

## Presented "Concrete Facts": PM Modi Praises Amit Shah's Parliament Speech

In a social media post, PM Modi said that Amit Shah presented "concrete facts" while addressing concerns raised by Opposition over electoral system.

New Delhi (Agency)  
Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Wednesday praised Home Minister Amit Shah for his "outstanding" speech in Parliament, where the Home Minister countered Opposition allegations on the electoral process and also responded to Congress MP Rahul Gandhi's charge of "vote theft".

In a post on X, PM Modi said that HM Shah had presented "concrete facts" while addressing concerns raised by the Opposition over the electoral system, adding that the

Home Minister had highlighted the robustness of India's democratic processes and "exposed the lies" being circulated in recent days.

"An outstanding speech by Home Minister Shri Amit Shah Ji. With concrete facts, he has highlighted diverse aspects of our electoral process, the strength of our democracy and also exposed the lies of the Opposition," PM Modi wrote on X.

HM Shah's speech came amid a heated debate over the integrity of elections, during which the Home Minister dismissed allegations of

manipulation as "baseless" and accused the Opposition of attempting to undermine public confidence in democratic institutions. He detailed procedural safeguards, historical precedents and legal frameworks to assert that India's electoral architecture remains secure and transparent.

The exchange marked one of the sharper confrontations of the ongoing session, with the Treasury benches rallying behind

HM Shah's detailed rebuttal and



the Opposition insisting that concerns raised by Rahul Gandhi

and others were legitimate and needed further examination. Union Home Minister Amit Shah, participating in a discussion on election reforms in Lok Sabha on Wednesday, rebutted every point raised by Congress leader Rahul Gandhi in his "vote theft" allegations, and cited instances of electoral manipulation by the Opposition itself. He delivered his statement amidst repeated interruptions from the Opposition benches, where he

was even forced to sit down on occasions, even as Speaker Om Birla was seen trying to bring the House in order. The Home Minister took a jibe at the Congress leader's "nuclear bomb" press conference and pointed out the anomalies in his allegations. He cited Gandhi's claim of more than 500 voters being shown on Haryana's voter list to be from the same residential address. HM Shah gave reference to the Election Commission of India (ECI), having clarified that the residence "House No. 265" is spread over a one-acre.

## Ruling Maharashtra Alliance To Fight Civic Polls Together: State Minister

A crucial meeting in this regard was attended by Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis, Deputy Chief Minister Eknath Shinde, and other senior leaders.

New Delhi (Agency)  
Maharashtra Revenue Minister Chandrashekhar Bawankule has said that the ruling Mahayuti alliance in the state will fight the forthcoming Zilla Parishad and Municipal Corporation elections as a united front. A crucial high-level meeting in this regard was attended by Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis, Deputy Chief Minister Eknath Shinde, Maharashtra Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) chief Ravindra Chavan, and senior leaders. "All district-level leaders have been directed to complete the Mahayuti structure at the grassroots level at the earliest. Minor issues may arise on 5-10 per cent seats locally, but wherever required, Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis and Deputy Chief Minister Eknath Shinde will personally intervene and take the final decision," Bawankule, who is also the BJP's state-in-charge for local body polls, told reporters.

**Ajit Pawar Is Inseparable Part Of Alliance**  
For the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation



representatives of other Mahayuti partners, will finalise seat-sharing after detailed technical analysis. Differences, if any, will be resolved by the top leadership.

Bawankule further clarified that the crucial decision regarding the post of Mayor of Mumbai

will be taken jointly by Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis, Deputy Chief Minister Eknath Shinde, and Deputy Chief Minister Ajit Pawar.

Bawankule dismissed any speculation, asserting that Deputy Chief Minister Pawar and his Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) form an integral part of the Mahayuti. "Recently local body elections saw some electoral differences among workers at a few places, but those have been completely resolved. There has never been any ill will, only normal electoral differences of opinion, which are now a thing of the past," the Maharashtra revenue minister added.

Addressing the issue of Vidarbha's development, Bawankule said that ever since the Devendra Fadnavis-led government came to power in 2014, the region has witnessed unprecedented progress. He slammed the Congress for decades of neglect that led to its decline in the region. Bawankule also reiterated that, given Vidarbha's largest forest cover in the state, the headquarters of the Forest Department will remain in Nagpur and will not be shifted.

New Delhi (Agency)

Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) chief Mohan Bhagwat said the ongoing Thiruparkundram issue in Tamil Nadu can be resolved within the state, asserting that the "strength and awakening of Hindus" in Tamil Nadu would be sufficient to achieve a favourable outcome. Speaking at the 100 Years of Sangh Journey – New Horizons event in Tiruchirappalli on Wednesday, Bhagwat was responding to an audience question on whether the RSS should escalate the Thiruparkundram issue to the national level. The matter is currently sub-judice.

"The Thiruparkundram issue, if it needs escalation, it will be done. That matter is now sub-judice. Let it resolve," he said, adding that Hindu organisations in Tamil Nadu were already working on the matter. "If at all it is needed, they will let us know. Then we will think about it." Emphasising that the situation could be settled locally, Bhagwat said, "At present, I think the issue can be resolved here only on the basis of Hindus' strength in Tamil Nadu. We will not need to

escalate it." He added that one thing was "pakkha (for sure)", that the issue would be resolved in



favour of Hindus. The Thiruparkundram dispute concerns the lighting of the traditional Karthigai Deepam lamp at 'Deepathoon', a stone lamp pillar on the Thiruparkundram hillock near a dargah in Madurai.

## Court rejects ex-Minister, family's discharge plea in Rs 31-crore land scam

A special court in Mumbai has rejected the discharge application filed by former Maharashtra Revenue Minister Eknath Khadse and his family in the Bhosari land scam, paving the way for charges to be framed against them and a trial to begin.



New Delhi (Agency)  
A special court in Mumbai rejected the discharge application of former Maharashtra Revenue Minister Eknath Khadse, his wife Mandakini Khadse, and their son-in-law Girish Chaudhary in the Bhosari land scam case, saying the accused in the matter had attempted to "strategically" use the "power and post" of the Nationalist Congress Party leader. The court's decision would now lead to framing of charges against all three of them and a start of trial.

"Whether the Sub-Registrar is to be added as an accused or not, will have to be decided by the court during trial, which depends upon the evidence which will be forthcoming. At this stage, it is sufficient to note that the material on record makes out a case for framing of charges," Special Judge Satyanarayana Navader said during the hearing. According to the case details, the alleged scam involved the purchase of a piece of land from the Maharashtra Industrial Development Corporation (MIDC) in the Bhosari industrial area near Pune. It is alleged that Khadse used his official position to facilitate the acquisition of this government land by his wife and son-in-law at a price significantly below market value. The Khadse family reportedly bought the land for Rs 3.75 crore when the actual price was Rs 13.01 crore, the Enforcement Directorate has alleged.

## Behind Handicrafts Award For Manipur Woman With Disability, A Life Of True Grit

In a light blue saree, Indira Devi smiled for the cameras from her wheelchair. She held the award - 'Divyang Artisan - Hand Embroidery' - in her lap

New Delhi (Agency)

A paralysis of the limb due to a tumour led to 80 per cent disability for Yengkhom (O) Indira Devi, a resident of Manipur's Kakching district. With movement restricted, she began working on small hand embroidery like knitting on handkerchiefs, pillow and bed covers as a hobby, her family says.

In 2014, Indira Devi - who had been living with locomotor disability - suffered rib and leg injuries in a car-bus collision of such severity that one of the drivers died on the spot, her family says.

Burdened by the second tragedy, Indira Devi, who could not walk, decided to put all her concentration on her hand embroidery work. She has not looked

back, her family says.

She was one of the artisans from all corners of India who received the National Handicrafts Awards for 2023



and 2024 from President Droupadi Murmu on Tuesday.

In a light blue saree, Indira Devi smiled for the cameras from her wheelchair. She

held the award - 'Divyang Artisan - Hand Embroidery' - in her lap. While two others from Manipur - Laishram Memicha and A Bimola Devi - also received the handicrafts awards, the circumstances that Indira Devi went through with true grit drew huge support.

"My mother is very happy. It means a lot to her. She has gone to Delhi for the award," Indira Devi's daughter, Anu, told on phone from the state capital Imphal.

Before the national recognition came, Indira Devi received several state awards for her handicrafts work that involved creating intricate embroideries on cloth, the most recognisable being an embroidered painting of the game of sagol kangjei, or polo.

## IPL matches won't leave Bengaluru, says Dy CM Shivakumar

BELAGAVI (Agency)

Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar on Wednesday said a decision on allowing IPL matches at Chinnaswamy stadium would be taken after discussing it in the cabinet meeting at Belagavi on Thursday. After meeting the newly elected KSCA President Venkatesh Prasad in Belagavi, Shivakumar said, "We have no intention of stopping cricket matches at Chinnaswamy stadium, but we have to think of crowd control measures. We will also have to incorporate Michael D'Cunha

committee suggestions in a phased manner. Venkatesh Prasad has also agreed to it. Our government is committed to organising cricket matches without denting the reputation of the state." The newly elected President of KSCA and his team met us today, seeking the government's cooperation. We will not allow any of the matches, including the IPL events, to be shifted out of Bengaluru. We will have to work together on this," he said.

Tournaments soon, says Prasad

International cricket matches, including

the IPL, will soon resume at Bengaluru's Chinnaswamy Stadium. Karnataka State Cricket Association (KSCA) President Venkatesh Prasad said that cricket fans will receive this good news soon. He visited the KSCA ground in Raj Nagar here on Wednesday, inspected the building, and later spoke to officials. He said that he has visited Belagavi and submitted a request to the CM and Deputy CM DK Shivakumar regarding the issue. Both leaders have assured that the matter will be discussed in Thursday's Assembly session.

## Will Mumbai Mayor Be From Sena? Eknath Shinde's "Mahayuti" Reply

Asked whether Shiv Sena would retain the BMC mayor position, Eknath Shinde avoided staking any claim. "The mayor of Mumbai will be from the Mahayuti," was all he said - twice.

Mumbai (Agency)

Maharashtra Deputy Chief Minister Eknath Shinde is cautious when pressed about the upcoming Mumbai mayoral election -- a race that has historically been central to the Shiv Sena's political identity. The undivided Shiv Sena had controlled the Mumbai mayor's post for 25 years. But on Wednesday, at the "Unstoppable Maharashtra" conclave organised by NDTV Marathi Manch, asked whether the Sena would retain the position, Shinde avoided staking any claim. "The mayor of Mumbai will be from the Mahayuti," was all he said - twice.

Sources said the BJP has signalled willingness to let Shinde's Sena hold the mayoral posts in Mirabhayandar and Thane, but Mumbai is non-negotiable. The political reunion of the Thackeray cousins has already injected fresh energy into the upcoming Brihanmumbai Corporation polls, especially in view of their strong personal pull in Mumbai and the Konkan region. The primary battle is expected to be between the BJP's Hindutva plank and the Thackerays' "Marathi first" narrative. In that landscape, Shinde is increasingly seen as playing a supporting role to the BJP rather than asserting the Sena's traditional dominance in the city. "All parties have the right to form alliances. Our agenda is clear - development and welfare schemes," said Shinde, when asked about the reunion of the Thackerays. He then underscored his ideological lineage. "We are following Balasaheb Thackeray's ideology," he said, while taking a swipe at the Thackerays for "not showing interest" during the rural local polls.

## News box

## Good intention, shoddy execution: What's ailing Haryana's Van Mitra plantations

## Gurgaon.(Agency)

Haryana's Van Mitra afforestation programme has crossed 1.3 lakh saplings across 2,950 sites during the current plantation season, but large approval and payment bottlenecks continue to slow its impact on the ground.

The forest department has called a high-level review meeting on Dec 11 to address delays holding up the programme. According to an official order issued by the principal chief conservator of forests (HoFF), a meeting will be held at Mangal Sen Auditorium in Karnal to review plantation progress for 2024-25 and 2025-26, review pending payments and examine approval bottlenecks. A senior forest officer said, "Issues related to verification, geo-tagging and delayed approvals will be resolved district-wise, and fresh budget demands are being finalised to ensure that no genuine Van Mitra payment remains pending." Each division has been asked to bring at least 10 Van Mitras per district, and all conservators of forests and territorial divisional forest officers (DFOs) have been asked to join virtually.

All DFOs have also been told to submit revised budget demands by Dec 10 to clear all pending payments up to March 2026. Dashboard data shows 627 Van Mitras mapped across 2,950 sites with 1,30,058 plants. Payments have been released for 87,026 plants across 1,927 sites, amounting to Rs 43.22 lakh. Several thousand more saplings are still pending or rejected across different approval levels. Currently, 6,494 plants across 104 sites await DFO approval; 2,324 (53 sites) are pending with range officers; 9,327 (170 sites) were rejected by forest guards; and 4,358 (21 sites) were rejected at the range level. Beyond these numbers, several thousand more saplings remain pending across multiple districts, according to officials. The unevenness across districts is stark. Nuh, with 18,151 plantations, has the biggest bottleneck—3,600 plants stuck at the DFO stage. Rewari, despite 2,311 plantations across 49 sites, hasn't cleared a single payment. Mahendragarh, Kaithal and Charkhi Dadri show high rejection rates due to verification failures and geo-tag mismatches, reflecting a massive loss of field effort.

## Gurgaon civic body fines agency for negligence in cattle management

## Noida.(Agency)

MCG on Wednesday imposed a penalty of Rs 1 lakh on a private agency responsible for catching stray cattle and transporting them to designated shelters. The penalty was issued for negligence in resolving complaints, installing GPS trackers on transporting vehicles and ensuring proper deployment of personnel on field.

The MCG has asked the contractor to clear all pending complaints within two days and submit daily progress reports. The junior engineer concerned has been instructed to deduct the penalty from the agency's monthly bill. The action followed a notice issued by the office of the joint commissioner (Swachh Bharat Mission), Preetpal Singh. Officials said that in an instance, teams caught three stray cows but the animals were not shifted to cow shelters as required. Moreover, vehicles meant for field operations were often unavailable. MCG also stated that the agency violated key conditions of the request for proposal, which require GPS trackers and cameras on all vehicles, along with access details for civic monitoring. For 11 days, the agency neither installed GPS devices nor fitted cameras, which prevented real-time oversight of its operations. The agency also failed to publish a helpline number for citizens to report stray cattle. The agency was awarded the contract on Nov 13, 2024 and began work on Nov 28, 2025, but several complaints remained pending for days. These complaints had been forwarded on time through multiple platforms, including the social media grievance tracker portal, the GRS portal, the CM window, samadhan shivir, the GMDA portal and the MCG helpline. An internal review found 45 complaints pending.

## Stepmother, friend get life term for killing 11-yr-old boy in Ghaziabad

## Noida.(Agency)

It was the stepmom and her friend who caused the disappearance of an 11-year-old boy "by killing him in a fit of rage", a court said two years after the incident.

The court sentenced both — stepmother Rekha and her friend Poonam — to a life term and imposed a fine of Rs 30,000 on each, directing that the time already spent in jail would be adjusted against the total sentence. The child, Shabd, had been insisting on being present when the woman showed sarees to her friend.

On Tuesday, additional sessions judge Vinod Kumar declared Rekha and Poonam guilty under Section 302 with common motive under Section 34 of the IPC and under Section 201 of the IPC for causing the disappearance of the body by throwing it in a septic tank. The incident dates back to Oct 15, 2023, when the boy was reported missing and an FIR was registered by his father, Rahul Saini, with the Modinagar police station the next day. Police initially registered the case under Section 363 (kidnapping) against unknown persons but later added sections 302 (murder) and 201 (causing disappearance of evidence) against Rekha and Poonam after being convinced that the boy never moved out of the house. Police checked the CCTV footage from the DVR of a neighbour and were convinced that the boy entered his house and never came out, whereas his stepmother informed the family members that Shabd went out to have chow mein around 4pm.

On being interrogated, Rekha confessed to have killed Shabd with the help of Poonam, who was at home at that time. She said that since the boy pulled her hair, injuring her on the nose, she lost calm and kicked him and sat on his chest while Poonam held his legs. She used a scarf (dupatta) to strangle him until he stopped resisting. Rekha told police that using the same scarf, she tied stones to the stomach and legs of the boy and threw it in the septic tank. Police recovered the body from the tank and an autopsy was conducted.

## PM2.5 level rises beyond safe limit in Gurgaon, Teri Gram pollution hotspot

## Gurgaon.(Agency)

The city's air quality index (AQI) on Wednesday went up to 276 from the previous day's 260. An analysis of PM2.5 data from air quality monitoring stations over the past 10 days shows that pollution is concentrated in a few chronic pockets instead of being distributed evenly across the region. Data from Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) indicates that Teri Gram has emerged as the city's most critical pollution hotspot so far this month, recording PM2.5 levels above 300 on six days. The station reported levels of 304 on Dec 1, 333 on Dec 2, 326 on Dec 4, 342 on Dec 6, 345 on Dec 7 and 323 on Dec 9. Sector 51 has reported consistently high baseline pollution as well, with short periods of relief. PM2.5 levels remained in the poor category for most of the first 10 days of the month, recording 283 on Dec 1, 292 on Dec 2, 251 on Dec 3, 262 on Dec 4 and 295 on Dec 5. After a brief dip to 179 on Dec 7,



pollution rose again to 327 on Dec 8 and remained high at 297 on Dec 9. At Manesar's industrial belt, monitored at Sector 2 IMT, PM2.5 levels crossed 320 for four consecutive days between Dec 1 and 4, with readings of 323, 331, 327 and 302. Levels dropped slightly to 282 on Dec 6, 254 on Dec 8 and 238 on Dec 9. Vikas Sadan showed noticeable day-to-day variation rather than persistent high

levels. PM2.5 levels fell to 159 on Dec 2 and 162 on Dec 9, although the area also recorded temporary spikes to 293 on Dec 4 and 290 on Dec 5. Gwal Pahari remained the least polluted among the five stations, although it too experienced seasonal smog. While there were brief spikes above 300 in early Dec, PM2.5 levels generally stayed lower than in the city's core hotspots. Lower traffic density

and better air movement due to its elevation helped keep pollution comparatively lower. The data shows that the air crisis is driven by persistent micro hotspots rather than uniform pollution across the city. With Teri Gram, Sector 51 and IMT Manesar repeatedly recording unsafe air, civic agencies need to focus on location-specific enforcement and source-wise control instead of broad city-level measures that do not address these chronic pockets," said Shubhansh Tiwari from the Centre for Science and Environment. "We have identified hotspots where pollution levels remain consistently high. Targeted enforcement drives are under way in these areas, including checks on construction dust, industrial emissions and waste burning. Strict action is being taken against violators, and monitoring is being intensified," said Krishan Kumar, regional officer, Haryana State Pollution Control Board.

## Land owning company gets control to complete Gurgaon project delayed by 11 years after NCLT nod

## Gurgaon.(Agency)

National Company Law Tribunal (NCLT) has approved separation of CHD Vann from the insolvency proceedings of the beleaguered CHD Developers, allowing Roots Developers — the landowners — to take full control of Vann and complete the long-delayed housing project in the city. CHD Vann, located in Sector 71, was launched in March 2014 as a 10-acre residential project with 12 towers and 569 units, offering 2, 3, and 4 BHK apartments. Possession was originally promised for Oct 2018, but the project stalled due to CHD Developers' financial distress, leaving many homebuyers burdened with EMIs and rent without any delivery in sight.

The Nov 21 order came in response to an application filed by resolution professional (RP) Rajesh Kumar Parikh. The proposal received support from the committee of creditors (CoC), with 95.5% voting in favour. With construction halted for years, the RP sought NCLT's approval to transfer all rights — land, licences, assets, receivables, and approvals — entirely to Roots, free from claims by CHD Developers' creditors. The proposal was bolstered by a memorandum of understanding (MoU) signed on Jan 8, 2024, and financial terms agreed upon with Edelweiss ARC, a major lender. As part of the settlement, Roots will pay Rs 22.9 crore to Edelweiss ARC to settle its claims. The tribunal said the application adhered to a 2023 NCLAT order, which permitted the landowners of CHD Vann to approach NCLT for project segregation from the ongoing corporate insolvency resolution process (CIRP). Both Roots and Edelweiss ARC subsequently filed affidavit and consent terms supporting the separation. With NCLT's approval, Roots will now proceed with the remaining construction, delivering homes to existing buyers, who constitute roughly half of the project's 569 flats. The remaining unsold units may be sold at market rates to fund the project's

## GMDA to map accident blackspots to reduce pedestrian deaths

## Gurgaon.(Agency)

GMDA has started an initiative to identify areas with a high risk of pedestrian accidents days after its CEO instructed officials to prepare a citywide road safety plan. The authority has asked the traffic police to map all accident-prone stretches where safety measures such as foot-over bridges are needed.

In a letter to DCP (traffic), GMDA said that several stretches, including key sections of NH8, have recorded a high number of pedestrian deaths and serious injuries in recent years. A senior official said GMDA CEO PC Meena's instruction prompted the mobility wing to begin collecting data and coordinating with enforcement agencies. "On the instruction of the CEO, we are collecting data to identify vulnerable stretches that need intervention to improve pedestrian safety," the official said. Between Jan and Nov, around 1,000 road accidents occurred in the district, resulting in 428 deaths. Pedestrians remain among the most

vulnerable road users, with 141 pedestrian deaths recorded between Jan and Sept. Last year, the city reported 479 road deaths, of which 148 were pedestrians.

Meena had earlier said that the identification and correction of these



black spots must be taken up without delay. The traffic police have now been asked to share a list of all identified black spots, along with accident and fatality data from the past three years. GMDA

said this information will help determine where foot-over bridges are essential and where alternatives such as barricading, speed-calming measures, improved signage, junction redesign or changes to signal timing may offer safer and more practical solutions.

Once the traffic police submit the data, the authority will prepare a consolidated list of priority stretches. It will then decide the next set of interventions and finalise plans for both short-term measures and long-term infrastructure upgrades.

Officials said the aim of this exercise is not only to identify locations where foot-over bridges are required but also to evaluate what other improvements can be introduced based on data and site conditions. "This will help us plan in a more integrated way, especially on corridors that see heavy footfall. Besides foot-over bridges, other geometric changes can also improve road safety," the official said.

## Multi-crore imported liquor smuggling racket busted near Signature Towers in Gurgaon

## Ghaziabad.(Agency)

A liquor smuggling racket has been busted with the haul of a large foreign-brand stock worth several crores. Acting on a tip-off, a team from the excise department on Tuesday raided a warehouse near Signature Tower and seized 3,921 cases and 176 bottles of premium imported liquor from two rooms of a shop, with individual bottle prices ranging from Rs 1,500 to Rs 2 lakh. The bottles, stored at the warehouse located at L-2/L-14A, were without mandatory hologram trace strips. "A special investigation team has been formed," deputy excise and taxation commissioner Amit Bhatia said, adding, "illegal liquor was being sold without paying customs and excise duty". The SIT, which will be headed by an ACP rank officer, will have members from the police

and excise department. The owner of the liquor vend is on the run. A popular BYOB 'Ebowl' was attached to the vend. There were around 80 different varieties of liquor, including Black White, Black Label, Absolute Vodka, Double Black, Ballantine's, Bushmills, VAT69, The Cuervo Viso, Reposado 818, Belvedere Forest, The Singleton, The Yamazaki, Hibiki, Glenwalk, Gold Label, Glenmorangie, Chivas, Elite Vodka and so on. An inventory of the liquor was prepared and a case was registered at Sector 40 police station under section 61 (illegal activities involving intoxicants, covering unlawful import, export, transport, manufacture, possession, and use of stills or materials for making liquor) of Punjab Excise Act and 318(4) (cheating) of BNS. Following the raid, the

excise department faced sharp criticism for its failure to detect the illegal operation. In a swift damage-control move, the department suspended excise inspector Pawan Sharma, raising serious questions about the involvement or negligence of officials and how such a large illegal stock continued to circulate unchecked. Vikram Yadav, who has been in the liquor business for a long time, said this is the first time such a large quantity of illegally imported liquor has been recovered. "They caused substantial revenue loss to the state exchequer by evading customs and excise duty," Yadav said. Elaborating on the magnitude of the tax evasion, Yadav said a box (a box contains 12 bottles) of imported liquor costs around Rs 7,200 before tax.

## Waste pickup rules changed to stop monopoly

## Noida.(Agency)

The directorate of urban local bodies (ULB) has once again revised the request for proposal (RFP) for the city's door-to-door waste collection tender, urging MCG to act "without delay". The latest directive comes from CM Nayab Singh Saini, who has mandated that the tender be presented to the high-powered works committee this month. This marks the fifth revision of the plan, a process that has spanned over a year, hindering progress on one of the city's most important civic services. The revised proposal, obtained by TOI, introduces a new condition: if MCG opts for zone-wise tendering, no private firm can be awarded more than one zone.

Consequently, the civic body has two choices: either issue a single consolidated tender for the entire city to one firm or float zone-wise tenders, ensuring each zone is awarded to a different agency, thus preventing any bidder from

securing multiple zones. This restriction is a shift from MCG's earlier proposal, which allowed a single bidder to win multiple zones. "It is further informed that the CM has desired that action be initiated immediately and efforts be made to ensure that the tender of MCG is placed before the high-powered works committee by the end of Dec 2025. Therefore, it is requested to ensure necessary compliance as per the directions of the CM," stated a recent letter from the ULB department to the MCG commissioner. "Now that we have received the revised RFP, we have started preparing the proposal. We will soon send it to ULB department for its approval. The civic body will finalise agencies for doorstep waste collection by March end," said MCG executive engineer Sunder Sheoran. The revised RFP also outlines new experience requirements for bidders. They must demonstrate one completed or substantially completed project with at least

80% of the estimated project cost, or two such projects with at least 60% each, or three projects with at least 40% each. Also, these projects must involve door-to-door waste collection and transportation to a processing site (or an integrated waste management project) in a metropolitan area within the last seven years, from 2018 to 2025. Furthermore, the revised RFP stipulates that overall penalties imposed on the contractor shall not exceed 10% of the monthly billing. However, if penalties surpass this threshold continuously for six months, MCG will initiate the termination process without further notice. The RFP also mandates that all RFID tags be installed at ground level and operational at every establishment. To streamline payments, it specifies that all contractor payments will be processed exclusively through the solid waste management (SWM) portal.

"The system-generated data

available on the portal shall be the sole basis for processing the monthly bills... Payment against the monthly bill shall be released in two parts: 50% by the fifth day of each month, and the remaining 50% by the 30th day of the same month, subject to verification of system-generated data on the SWM Portal," the RFP states. The initial RFP for door-to-door waste collection for municipal corporations was issued on July 12, 2024. It was followed by a change in the RFP condition on Jan 7, 2025, extending the contract period for agencies from five to seven years. Subsequent revisions were issued on May 14, 2025, June 10, 2025, and September 25, 2025. TOI had reported on Sept 30 that the city's waste collection tender, based on the revised RFP issued in June, was abruptly cancelled before the vendors' meeting on Sept 15, despite the technical evaluation of bidders being underway. Officials provided no explanation for the mid-process

cancellation. TOI also reported on July 3 that MCG modified.

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Gurcharan Singh Babbar  
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## Delhi University law student stabbed to death after altercation with relatives

New Delhi: The incident was reported around 11:30 am on Friday, when a PCR call alerted Sangam Vihar police station. A team rushed to the spot and found the victim, Mohammad Irshad, critically injured. He was taken to Majidia Maqbool Memorial Hospital, where he was declared dead, a senior police officer said. Irshad, a first-year LLB student at Delhi University's Campus Law Centre, had sustained multiple stab wounds, according to police. Investigators said Irshad's sister, an eyewitness, alleged that her brother was attacked by their uncle, Mubarak, 50, a mason; his wife, Rihana Khatoon, 47; and their sons, Ishaqyaq, 26, and a 15-year-old minor. All of them reside in the same neighbourhood, officers added.

### NAME CHANGE

I, hitherto known as SURINDRA KUMARI MEHTA alias SURINDRA DIO RAM PERSHAD W/O RAVINDER LAL R/O Pocket-A/53 A- Ashok Vihar Phase-2, Ashok Vihar H.O, North West Delhi, Delhi - 110052 have changed my name and shall hereafter be known as SURENDRA MAHARAJA.

### NAME CHANGE

I, VIJAY SHANKAR PRAJAPATI S/o SHRI RAM DEV R/o Kh. No/1 Front Portion 2nd Floor, Bilk-B Gali No-15, Tomar Colony, Kamal Pur Majra Burari, North Delhi, Delhi - 110084, have changed the name of my minor son BHAYA KUMAR alias APURVA PRAJAPATI aged 10 years and he shall hereafter be known as APURVA PRAJAPATI.

### NAME CHANGE

I, Mohd Mohd Husain S/o Mohd Isha R/o House No.72/A, Teh. Nuh, V.P.O. Tain(152), Mewat, Haryana-122107 have changed my name to Mohd Husain.

### NAME CHANGE

I, Mohammad Isa S/o Juhu Khan R/o Tain(152), Mewat, Nuh, Haryana-122107 have changed my name to Mohd Isha.

### NAME CHANGE

I, Aarston W/o Mohd. Husain R/o Tain(152), Mewat, Nuh, Haryana-122107 have changed my name to Aarston.

### NAME CHANGE

I, hitherto known as LATESH Alias LEENA GARG D/O JAGDISH CHAND W/O AMIT GARG R/O PLOT NO-21, F-BLOCK, GALLI NO-6, QUTUB VIHAR, PHASE-1, GOYLA DAIRY, QUTUB PUR, SOUTH WEST DELHI, CHHAWLA, DELHI- 110071 have changed my name and shall hereafter be known as LEENA GARG.

### NAME CHANGE

I, MOHIN KHAN S/O MAKBUL resident of C-2/181, Ashok Nagar Vasundhara Enclave, East Delhi, Delhi - 110098, have changed the name of my minor daughter LAAMIYAN aged 7 years and she shall hereafter be known as ELISHA HAYAT.

### NAME CHANGE

I, NEETU W/o PANKAJ KUMAR SAIN R/o 64-F, POCKET-A1, Mayur Vihar, Phase-3, East Delhi, Delhi - 110096 have changed the name of my minor son TEJAS aged 14 years and he shall hereafter be known as TEJAS SEN.

### NAME CHANGE

I, hitherto known as LATESH Alias LEENA GARG D/O JAGDISH CHAND W/O AMIT GARG R/O PLOT NO-21, F-BLOCK, GALLI NO-6, QUTUB VIHAR, PHASE-1, GOYLA DAIRY, QUTUB PUR, SOUTH WEST DELHI, CHHAWLA, DELHI- 110071 have changed my name and shall hereafter be known as LEENA GARG.

### PUBLIC NOTICE

This is to inform you that Mr. Rohit Kaushik intends to purchase Flat No. 594 (consisting of the Second Floor and Third Floor), Category-III, Type-SFS, in Block-F, situated in the layout plan of the Housing Estate at Santa Vihar, New Delhi, from Mr. Anuraj Singh Bedi. The owner of the property was Mrs. Deep Bedi. She and the DDA executed a Conveyance Deed dated 18.07.2001 in her favour. Unfortunately, Mrs. Deep Bedi passed away on 06.08.2024 and left behind legal heirs, namely: (1) Mr. Anuraj Singh Bedi (2) Mr. Gurman Singh Bedi, (3) Mr. Kavilaj Singh Bedi. Thereafter, Mr. Kavilaj Singh Bedi and Mr. Gurman Singh Bedi released their respective shares in favour of Mr. Anuraj Singh Bedi through a Relinquishment Deed dated 20.01.2025. Consequently, Mr. Anuraj Singh Bedi is now the absolute owner of the aforementioned property. The property is certified to be free from all kinds of litigation, encumbrances, liens, charges, or claims. Please be informed that the property is currently financed by RBL Bank Ltd., Branch: Ghaziabad, U.P. If any person's objection & regarding subject property, then kindly may submit his/her 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 aforementioned shall be treated as null and void in respect of the subject property.

[ASHWANI KUMAR] Advocate

Chamber No. 122,  
Tehsil Compound, Ghaziabad, U.P.

### NAME CHANGE

I, ARPIT OMPRAKASH MUNDRA S/O OMPRAKASH MUNDRA/X-147, REGENCY PARK 2, DLF PHASE-4, GURGAON, HARYANA-122002, HAVE CHANGED MY NAME TO ARPIT MUNDRA FOR ALL FUTURE PURPOSES

### NAME CHANGE

I, No-2615520M Rank-NK Name-MUGESH KUMAR R legal father of M ISHASRI Presently residing at 3/47, SUBASH NAGAR, KOTIAJ MEDU (PO), KAMUTHI (TK) RAMANATHAPURAM (DT), TAMIL-NADU-623604, have changed my minor son's name from ISANTH TAMIL to ISANTH-TAMIL M for all future purposes vide Affidavit dated 11/12/2025 before Notary Public, Delhi.

### NAME CHANGE

I, No-2615520M Rank-NK Name-MUGESH KUMAR R Presently residing at 3/47, SUBASH NAGAR, KOTIAJ MEDU (PO), KAMUTHI (TK) RAMANATHAPURAM (DT), TAMIL-NADU-623604, have changed my wife's name from SUMATHI to SUMATHI M for all future purposes vide Affidavit dated 11/12/2025 before Notary Public, Delhi.

### NAME CHANGE

I MOHD RAFEEQ S/O MOHD YAMIN R/O 1446 CHATTA ABDUL RAZZAQ LABMI GALI BEHIND NOVELTY CINEMA TILAK BAZAR DELHI GPO NORTH DELHI 110006 HAVE CHANGED MY NAME TO MOHD RAFIQ.

### NAME CHANGE

I hitherto known as SAKIB S/O NASRUL HAQUE R/o House No - N-299, Gali No -12, Amar Market Sarabha Vihar , Jaipur , Badarpur , South Delhi , Delhi - 110042 have changed my name and shall hereafter be known as SAQIB NASEER.

### NAME CHANGE

I Ramesh Katal S/o Satram Dass R/o WZ-3446, Raja Park, Shakur Basti, Delhi - 110034 have changed my name to Ramesh Lal Katal for all future purposes.

### NAME CHANGE

It is for general information that I Deepak Verma S/o Vishnu Verma, R/O H.NO-254, Gate No.2, Sainik Vihar, Pilampru, North West Delhi, Delhi -110034, declare that name of mine and my father has been wrongly written as Deepak and Bisnu Bahadur in my 10th Class educational documents. The actual name of mine and my father are Deepak Verma Vishnu Verma, respectively which may be amended accordingly.

### NAME CHANGE

I BHUPINDER SINGH S/O JAGMOHAN SINGH R/O 41-41 3RD FLOOR, RISHABH NAGAR VTC, MODEL TOWN-3, NORTH WEST DELHI, DELHI-110009 HAVE CHANGED MY NAME TO BHUPINDER SINGH KHURANA

### NAME CHANGE

I, hitherto known as LATESH Alias LEENA GARG D/O JAGDISH CHAND W/O AMIT GARG R/O PLOT NO-21, F-BLOCK, GALLI NO-6, QUTUB VIHAR, PHASE-1, GOYLA DAIRY, QUTUB PUR, SOUTH WEST DELHI, CHHAWLA, DELHI- 110071 have changed my name and shall hereafter be known as LEENA GARG.

### NAME CHANGE

I, hitherto known as SANA AHTESH-WAM/0/ARTESHA AHMED, R/o 1561, III Floor, David Street Pataudi House, Janta Co-op Bank, Daryaganj, Central Delhi, Delhi -110002, have changed my name and shall hereafter be known as SANA FARAZ, for all future purposes.

### NAME CHANGE

I hitherto known as SHWETA W/o DEEPAK SONIK R/o House No-86, Upper Ground Floor, Band Bahadur Gurudwara, Bhai Parmanand Colony, Dr. Mukherjee Nagar, North West Delhi, Delhi-110009, have changed my name and shall hereafter be known as Naitik Lakhwan.

### NAME CHANGE

I, hitherto known as SANA AHTESH-WAM/0/ARTESHA AHMED, R/o 1561, III Floor, David Street Pataudi House, Janta Co-op Bank, Daryaganj, Central Delhi, Delhi -110002, have changed my name and shall hereafter be known as SANA FARAZ, for all future purposes.

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### NAME CHANGE

I, hitherto known as SANA

## NEWS BOX

**Ukraine hasn't held elections since Russia's full-scale invasion. Here's why**

**KYIV. (Agency)**

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy has rejected suggestions that he is using the war as an excuse to cling to power, saying he is ready to hold elections if the US and other allies will help ensure the security of the poll and if the country's electoral law can be altered. Zelenskyy's five-year term was scheduled to end in May 2024, but elections were legally put off due to Russia's full-scale invasion. That has become a source of tension with US President Donald Trump, who has criticized the delay as he pushes Zelenskyy to accept his proposals for ending the war.

Zelenskyy responded to that criticism on Tuesday, saying he was ready for elections. "Moreover, I am now asking—and I am stating this openly—for the United States, possibly together with our European colleagues, to help me ensure security for holding elections," he told reporters on WhatsApp.

"And then, within the next 60–90 days, Ukraine will be ready to hold them." Until now, Zelenskyy has declined to hold an election until a ceasefire is declared, in line with Ukrainian law that prevents a poll from being held when martial law is in effect. Ukrainians largely support that decision.

Here is a look at why Ukraine has not been able to hold elections so far:

A wartime election would be illegal

Ukraine has been under martial law since February 2022, when Russia launched its full-scale invasion. The country's constitution provides for martial law in wartime, and a separate law bars the holding of elections while it remains in force. Beyond being illegal, any nationwide vote would pose serious security risks as Russia bombs Ukrainian cities with missiles and drones. With roughly one-fifth of the country under Russian occupation and millions of Ukrainians displaced abroad, organizing a nationwide ballot is also widely seen as logistically impossible. It would also be difficult to find a way for Ukrainian soldiers on the front line to cast their votes. Although Zelenskyy's term formally expired in May 2024, Ukraine's constitution allows him to legitimately remain in office until a newly elected president is sworn in.

## Aid flow into Gaza falls short of ceasefire terms, leaving two million Palestinians in distress

**JERUSALEM. (Agency)**

Aid deliveries into Gaza are falling far short of the amount called for under the US-brokered ceasefire, according to an Associated Press analysis of the Israeli military's figures as humanitarian groups say the shortfall is severely impacting the strip's 2 million people. Under the October ceasefire deal between Israel and Hamas, Israel agreed to allow 600 trucks of aid into Gaza a day. However, Israel's own figures suggest that an average of only 459 trucks a day have entered the Gaza Strip between Oct. 12, when the flow of the aid restarted, and Sunday, according to an AP analysis. COGAT, the Israeli military body in charge of coordinating aid entry, provided the figures. Aid flow does not meet ceasefire benchmark. COGAT said that roughly 18,000 trucks of food aid had entered Gaza from when the ceasefire took effect until Sunday, amounting to 70% of all aid that had entered the territory since the truce. This means that COGAT estimates that including the rest of the aid—items that are not food, such as tents and medicines—a total of just over 25,700 trucks have entered Gaza. That is well under the 33,600 trucks that should have gone in by Sunday, under the terms of the ceasefire. In response to the AP analysis, COGAT insisted Wednesday the number of trucks entering Gaza each day was above the 600 mark but refused to elaborate why the figures don't match or provide raw data on truck entry. COGAT used to give daily figures of trucks entering Gaza during the war but stopped doing so when the ceasefire began. Rights groups say that is because it controls the crossings and has sole access to track how much aid and commercial goods are entering Gaza.

## US Congress set to target China with new restrictions in massive defense bill

**WASHINGTON. (Agency)**

The Trump administration may have softened its language on China to maintain a fragile truce in their trade war, but Congress is charging ahead with more restrictions in a defense authorization bill that would deny Beijing investments in highly sensitive sectors and reduce US reliance on Chinese biotechnology companies.

Included in the 3,000-page bill approved Wednesday by the House is a provision to scrutinize American investments in China that could help develop technologies to boost Chinese military power. The bill, which next heads to the Senate, also would prohibit government money to be used for equipment and services from blacklisted Chinese biotechnology companies. In addition, the National Defense Authorization Act would boost US support for the self-governing island of Taiwan that Beijing claims as its own and says it will take by force if necessary.

"Taken together, these measures reflect a serious, strategic approach to countering the Chinese Communist Party," said Rep. Raja Krishnamoorthi, the top Democrat on the House Select Committee on the Chinese Communist Party. He said the approach "stands in stark contrast to the White House's recent actions." Congress moves for harsher line toward China

# Australia demands social media giants report progress on account bans for children under 16

**The tech companies' responses to eSafety Commissioner Julie Inman Grant's first demand for data will likely indicate their commitment to ridding their platforms of young children.**

**MELBOURNE. (Agency)**

Australian authorities on Thursday demanded some of the world's biggest social media platforms report how many accounts they have deactivated since a ban on accounts for children younger than 16 became law. Facebook, Instagram, Kick, Reddit, Snapchat, Threads, TikTok, X, YouTube and Twitch all said they would abide by Australia's world-first law that took effect on Wednesday, Communications Minister Anika Wells said. But the tech companies' responses to eSafety Commissioner Julie

Inman Grant's first demand for data will likely indicate their commitment to ridding their platforms of young children. "Today the eSafety Commissioner will write to all 10 platforms who are considered age-restricted social media platforms and she will ask them ... what were your numbers of under 16 accounts on Dec. 9; what are your numbers today on Dec. 11?" Wells said.

The commissioner would reveal the platforms' responses within two weeks. The platforms would be required to provide monthly updates for six months.

The companies face fines of up to 49.5 million Australian dollars (\$32.9 million) from Wednesday if they fail to take reasonable steps to remove the accounts of Australian children younger than 16.

Wells said the European Commission, France, Denmark, Greece, Romania, Indonesia, Malaysia and New Zealand were considering following Australia's lead in restricting children's access to social media.

"There's been a huge amount of global interest and we welcome it, and we welcome all of the allies who are joining Australia to take action in this space to draw a line to say



enough's enough," Wells said.

Sydney-based rights group Digital Freedom Project plans to challenge the law on constitutional grounds in the Australian High Court early next year.

Inman Grant said some platforms had consulted lawyers and might be waiting to

receive their first so-called compulsory information notice Thursday or their first fine for noncompliance before mounting a legal challenge. Inman Grant said her staff were ready for the possibility that platforms would deliberately fail to exclude young children through age verification and age estimation technologies.

"That could be a strategy that they have in and of themselves: we'll say we're complying but then we'll do a crappy job using these technologies and we'll let people get through and have people claim it's a failure," Inman Grant told Australian Broadcasting Corp. Inman Grant said her research had found that 84% of children in Australia aged 8–12 had accessed a social media account.

Of those with social media access, 90% did so with the help of parents. Inman Grant said the main reason parents helped was because "they didn't want their children to be excluded."

"What this legislation does... is it takes away that fear of exclusion," Inman Grant said.

## Big boost for Pak's F-16 jets as US approves \$686 million tech upgrade: Report

**KATHMANDU. (Agency)**

The Trump administration has informed Congress of a USD 686 million proposal to upgrade Pakistan's F-16 fighter jets, triggering a 30-day review period and expected scrutiny from lawmakers, with India keeping a close watch, Pakistani media reported on Wednesday. The package, approved by the US Defense Security Cooperation Agency (DSCA), included advanced avionics, Link-16 tactical data links, cryptographic equipment, training, and full logistical support. According to the report quoting a DSCA letter dated December 8, the sale covered USD 37 million in Major Defense Equipment (MDE) and USD 649 million in additional hardware, software, and support services. Key recipients of the notification included House Speaker Mike Johnson, Senate

Foreign Relations Committee Chairman James Risch, and House Foreign Affairs Committee Chairman Brian Mast. The administration emphasised that the deal is intended to modernise Pakistan's Block-52 and



Mid-Life Upgrade F-16 fleet while ensuring compatibility with US and partner forces. The MDE list featured 92 Link-16 systems, a secure, jam-resistant digital network used by US and allied militaries for real-time

battlefield coordination, and six Mk-82 inert 500-pound bombs, designed for integration and release testing. Non-MDE items included avionics updates, mission-planning systems, IFF (Identification Friend or Foe) equipment, cryptographic appliques, test equipment, spare parts, simulators, publications, and contractor engineering and logistics support. Lockheed Martin of Fort Worth, Texas, has been named the principal contractor. According to the notification, the US does not plan to send additional personnel to Pakistan for the upgrades, nor does it expect any impact on

American defence readiness. The administration stressed that the sale "will not alter the basic military balance in the region," a line aimed at addressing longstanding Indian concerns.

## Former Bolivian President Arce arrested in corruption investigation a month after leaving office

**LA PAZ. (Agency)**

Bolivian law enforcement officials on Wednesday arrested former President Luis Arce as part of a corruption investigation, opening an uncertain chapter in the country's politics a month after the inauguration of conservative President Rodrigo Paz ended 20 years of socialist rule.

A senior official in Paz's government, Marco Antonio Oviedo, told reporters that Arce had been arrested on charges of breach of duty and financial misconduct related to the alleged embezzlement of public funds during his stint as economy minister in the government of charismatic former leader Evo Morales (2006–2019). A special police force dedicated to fighting corruption confirmed to The Associated Press that Arce was in custody at the unit's headquarters in Bolivia's capital of La Paz.

Officials described Arce's arrest as proof of the new government's commitment to fighting graft at the highest levels in fulfillment of its flagship campaign promise. "It is the

decision of this government to fight corruption, and we will arrest all those responsible for this massive embezzlement," Oviedo said. But underlining the country's polarization, Arce's allies said his arrest was unjustified and smacked of political persecution. Accusations of theft from a fund for rural peasants

Authorities accused Arce and other officials of diverting an estimated \$700 million from a state-run fund dedicated to supporting the Indigenous people and peasant farmers who formed the backbone of Morales' Movement Toward Socialism party. As Bolivia's first Indigenous president, Morales transformed the country's power structure and gave Indigenous people more sway than ever.

Serving on the board of directors of the Indigenous Peasant Development Fund from 2006 to 2017, Arce was in charge of allocating funds to social development projects in rural areas. During that time, officials allege, Arce siphoned off some of that money for

personal expenses.

"Arce was identified as the main person responsible for this vast economic damage," said Oviedo. Bolivia's attorney general, Roger Mariaca, told local media that Arce had invoked his right to remain silent during police questioning. He said Arce would remain in police custody overnight before being brought before a judge to determine whether he will remain detained pending trial.

The charges against Arce carry a maximum sentence of 4–6 years in prison. An ex-president allegedly grabbed from the street Arce's key ally and former government minister, María Nela Prada, insisted on the ex-president's innocence and denounced the corruption scandal as a case of political persecution. Although the prosecution said it issued an arrest warrant, she said Arce was not notified of the case before he was bundled into a minivan with tinted windows in an upscale La Paz neighborhood on Wednesday and brought in for interrogation.

## European nations agree to consider weakening protections for migrants dating to World War II

**BRUSSELS. (Agency)**

As sympathy for immigrants erodes around the world, European nations agreed Wednesday to consider changes that rights advocates say would weaken migrant protections that have underpinned European law since World War II. The consensus coalesced as mainstream political parties across Europe have adopted tougher migration policies as a way to blunt the momentum of far-right politicians exploiting discontent over immigration, even though illegal border crossings are actually falling.

Members of the 46 countries that make up the Council of Europe acknowledged "challenges" posed by migration while reaffirming their respect for the European Convention on Human Rights and the European Court of Human Rights, the council's secretary general, Alain Berset, told journalists after discussions in Strasbourg, France.

Berset described the 75-year-old convention as a "living instrument." "While nations reaffirmed their commitment to the rights and freedoms of the convention, they also recognized countries' responsibility to 'safeguard national vital interests such as security.'" The convention and the court, which handles complaints against the council, have been increasingly criticized by some member states, including Italy, Denmark and the United Kingdom. They argue that they are too limited in how far they can go to tackle illegal migration and deport migrants who commit crimes. Ministers of the 46 countries will now begin debating a political declaration on migration to be adopted in May and a new recommendation to deter human smuggling, Berset added.

The council, which is not an European Union institution, was set up in the wake of World War II to promote peace and democracy.

Growing consensus for a new interpretation. Discussions over the need to reform or reinterpret the convention as it relates to migrants began last year after nine nations signed a letter attempting to curtail the power of the court, the council's independent legal arm. The group of nations argued that the court's interpretation of rights and obligations prevented them from expelling migrants who commit crimes and keeping their countries safe. Berset defended the court's independence at the time, but support for a tougher stance has only grown. While Berset sought to downplay the division, 27 nations signed a separate statement on Wednesday calling for a less restrictive interpretation of the law, echoing the arguments made last year. "A right balance has to be found between the migrants' individual rights and interests and the weighty public interests of defending freedom and security in our societies," it read.

## 'It makes me want to cry': Emotional evacuees recount moments they fled Thailand-Cambodia fighting

**SURIN. (Agency)**

Amnat Meephew had just enough time to pack up his clothes and flee his home in Thailand a couple of kilometers from the border with Cambodia, the second time in four months hundreds of thousands of people like him have had to escape fighting between the Southeast Asian neighbours. "Sometimes when I think about it, I tear up. Why are Thais and Cambodians, who are like siblings, fighting?" the 73-year-old said. "Speaking about it makes me want to cry." The latest round of clashes along the disputed border erupted on Monday, derailing a ceasefire pushed by US President Donald Trump that ended the previous clashes in July, which killed dozens in both countries. Officials in Thailand said Wednesday that about 400,000 people have been evacuated, while Cambodia reported more than 127,000 displaced. Unlike during the first round of fighting in July, many Thai evacuees in northeastern Surin province said they left before hearing the sound of fire following early evacuation warnings

from local leaders, triggered by a brief skirmish at the Cambodian border on Sunday.

"I could only bring my clothes," Amnat said. "I even forgot to lock my doors when I left." Many took shelter in university halls, sitting or lying on thin mats or in tents erected within their allotted space. Music played to help relieve stress. Health officials checked on evacuees, while volunteers organized activities to entertain children. Thidarat Homhual also received a warning on Sunday to leave her home about 15 kilometers from the border. She teared up as she spoke about the pets she had to leave behind. Her stay in a gymnasium with more than 500 others has been far from comfortable, but she said meals are provided, and support from officials and volunteers helped her cope. "Maybe because this isn't the first time we've lived through something like this, I believe many of us can adapt. Although no one wants to adjust to living like this, I'll just go with the flow. Otherwise, it would be too stressful," she

said. Cambodians take shelter in open fields across the border in Cambodia, life for evacuees has taken on a rugged rhythm. Many said they left in a hurry after hearing



shots on Monday, seeking refuge mostly in an open field. They erected tents or improvised shelters stitched together with tarps, anchored to the backs of trucks to shield themselves from the wind. People huddled for conversation, meals or sleep. Smoke drifted from small coal stoves where families cooked simple dishes, while others went fishing in a nearby pond

to supplement their food. Loueng Soth arrived at a roadside area in the Cambodian town of Srei Snam with her seven family members. She said conditions have been difficult, and she was praying for the fighting to end as soon as possible.

"I don't want to stay here and sleep on the ground as I do now," she said. "I want the war to end so I can return to my home." With cool-season temperatures dropping, the chilling winds have made life in the same field even harder for Thai Chea, who on Monday fled his home just a few hundred meters (feet) from the battleground. At the shelter where he is staying, people donned sweaters and gathered around cooking stoves in the early morning to keep warm. But there is still no sign of when evacuees can return home, as leaders on neither side appear willing to back down. "I want the war to end as soon as possible, so that I can go back to my home to do my farming work and take care of my dogs and chickens. They are at home with no one looking after them."

## NEWS BOX

**AAI undertakes measures to assist stranded passengers at Agartala airport**

**Agartala. (Agency)**  
The Airports Authority of India (AAI) has undertaken various measures to alleviate the challenges faced by stranded passengers at Maharaja Bir Bikram (MBB) Airport in Agartala due to operational disruptions by IndiGo Airlines.

Airport Director Krishan Mohan Mehra stated that 39 IndiGo flights were cancelled over the past 10 days, causing significant inconvenience for hundreds of travellers with medical appointments and other urgent commitments outside the state.

While AAI does not have the authority to manage flights, the airport team, in collaboration with the CISF, various airlines, and other stakeholders, increased the seating capacity within the terminal and added extra seating outside the airport to accommodate passengers who were unable to return home after cancellations.

Additionally, provisions for food, drinking water, and essential support were arranged to ensure affected travellers received necessary assistance during the disruption. The airport also increased the frequency of cleaning and maintenance of restroom facilities to manage the higher footfall.

The Airport Director noted that IndiGo has confirmed the processing of refunds for all cancelled flights up to December 9. He also mentioned that passengers' baggage was delivered to their homes, with the airline assuring that no luggage remains unclaimed in Agartala.

Mehra further reported that the On-Time Performance (OTP) of the currently operating flights has reached 100% as of December 7, indicating a stabilization of operations. To accommodate the rising travel demand, IndiGo has also launched additional flights from Agartala to Delhi starting yesterday.

He emphasized that throughout the disruption, airport teams worked tirelessly and even extended ATC watch hours to facilitate delayed flight movements and ensure smoother operations.

**Tripura Govt directs 100 pc enrolment in farmers' registry for direct benefits**

**Agartala. (Agency)**  
The Tripura government has directed the complete enrollment of farmers in the Farmers' Registry, an integrated database for every farmer in India to establish a modern, efficient, and transparent agricultural system. Agriculture and Farmers' Welfare Minister Ratan Lal Nath said on Thursday.

"By registering, farmers can be confident that the benefits designated for them will be deposited directly into their bank accounts, without any delays or the risk of intermediaries. This guarantees that assistance reaches the appropriate farmer promptly," he stated.

The Farmers Registry allows us to establish a verified identity for each farmer, which is associated with their land details and Aadhaar. This not only eliminates duplication but also aids in accurately targeting subsidies, crop insurance, loans, and agricultural inputs, he elaborated.

Nath emphasized that this system promotes integration with soil health cards, digital crop surveys, market connectivity, and advisory services. Farmers will now have straightforward access to all necessary information and services, enabling them to make more informed decisions.

By leveraging digital tools, we are alleviating the administrative load on both farmers and government officials, while simultaneously ensuring transparency and accountability in all programs. This initiative also paves the way for innovations in the agri-tech sector, which contributes to enhancing the production and income of our farmers," Nath remarked.

**Bengaluru's egg prices hit all-time high of Rs 8 per piece**

**BENGALURU. (Agency)**  
Egg prices set a new high in Bengaluru, with one egg being sold in the retail market for Rs 8. Experts from the industry attributed the hike to multiple factors including export of eggs, dip in production, the onset of winter season when eggs are consumed most, the Christmas season and the approaching new year, when there is bulk demand for eggs from bakers. They said the prices are likely to come down by mid-January. Karnataka Poultry Traders Association president K N Nagaraju said the demand for eggs is high as Bengaluru consumes a whopping 1.1 crore eggs per day. "During the winter season, people consume more eggs."

Dishes like omelettes, egg fried rice and egg bhurjis are more in demand now. Also, due to the upcoming Christmas and New Year, bakeries in the city are preparing cakes and other items in advance and are buying eggs in huge quantities, adding to the increase in demand." According to National Egg Coordination Committee (NECC) Bengaluru zonal chairman Venkateshwarulu T, the farm price for an egg on December 10 was Rs 6.75, which was an all-time high.

"The previous high was Rs 6.30 for one egg. The majority of Bengaluru's egg supply comes from Namakkal district in Tamil Nadu, and the remaining reaches the city from rural areas adjoining the city. Davangere, Hospet, and Chikkamagaluru. As there is a high demand for eggs abroad, including Dubai, more are being exported now," Venkateshwarulu said.

# BJP seeks white paper on development of North Karnataka

**Starting the discussion on the development of North Karnataka in the Assembly on Wednesday, Ashoka alleged that the Congress government has not spent even 20% of the total funds allocated for the region.**

## BELAGAVI. (Agency)

Both the House of the legislature on Wednesday discussed various issues concerning the development of North Karnataka districts. In the Assembly, Leader of Opposition R Ashoka took the State Government to task, accusing it of just rendering lip service without delivering on the promises made to the people of North Karnataka.

Accusing the government of betraying the people of North Karnataka, Ashoka demanded that Chief Minister Siddaramaiah issue a white paper in the ongoing winter session on the allocation of funds and spending for the region's development. "Don't shed crocodile tears for the NK region. You must give clear information... clarify how much you promised and how much you have delivered," Ashoka said. Starting the discussion on the development of North Karnataka in the Assembly on Wednesday, Ashoka alleged that the Congress government

has not spent even 20% of the total funds allocated for the region. He also alleged that people are putting up posters in public that eight ministers elected from the region are absconding. "This is happening only because

suggested the government either stop the guarantee schemes or cut down the budget to different departments by at least 20%.

He said that the government is facing financial constraints for development. On increasing the height of Almatti Dam from 519 m to 524 m as promised by the Congress government, he said that the CM had announced in the last session that the government will allocate funds for land acquisition to increase the height.

"Now, the government has no funds to meet this promise. The government has promised funds to acquire land. Either the CM has to withdraw the guarantees or cut down budget allocation to mobilise funds to increase the height of Almatti Dam," he said.

The issue echoed in the Council too. MLC Hanumant Nirani presented striking data showing long-standing regional imbalance. Although North Karnataka is 8,917 sq km larger and more populous, both regions have 15 districts, prompting a demand for 4-6 new districts in the north.



the CM has not taken the minister to task," the BJP leader said, urging CM Siddaramaiah to sack "inefficient ministers".

Ashoka has claimed that in order to mobilise funds for development, the officials have

## Mithi River silt scam: 2 arrested for forging signatures, preparing fake MoUs

**According to the EOW, during investigation, they found that both the accused had prepared fake MOUs with forged signatures of farm owners and used them as genuine documents.**

## Mumbai. (Agency)

The Economic Offences Wing (EOW) of the Mumbai police, which is investigating the Rs 65 crore Mithi river desilting scam, arrested two contractors on Wednesday.

The arrested accused have been identified as Sunil Shyamnaranay Upadhyay and Mahesh Medaram Purohit. Upadhyay is a director of SBNB Infrastructure Pvt Ltd, while Mahesh is a partner of the MB Brothers firm. Both the accused were produced in court, which sent them to police custody till December 16.

According to the EOW, during investigation, they found that both the accused had prepared fake MOUs with forged signatures of farm owners and used them as

genuine documents. It is alleged that on the basis of these bogus documents, they did not dump the silt of Mithi river at the designated places, yet received crores of rupees from the BMC, causing massive financial loss to the BMC. While investigating, it was found that Upadhyay allegedly carried out a fraud between 2013 and 2018, and his firm submitted bogus MOUs for six dumping sites. When EOW officials inquired with the landowners of all six, they learned that they never gave any permission and no agreement was made with them, so the documents were fabricated. Using these forged papers, Upadhyay reportedly managed to claim payment to the tune of ₹27.79 crore from the BMC. During further probes, the EOW found

that between 2014 and 2020, Purohit had taken ₹23.43 crore from the BMC by attaching bogus MOUs for various desilting contracts. Purohit submitted the bogus documents claiming that his firm had deposited the silt at eight dumping grounds.

When an agency recorded the statement of the dumping ground owners, they claimed that they had never signed any agreement and were not even aware of one. This showed that their signatures were also found to be forged, and by submitting the bogus documents, Purohit collected money from the BMC. The contractors of the municipal corporation were allegedly involved in the silt scam, making bogus MOUs regarding the dumping grounds where they were supposed to dump silt from the Mithi river between 2013 and 2023 and causing a loss of crores of rupees to the BMC. Earlier, the police had arrested agents Ketan Kadam and Jay Joshi and Mithi River silt removal contractor Shersing Rathore.



## Government defends menstrual leave policy in Karnataka HC

## BENGALURU. (Agency)

The state government on Wednesday cited a Supreme Court's ruling that gives the state powers to issue executive orders under Article 162 of the Constitution even in the absence of legislation while defending its menstrual leave policy in the Karnataka High Court. The government had issued

enactments, but under Article 162 of the Constitution, which is not in conflict with the Central Acts as contended by the petitioners. It only needs to be approved by the cabinet.

The government stated that the central enactments cited by the petitioners have a specific provision that allows every employee to take the benefit of leaves granted to him or her under any other law.

The government said

the notification was issued considering the recommendations of the expert committee, the Law Commission Report and several other expert opinions.



The state has powers to ensure that every citizen is subjected to fair working conditions devoid of exploitation, the government argued. They also said the petitioner's contention that the impugned order will result in financial liability cannot be sustained, as the health of the employees is of far more importance in the eyes of the state. The court has adjourned the hearing to January 20.

## Three-day Huddle Global 2025 to kick off at Kovalam on Dec 12

### Thiruvananthapuram. (Agency)

India's largest beachside startup festival, Huddle Global 2025, organised by the Kerala Startup Mission (KSUM), will get underway at Kovai Kovalam near Thiruvananthapuram on Friday, December 12. The three-day festival

will showcase the journey of India's startup ecosystem, with Kerala serving as the focal hub for innovation, entrepreneurship, and emerging technologies. Besides opening vast opportunities for startups, including funding and mentor support, the three-day event, now into its 7th edition, is packed with insightful debates, expo of innovative products, an all-India hackathon with attractive prizes up for grabs and a host of other exciting programmes.

In his visionary talk, Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan will address a session on 'The Kerala Future Forum: A Dialogue with the Chief Minister' on December 14 at 11 am. Finance Minister KN Balagopal will speak on 'Vision 2031 - What is in store for Kerala's Knowledge Economy' at the opening session of the event at The Leela Kovalam, a Raviz Hotel on December 12 at 10 am. Minister for General Education and Labour V Sivan Kutty will speak at the session

to be addressed by the Chief Minister.

More than 3000 startups, 200-plus HNIs (High Network Individuals), 100-plus mentors, corporate, exhibitors and 150 speakers have confirmed their participation for Huddle Global 2025, where startups will also launch their products and solutions.

Deepak Bagla, Mission Director, Atal Innovation Mission, Government of India, will deliver a keynote address on 'Choosing Wise Kerala's Role in the Indian Deep-Tech Mission' at the opening session. Seeram Sambasiva Rao, IAS, Special Secretary (Electronics & IT), Government of Kerala, will deliver a talk on 'Actions Speak Louder than Words Report on Startup Ecosystem.'

The opening session will also see Dr Philipp Ackermann German, Ambassador to India & Bhutan, speaking on 'Innovation Without Borders: Building the India-Germany Partnership for Global Impact'; Anoop Ambika, CEO, KSUM, on 'Entrepreneurs and Bureaucrats Huddling Together for a Better Tomorrow,' and Sridhar Vembu, Founder, Zoho Corporation, on 'Prosperity with Purpose Why Kerala must Build Domestic Wealth to Build its Future.'

## Fleeing on high-speed bikes, hiding them in trucks: Cops bust gang of burglars 'in Dhoom style heist'

**Police seized gold ornaments worth Rs 25 lakh along with gateway bikes and a truck from them. A team from Unit 3 of the Crime Branch of Pimpri Chinchwad police was probing multiple house break-ins in the jurisdiction where the burglars had used bikes to flee from the target locations.**

### Pune. (Agency)

The Crime Branch of Pimpri Chinchwad police busted a gang of burglars from Meerut, Uttar Pradesh that executed meticulously-planned heists in Pune, inspired by Bollywood movie Dhoom using high-speed bikes to evade police and then switching to trucks to hide the motorcycles for long-distance travel.

With the arrest of three members of the gang from Meerut, the police claimed to have solved four burglaries in Dighi, Chakan, Kalewadi and Sangvi from earlier this year. Police seized gold

ornaments worth Rs 25 lakh along with gateway bikes and a truck from them. A team from Unit 3 of the Crime Branch of Pimpri Chinchwad police was probing multiple house break-ins in the jurisdiction where the burglars had used bikes to flee from the target locations.

short article insert The investigation team had gathered intelligence on these suspects for some time. They recently received concrete inputs about the movement of the suspects who were part of this gang. Accordingly, a trap was set on the night of December 6 within



Chakan police station limits on the Pune-Nashik Highway at Waki-Chakan. During the operation, a white Tata tempo was spotted with an unregistered motorcycle in the back and three men seated in the cabin. As the

team approached the vehicle, the suspects attempted to flee. However, Crime Branch officers and staff used force and restrained them.

The arrested suspects were identified as Mosin Shaukat Ali Sheik (32), a resident of M-Block, Meerut, Udayveer Malkhansing Sahasi (36) resident of Jaybhim Nagar, Meerut and Vinay Kumar Gangasaran (34) resident of Kharkhoda, Meerut. On searching the suspects, police recovered tools used for burglaries. The tempo, the unregistered motorcycle, gold and silver

ornaments and cash were also recovered from their possession.

Deputy Commissioner of Police (Crime) Dr Shivaji Pawar said, "During the interrogation, the suspects revealed that they had travelled from Meerut to Pimpri Chinchwad by hiding their motorcycles inside the tempo. After executing burglaries at their target locations, they rode 100-150 kilometres on high speed bikes to avoid detection by police. They would then load the motorcycle back into the tempo at a secluded spot and return to Meerut thus executing the heist and escape in Dhoom style."

**Himachal Health worker honoured by NIV for braving treacherous terrain to deliver vaccines**

### Mandi. (Agency)

In the rugged mountains of Himachal Pradesh, where swollen streams transform into roaring threats and narrow footpaths disappear under landslides, fulfilling one's duty often requires extraordinary courage and unwavering determination.

This monsoon, a health worker from Mandi district exemplified such heroism, earning national recognition for her fearless service.

The National Institute of Virology (NIV) has honoured her after a striking photograph went viral, capturing her mid-leap across massive boulders with a raging river surging below, a vaccine box clutched firmly in her hands, and an unyielding resolve to reach families stranded by the floods.

The image, shared widely across social media, became a powerful symbol of Himachal's indomitable frontline workers. Officials said that even as roads caved in and communication lines snapped, she refused to suspend her rounds, travelling on foot through treacherous terrain so that no child missed a life-saving vaccine. Villagers recall her arriving drenched, exhausted, yet smiling, saying only that the "work must not stop."

Her story adds to a proud legacy of extraordinary health workers from Mandi, whose resolve has repeatedly brought national and global appreciation. Only months ago, Kamla Devi of Chohar Valley became a household name after she crossed a raging stream during the July disaster to vaccinate an infant. She was later felicitated by Serum Institute of India Chairman Dr. Cyrus Poonawalla in Pune. And the world still remembers Geeta Verma of Karsog, photographed riding a motorcycle on a rugged Serai Valley track with a measles-rubella vaccine box strapped behind her a moment that earned her a place in the WHO's 2018 calendar. Even before that, during the polio eradication drive under the previous Jai Ram Thakur government, a WHO-released image had highlighted the sheer physical endurance displayed by Himachal's field staff.

## A shaman who shattered the lens of the Anthropocene

The big problem with information today is not noise, but silence. The latter is the most eloquent part of a lecture. Yet, one never asks about the kind of violence that precedes every part of a story.

My next-door neighbour, a sociologist, recently commented, "Why is everyone talking about development when they should be talking about the Anthropocene? Silence needs a new kind of storytelling." It reminded me about a Pakistani social scientist who talked at length about a conference. I once met Ziauddin Sardar, the well-known futurist, at Perth airport. We had three hours to kill. He was returning from a conference, and I from visiting relatives. Zia was a wonderful gossip and even more entertaining as a social scientist. He was a genuine South Asian. He wrote the most interesting article on the Ambassador car—I wish Ratan Tata had read it before he introduced the Nano. On this day in Perth, Zia was waiting to gossip—not just about the conference, but about his old colleagues and friends in India. He felt gossip was disappearing. And gossip, he felt, made eccentricity and dissent available. This is what he felt made India of the 1970s so interesting. Zia desperately missed his colleagues at the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies. India, he felt, had become rigid and straightforward. He felt that the present regime had added to the mediocrity, destroying India's sense of play and dissent.

I asked Zia about the changes. He sat silently for a while, drinking his coffee. Then he said that today, the future is an extrapolation, regimented into a straight line of expectations. Earlier, the future was a domain of dissent and diversity. The future is a pretext for freedom—an invitation to the Homo ludens, the human as a player. Zia explained that earlier, such conferences were full of oddballs, marginals who ambushed you with new ideas. The future was open-ended and inclusive. Over the next three hours, he proceeded to describe the three-day conference he had been part of.

The first day was a meeting of knowledge and power, demonstrating the competence of policy. There was only one interesting paper, from South Africa. It talked about Islam in general and believed that India could add a new kind of Islamic imagination to the future.

The second day focused on the basic theme of the conference: the Anthropocene. The word 'Anthropocene' was coined by Dutch scientist Paul J Crutzen. He believed it's a new geological era during which human activity has been the dominant influence on climate and the environment. Crutzen wanted to create the picture of a wounded Earth—damaged by a promethean man. The Anthropocene was a statement of guilt.

Unfortunately, the debate got involved in dates. Dutch scientist Wiebe Bijker felt that assigning dates to the era had become an obsession. The question was whether to date the Anthropocene to the beginning of the Spanish conquest, which eliminated a million indigenous people, or to locate it at the Industrial Revolution. Today, many prefer to locate it with the birth of the atom bomb. Zia said, regardless of the dates, what the dating did was remove the question of guilt—the fact that Earth was being destroyed by man. He added that two earlier papers that had discussed the Anthropocene were purely economic exercises, where climate change became a battle between the centre and the periphery.

But the next paper ambushed the conference. It was by a shaman serving as a lecturer at a local university. The shaman's speech was electric, as if it was an afterthought brought into the conference. He said that what futurology lacked was the quality of storytelling, the ability to create a new myth for the Anthropocene. The Western idea of Anthropocene was an incomplete myth—it talked of Prometheus, but it had no sense of an alternative. The myth one needed to destroy was the idea of economics, which is centred around the 'noise' called consumption.

THE latest labour codes, released last month, have many new features. Yet, discussions on them in the media and Parliament keep hovering around how best to tame the working class. There are abundant sweeteners in the new laws but the fear of strikes still sticks out like a red chilli. As a result, the emphasis again is on anti-strike mechanisms. This is an uncalled-for overkill, based on habit, not reason, as we shall soon see. The truth is that over the years, the number of strikes has progressively fallen. Yet, the fear of worker unrest dominates labour laws ever since the first factory horn blared. Strikes were at their highest when, paradoxically, labour laws were at their harshest too. That was when robber barons came charging down the hill with hired blacklegs to beat the stuffing out of protesting workers.

All this has changed over time. The labouring class has grown tamer, but factory laws still have that old mindset. The number of strikes went down sharply by 75 per cent in the decade between 2003 and 2014. In 2019, there were just 59 strikes and only 30 were recorded in 2023. At one time, this figure was in hundreds. Yet, labour laws kept distrustful workers, making the staging of protests and strikes progressively more difficult.

As a result, we see a version of self-fulfilling prophecy at work. Workers and their unions suspect every move of the government, entrepreneurs and the management refusing to see the sweeteners that are introduced from time to time in the labour codes. There isn't a strike on the horizon, yet labour unions worry that should they want to organise one, it will now get more difficult to do so.

Look at the number of wins the new codes give the worker. They can now get annual leave after 180 days of work and not 240, as was the case earlier. Paid maternity leave has been extended from 12 to 16 weeks. Gig workers are eligible, at long last, for retirement benefits. Men and women will get the same wages for the same work. Retrenched organised sector workers will receive 15 days' wages for retraining. Labour representatives see these as sops because the new law allows the management to fire workers without informing the government if the enterprise employs less than 300 people, and not 100 as earlier. Alongside, the advance notice for strikes must now be of 60 days and not 14. These two together, labour unions believe, defang the working class. With their bite gone, their bark won't matter either. The new law indeed allows factories with up to 299 workers to retrench employees without government notice, but this is hardly significant. Only about 4.5 per cent establishments employ between 100 and 199 workers. While the management fears more unrest though the number of strikes is decreasing, the workers fear more lockouts even as these figures are falling dramatically too. There were

## The old in the new labour codes

The laws won't really count as long as informal workers dominate the Indian industry



only 34 lockouts in 2022; so why this fear?

The principal reason the two sides have locked horns is because the good parts of the codes are not actionable as most workers are in the unorganised sector. Nearly 50 per cent of Indian factories employ less than 20 workers. In such units, even occupational health hazard rules do not apply. The workers will, therefore, remain vulnerable. It is hard to imagine these outfits scaling up to cross the 300-worker mark. In fact, Economic Surveys (2017-20) point out that the share of employment in the organised sector has actually gone down over time and it now hovers around a mere 17 per cent. What is really telling is that such jobs are decreasing in Central public sector enterprises too. Between 2016-17 and 2020-21, the number of organised workers in these units fell from 11.29 lakh to 8.61 lakh. If this is so in the state sector, can the private sector be any better? To add more pixel detail to this picture, the 2023-24 Economic Survey tells us that over 57 per cent of the total Indian workforce is self-employed and, by definition, outside all labour laws. Thus,

while the number of organised-sector workers is falling, the count of strikes too is declining. At the same time, lockouts are also dropping, even as unorganised-sector labour is growing. Between 2017 and 2022, their proportion edged up from 80.8 per cent to 82.6 per cent. To what extent then can the new labour codes make a difference? Much of its newness is notional and cannot be tested as even direct factory employment declined from 61 per cent to 47 per cent between 2011 and 2023. As the organised sector, too, is souring out its jobs to the informal sector, even high-end cars have parts produced in petty, informal workshops. Business magnates and workers' unions must know that the new labour codes are a dressing that won't really count as long as informal workers dominate the Indian industry. Only elite "labour aristocrats" with signed contracts will benefit from them, but they are just a tiny fraction, and unlikely to grow. Both lockouts, which labour fears, and strikes.

## Robust fundamentals should trigger better business growth

The overcautious, risk-averse approach of businesses is probably hurting growth even though the fundamentals seem positive. The sharp uptake of the services sector shows there is strong domestic demand even though the export environment is cloudy

A year-end survey has shown that the Indian economy has stood fairly resilient in the face of headwinds, but the checklist is a mix of hits and misses. The all-important services sector accelerated in November this year on the back of robust domestic demand, thus recovering lost ground from the previous month. However, export growth slipped to an 8-month low in the face of high US tariffs and rising global competition. The India Services Purchasing Managers' Index, compiled by S&P Global, inched up to 59.8 last month from October's 58.9. This is well above the neutral mark of 50, which separates expansion from contraction, and reflects sustained resilience. However, the Composite Index, which combines manufacturing and services, eased slightly to 59.7 in November from 60.4 in October, primarily due to a slowdown in manufacturing activity. The worry is that even though the index remains comfortably above the 50-mark, a decline for three consecutive months suggests India's economy may be losing momentum. The data



indicates despite a rise in company outputs, job growth remained muted. Around 95 percent of the firms surveyed reported no change in payroll numbers, indicating they did not face any pressure on existing capacity and that pending work was on a plateau. Simultaneously, business confidence for the 12 months ahead slipped to its lowest

since July 2022, as companies turned cautious in the face of turbulent geopolitics. The overcautious, risk-averse approach of businesses is probably hurting growth even though the fundamentals seem positive. The sharp uptake of the services sector shows there is strong domestic demand even though the export environment is cloudy. The PMI figures show input price inflation has reached its lowest rate in 5 years since August 2020, except for small increases in electricity, food, and software. This kept selling prices at an 8-month low, and in turn, stoked consumer demand. It is this trend that has encouraged the Reserve Bank to lower lending rates by 25 basis points. The various pointers should not be crimping business confidence; rather, with low inflation and high domestic demand, now is the time to boost investment and capacity in manufacturing, and generating more jobs. Businesses are built on informed risk-taking and it is time the government puts its shoulders behind growth-focused entrepreneurship.

## Perils of an unchecked narrative

The surge in women's turnout share in Bihar may be attributable to the cleaning up of voter lists. If more states believe the narrative of cash-for-women as a winning formula, something that started in Karnataka, the states' fiscal health will be strained

According to some scholars, the worst tragedy in human history was an outcome of a misleading media narrative. Responding to the Allied Forces' terms of surrender in July 1945, Japan's prime minister used the word 'mokusatsu' to mean 'silence'. Western media mischievously interpreted it to mean 'ignore'. Enraged, the US president decided to bomb Hiroshima and Nagasaki to devastation. It triggered a nuclear arms race that the world is still suffering from. Misleading narratives in quest for sensational headlines can wreak havoc. The 2025 Bihar election outcome is a case in point. Nearly every political leader and policymaker in the country believes that the cash scheme of ₹10,000 to a woman in every family, announced by Prime Minister Narendra Modi just two months before the election, was the game-changer. As a result, this will further intensify the race among parties in other states to distribute 'cash for women' in the belief that it is the magic bullet. This competitive populism can send the entire nation spiralling down a path to eventual fiscal catastrophe, political emptiness, and social disorder. Worse, this is a false narrative much like the 'mokusatsu' misinterpretation. Contrary to the Election Commission's boast that women's turnout percentage in the 2025 election was the highest in 75 years, it was nothing extraordinary in number. About 1.4 crore women voted in the 2010 Bihar election, 1.9 crore in 2015, 2.1 crore in 2020 (Covid year), and 2.5 crore in 2025. If a student scores 75/100 (75 percent) one year and 77/90 (86 percent) the next, her score has only increased marginally; but her percentage increase looks much higher because the denominator is lower. This is exactly what happened with the EC's women turnout

percentage. Due to the cleaning up of voter lists through the special intensive revision, the denominator of total women electors was smaller than it would have been otherwise and inflating the turnout percentage. Yes, for the first time, slightly more women than men voted, but that is as much a result of fewer-than-expected men voting due to male migration out of Bihar than any sudden increase in women voters. The women's turnout in this election was merely a continuation of previous trends and was neither extraordinary nor sudden. It is not even the case that women voters, lured by the cash scheme, shifted their support en masse from the opposition Mahagathbandhan alliance to the ruling NDA. The percentage of women who voted for the opposition MGB in both the 2020 and 2025 election was the same at 37 percent. The NDA vote share increased by nearly 10 percentage points in 2025, driven by Chirag Paswan's LJP party joining the alliance, and not by a shift of women's votes. The increase in NDA vote share came equally from both men and women. This is clearly seen in districts such as Begusarai and Khagaria, where the NDA vote share increased by 18 percentage points; but the share of women voters remained the same as in 2020. So, neither was there a sudden sharp increase in women voters, nor was there a huge shift of them from the MGB to the NDA. The cash scheme for women in Bihar cost ₹12,000 crore, which is the same as the annual health budget for the whole state for 2023-24. To put it simply, the amount of money needed to provide medical facilities for the entire population of Bihar for one year was given away as free cash in two months.

Bihar was the 12th state to indulge in such election throwaways in the last two years. It began with Karnataka in 2023, when the Congress party announced ₹2,000 a month for women just before the election and won. Election consultants and the media painted a narrative of this scheme being the clincher, when in



reality the Congress would have won even without this scheme due to a heavy anti-incumbency then. But that false narrative set off a series of such pre-election announcements in Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Telangana, Rajasthan, Haryana, Jharkhand, Maharashtra, Delhi, and now Bihar. Six of these states do not even have enough money to pay salaries for government staff. Many have cut their development

expenditure on hospitals, schools, roads, water, and roads to fund their cash schemes. This misguided race has burnt a ₹2-lakh-crore hole in state finances annually, about the amount the Union government spends on rural jobs, drinking water, and rural roads combined for the country. The total debt of these states has doubled in three years. When states cut back on development and borrow heavily, it is the same poor woman who receives the cash that is impacted the most. Further, merely throwing cash before elections hollows out the essence of democratic politics. Such blind faith in a 'cash for women' magic wand to win elections breaks the connection between governance and elections, and renders leaders lazy and redundant. Why have an entire political party apparatus if all one needs to win is to throw money a few months before elections and have paid 'jeevika didis' go door-to-door to campaign? Such cash transfer schemes also hollow out the very essence of governance. After all, without adequate health infrastructure, well-paved roads, or high-quality public education, people cannot just wave a bunch of currency notes to improve their lives. Distributing free cash by reducing other development expenditure and letting people fend for themselves can turn societies chaotic. Misleading narratives of electoral outcomes, while seemingly innocuous, can be extremely dangerous. In the interest of the nation, it is time all political parties learned from the 'mokusatsu' mistake and stopped this race to the bottom.

## NEWS BOX

**Nagpur sees sharp dip to 8.1 degree Celsius as cold wave grips region****Nagpur. (Agency)**

A biting cold wave continued to sweep across Nagpur and several parts of Vidarbha, according to the Meteorological Department. The city logged a minimum temperature of 8.1 degrees Celsius on Thursday, marking the second consecutive day of single-digit chill. Residents woke up to an icy morning as temperatures kept sliding in Maharashtra's second capital. Most cities across Vidarbha also experienced a noticeable drop in night temperatures, signalling the return of winter's bite. While early hours remained freezing, afternoons offered relatively mild and pleasant conditions. Weather officials attributed the sudden temperature plunge to steady northerly winds blowing over the region. The cold wave is likely to persist through the week, the department added.

**CHRDS, HPNLU, Shimla organises Expert Lecture on Human Rights Day 2025****Shimla. (Agency)**

Himachal Pradesh National Law University, Shimla, under the leadership of Prof. Priti Saxena, Vice Chancellor, HPNLU, organised an Expert Lecture on Human Rights Day 2025, highlighting the theme "Human Rights, Our Everyday Essentials." The programme featured Deshabandu Senior Prof. Jeeva Niriella, University of Colombo, as the Chief Guest.

The event underscored the need for strengthening everyday human rights consciousness, encouraged scholarly engagement with emerging global human rights challenges, and reiterated the University's commitment to nurturing socially responsible citizens. The session was graced by Prof. Saxena, who emphasised the indispensable role of human rights in maintaining societal harmony and the responsibility of academic institutions in advancing human rights literacy. Senior Prof. Jeeva Niriella delivered an insightful address, offering comparative global perspectives and calling upon young scholars to actively contribute to the protection and promotion of fundamental freedoms.

Both speakers highlighted the importance of embedding human rights values in daily practice and fostering collective responsibility in sustaining a robust human rights culture. The programme, organised by Sachin Sharma, Director, (Centre for Human Rights and Disability Studies) CHRDS, reflected the ongoing efforts to promote human rights education, interdisciplinary research, and community outreach. Active participation from faculty members and students enriched the deliberations and reaffirmed HPNLU's mission of cultivating informed, compassionate, and socially conscious individuals dedicated to the advancement of justice and equality.

**Temperatures continue to fall in Himachal, with dry weather likely to persist until December 13.****Shimla. (Agency)**

The weather in Himachal Pradesh can change again as there is a possibility of light rain-snowfall in the state due to the activation of Western Disturbance. At the same time, the minimum temperature is below 5 degrees Celsius at 13 places in the state. Mercury is in minus at three places.

On the other hand, in many areas of the tribal district of Lahail-Spiti, the springs-lakes and drains have turned into solid ice due to the sub-zero temperature. The Lingati stream and waterfall have turned into solid ice. Today the sun is blooming in other parts including the capital Shimla.

Minimum temperature in Shimla was 9.6, Sundernagar 2.9, Bhuntar 2.4, Kalpa 1.8, Dharamshala 7.4, Una 5.9, Nahan 10.1, Palampur 5.0, Solan 3.4, Manali 2.7, Kangra 5.5, Mandi 4.3, Bilaspur 6.1, Hamirpur 4.2, Jubbadat 9.8, Kufri 7.3, Kukumseri -5.8, Narkanda 4.6, Bharmar 5.7, Rekangpiao 3.5, Barthi 4.2, Paonta Sahib 9.0, Sarahan 5.1, Dehra Gopipur 6.0, Tabo -7.1, Neri 10.1 and Bajairai recorded 2.4 degrees Celsius.

According to Maisam Vigyan Kendra Shimla, the entire state is likely to have dry weather till tomorrow. A weak Western Disturbance may become active in the state from tomorrow night. Due to its effect, there may be light rain-snowfall in the high mountain areas of the state on December 14.

The weather is expected to be clear on December 15 and 16 as well. At the same time, there is a yellow alert for fog in some areas of the plains and low altitudes from December 10 to 12.

After the Manali-Leh route was closed due to snowfall, the 16,800 feet high Shinkula pass has become a new snow point for tourists. After the recent snowfall, about half a foot of fresh snow has been frozen in Shinkula Pass, after which the tourist traffic has started to increase here. In view of the demand of tourism businesses, the Lahaul-Spiti administration has given permission for four-by-four vehicles to travel up to Shinkula pass. Earlier, the main snow point for tourists was Baralacha pass, but after the vehicular movement from Darcha to Sarchu was stopped from December 8, tourists are now moving towards Shinkula.

**MC-GMADA team returns empty-handed again as immigration firm stalls action****Mohali. (Agency)**

A joint team of the Mohali Municipal Corporation (MC) and GMADA had to return without carrying out any action for the second consecutive day on Wednesday, after their attempt to demolish illegal structures built behind the showroom of a well-known immigration company in Phase 10 was stalled once again. Officials on site said the company's "administrative clout" coupled with "poor police support" has become a major hurdle, triggering strong resentment among local residents.

According to officials, the team reached the spot on Wednesday morning but could not initiate the demolition due to the absence of adequate police force. Only the Phase-11 SHO with three personnel reached the scene to supervise the action.

"Today (Wednesday) the police force could not be made available, due to which the action could not be completed. Tomorrow police support will be provided and the drive will continue without any obstruction," Mohali Municipal Commissioner Parvinder Pal Singh said. This came a day after Tuesday's drive was similarly stalled due to lack of police presence.

Company staff oppose action, women sent ahead to block officials. As soon as preparations for the action began, employees of Seabird Immigration started protesting. According to officials, the company management allegedly put women employees in the front to obstruct



the demolition.

A heated argument followed between officials and company staff. Once officers signalled strict measures, the staff requested some time and assured they would remove the illegal structures themselves but no progress was seen on ground. Officials added that inspection

revealed extensive illegal construction in the parking area behind the showroom, including unauthorised storerooms, washrooms, walls, and a generator placed in the parking space. They confirmed that all such structures are in violation of norms and must be demolished, but the company's influence is delaying action.

Some sources said the company enjoys strong connections in government circles and maintains close ties with local police, which is the real reason behind the stalled action.

Reacting on the developments, Deputy Mayor Kuljit Singh Bedi underscored that action should be taken without any "pick and choose". "No matter how influential someone is, they should not be spared. If this continues, anger among Mohali residents will rise and the administration will be held responsible," Bedi added.

Mohali's Akali Dal president Parvinder Singh Sohana claimed that "influential people are being protected while common citizens and the poor are being targeted". "Such pick-and-choose policy is unacceptable. We will move the high court if needed," Sohana added.

**Chandigarh teen selected for BCCI One Day Trophy****Chandigarh. (Agency)**

Sixteen-year-old Aditi Sheoran has emerged as one of the most promising names in Chandigarh's women's cricket. The all-rounder has been selected for the BCCI Women's One Day Trophy beginning December 13 in Lucknow, her third straight appearance in the national championship. She will represent the UT Cricket Association's Under-19 team, which has already left for the tournament. Speaking to The Indian Express, Aditi recalled walking into her first trials unsure if she even belonged in a sport still seen as a boys' preserve in many parts of the country. "When I went for the trials, there were no girls in the stadium. I thought they would not even let me play," she said. "But once they saw my determination, they put me in."

**Rising record**

Aditi has represented UTCA Chandigarh in both Under-15 and Under-19 BCCI women's competitions and played the U-19 One Day Championship last year. In the 2025-26 sports calendar, she finished as the top scorer in the Inter-School State U-17 Girls Cricket

Championship conducted by the Chandigarh Education Department.

Her performances have earned her a Commendation Certificate from the Chandigarh Administration. "I am training



hard for it. I want to wear the India jersey and hold that World Cup trophy one day," she said.

**Balancing books and bats**

Despite training five to six hours a day, Aditi insists on attending school regularly. "Even when I have practice, I still go to school," she said. "Because when you are in school, you learn a lot more than just from books." The

balance did not come easily. "In Class 7, I would come home so tired that I could barely eat before sleeping. My marks dropped from the 90s to the 70s. It felt like a crisis, but that is when I learned you cannot score in every match or exam."

**From nervous debutant to U-19 captain**

Her first match, in the Under-17 school state tournament on August 8, 2022, is still vivid. "I barely knew how to hold the bat. It was a 10-over game and I just defended everything. I played all 10 overs and made 11 not out," she laughed. Even the hit she took on her arm while fielding became part of the lesson. "That day I realised what patience means in cricket."

Two years later, she was named captain of the U-19 School Nationals Team, the youngest ever to lead a Chandigarh side.

The announcement came a night before the tournament in Udaipur. "I was shocked for five minutes, then I started planning," she said. "Most girls were older than me, but they respected me. We worked as one." She captained again in 2024, heading the UTCA U-19 Women's Zonal Team.

**Parry murder: 40-year-old Kharar man held for 'providing' logistics to assailants**

The IG, Chandigarh Police, Pushpendra Kumar, said that the team of DCC (District Crime Cell) and Sector 26 police station officials arrested the accused identified as Rahul Sharma from Sector 24, Chandigarh.

**Chandigarh. (Agency)**

More than a week after Inderpreet Singh, alias Parry, the 35-year-old associate of gangsters Lawrence Bishnoi and Goldy Brar, was shot down at Timber Market, Sector 26, the Chandigarh Police made the first arrest in the case by picking a 40-year-old Kharar resident, who had allegedly provided logistics to the assailants. The IG, Chandigarh Police, Pushpendra Kumar, said that the team of DCC (District Crime Cell) and Sector 26 police station officials arrested the accused identified as Rahul Sharma from Sector 24, Chandigarh.

A resident of Kharar, Rahul was an important link in providing logistics for the commission of crime, said the IG. Rahul was produced in the court which remanded him in four-day police custody.

Police sources said that Rahul reportedly provided the Creta car to assailants, which was later used in the crime. The police have traced the origins of the Creta car to Kota (Rajasthan). Police sources said that the SUV was stolen from Kota, Rajasthan, in 2024. The attackers had meticulously tampered with and painted over the vehicle's engine and

chassis numbers and had replaced its number plate to avoid detection. The Chandigarh Police sought the expertise of an automobile specialist, who was able to uncover the original identifiers, leading to confirmation of the vehicle's stolen status.

The Chandigarh Police has retrieved crucial digital evidence — including call recordings and deleted voice notes — from the victim's mobile phones. These recoveries are expected to play a central role in cracking the case.

Police sources said that the assailants have been identified, and as per CCTV footage obtained, one of the suspects is Piyush, who has been on the



run since he emerged as a prime accused in the June killing of kabaddi player Sonu Nolta outside a mall in Pinjore earlier this year.

As per the police, there are two main suspects, who aimed at the victim, while others are co-conspirators. Parry, known for his association with the Creta car to Kota (Rajasthan). Police sources said that the SUV was stolen from Kota, Rajasthan, in 2024. The attackers had meticulously tampered with and painted over the vehicle's engine and

**Fuel loading underway at India's first 500 MW fast breeder reactor****Chennai. (Agency)**

Thirty-seven sub-assemblies, including 28 fuel sub-assemblies, are currently being loaded into India's first 500 MW Prototype Fast Breeder Reactor (PFBR) at Kalpakkam, the government said, marking a critical step towards achieving the reactor's first approach to criticality.

The Atomic Energy Regulatory Board (AERB) has granted permission for Initial Fuel Loading (IFL) into the reactor core. First Approach to Criticality (FAC) and Low Power Physics Experiments (LPPE) for PFBR on 16.10.2025. A total of 181 fuel assemblies have to be loaded into the PFBR's reactor. It is learnt the fuel loading will take about three or four months to be completed and in between the approach to criticality will be done.

The fuel loading began in October 2025, through an alternate route as the originally designed inclined fuel transfer machine (IFTM) had encountered some technical issues, sources in the Indian nuclear power sector had said earlier. The alternate system or the 'direct machine' system

is a well proven system and is being followed in the existing pressurised heavy water reactors (PHWR), it is learnt. The future fast breeder reactors will have the 'direct machine' system which is simple, the source had said. Two more 500 MW fast breeder reactors are being planned at Kalpakkam.

While the direct machine is a new machine fabricated for PFBR and is external while the IFTM was an internal component, it is said. The 500MW PFBR is designed by the Indira Gandhi Centre for Atomic Research (IGCAR). Both the PFBR and IGCAR are located in Kalpakkam near Chennai. The PFBR is built by India's fast breeder reactor company Bharatiya Nabhikiya Vidyut Nigam Ltd (BHAVINI).

A fast breeder reactor is one which breeds more material for a nuclear fission reaction. Thirty seven sub-assemblies including 28 fuel sub-assemblies are in the process of being loaded into the country's first 500 MW prototype fast breeder reactor (PFBR), said the government.

**DDA to auction 10.43-acre plot in Dwarka Sec 22**

New Delhi: The Delhi Development Authority (DDA) is preparing to auction a 10.43-acre plot in Sector 22, Dwarka, where a luxury mall, corporate office spaces and pre-

constructing, operating and maintaining the complex for the abovementioned period before handing it over to the DDA at the end of the contract. Though the reserve price for

issued for the site, at least 50 per cent of the floor area ratio (FAR) must be dedicated to high-end retail and office spaces, while another 30 per cent FAR is earmarked for serviced apartments and luxury guest houses. A minimum of 10 per cent FAR has been reserved for public facilities such as medical centres and training institutes. The project permits a maximum FAR of 300 and ground coverage of up to 50 per cent. The plot falls within Dwarka's transit-oriented development zone, where expanding Metro and road connectivity has increased interest among private developers.

Once allotted, the project is expected to be completed within three to four years. DDA officials said they were shifting their approach from conventional land disposal to creating modern economic and employment hubs. In August, the DDA allotted a five-star hotel site at Nehru Place, projected to generate about Rs 10,000 crore over the

next 55 years. Other hotel, hospital and commercial parcels are expected to be offered to private developers for long-term development in the coming months.

minimum residential facilities are planned in the mixed-use complex. This will be first time the DDA will offer commercial, office spaces and residential facilities within one integrated project. The plot will be allotted on a 55-year licence period to the selected developer, who will be responsible for designing, financing, the auction has been fixed at Rs 25 crore, officials hope the land is expected to fetch higher price. The application process closed on Tuesday and the e-auction is scheduled to be held later this month. Several major real estate firms have expressed interest in the project. According to the development norms

**Manipur braces for President Murmu visit amid boycott calls, tight security****Imphal. (Agency)**

Manipur is gearing up to welcome President Droupadi Murmu on a two-day visit beginning Thursday, with security forces tightening vigil across the state in view of boycott and shutdown calls issued by CorCom and MNRF.

According to state information official, the President will arrive in Imphal in the afternoon and attend a special polo exhibition match at Mapal Kangjeibung, scheduled to begin around 2.30 pm.

The Mapal Kangjeibung, also referred as Imphal Pologround the oldest Polo Ground in the world. The 15th Manipur Polo International just concluded at the Polo Ground and it is the dream of every polo player to play at the place where polo originated.

After the match, the President will proceed to the City Convention Centre where she is slated to address a civic reception in the presence of State dignitaries, invited guests and members of the public. She will then retire for the night at Raj Bhavan.

On the second day of her visit today, the President will observe Nupi Lan Day by paying floral tribute at the Nupi Lan Memorial Complex. The commemoration marks the heroic uprising of Manipuri women against colonial policies in 1904 and again in 1939, movements that have since become a powerful symbol of resistance and gendered political assertion in the State. Her presence at the observance is expected to lend national significance to the historic day.

From Imphal, the President will fly to Senapati District Headquarters in the afternoon to interact with leaders of the Marma tribe, one of the communities recognised as a Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Group by the Ministry of Tribal Affairs. Sources also indicate that the President may meet Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) who continue to reside in relief camps. Meanwhile, elaborate security arrangements have been put in place across the state particularly along the routes connecting the airport, Raj Bhavan, Polo Ground and the City Convention Centre. Additional checkpoints, patrolling units and surveillance measures have been activated to ensure a smooth and incident-free visit.

**Date of Birth Changed**

I. SHANOO DEVI is a real Mother of No. 18016618X. Rank SPR Name GAUTAM SINGH Unit DGRE RDC MANALI presently residing VILLAGE V POST BHAL KANPUR DEHAT TAHSIL SIKHANDRA THANA RAJPUR KANPUR DEHATA STATE (UP)-209115, have changed my date of birth from 10/04/1978 to 01/01/1970 for all future purposes vide affidavit dated 10.12.2025 before Sub Divisional Magistrate Delhi.

**Date of Birth Changed**

I. LALJI SINGH is a real father of No. 18016618X. Rank SPR Name GAUTAM SINGH Unit DGRE RDC MANALI presently residing VILLAGE V POST BHAL KANPUR DEHAT TAHSIL SIKHANDRA THANA RAJPUR KANPUR DEHATA STATE (UP)-209115, have changed my date of birth from 05/10/1973 to 01/01/1975 for all future purposes vide affidavit dated 10.12.2025 before Sub Divisional Magistrate Delhi.

**NAME CHANGE**

I. ABHISEK KUMAR son of No. GS-17504X Rank- MVTR Name- PRATAP RAM, R/o PLOT NO 112, KHASRA NO-50/90 Gali NO 38, SARASWATI ENCLAVE GOPAL NAGAR, NAJAFGARH, PO: NAJAFGARH, DIST-SOUTH WEST DELHI-110043, have changed my name from ABHISEK KUMAR to ABHISEK KUMAR for all future purposes vide affidavit dated 10.12.2025 before Sub Divisional Magistrate Delhi.

**NAME CHANGE**

# Delhi chokes on dust: DDA named 'top violator' in air monitor's latest inspection of roads

The findings are part of the third round of such inspection carried out by 22 CAQM Flying Squads on Monday to assess dust accumulation and the effectiveness of mitigation measures under the Graded Response Action Plan (GRAP).

#### New Delhi.(Agency)

As dust on Delhi's roads continues to worsen the already hazardous pollution in the Capital this winter, the Delhi Development Authority (DDA) has been identified as the top violator during the Commission for Air Quality Management's (CAQM's) latest inspection drive—with high dust detected on 12 out of its 57 stretches surveyed in Rohini.

The findings are part of the third round of such inspection carried out by 22 CAQM Flying Squads on Monday to assess dust accumulation and the effectiveness of mitigation measures under the Graded Response Action Plan (GRAP).

According to the CAQM, the inspection covered 79 road stretches maintained by the Delhi Metro Rail Corporation

(DMRC), Delhi State Industrial and Infrastructure Development Corporation (DSIIDC) and the DDA.

The CAQM teams also re-inspected stretches under the Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD) and the New Delhi Municipal Council (NDMC) to evaluate the impact of corrective actions taken earlier. The commission said geo-tagged and time-stamped photographs were collected and submitted as part of the consolidated report.

Of the inspected stretches, high visible dust were detected on 15, 36 had moderate dust, 22 had low dust and six stretches showed no visible dust, the CAQM said.

The DDA accounted for the majority of high-dust stretches, prompting the



commission to note that the agency's

mechanical sweeping and road-cleaning efforts "need to be strengthened," particularly on stretches where dust tends to accumulate frequently.

Re-inspection of MCD and NDMC roads showed mixed progress. The CAQM said it observed a nearly 50% reduction in the MCD's high-dust stretches after corrective measures were undertaken. However, of the 35 stretches rechecked, 18 continued to remain in the high-dust category. For the NDMC, the only re-inspected stretch continued to remain in the high-dust category, according to the commission.

The DMRC and the DSIIDC performed comparatively better. Out of the

10 DMRC stretches inspected, none fell in the high-dust category, with two showing no visible dust, three low dust and four moderate dust, the commission said.

For the DSIIDC, out of 12 stretches, three recorded high dust, four moderate, three low and two no visible dust.

Reiterating that road dust remains a major contributor to particulate pollution in Delhi, the CAQM, in a statement on Wednesday, called for "strengthened on-ground action," including regular mechanical sweeping, timely disposal of collected dust, and maintenance of road shoulders and central verges. The commission has also emphasised the need to deploy water-sprinkling and dust-suppression systems consistently.

## Delhi-NCR air quality improves slightly, remains in 'poor' category; layer of smog covers city

#### New Delhi.(Agency)

The air quality in the national capital remained in the 'poor' category on Thursday, with a thin layer of smog covering parts of the city and limiting visibility.

According to the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB), the AQI was 287 at 8 am in the national capital. Several monitoring stations across the city reported pollution levels firmly in the 'poor' bracket. At 8 am, Aya Nagar recorded an AQI of 246, Burari



295, Dwarka 289 and Lodhi Road 233.

Meanwhile, in Anand Vihar and Delhi Cantonment, pollution levels were markedly higher, with the AQI touching 302, placing it in the 'Very Poor' category.

Several other key stations, including Ashok Vihar (332), Bawana (335), ITO Delhi (310), Chandni Chowk (309), and Alipur (315), remained in the "very poor" category, highlighting the widespread nature of pollution across Delhi. According to AQI categorisation, 0-50 is 'good', 51-100 'satisfactory', 101-200 'moderate', 201-300 'poor', 301-400 'very poor', and 401-500 'severe'.

## City celebrates Deepavali's UNESCO tag

#### Govt organised festivities in capital to mark the event with cultural performances, lighting buildings.

#### New Delhi.(Agency)

After Deepavali, the festival of lights, was on Wednesday inscribed on UNESCO's Intangible Cultural Heritage list, it sparked celebrations across the capital to mark the earning of the coveted tag. The decision was taken during UNESCO's key meeting at Red Fort, where representatives from 180 countries participated. To mark the milestone, the Delhi government organised a grand cultural ceremony at Dilli Haat, INA.

Chief Minister Rekha Gupta lit the ceremonial lamp, offered prayers to Lord Ram and extended greetings to the nation. The event featured traditional folk dances and cultural performances, transforming the venue into a vibrant celebration of Indian heritage.

Gupta said the inscription marked a "historic global recognition of India's civilisational values" and symbolised the universal appeal of Diwali's core messages—love, harmony, hope and righteous living. "This is a proud moment for 1.4 billion Indians. The world has acknowledged the spiritual essence of Deepavali," she said, adding that the honour strengthened India's cultural standing globally.

The chief minister linked the achievement to Prime Minister Narendra Modi's vision of "Vikas bhi, Virasat bhi," saying that India was progressing rapidly while firmly rooted in its cultural traditions.

"A festival that lives in our homes and hearts is today recognised by the world as a cultural treasure shared by humanity," she wrote on X, calling the inscription a "golden chapter of Indian culture on the global stage." Gupta said previous global recognitions, including those for Yoga, Kumbh, Durga Puja and Garba, had showcased India's rich and diverse heritage, and Diwali's inclusion further affirmed the "universality of Sanatan traditions". Cabinet Ministers Ashish Sood, Manjinder Singh Sirsa, Kapil Mishra, MLA Anil Sharma and other dignitaries attended the government's celebration. Gupta also announced that Delhi would host a special "Bhavya Deepavali" this year to commemorate the UNESCO recognition, saying the entire capital had been illuminated with rows of lamps at public spaces and monuments, including the Red Fort.

## BJP rejects AAP claim of rise in ammonia in Yamuna

#### Earlier, AAP had claimed that the city's water treatment plants failed to filter water because Haryana's industrial waste had entered Delhi's freshwater supply.

#### New Delhi.(Agency)

The BJP on Tuesday hit out at the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP), saying the ammonia level in raw water in the Yamuna "never rose to 6.5 ppm" as alleged in the recent past, and accused the party of creating panic in Delhi with "ulterior political motives".

Earlier, AAP had claimed that the city's water treatment plants failed to filter water because Haryana's industrial waste had entered Delhi's freshwater supply. Delhi BJP President Virendra Sachdeva said it was "regrettable" that AAP leader Saurabh Bhardwaj was "misleading Delhiites" by alleging that the city's water treatment plants had failed and that Delhi was facing a water crisis due to high contamination levels. "There is no water shortage in Delhi, and the water

treatment plants are regularly treating and supplying over 1,000 MGD of drinking water every day," he added. "Ammonia level in raw water in the Yamuna never rose to 6.5 ppm as alleged by Saurabh Bhardwaj, and it seems he is simply trying to create a



panic situation in Delhi with ulterior political motives. Nor have water treatment plants been shut down. The drains that carry waste have no connection with the raw water passed on by Haryana to Delhi via the Yamuna river or canal," he said.

## Fire safety tightened across Delhi after Goa case

#### New Delhi.(Agency)

In the wake of the tragic fire incident in Goa, the Delhi government has announced a set of stringent measures aimed at preventing similar accidents and enhancing public safety across the national capital. Expressing profound grief over the loss of lives, the government noted that such incidents anywhere in the country demand serious attention and collective responsibility.

The government has been ensuring robust fire safety standards in all restaurants, banquet halls, dining areas, and wedding venues in the city. He informed that, in view of the Goa tragedy, strict directions have been issued to ensure that all fire safety equipment in these

establishments is thoroughly inspected and maintained in full working condition," Delhi minister Ashish Sood said.

Sood further said that he has taken



strong note of the matter. A high-level meeting was convened to review and strengthen the existing licensing and regulatory framework

for public establishments, including restaurants, hotels, clubs, and bars.

He informed that previous governments had shown no interest in strengthening fire safety arrangements in hotels, restaurants, nightclubs and similar establishments. As a result, such unfortunate incidents kept occurring frequently. He added that under the current government, a complete transformation in fire safety preparedness is underway. New specialised equipment is being procured that can operate effectively in narrow lanes as well as reach the upper floors of high-rise buildings. Additionally, advanced appliances, including high-reach equipment, are being added to the Delhi Fire Service fleet.

## Sale of fake stickers, spy cameras for extortion of traffic cops, WhatsApp command centres: How 2 crime syndicates flourished in Delhi

#### The Delhi Police arrested five people, including the masterminds, and recovered over 1,200 fake stickers, several spy cameras, a pistol, and other incriminating evidence.

#### New Delhi.(Agency)

The Delhi Police said Wednesday they busted two organised crime syndicates, one selling illegal stickers that allowed commercial vehicles to bypass no-entry restrictions and an extortion racket targeting transporters and traffic police personnel, and arrested five people.

According to the police, Rajkumar alias Raju Meena and Jeeshan Ali were leading separate crime syndicates that exploited transporters and government officials through systematic extortion.

The investigation revealed that the accused were actively involved in running parallel systems: one selling fake stickers to commercial vehicles for Rs 2,000 to Rs 5,000 per month, and another extorting money from traffic police personnel by fabricating videos of them performing their duties," said Sanjeev Kumar Yadav, Deputy Commissioner of Police, Crime.

The syndicates operated through dedicated WhatsApp groups that coordinated routes, checkpoints, and safe passages for commercial vehicles during no-entry restrictions, the police said. "Sticker designs, colours and codes were changed monthly to avoid detection. Drivers were guaranteed free movement within Delhi," a police officer said. Rajkumar was arrested on December 8, and a case under the Maharashtra Control of Organised Crime Act (MCOCA) was registered against him for leading a network that had been operational since 2015.

Jeeshan Ali, the police said, was the mastermind who allegedly manufactured and distributed over 2,000 stickers monthly and directed operations through multiple bank

accounts in the names of his wife, brothers and friends. "He printed special stickers each month and issued real-time



directions to drivers for navigating police pickets. He used multiple bank accounts to receive ill-gotten money and had previously been involved in two extortion cases in Haryana," DCP Yadav

said. The police claim they have also arrested three associates of Jeeshan: Chandan Kumar Chaudhary, Dilip Kumar, and Dina Nath Chaudhary, who were allegedly responsible for field operations and sticker distribution.

"Rajkumar's syndicate deployed drivers with spy cameras to record traffic police during enforcement, then manipulated these recordings to blackmail officials. False complaints were lodged to exert pressure, later withdrawn after extortion," DCP Yadav said. Approximately 1,200 fake stickers, two rubber stamps, one Webley pistol with five live cartridges, spy cameras, and multiple mobile phones containing incriminating evidence have been recovered. Financial investigation and digital forensic analysis are ongoing.

## NEWS BOX

**Arsenal crush Club Brugge to keep 100 per cent Champions League record**

NEW DELHI. (Agency)

BRUGES: Noni Madueke and Gabriel Martinelli scored wonder goals as Arsenal outclassed Club Brugge 3-0 on Wednesday to make it six wins out of six in the Champions League, virtually guaranteeing automatic qualification to the last 16. Former Chelsea winger Madueke unleashed a thunderbolt from distance to give the table-topping Gunners a deserved first-half lead and headed in from point-blank range at the start of the second half. Brazil forward Martinelli then put the result beyond doubt, cutting in from the left and hitting a curling right-footed effort home from just outside the box -- competing with Madueke for goal of the night. The crushing win leaves injury-hit Arsenal top of the league phase of the Champions League with 18 points, with a top-eight finish all but assured with two games remaining. Finishing in the top eight



means automatic qualification for the last 16, avoiding the need for a risky play-off. Arsenal boss Mikel Arteta praised his team's performance, particularly in light of their lengthy list of missing players.

"To play in the Champions League and to win away from home and especially when we have that many players out, it makes the task bigger but I talked to the boys," he told TNT Sports. "It was about showing how much we wanted it, the resilience and how we prepared and I think there were some great examples, for example Christian Norgaard, which is a player that probably prepares the best out of all of them."

**Rare defeat**

Premier League leaders Arsenal, who have never been crowned European champions, travelled to Belgium after suffering their first defeat since August at the weekend -- a 2-1 loss at high-flying Aston Villa.

**Shahid Afridi sparks feud with Gautam Gambhir: He thought whatever he says is right**

New Delhi. (Agency)

Former Pakistan captain Shahid Afridi has reigned his old feud with current Indian coach Gautam Gambhir. The legendary all-rounder took a subtle and cheeky dig at the former Indian opener with whom he has multiple feuds when they shared the field. In an interview with Telecom Asia Sport, Afridi commented on Gambhir's coaching stint, which has received mixed reactions.

"The way Gautam started his stint, it looked like he thought whatever he said was right. But after some time, it is proven that you are not always right," Afridi said. In his autobiography, Afridi recalled the heated confrontation in typically blunt fashion. "I remember the run-in with Gambhir during the 2007 Asia Cup, when he completed his single while running straight into me. The umpires had to finish it off, or I would have. Clearly, we had a frank bilateral discussion



about each other's female relative," he wrote. Afridi doubled down in his book, making it clear that his opinion of Gambhir has remained unchanged. He described Gambhir as lacking positivity and criticised his attitude. "Gambhir behaves like he's a cross between Don Bradman & James Bond. In Karachi, we call guys like him saryal (burnt up). It's simple, I like happy, positive people. Doesn't matter if they are aggressive or competitive, but you have to be positive & Gambhir wasn't," Afridi wrote. He went even further, attacking Gambhir's personality and character in a scathing passage. "Some rivalries were personal, some professional. First the curious case of Gambhir. Oh, poor Gautam. He & his attitude problem. He who has no personality. He who is barely a character in the great" Afridi wrote, leaving little to the imagination. Gambhir, for his part, has been equally direct in his responses over the years. During the 2019 Lok Sabha election campaign, he dismissed Afridi's comments by questioning his maturity.

# Seattle's Pride game with anti-LGBTQ nations Egypt and Iran creates problems for FIFA

**Seattle's plan to celebrate Pride during a World Cup match has triggered strong protests from Egypt and Iran, placing FIFA in the middle of a global cultural dispute.**

BRISBANE. (Agency)

A World Cup match in Seattle meant to celebrate LGBTQ+ Pride has now drawn complaints from two of the world's least LGBTQ-friendly nations, Egypt and Iran, who were ironically picked to play against each other at the FIFA World Cup 2026. Now, football's global governing body finds itself in a pickle where picking either side results in serious backlash from the other. Seattle had originally envisioned a colourful community event full of art, Pride themes and local festivities. But once Egypt and Iran were assigned to play the June 26 match, the celebration shifted into a flashpoint that neither Seattle nor FIFA particularly asked for, but must now navigate.

**PRIDE MEETS POLITICS**

Seattle PrideFest had chosen the match months earlier for a Pride celebration, complete with rainbow-themed art contests. One entry even featured a rainbow sun over Mount Rainier with a coffee-clutching crab goalkeeper. Seattle's mayor-elect, Kate Wilson, welcomed the idea, calling it a chance to show "everyone is welcome." Egypt's soccer federation said it sent a letter to FIFA "categorically rejecting" any activities supporting homosexuality, as reported by the Associated Press. Iran's federation president, Mehdi Taj, called the plan "unreasonable and illogical," saying Tehran would file a formal complaint and raise the issue at a FIFA meeting. Both countries said Pride events clash with their cultural and religious values — something unsurprising given their long records of targeting LGBTQ+ people. What began as a rainbow celebration suddenly ran into a geopolitical mess.

**FIFA IN THE MIDDLE**

The irony goes even further: FIFA can't actually control Seattle PrideFest. It only governs what happens inside stadiums and official fan zones not community events around the city.

So for once, FIFA's typical firm grip is replaced

by an awkward shrug. The organisation reportedly declined to comment, avoiding any commitment that might upset either the host city or the protesting nations.



all planned Pride programming. "We're committed to ensuring all residents and visitors experience the warmth, respect and dignity that defines our region," said s p o k e s p o r s o n H a n a Tadesse. Meanwhile, Egypt and Iran remain firm in their objections. Egypt, which often prosecutes LGBTQ+ people under "debauchery" laws, argues the celebration violates regional values. Iran, where same-sex relations can carry the death penalty, insists the event signals unacceptable support for LGBTQ+ rights. Now a local Pride celebration has become an international controversy,

placing FIFA in a cultural tug-of-war and exposing how differently nations view LGBTQ+ inclusion. What was meant to be a welcoming moment for Seattle has instead turned into a test of how global sports organisations handle clashing values — all triggered by one match, one date, and one rainbow-themed art contest that travelled a little further onto the world stage than anyone expected.

## It's not Sanju Samson vs Jitesh Sharma. It's Sanju Samson vs Shubman Gill

New Delhi. (Agency)

Yes, it has not been an ideal few months for Sanju Samson in international cricket. With the T20 World Cup fast approaching, Samson's chances of finding a place in the XI look bleak. How did this happen to someone who had been clearing the ropes at will in the T20I format until late last year?

Sanju Samson has endured a roller-coaster ride in international cricket that many would dread. After making his debut in 2015 at the age of 21, he had to wait five more years for another opportunity in the T20I side. Despite amassing runs in the IPL, a return to the senior national team continued to elude him until he eventually got his break in 2020. However, consistent opportunities remained few and far between. It was only during Rahul Dravid's tenure as head coach that Samson



finally received a steady run. Even though he had played a considerable number of T20Is before the 2024 T20 World Cup, Samson warmed the benches as the reserve wicketkeeper during India's historic campaign. He was always on the fringes but never quite able to force the door open. That changed after Rohit Sharma and Virat Kohli retired from T20Is. Samson began receiving consistent opportunities — this time as an opener — under head coach Gautam Gambhir. Settled at the top of the order, Samson forged a fearsome opening partnership with Abhishek Sharma as he anchored India's ultra-aggressive T20I approach under new captain Suryakumar Yadav and coach Gambhir. The results were immediate: he struck three hundreds in a span of five matches in late 2024. Just when it appeared Samson was close to cementing his place in the XI as an opener, he was pushed down the order upon Shubman Gill's return. Gill, who had struck a T20I hundred in 2023,

## The unflinching 15 minutes: How India staged a historic comeback to win bronze

New Delhi. (Agency)

Sometimes, teams chase shadows. For most of the first three quarters, that's exactly what India did before shaking themselves loose and emerging from it. From the outside, their play seemed internally confused, stylish in moments, of course, but largely uneven, the parts that define this junior side stubbornly refusing to come together. And when, eventually, they did in the 4th quarter, they not only equalised but raced ahead to clinch what might be one of the most important bronze medals in Indian hockey history. The 4-2 win over two-time World Champions (2005 and 2021), Argentina, not only gives us hope of progress down the ranks but a bench strength that reinforces the hope that the transition to the senior side may be a bit smoother.

Argentina would be kicking themselves, which team wouldn't. After taking a 2-0 lead with just a quarter left, they decided to hang back and stopped pressing. In fact, their runs down the middle, so impressive in the start, had faded as the match progressed. It wouldn't be out of place to



state that India's pressing in the 3rd and 4th quarter created doubts, a fear that if they stepped out, India would hammer them at the back. Exactly that happened. For India, coming back from a 0-2 deficit in just 15 minutes showed character and a 'never give in' mentality. Teams do give up. But this junior side innovated. In fact, in the past decade, there have been only a handful of matches, mostly by the senior Indian side, during the Pro League where they have used the indirect penalty corner as a means of breaking the deadlock and winning close games. In close matches, where teams are locked 2-2, it requires courage to try a deflection bang in the middle of the striking

circle. India did that, not once but twice, to first cut the scores and then equalise before moving ahead 3-2 and then closing out the match 4-2 as Anmol Ekka fired in India's 7th PC after Argentina had pulled off their goalkeeper. Anmol Ekka is actually the story within the larger narrative. Or maybe, he was the highlight once you strip the bronze-medal match of all its body parts.

With the game hardly three minutes in, fans not even settled down, the VIPs, usually late, still sauntering in, group of women still not getting the right background frame for their selfies, Ekka decided to barge into Nicolas Rodriguez, on the right corner of the Indian striking circle. South African umpire Annelize Rostron pointed for a stroke. From Ekka it was a massive mistake. Players usually find it difficult to shake off such costly errors giving the opposition not just the lead but a huge mental advantage. Ekka, played himself back into the match, and by the end of the 2nd quarter, was pushing the players up, making a few runs of his own. India's problems were in transition.

## Erling Haaland fires playful jibe at Carragher amid Liverpool's Salah crisis

Madrid. (Agency)

Erling Haaland referenced Jamie Carragher's ongoing dispute with Mohamed Salah as he delivered a light-hearted remark about the former Liverpool defender following Manchester City's 2-1 Champions League win over Real Madrid on Wednesday.

Carragher has been at the centre of a major talking point in English football this week after launching a strong critique of Salah's recent conduct and performances at Liverpool. His comments have sparked widespread debate, with the story dominating analysis shows and discussions across media platforms. Against this backdrop, Haaland alluded to Carragher's heightened presence in the news cycle while speaking after City's victory at the Santiago Bernabeu. "I'm getting nervous now when I see Jamie Carragher in the studio now," Haaland said. Maintaining a playful tone, he



added: "I think I need to say Rdiger now because Carragher is a bit of a loose cannon now, so we need to be careful." Haaland's remarks came after he scored the decisive penalty in a match that saw City recover from an early setback. Real Madrid opened the scoring in the 28th minute when Rodrygo finished low into the corner following a counterattack. Despite

Madrid's strong start, defensive errors before halftime allowed City to take control. Nico O'Reilly equalised in the 35th minute after reacting quickly to a rebound from Thibaut Courtois, who failed to hold Josko Gvardiol's header. Eight minutes later, Antonio Rüdiger was penalised for pulling Haaland down inside the box. Following a VAR review, referee Clément Turpin awarded the penalty, and Haaland converted confidently for his first goal at the Bernabeu. City managed long spells of possession in the second half, with Courtois making several important saves to keep the hosts in contention. Real Madrid's best chance came late on when Endrick struck the post, but they could not find an equaliser as frustration grew among the home supporters. The win moved Manchester City to fourth place in the standings on 13 points.

## Did Gautam Gambhir ignore Ro-Ko after ODI series win? Ex-teammate sparks fresh row

**After India's ODI series victory over South Africa, Robin Uthappa expressed surprise at head coach Gautam Gambhir for not crediting Virat Kohli and Rohit Sharma, despite their standout performances. Kohli amassed 302 runs, including two hundreds, in the three-match series, which India won 2-1.**

WELLINGTON. (Agency)

India's 2-1 ODI series win over South Africa on December 6 should have closed with unqualified praise for the key performers. Instead, conversation quickly drifted to the

post-match press conference, where head coach Gautam Gambhir barely mentioned Virat Kohli or Rohit Sharma — the two batters who had defined the series. The omission caught the attention of former India international and Gambhir's ex-teammate Robin Uthappa, whose remarks have since prompted wider discussion among fans and analysts. Kohli produced a standout campaign, scoring 302 runs at an average of 151 and a strike rate of 117.05, punctuated by two centuries. Rohit Sharma, too, made meaningful contributions, tallying 146 runs at an average of 48.66 and striking at over 110. Their efforts were instrumental in sealing the series for India. "What I found surprising is the post-match of that series, in the press conference, I didn't see Gautam giving credit to either Rohit or Virat. Here are a couple of guys who've batted out of their skins and shown us how

good they are and how good they can be. They reduced all kinds of doubts and shut down any naysayers about what they actually



can do and will do for India when they are in the right kind of form. That felt strange," Uthappa said on his YouTube channel. The press conference snub comes at a time when

there are rumours over a rift between Gambhir and Kohli. A section of fans inferred from TV visuals that Kohli ignored

Gambhir after his hundred in the first ODI against South Africa in Ranchi last month. However, visuals of Gambhir having a casual chat with Rohit went viral.

Gambhir, meanwhile, used the press conference to speak largely about team themes and long-term planning, offering minimal direct acknowledgement of the senior pair. Uthappa highlighted this as an unusual oversight, especially given the weight of Rohit and Kohli's contributions. Both players remain fully committed to the ODI format, even as they reduce their international workloads. Having retired from Test cricket earlier this year and stepped away from T20Is following the last World Cup, they continue to anchor India's 50-over ambitions — fuelling speculation about their roles in the 2027 ODI World Cup.

## A 21% jump in equity fund inflows push AUM past Rs 80 tn: Amfi; SIP inflows marginally decline

MUMBAI.(Agency)

After several months of tepid inflows, investor interest in equity mutual funds saw a strong revival, pumping 21% more money into those schemes, pushing the industry's assets under management to scale past the Rs 80-trillion-mark in November. However, inflows into SIPs dipped marginally to Rs 29,445 crore in November from Rs 29,529 crore in October, down 0.28% on an on-month basis and first time since April. Equity funds saw a net 21.2% jump in inflows at Rs 29,911 crore up from Rs 24,690 crore in October, according to the data released by the Association of Mutual Funds (Amfi) here Thursday. Total assets under management of the industry rose to Rs 80.5 trillion, up from Rs 79.9 trillion in the previous month, which equity AUM stood at Rs 35.66 trillion, up from Rs 35.39 trillion in the previous month.

The month saw 24 new schemes being launched across categories, mobilising around Rs 3,126 crore.

Large-cap funds staged a sharp recovery, getting Rs 1,640 crore, up 68.7% from October's Rs 972 crore. Large & mid-cap funds also saw a strong month with Rs 4,503 crore, rising 41.7% on-month, while mid-cap funds saw inflows increase 17.9% to Rs 4,487 crore. Small-cap funds collected Rs 4,407 crore, improving 26.8% from October. In contrast, ELSS funds and dividend yield funds saw net outflows of Rs 570 crore and Rs 278 crore, respectively. Himanshu Srivastava, a principal research at Morningstar Investment India said the revival of investor interest in equity-oriented funds reflecting sustained investor confidence amid a supportive macro-environment, resilient corporate earnings, and improving clarity around the global interest-rate trajectory.

## Equity mutual funds rebound; inflows rise 21% to Rs 29,911 crore in November

NEW DELHI.(Agency)

Equity mutual funds attracted Rs 29,911 crore in November, marking a 21 percent increase from the preceding month, according to data released by industry body Amfi on Thursday. This rise in inflows comes after three consecutive months of decline, signalled an improvement in investor sentiment.

The positive momentum in equity flows also boosted the broader industry's asset base with total assets under management (AUM) rising to Rs 80.80 lakh crore, up from Rs 79.87 lakh crore in October.

Retail participation through Systematic Investment Plans (SIPs) showed a slight softening. SIP inflows edged down to Rs 29,445 crore, compared with Rs 29,631 crore in the previous month. According to the data, net flows in equity mutual funds rose to Rs 29,911 crore in November, up from Rs 24,690 crore in October. The net inflow in equities stood at Rs 30,421 crore in September and Rs 33,430 crore in August. Most sub-categories saw positive traction, except for dividend yield and ELSS funds during the month under review. Flexi-cap funds, which remained a preferred choice, recorded the highest inflows at Rs 8,135 crore, though this was a 9 percent dip from October's Rs 8,929 crore.

In contrast, debt mutual funds saw an outflow of Rs 25,692 crore in November after witnessing a hefty inflow of Rs 1.6 lakh crore in the preceding month. Also, gold Exchange-traded Funds (ETFs) witnessed a sharp slowdown, with net inflows falling to Rs 3,742 crore from Rs 7,743 crore in October, pointing to a shift in investor appetite for safe-haven assets.

## Microsoft 'deepening its commitment' to India's AI ecosystem, says Satya Nadella

BENGALURU.(Agency)

Microsoft Chairman and CEO Satya Nadella on Thursday said the company is deepening its commitment to India's artificial intelligence ecosystem with massive infrastructure investments.

Microsoft is also strengthening its cloud footprint and focusing on skilling millions of Indians for an AI-driven future, he said. Speaking at a Microsoft event here, Nadella said, "We are very excited about investing in India to make sure that we're able to bring the best in class infrastructure here, the USD 17.5 billion investment," calling it Microsoft's largest investment in Asia. The Microsoft chairman underlined the rapid expansion of the company's cloud footprint across the country. "We're building on Azure as the world's computer and we have 70 plus data centre regions all over the world. In India, the footprint continues to grow. We now have central India, West India, South India, and we have a partnership with Jio as well," he said. Nadella further said that a new data centre region would become operational in 2026. "We are very excited that in 2026, we will have a new DC in south central and then the most exciting part for me is that it's 100 per cent sustainable," he said. Nadella also emphasised the importance of digital sovereignty and cybersecurity in an era of expanding AI deployment. "We are taking sovereignty and making sure that there's a portfolio of options for sovereignty. So you have the public cloud, you have sovereign controls in public cloud..." he noted. He warned that sovereignty cannot be viewed in isolation from security. "Cyber security is a signals game--you can be sovereign and not have global intelligence--you'll be vulnerable in fact," he said, noting that Microsoft processes "trillions of daily signals" to secure platforms from Azure to Windows.

# US Fed rate cut: How the move shapes global markets and India

**The Fed's third rate cut steadies some nerves and tests others, raising fresh questions on growth, liquidity and currency pressures, but what do these shifting global cues ultimately mean for India?**

New Delhi.(Agency)

The US Federal Reserve delivered its third interest rate cut of the year, reducing the federal funds rate by 25 basis points and bringing it into the 3.5–3.75% range.

The move immediately became the biggest headline in US rate cut news, with markets asking what the shift means for inflation, growth, the dollar and emerging markets like India.

WHY THE FED MOVED AGAIN

Subho Moulik, CEO of Appreciate, says the

Fed is still navigating a delicate soft-landing attempt. "Core PCE is at 2.8% yoy, the labour market is gradually cooling, and the unemployment rate rose to 4.4%," he noted, adding that employment gains have slowed to around 110,000–120,000 a month. According to him, the latest Federal Reserve interest rate cut is the final move in a three-step cycle that began in September. With rates now near neutral, Moulik expects US Treasury yields to stabilise. "Even US Treasury yields (10Y) are likely to stabilise around 4%, which is approximately 10% in INR terms in one of the lowest-risk asset classes," he said.

However, he also highlighted that the Fed has signalled a tougher road ahead for further cuts, with only one to two rate reductions expected in 2026, depending on inflation and labour-market trends. Nachiketa Sawrikar, Boston-based fund manager of the Rs 900 crore Artha Global Multiplier Fund, points out that the Fed has now cut rates by 75 bps

between September and December 2025, following a 100 bps reduction in late



2024. With the federal funds rate now at 3.625%, he says policy is "very close to the estimated neutral rate of 3.25%."

But the outlook remains uncertain. "The Fed's dot plot indicates just one additional rate cut in 2026 and one more in 2027," he said, noting that much will depend on whether inflation can fall sustainably from 3% toward the 2% target without further deterioration in job growth. Sawrikar warned that such uncertainty is weighing on markets.

"Higher long-term rates and unclear policy expectations have weighed on asset valuations and heightened volatility across rate-sensitive sectors," he said. The rise in the 10-year Treasury yield to 4.16% captures that nervousness.

For emerging markets, the assessment is more sobering. "All this policy uncertainty is negative for emerging markets," Sawrikar said, adding that India is facing additional pressure because the India-US trade deal has not yet been finalised. This has put "downward pressure on the rupee-dollar exchange rate," which could slow foreign inflows and affect domestic equity valuations.

RISKS REMAINRajesh Palviya, SVP – Research at Axis Securities, notes that the Fed's message signals a shift in priorities. "Concerns over slowing growth and labour-market softness now outweigh earlier fears of persistent inflation," he said. The cut takes the policy rate to its lowest point in over three years.

## Eggos faces social media heat over viral cancer claims: All you need to know

MUMBAI. (Agency)

If you have been seeing posts about cancer-causing eggs on social media this week, it's because a popular premium egg brand, Eggos Nutrition, has landed in the middle of a controversy. Eggos Nutrition, a brand that has built its reputation on selling fresh, chemical-free eggs, found itself at the centre of a storm. It started with a video from the YouTube channel Trustified, known for sending health products to independent labs for blind testing. The channel released a report claiming that samples of Eggos eggs tested positive for AOZ, a metabolite of the antibiotic Nitrofurantoin. This particular chemical is banned for use in poultry farming because of its potential links to cancer. The finding, 0.73 parts per billion, was minute, but it was enough to shatter the "100% Antibiotic Free" promise the brand is famous for.

For consumers who pay a premium price specifically to avoid the hidden nasties of industrial farming, the allegation that these eggs contained traces of a banned, potential carcinogen felt like a betrayal. Amid the noise, medical experts stepped in to offer some perspective. Dr. Manan Vora, an orthopedic surgeon and content creator, addressed the viral claims to calm the fraying nerves. While he admitted the findings were shocking for a brand making such high purity claims, he clarified that the situation did not warrant immediate panic.

The levels detected were extremely low, trace amounts that don't pose an acute, overnight threat to health. The real concern, he noted, was not immediate toxicity but the breach of trust and the broader issue of how these chemicals enter the food chain at all. The company broke its silence on December 9 to address the allegations directly.

They maintained that their product remains safe and technically compliant with Indian regulations, which allow for a tiny margin of residue to account for unavoidable environmental factors like contaminated groundwater.

In a statement posted on Instagram, the brand defended its processes, and said, "We are aware of a video that is currently being shared and understand that it may have raised some questions and concerns. We want to reassure our consumers that our eggs are safe for consumption and comply with the standards set by the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI)."

"We take every care to maintain quality and safety at our farms and across the entire value chain which includes ensuring zero anti-biotic usage. Our process also includes sourcing best quality feed, to storage, transport and delivery.



shipments, up sharply from 2% in FY23. This logistics shift has already pushed contribution margins to 5 percent in FY25, with further expansion expected as integration deepens. IS THERE MORE UPSIDE?

Kunal Bajaj, Senior Research Associate at Choice Institutional Equities, said Meesho's day one performance reflects clear faith in its business model. "Meesho's blockbuster debut

delivering over 50% listing gains highlights strong investor confidence in its position as India's most efficient value e-commerce platform," he told IndiaToday.in.

He added that the IPO was attractively priced. "At 5.3 times FY25 EV to revenue, the IPO was priced low versus peers who came at 13.3 times at their listings," Bajaj said.

Choice has initiated coverage with a 'BUY' rating and a target price of Rs 200. It expects a 31% revenue CAGR between FY25 and FY28 supported by category strength, increasing ad and fulfilment monetisation and deeper logistics integration.

Choice expects EBITDA to turn positive in FY27 as operating leverage improves. Contribution margins are projected to rise from 5% in FY25 to about 5.8% by FY28.

The firm's bull case assumes stronger growth and higher take rates while its bear case accounts for slower topline expansion to arrive at a valuation range of Rs 234 to Rs 148.

## Stocks markets open firm but later turned choppy amid mixed global cues

MUMBAI.(Agency)

Equity benchmark indices Sensex and Nifty began trading on a positive note on Thursday but soon pared all early gains to trade in the negative territory amid weak trends in Asian markets and persistent foreign fund outflows.

The 30-share BSE Sensex opened higher and climbed 149.3 points, or 0.17 per cent to 84,540.57. The 50-share NSE Nifty also advanced 45.05 points to 25,803.05. However, both key indices reversed their gains as selling pressure intensified, with the Sensex declining 222.39 points, or 0.26 per cent, to 84,168.88 and the Nifty slipping 50.90 points to 25,707.10. Among the Sensex constituents, Titan, PowerGrid, HCL Technologies, Bharti Airtel, Asian

Paints, Reliance Industries, Tata Consultancy Services, Tech Mahindra, ICICI Bank, Trent, Tech Mahindra, Axis Bank, Bajaj Finserv and ITC were the laggards.

On the other hand, Eternal, Tata Steel, Maruti Suzuki India, Kotak Mahindra Bank, Adani Ports, Bharat Electronics Ltd, Larsen & Toubro, Infosys and UltraTech Cement were among the gainers. In Asian markets, Japan's Nikkei 225 benchmark, Shanghai's SSE Composite, Hong Kong's Hang Seng and South Korea's KOSPI were trading lower. Wall Street settled higher in overnight deals on Wednesday after the Federal Reserve cut the federal funds rate by 25 basis points to a range of 3.5–3.75 per cent in its December

meeting. However, policymakers left their projections for the federal funds rate unchanged from September, signalling only one 25 basis points cut in 2026.

Meanwhile, Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) remained the net sellers of equities worth Rs 1,651.

06 crore on Wednesday while Domestic Institutional Investors (DIIs) bought stocks worth Rs 3,752.31 crore, according to the exchange data.

Brent crude, the global oil benchmark, rose 0.03 per cent to USD 62.23 per barrel. On Wednesday, the 30-share BSE Sensex dropped by 275.01 points to settle at 84,391.27, while the broader NSE Nifty fell by 81.65 points to close at a month's low of 25,758.

## Why India is the next global hotspot for luxury real estate investment

**The profile of the Indian homebuyer is changing in ways that directly favour the luxury segment.**

**Millennials, who grew up with global exposure, digital access, and rising professional mobility, prefer premium homeownership.**

Mumbai.(Agency)

As of 2025, India stands at a great demographic and economic moment. Its population, now the largest globally, enjoys a strong working-age majority. With about 68% in the 15 to 64 age bracket, the country has a powerful demographic dividend. At the same time, India is urbanising at a quick pace. Expansion across established metros and growing tier-2 cities is reshaping housing demand, infrastructure, and lifestyle expectations. This combination is driving housing volume and redefining quality as well. As incomes rise and aspirations evolve, a growing segment of Indian buyers and investors is moving beyond basic homeownership toward premium

residences. This is mainly because of better amenities, location advantages, and long-term asset value. This shift positions India as a credible emerging global hotspot for luxury housing investment. What drives the new face of premium living?

This momentum is being further strengthened by the way India's physical and social infrastructure are changing together. Over the last few years, connectivity has quietly become one of the strongest suits for premium real estate demand. New expressways, upgraded airports, high-speed rail corridors, and urban transit networks are compressing travel time between business districts, residential corridors, and emerging suburbs. This shift is making high-end residential pockets more accessible, liveable, and investment-worthy, especially for buyers who value location efficiency as much as lifestyle. Given this, the profile of the Indian homebuyer is changing in ways that directly favour the luxury segment.

Millennials, who grew up with global exposure, digital access, and rising professional mobility, prefer premium homeownership.

earning years with a clear preference for larger spaces, gated developments, smart homes, and lifestyle-led communities.

Parallel to this generational shift is the growing influence of India's high-net-worth and ultra-high-net-worth

townships, waterfront homes, golf communities, and serviced living spaces, all designed to match global benchmarks in design, comfort, and amenities. This evolution in luxury real estate projects is aligning supply with a demanding, quality-conscious buyer base. Future playground for luxury real estate. Between 2019 and 2025, luxury homes priced above Rs 1 crore surged, reflecting rising incomes, urban aspirations, and a growing appetite for premium lifestyles. Yet the narrative today goes far beyond volume sales. Developers are now seeing the potential in cities like Jaipur, Bhubaneswar, Nagpur, and Vishakhapatnam. They are emerging as prime hotspots, driven by government-led regional development initiatives and expanding employment opportunities outside traditional metro centres.

The market is also evolving in how it delivers value. For example, "Live-work-play" communities are becoming the norm in luxury projects, offering self-sustained townships with integrated amenities, professional management, and smart infrastructure. These developments reduce risk and align with global investor expectations. Not just residential but commercial real estate complements this trend.

population. As wealth creation accelerates across sectors, real estate remains one of the most trusted asset classes for capital preservation and diversification. Luxury housing, in particular, offers the dual promise of tangible security and long-term appreciation. It also benefits from a strong emotional dimension. For many domesticHNIs and overseas Indians, investing in premium property at home is both a financial and personal decision. In response, developers are focusing on curated residential ecosystems. For example, branded residences, luxury

townships, and integrated infrastructure.

townships, and integrated infrastructure.

Kundali Bhagya's

# Shraddha Arya



## Throws Star-Studded Birthday Party For Twins Siya, Shaurya

Television actress Shraddha Arya celebrated the first birthday of her twins, Siya and Shaurya, on November 29. The celebration was grand, befitting such a special occasion. Shraddha also delighted fans by revealing her children's faces and sharing adorable glimpses of them enjoying the day on her social media handle on December 2. She posted a video from the birthday bash recently, which turned out to be a star-studded affair. The event was graced by her Kundali Bhagya co-star Dheeraj Dhoopar, Bigg Boss 13 fame Mahira Sharma, Rashami Desai, and many others, making it a memorable celebration for the family and friends alike.

### A Glimpse Into The Celebration

In the video, Shraddha Arya was seen mingling with friends while everyone enjoyed the night away. It also offered glimpses of the grand decorations and the heartwarming cake-cutting ceremony. Her caption read, "Thank you to all wonderful friends and family for being there and making Siya and Shaurya's first birthday so special. Your love and energy made the day a total party!!"

A user commented, "My heart, Shaurya and Siya!" Another user added, "The Kundali Bhagya reunion is the best thing." Someone wrote, "Such a beautiful, wholesome video it is." A user remarked, "Beautiful day, beautiful family." Another one wrote, "Incredible photos of an incredible day! Looks like a perfect celebration for two stars." "These cuties are the real bundle of joy. God bless them always," commented a user.

### Shraddha's 'Tiny Tornadoes' Are Adorable!

Ever since Shraddha became a mother, she has been careful to keep her children's faces private. However, as they turned one, she decided to reveal their faces in an Instagram post. The pictures, taken on their birthday, captured the adorable little ones dressed in cute outfits. Shraddha looked stunning in a baby-pink one-shoulder dress, while her husband, Rahul Nagal, twinned with her in a matching blazer, paired with a white shirt and beige pants.

Her caption on the post read, "Siya and Shaurya, our tiny tornadoes, are officially one." The post garnered over 8 lakh likes and received more than 3K comments. Actress Anjuum Faakih commented on the post, "Mashallah Mashallah!" Dheeraj Dhoopar's wife, Vinny Arora added "Touchwood" on the post. Abhishek Kapoor also wrote, "Beautiful, god bless the fam jam." Aditi Dev Sharma remarked, "Aww, so beautiful. God bless you all." Mansi Srivastava, Rashami Desai and Sriti Jha reacted to the post with red heart emojis.



# Priyanka Chopra

## Is In Mumbai For The Great Indian Kapil Show

Priyanka Chopra has landed in Mumbai once again, exuding her usual easy style. As she walked through the terminal with her team, fans could not help but notice her understated yet charming persona. The global icon, dressed in a comfy outfit for a long flight, achieved the ideal blend of ease and sophistication. Priyanka was seen in a pair of grey trousers, a loose-fitted tee and a jacket at the airport. She also wore a cap, glasses and carried a duffel bag on the side. Priyanka Chopra has already caused a stir with her light-hearted warning to comedian Kapil Sharma. The global diva stunned fans by announcing that she will soon appear on Kapil Sharma's renowned chat show, The Great Indian Kapil Show.

Taking to her Instagram stories, Priyanka Chopra shared a selfie with a teasing caption, "@Kapilsharma you better be ready. #Mumbai @thegreatindiankapilshow." The actress is in Mumbai for SS Rajamouli's film with Mahesh Babu as well. Last month, the title teaser was released, which received immense love.

### Priyanka Chopra On Her Struggles

Meanwhile, the actress has been in the news for her assessment of her struggles so far this week. While speaking at the Bridge Summit in Abu Dhabi, Priyanka Chopra said, "Beyoncé said

this, and I am going to quote her. "I feel like I am on the other side of my sacrifice." I worked really hard, I missed birthdays, I missed when my father was in the hospital. I should have maybe spent every day with him, but he would chase me back to the set. I missed Christmases, Diwali, I missed time with my family. Because it's romanticised with young people- if you don't



work hard, you don't deserve success. Which isn't true either."

### Priyanka Chopra's Upcoming Projects

Priyanka most recently appeared in Prime Video's Heads of State. She is currently filming SS Rajamouli's ambitious Telugu film Varanasi with Mahesh Babu and Prithviraj Sukumaran. She also has two huge Hollywood projects, The Bluff and Judgement Day, scheduled for release in 2026.

What Makes The Great Indian Kapil Show Season 4 Different? Kapil Sharma Reveals



Kapil Sharma has opened up about the new season of "The Great Indian Kapil Show," revealing what will make season 4 truly unique. Speaking about the new season, the comedian shared in a statement, "Har baar lagta hai ki ab toh sab kar liya, naye season me kya karunga, lekin phir aapka pyaar aur aapki umeed mujhe kuch naya karne ka rasta dikha deti hai, iss baar bhi aap hi ki ummeedo ne mujhe bahut se naye kirdar aur sath hi wo kirdaar jo aapko humesha se pasand aaye hain, unhe nibhaane ka rasta dikhaya hai ... toh aapke liye comedy ke wo saare avtaar lekar aa raha hoon Netflix par, season 4 me ... jo hoga comedy ke universe ka multiverse yani mastiverse."

On Wednesday, the makers announced the exciting season 4 of the comedy show. Sharing the teaser on Instagram, Netflix wrote, "In short, India ke mastiverse mein aapka swaagat hai Watch the new season of The Great Indian Kapil Show, streaming from 20th December, 8 pm, only on Netflix."

This season, Kapil Sharma dons a variety of new avatars, including GenZ Baba, Tau Ji, Raja, and Mantri Ji, bringing a fresh generation of characters for viewers of all ages. The season features World Cup champions, global superstars, Gen Z icons, Bhojpuri celebrities, and plenty of unexpected surprises.

Sharing her excitement about the new season Tanya Bami – Series Head, Netflix India, stated, "The Great Indian Kapil Show is not just a show for us. It's something that has begun to define family time and Netflix time for India and many Indians outside of our country as well!"

"The Great Indian Kapil Show Season 4" will start from December 20, on Netflix. The season 3 wrapped up in September, with Akshay Kumar gracing the finale. Merely two months later, Kapil Sharma kicked off Season 4 and shared snapshots from the very first day of shooting on social media.

## Samantha Ruth Prabhu And Raj Nidimoru's Unseen Pre Wedding Celebration Pic With Family



Samantha Ruth Prabhu and Raj Nidimoru recently announced their wedding, leaving fans super excited. Recently, an unseen moment from their pre-wedding festivities has taken over social media. The photo, which surfaced online, is from their mehendi function. The actress looked stunning in a yellow and green outfit. Viral Bhayani took to his Instagram handle and shared an unseen photo from their mehendi festivities. The couple is seen posing with other family members. The diva went for minimal mandala designs for both her hands and feet, which looked stunning. Although it wasn't clearly visible in the recent images, eagle-eyed fans earlier noticed Raj's name in one of the fingers of her mehendi design.

### Raj Nidimoru Thanks Paparazzi For Congratulating Him On Marriage To Samantha Ruth Prabhu

Raj arrived at the success party, photographers quickly surrounded him with congratulations. Their warm "Shaadi mubarak ho!" prompted a shy smile from the filmmaker, who responded with a gentle, almost whispered, "Thank you." It was a moment that fans of both Samantha and Raj had been waiting for—confirmation that the couple had stepped into this new chapter with the same calm sincerity that marked their wedding.

### How Samantha and Raj Met

Raj Nidimoru—one half of the celebrated duo Raj & DK—first worked with Samantha during the shooting of The Family Man season 2 in 2021. Their paths crossed again on the sets of Citadel: Honey Bunny, where Samantha starred opposite Varun Dhawan. Sources from the sets have often spoken about their growing closeness during this period, though the two remained extremely guarded about their personal lives. Despite months of speculation, neither Samantha nor Raj publicly acknowledged their relationship. Their rare appearances together only strengthened rumours until Samantha finally confirmed their union shortly before the wedding.

### Samantha Ruth Prabhu and Raj Nidimoru's Wedding Looks

The lovebirds sealed the deal at the Isha Yoga Centre in Coimbatore, following simple rituals. Their temple-style spiritual wedding was also attended by Samantha's Rangasthalam co-star Ram Charan and many others. Sharing the photographs on Instagram, the actress only mentioned the date of their marriage in the caption. Coming to the duo's wedding looks, they were undoubtedly a vision of understated, traditional elegance. The actress wore a custom red Banarasi saree designed by Arpita Mehta and striking temple jewellery.

**A small coastal town in Karnataka, it used to be highly unlikely that Murudeshwar was on the travel wish-list for any one other than the inhabitants of Karnataka state.**

**B**ut the times are a changing now. Coupled with accessibility and the increased desire of visiting off-beat destinations, people have started venturing further south of beach haven, Goa, to Murudeshwar. Scuba diving has been another reason for this destination becoming popular over the past couple of years.

*Scuba diving is what brought me here.*

**Climate**

The summers in Murudeshwar are hot and extend from March to May. The winters are quite pleasant and do get as chilly as it can possibly get on the Indian west coast. This makes the months of Oct to Mar the perfect time to visit Murudeshwar. Leaving aside the monsoon months of July to September, anytime is a great time to visit here.

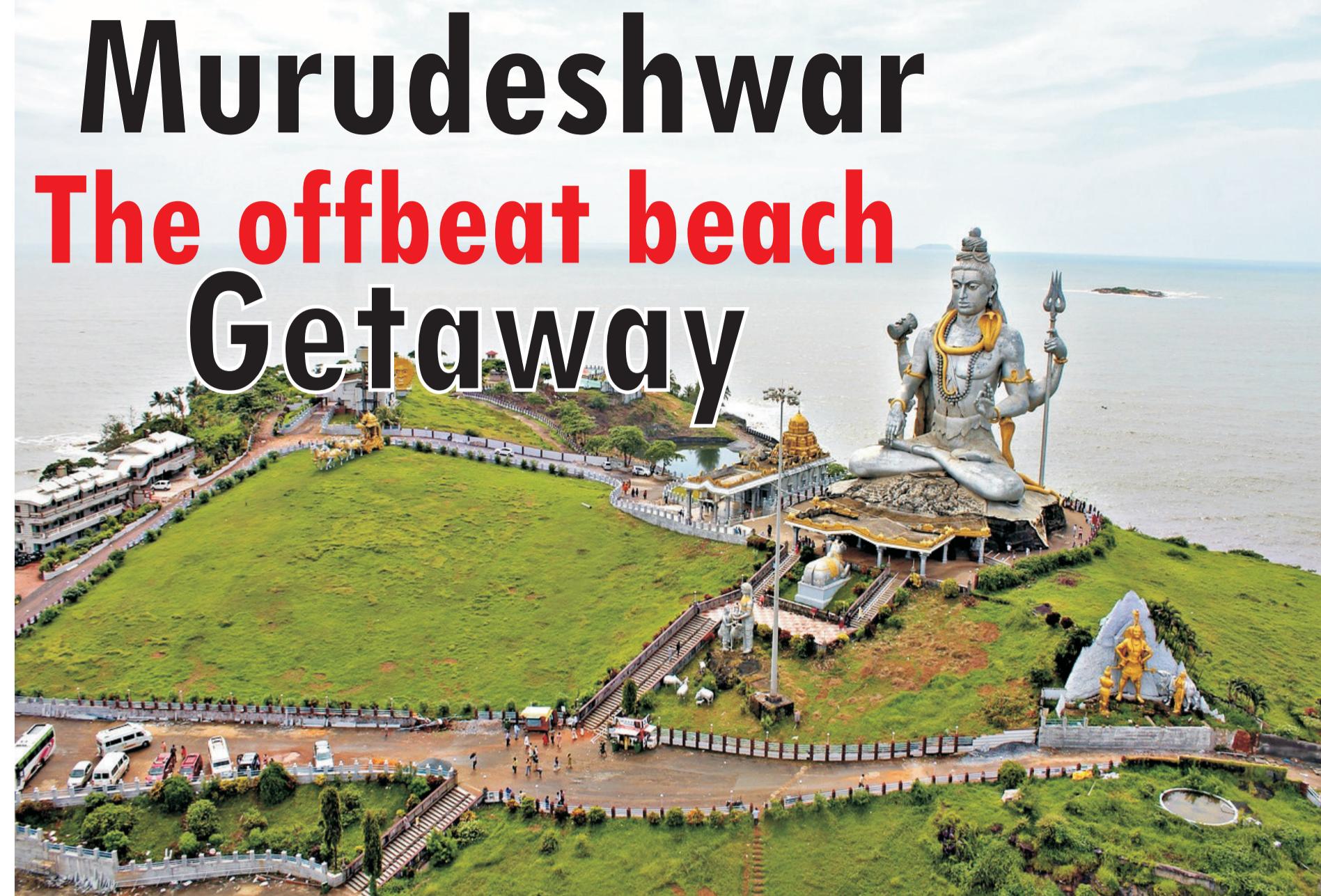
**Food**

Being a religious town, it is not easy to come by non-vegetarian restaurants in Murudeshwar. The Sea Lounge at RNS Residency is a great place to sit and have a meal given its ambience and view but does not serve non-veg or alcohol. You can however come down here for a juice or milkshake in the morning or afternoon. Naveen Beach Resort is probably the only one in the main town where you get both alcohol as well as non-veg food and is therefore the one most popular amongst tourists. Definitely go here for seafood. Naveen Beach Restaurant is a great place to have breakfast with its traditional south Indian fare. They have amazing dosa, upma, medu wada, etc.

**Places of interest**

Murudeshwar is a small little beautiful beach town with loads of tourists visiting to see the temples and to take a dip in the holy waters of this town. The town is in fact named after Lord Shiva.

**Shiva temple**



Murudeshwar is home to the second tallest Shiva statue in the world. Standing enormously tall at 123 ft, this statue is the main reason thousands of tourists throng to Murudeshwar.

**Raja Gopura**

At 18 to 20 storeys high, this tower was built by Mr R.N Shetty, a very well known businessman and philanthropist in Murudeshwar. To me it seemed like he practically owns the town. This Raja Gopura was built with a viewing gallery on the 18th floor so that everyone could witness the spectacular views from a height as well as get a great view of the statue of Lord Shiva.

**Murudeshwar beach**

While the beach is beautiful just as any other

beach is to me, it is lined with small, cheap food stalls, crabs, garbage and locals who stare at you enough to make you uncomfortable. So Murudeshwar beach is preferably best seen from afar. However a trip to the beach really early in the morning might not be a bad idea.

**Netrani Island - Scuba diving & snorkelling**

A boat ride of around an hour and fifteen minutes from Murudeshwar beach gets you to Netrani Island. This is a small island, one that you don't really need to get down on to. The boatmen will keep the boat parked close by to the island and you can jump in with a snorkel mask and have some fun. I'd recommend giving scuba diving a try. It is probably the next best thing to travelling into outer space as a lot of

people say.

**How to get there**

**By air**

The nearest airport is Mangalore at 165 kms away. It probably doesn't make sense for people to fly in to Mangalore and then drive to Murudeshwar unless they're coming from far up north and are really constrained on time.

**By rail**

Murudeshwar is well connected on the Konkan railway line with a few trains daily connecting it to Goa and onwards to Mumbai.

**By road**

The journey from Pune to Murudeshwar is over 600 kilometres. We left in a friend's car at 7:45am, not bad considering our targeted time

of departure was to be 6:30am. While getting out of Pune, head in the general direction that you would to go to Goa. You could go up till Goa and then drive southwards but it is a better idea to travel through the interiors of Karnataka via Hubli and reach Murudeshwar directly. The time taken for this journey was around 11 hours with enough leisurely tea and eats stops. Go to Murudeshwar only if you plan on going snorkeling or scuba diving because there isn't much else here. A few hour stop-over to visit the temples would be just fine but Netrani Island definitely scored high on my travel ranks.

**Shiva temple**

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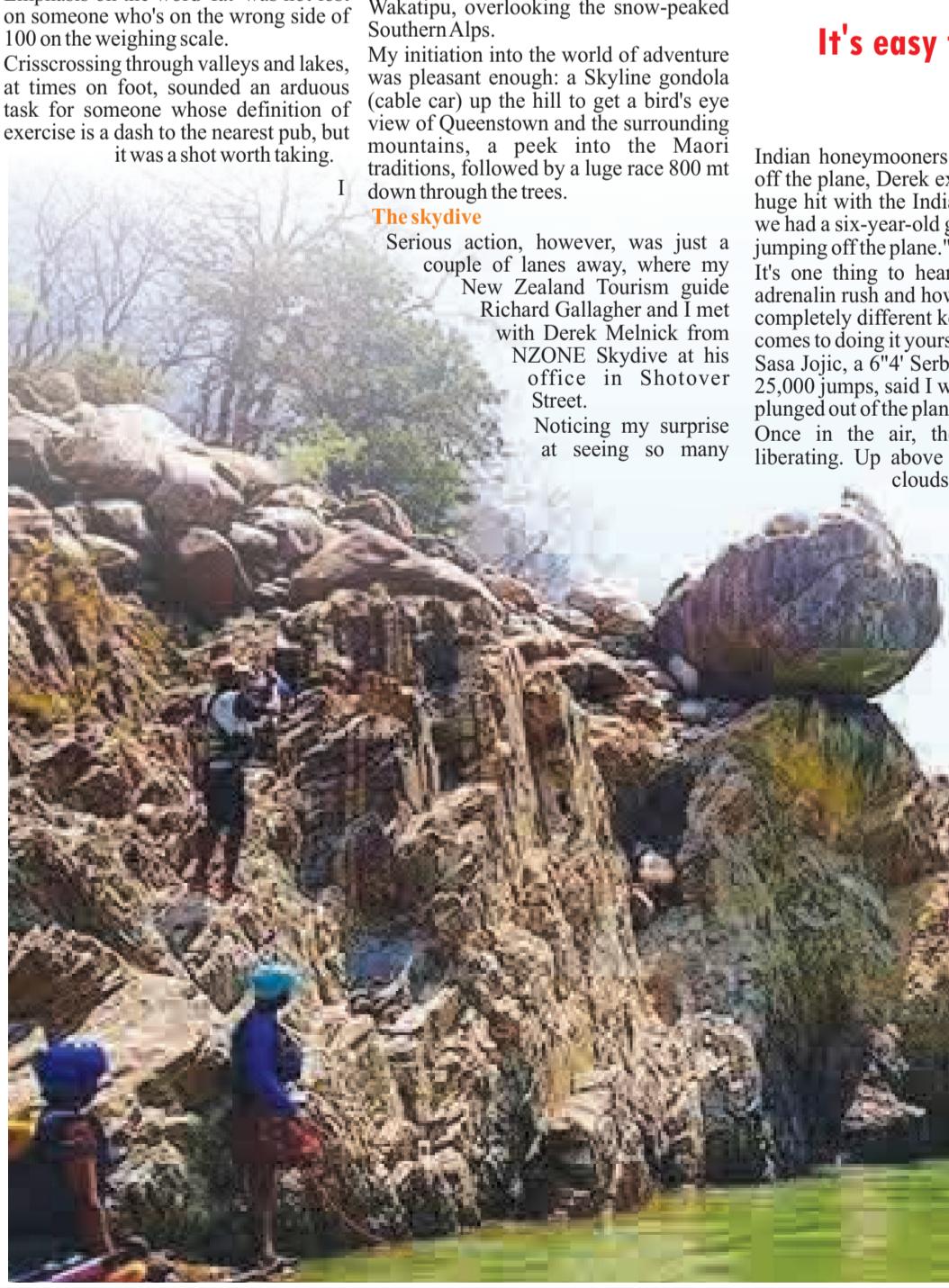
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## Adventure in the cliffs

**It's easy to see why New Zealand is the adrenalin capital of the world. Especially when you hit the ground, safe, after jumping off an airplane.**



Indian honeymooners lining up to jump off the plane, Derek explained, "We are a huge hit with the Indians. The other day, we had a six-year-old girl from Bangalore jumping off the plane."

It's one thing to hear stories about the adrenalin rush and how safe it all is, but a completely different kettle of fish when it comes to doing it yourself. My jump guide Sasa Jovic, a 6'4" Serb who's a veteran of 25,000 jumps, said I was trembling as we plunged out of the plane.

Once in the air, the experience was liberating. Up above the blue lake, the clouds and the mountains,

the 60-ft plus 200 mph, and the subsequent

glide down appeared to have stopped time in its tracks. The initial adrenalin rush gave way to a feeling of tranquillity as I took in the sights.

**The jump**

The cliff jump, on the other hand, scared the daylight out of me, although it's safe as houses. We met with Ana Bajurin from the Shotover Canyon Swing, at her office on a clifftop 109 mt above the spectacular Shotover River.

Ana and her team have a wicked sense of humour ("Hey Jowsie, here's the GPRS that'll help us track your body. We'll need the harnesses back, they are \$1,000 each"), matched by their merchandise (undergarments that say "even my s\*\*\* was scared").

Created by avid rock climbers Hamish Emerson and Chris Russell more than 10 years ago, the Shotover Canyon Swing offers more than 70 types of jumps (Richard was tied to a tricycle and I was fastened to a slide), including the crazy one where a person is tied to a chair and pushed off the cliff backwards.

As I went off the cliff, I had a 60

**And a bit of leisure**

Between the jumps and skips were sights and sounds that make New Zealand picture-perfect. We travelled 300 km from Queenstown to Milford Sound, a fiord 15 km inland from the Tasman Sea. Rudyard Kipling called the place the eighth wonder of the world, and it is easily New Zealand's most famous destination, attracting one million visitors a year. We cruised for three hours through the Sound courtesy Southern Discoveries, a more than 50-year-old premier tourism company, exploring the waterfalls, watching the dolphins strut their stuff, the seagulls lazing around, and being given a guided tour of the Milford Discovery Centre and Deep Underwater Observatory.

