially improving their incomes.

### Dairy products become more affordable

The GST rates for dairy-use milk and dairy products have been reduced from 12% to 5%. This will make essential sources of protein and fat more affordable for families, promoting better nutritional security.

### Fish and honey get relief

The GST rate on aquaculture products, including processed and preserved fish, has been reduced, which is expected to boost fisheries across the country. Natural honey will also benefit beekeepers, tribal communities, and rural self-help groups, with a 5% GST applied.

### Solar energy and commercial vehicles see cuts

To further help farmers, the government has reduced GST rates on solar energy equipment and commercial cargo vehicles. Solar-based equipment will now attract 5% GST.

# Mouni Roy's

Everyday Look Is Becoming Internet's New Obsession



Bollywood actress Mouni Roy once again won over her fans with her effortless fashion sense. The actress was recently seen in a town, and she made a stylish entry in a relaxed yet stylish Gucci oversized T-shirt with shorts. Her look became viral soon after a video of the moment was posted on Instagram, and fans admired her to bits. In the clip, Mouni was seen interacting with paparazzi who teased her playfully. One of them remarked, "Mouni ji ruko na, bohot fast rehte hai," which translates to, "Mouni ji, stop for a moment, you're always in such a hurry." The actress smiled while continuing to walk, showcasing her usual graceful charm.

#### Fans Applaud Mouni's Style

The video created a stir online, with fans throwing compliments at her everyday style. Several complimented Mouni on balancing comfort and fashion, while others wrote heart and clap emojis in the comments. Her simple yet stylish Gucci attire was the buzz, showing she could cut a figure even in a simple outfit. One of them commented, "So elegant and stylish," while another wrote with several pink heart emojis. The response reconfirmed the popularity of Mouni as a fashion icon and favourite actress.

#### Moments Go Viral

Mouni Roy is usually snapped by paparazzi when she makes a public appearance in Mumbai. Her interactions with the click-happy photographers often make headlines online, with fans loving to catch her off guard and natural. This new video, where she was teased for walking fast, showcases the cordial relationship she has with the paparazzi. These lighthearted banter exchanges usually enhance the celebrity sighting charm, turning these instances viral on social media within hours.

#### Growing Popularity Aside From Fashion

Though her fashion outings make headlines quite often, Mouni Roy keeps broadening her professional journey with varied Bollywood projects. With roles in movies such as Gold and Brahmastra, along with a successful stint on television, Mouni has emerged as a multi-faceted artist. Adding to her journey, Mouni has now begun shooting for her upcoming film The Wives. Directed by acclaimed filmmaker Madhur Bhandarkar, the project promises to explore the untold stories of Bollywood's star wives, offering the actress yet another powerful role to showcase her versatility.



# Divya Khosla

## Dazzles Like A Diamond At Ek Chatur Naar Promotions

Bollywood actress Divya Khosla has impressed fans with her beautiful appearance in the trailer of her new film Ek Chatur Naar. A recent social media update featured her poise, generating enthusiasm as the movie prepares for release on September 12.

The video was posted on Instagram with a note, "So pretty, so elegant! #DivyaKhosla is shining. Enjoyed her in the #EkChaturNaar trailer, now waiting for 12th Sept!" The caption, in tandem



with Divya's elegant look, earned praise from fans on various platforms.

#### Fans React with Admiration

The actress, who has an impeccable sense of style, was spotted in a minimalist yet impactful appearance, accompanied by statement earrings. Social media users complimented her glow, with a fan writing, "Akele hu," as others left heart emojis and compliments.

Her appearance was universally characterised as "beautiful" and "elegant," solidifying her image as a versatile actress who meshes charm with acting ability. Multiple individuals expressed eagerness for her next film, saying they cannot wait for September 12.

#### Creating Hype for Ek Chatur Naar

The trailer of Ek Chatur Naar has already generated curiosity. Although not much is known about the plot, producers have assured that the film will be an interesting combination of drama and entertainment. Divya's work in the scenes revealed so far has boosted expectations.

The movie also includes Divya Khosla Kumar, Neil Nitin Mukesh, Sushant Singh and Yashpal Sharma, providing a robust background. This interaction has generated more buzz prior to release.

#### Divya Khosla's Growing Popular Base

Divya Khosla is gradually becoming a prominent figure in the industry. She has also made her presence felt as a producer and director apart from acting, reflecting her multifaceted talent. Her consistent talent for reinventing her on-screen persona has kept her in the limelight, with Ek Chatur Naar poised to further entrench her increasing popularity.



Ranbir Kapoor, Alia Bhatt And Vicky Kaushal To Film Love & War Climax In Sicily: Report



Sanjay Leela Bhansali is taking Bollywood romance and drama to a global stage. The filmmaker will shoot the much-awaited climax of Love & War in Sicily, Italy, with Ranbir Kapoor, Alia Bhatt and Vicky Kaushal at the centre of the story.

After completing nearly 125 days of shoot in India, including a huge schedule on a specially created set in Mumbai, the film now heads overseas. An insider revealed, as quoted in India Today, "Sanjay Leela Bhansali is going international with Love & War. The director is going to shoot the climax scene of the film in Italy, Sicily. It's planned as a massive schedule across the city, making this one of the grandest shoots of the film."

The climax promises a mix of towering emotions, romance and visual scale. "SLB loves to shoot larger-than-life dramatic moments, and the climax of Love & War will be drama at its peak with romance in the backdrop. He plans to shoot a prolonged climax sequence across Sicily, exploring the diverse landscape of the city. Through the schedule, he will also shoot for a song with the three characters. He will be stationed abroad for almost a month," the source shared.

Meanwhile, Sanjay Leela Bhansali has fallen into hot water as reports suggest that an FIR has been filed against him and two others in Rajasthan. According to a report in PTI, the complaint has been filed by a man named Prateek Raj Mathur, who claimed that he was given a contract as a line producer by Bhansali, but it was later cancelled.

Circle Officer Vishal Jangid told PTI that Bhansali and two of his team members had given Mathur a contract, but later removed him from the project without any payment. The officer stated that the FIR has been filed against Bhansali and his team under charges of fraud, criminal conspiracy, and criminal intimidation.

Mathur claimed he had arranged everything for the film's shoot and liaised with government departments, but alleged that Bhansali and his team misbehaved when he visited them at a hotel. The matter is currently under investigation by Bichhwal SHO Govind Singh Charan.

**Shilpa Shetty 'Shuts Down' Bastian Bandra, Gauahar Khan Welcomes Second Child**



News of Shilpa Shetty's Bandra hotspot, Bastion, shutting its doors quickly sparked a wave of chatter online, leaving fans and food lovers equally surprised. But the actress has now stepped in to set the record straight. In a video message, Shilpa shared that she had been inundated with calls and wanted to clarify the buzz. She explained that Bastion isn't closing for good but rather evolving. A new South Indian restaurant will take over the Bandra space, while Bastion itself will soon make its way to Juhu with the launch of the much-awaited Bastion Beach Club.

Gauahar Khan has welcomed her second child, a baby boy, on September 1, 2025. The actress, who was expecting her second baby, took to her Instagram and shared a post to announce the arrival of her son Zehaan's little brother. While sharing the post, she just wrote "Alhamdulillah" in the caption.

The trailer of Anurag Kashyap's upcoming film Nishaanchi was launched today, marking the Bollywood debut of Aaishvary Thackeray, grandson of the late Shiv Sena founder Bal Thackeray.

Soon after the release, the filmmaker's daughter, Aaliyah Kashyap, issued a statement highlighting what she described as a recurring problem in the industry—the lack of audience support for meaningful cinema at the time of release. She expressed disappointment that films with strong content often struggle at the box office, only to be hailed later as "cult classics."

Actress Simple Kaul, best known for her performances in Shararat and Taarak Mehta Ka Ooltah Chashmah, has confirmed her separation from husband Rahul Loomba after 15 years of marriage. Describing the decision as mutual, Kaul said the couple chose to part ways with respect and understanding, emphasising the care with which they have handled this significant change in their lives.

Television favourites Jasmine Bhasin and Aly Goni, who are often admired for their strong bond, recently joined Ganpati celebrations in Mumbai. The couple was accompanied by close friends and fellow actors, making the festivities a lively affair. Photos and videos from the event have since surfaced online, offering fans an inside look at the joyous occasion.



# 8 ways to get off the beaten track in Thailand

Thailand is a major travel destination, and as a result, much of its once-untouched landscape and island culture has been modernised. Yet, it still seems remarkably easy to get 'off the beaten track' in Thailand. This is due, in large part, to the fact that many first- and second-time visitors simply choose not to (as knowing the language quickly becomes a legitimate necessity and the transportation infrastructure degenerates aggressively farther from the tourist hotspots). The majority of the wonders to be seen in Thailand have become top tourist traps by default, so getting off the beaten path is an undertaking for a different kind of thrill—the experience of true Thai life, synced with the ebb and flow of the weather and seasons. This makes exploring and experiencing the 'unseen' Thailand a great opportunity to break from the hustle of 9-5 culture, and to often find more eco-friendly and fulfilling experiences.

## Travel till you run out of English speakers

This seems pretty obvious, but what acts as a deterrent to most travellers is a fantastic guide to determine your level of off-track-ness. Yes, it will mean you'll need to learn a few key phrases (such as 7-Eleven yoo nai

You know you're on the right track when the Wikipedia page for Isaan lists 'Buddhist monks' as the first subcategory under 'Notable natives or residents'. Literally translating to 'north east direction', this massive section of north-eastern Thailand is home to a third of the

and time should be allotted to teasing apart the Laotian and Burmese influences on Thai regions. Backpackers gravitate to the north to lose themselves in the legendary trekking and motorcycling circuits (such as the well-known ones in Chiang Mai, and the lesser-travelled ones in Nan), so it's a perfect place to get outdoorsy and carve your own path.

The remote Nan province in particular, right at Laos border, is a great place to explore between its three major towns and six national parks.

## Follow the coast

Thailand's beach culture is justifiably legendary, considering its 2,000 miles of coastline and 85-degree summer days. This becomes incredibly evident when travelling to any of the many heavily populated beaches, such as the majority of the Krabi coast. But follow that coast a little farther, and you'll discover beaches that don't make to the 'top 10' lists, but wind up more beautiful in their isolation. Take Railay Beach in Southern Thailand, for example. It's a killer beach, and many make a day trip out there for sun, surf, cave exploration, and climbing. As a result, it's also become home to a dozen or more luxury resorts and is now super touristy. Follow the coast north a bit, however, and you'll wind up at Tonsai Beach—just as sweet, less than a third as populated. Plus, Tonsai is super laid-back, and a great place to grab a freshly ground chai or coffee and learn some slacklining or fire dancing.

## Explore the islands

Thailand has a ton of islands. For example, the island group in Phang Nga Bay comprises 67. Some islands are big enough to house full

native population, but only sees about 0.31% of the nation's overall annual tourists. Sure, there are some key tourist hotspots in Isaan, but even those get routinely skipped over by the week- to week-and-a-half traveller starting in Bangkok.

Perhaps you'll hit up the Mekong riverside in Sangkhom to do a little hammock lounging. Perhaps you'll go to Nakhon Phanom province to see the oldest temple in Thailand (That Phanom), before reaching Loei province at the northern tip of Isaan, to explore its many peaceful river towns. Regardless of where you wind up, Isaan has it all—national parks, mountains and rivers (often with accompanying temples, like the Wat Phu Tok mountain temple and Erawan shrine), ruins, and a near-endless sea of rice paddies.

Moreover, Northern Thailand is something of a hub for backpackers and long-holidaymakers. As the nexus between Thailand, Laos, and Myanmar, Northern Thailand is a cultural blend of the three,

resorts, while others (many of which are privately owned and readily and cheaply available for rent) are much smaller and have accommodations for only a few, but are as off-the-beaten-track as they are ideal getaways for a peaceful and remote stay. Among the

best are the islands in Trat province off the Andaman coast. Take Ko Kut, which has been described as 'so off-the-beaten-path you might get bored', or Ko Chang, the second largest Thai island after Phuket and the last 'cheap' island—large enough to find some solid secluded spots.

## Don't rule out any day trips

Many incredible Thailand experiences remain incredible because they don't, at the very first glance, seem quite as appealing. Take Doy Din Dang pottery studio, 7 mi north of Chiang Rai. Meaning 'Red Clay Hill', Doy Din Dang is a pottery studio in the middle of jungle nowhere, and is home to Somluk Pantiboon—an internationally renowned master potter. He gathers every material he uses from the land and supplies a lot of the ceramic ware you'll encounter at local restaurants. You can also sample some home-grown coffee that's supposed to be quite epic, so all around, it's an awesome trip that would likely never have occurred to you in the shadow of white temples and giant golden buddhas.

Alternatively, check out Bo Klua salt wells outside of Nan. They're thought to have been in use for over 800 years and tap into brine from ocean water trapped underground for millennia. The water is pulled up to the surface and boiled off to access the salt. Again, totally remote and not terribly exciting at first glance, but an awesome way to get utterly off the tourist grid.

## Ask the locals

If you must start your trip in one of the huge touristy cities in Thailand, fear not, there are still some amazing 'unseen' areas and neighbourhoods well within the city limits. Want to find where all the locals hide when the sea of tour buses shows up? Ask someone (and enjoy the benefit of being able to communicate with them in your native language). Of course, be wary, as some locals in the tourist districts will have their own agendas, but for the most part, you're likely to discover some legit locals-only spots by talking to the notoriously friendly people of Thailand. Want some peace? Try spending a stint at a wat and explore the Buddhist culture of the country. For something altogether different, have someone direct you to the part-store, part-museum Papaya Vintage Shop in Bangkok, or go to Phang Nga in Phuket on your own between tours. Finally, when you've exhausted all the resources within the city, venture just outside them—for example, to Amphawa, just west of Bangkok, where you'll find a kickass floating market on weekends.

## Travel slow

The best way to get off the beaten track in virtually any destination is to give yourself enough time to do so. Sometimes this means having enough time to find that fork in the road that takes you to San Kamphaeng Hot Springs outside Chiang Mai. Sometimes it means having enough time to let a two- or three-day stay at Wat Suan Mokkh become a week-long experience. The only way to find what you're looking for, to touch those furthest obscure regions, is to be around long enough to identify what those regions are, and the idiosyncrasies that define each and its inhabitants. If you've come to experience true Thai living, you really have to give yourself the opportunity to live it—slow down, stay awhile.

traveller farther north and with the freedom a motorbike provides. Additionally, the motorbike is probably the most ideal way to explore the multitude of islands surrounding Thailand. Yes, some may get a little hairy if you're an inexperienced biker (like the rougher and steeper roads to the better beaches on the northern and eastern edges of Ko Pha Ngan), but by and large, the best (and most cost-effective) way to set out is on a motorbike—particularly since the cost of motorbike freedom is about 600 baht (\$18.61) daily out of Chiang Mai, and fuel only 39.27 baht (\$1.22) per gallon.

## Go north (east)

Generally, the northern half of Thailand is the best place to leave the souvenir stalls behind and enter the true 'land of smiles'. Some key regions to visit when planning your trip off the beaten path are Isaan and North.

## Travel by motorbike

One of the easiest ways to traverse Thailand and the easiest way to find the path-less-travelled is by motorbike. Even on well-worn circuits (like the 3-hour stretch from Chiang Mai to Pai via Route 1095) becomes very much an individualised experience as you

