

Beware of Congress, they protected infiltrators for decades: PM in Assam

Addressing a rally in Kaliabor in poll-bound Assam, PM Narendra Modi said the state was facing a major challenge in preserving its cultural identity and demographic balance.

New Delhi (Agency) Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday launched a sharp attack on the Congress, accusing the party of protecting infiltrators for decades for power at the cost of the state's identity, culture and security. Addressing a rally in Kaliabor in poll-bound Assam, PM Modi said the state was facing a major challenge in preserving its cultural identity and demographic balance. He asserted that unchecked infiltration had altered the state's demography, increased crime and led to encroachment on tribal lands.

"To form governments and win votes, Congress handed over your land to infiltrators. Infiltrators pose a great threat to Assam as well as the country. You need to beware of Congress," he said.

PM Modi further accused the Congress of following a single policy of relying on infiltrators for political power, claiming the party had been rejected by voters elsewhere for the same reason. The Prime Minister praised the BJP-led Assam government for taking firm action against infiltration, illegal encroachments and for protecting forests, religious sites and heritage structures. He said these efforts were being widely appreciated across the country.

PM Modi was in Kaliabor to lay the foundation for the Rs 6,950-crore Kaziranga elevated corridor project and flagging off two Amrit Bharat Express trains (Guwahati (Kamakhya)-Rohit Amrit Bharat Express and the Dibrugarh-Lucknow (Gomti Nagar)



Amrit Bharat Express.)

Stressing the importance of connectivity, the Prime Minister said the Northeast was no longer on the margins of development but "close to Delhi and close to the heart".

He stressed that Assam plays a key role in India's Act East policy and said the development of Assam and the Northeast was central to the nation's growth.

Citing the BJP's record wins in Bihar, Thiruvananthapuram municipal polls and the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) election, PM Modi said the people were "consistently rejecting the negative politics" of the Congress. In a dig at the Congress over its poor showing in the BMC polls, PM

Modi said the grand old party was born in Mumbai in 1885, but still finished fifth in the BMC polls.

"The Congress has lost the country's trust because it has no development agenda.

Haryana's Saini Questions Punjab Flood Relief, AAP's Compensation Counter

AAP Punjab General Secretary and Media In-charge Baltej Pannu reacted to the statement given by Haryana Chief Minister regarding flood compensation, and said that Saini is lying.

Haryana (Agency) Haryana Chief Minister Nayab Singh Saini on Saturday released funds under various schemes for farmers and beneficiaries of the Deendayal Ladli Lakshmi Yojana. However, during this event, the Punjab government and Arvind Kejriwal of the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) were the main targets of Chief Minister Saini's criticism.

Nayab Singh Saini stated that his government prioritises the interests of farmers, saying, "We are working to empower and strengthen farmers. But the Congress party, in particular, has exploited farmers. The Aam Aadmi Party in Punjab has gone to extremes. Sometimes they side with the Congress. Therefore, the policies of the Congress are the same as those of the Aam Aadmi Party. In fact, the AAP's policies are even worse, whether it's corruption or exploitation. Your policies are more terrible than those of the Congress." He added, "The Punjab Chief

Minister says that during the floods, Rs 20,000 per acre was given to farmers for crop damage, while Kejriwal says in Gujarat that Rs 50,000 per hectare was given in Punjab. So, who pocketed the remaining Rs 30,000? Will Kejriwal or



Mann Sahib explain this? Our government stands with the farmers. We have released Rs 659 crore under five schemes for the farmers."

Regarding stubble burning, he said that when Kejriwal was in Delhi, he blamed the farmers of Punjab and Haryana on this issue. He said that if farmers are not to

burn stubble, there should be a proper policy for it, which his government has created. But they (AAP) are only interested in reaping the benefits. He said that they are not paying any attention to the farmers.

He also spoke on the release of funds to farmers for direct sowing of paddy, crop diversification, and the Bhavantar Bharat Yojana (price deficiency payment scheme), and said, "If there is a scheme in the interest of farmers, they will definitely benefit from it. But the Punjab government has no concern for the farmers; it's all just talk."

Giving the example of Samrala city in Punjab, he said that potato crops are standing in many acres, and if farmers are getting low prices, the government should formulate a scheme. "We are also doing this in Haryana, but they shouldn't defame us by saying that the farmers' condition has worsened. The Congress ruled for 55 years, what did they do? You are also following in their footsteps," Saini said.

the Mayor's seat. "(Sena) UBT must not forget that when they were with BJP, the BJP had more corporators but still gave a chance to them to put their mayor on the seat," he said.

Waghmare said Shinde has put its corporators in a hotel. "We don't want anybody to try to coerce them and anybody trying to convince our corporators. We fought the election properly. We want all formalities to be completed properly. That's why we kept our



corporators in a secluded place," he said. The BMC polls, held after 2017, saw the Devendra Fadnavis-led BJP and its ally, the Eknath Shinde-led Shiv Sena, win 89 and 29 seats, respectively. The Thackeray brothers, Uddhav and Raj, who fought in alliance with the NCP's Sharad Pawar faction, have won 72 seats together. While the BJP and Shinde Sena have the numbers to cross the majority mark in the 227-member House, the question of who the mayor will be is likely to dominate.

Chief Justice on stage, Mamata Banerjee's save democracy plea after I-PAC raids

New Delhi (Agency) West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Saturday appealed to Chief Justice of India Surya Kant to safeguard the Constitution, democracy and the independence of the judiciary, while also cautioning against what she described as the misuse of investigative agencies. Speaking at the inauguration of the new Jalpaiguri Circuit Bench building of the Calcutta High Court, Banerjee urged the Chief Justice to ensure that citizens are not wrongly targeted. "Please protect the Constitution, democracy, judiciary, history and geography, as well as the country's borders, from disaster," she said. Calling the Chief Justice the "guardian of the Constitution",



Banerjee said the judiciary must remain free of bias. The Trinamool Congress chief also flagged the issue of what she termed "media trials", arguing that cases are increasingly being debated publicly before courts deliver verdicts.

"There should be no media trials before cases are finalised. This has become a tool to

malign people. Please ensure that agencies do not deliberately attempt to defame citizens. I am not speaking for myself. I am saying this to save democracy, people, judiciary and the Constitution. We are under your guardianship. Nobody is above you," the Chief Minister remarked. The Chief Minister's remarks came amid a simmering standoff between the Enforcement Directorate and the Trinamool Congress government in West Bengal, triggered after the federal agency raided 10 locations, including Trinamool's political consultancy firm I-PAC, in a money-laundering investigation.

During the same event, Mamata Banerjee raised concerns about the legal fraternity and said junior lawyers were struggling and

not receiving their due benefits. She asked the CJI to take special care of the new generation entering the profession.

On judicial infrastructure, the Chief Minister said the Bengal government had expanded fast-track courts despite what she claimed was a halt in central funding. "Though the Centre has stopped funding, we are continuing the fast-track courts," she said, referring to Union Law and Justice Minister Arjun Ram Meghwal, who was present at the event.

According to Banerjee, West Bengal has set up 88 fast-track courts and spent over Rs 1,200 crore on courts. Of these, 52 are women's courts, seven deal with POCO cases, four are labour courts and 19 are human rights courts.

After meeting those ill from contaminated water, Rahul tears into Madhya Pradesh govt

Bhopal (Agency) LEADER OF the Opposition Rahul Gandhi on Saturday visited the families of those who died after consuming contaminated drinking water in Indore's Bhagirathpura area and accused the BJP government of negligence and failing in its basic responsibility to provide clean drinking water. Gandhi visited Indore's Bombay Hospital and met seven patients undergoing treatment after drinking contaminated water. He spoke at length with the patients and their families, inquired about their medical condition, treatment cost, and also inquired about administrative lapses.

Criticising the implementation of the Smart City project, the Congress MP said Indore, promoted as a model city under the project, still lacks assured supply of clean drinking water.

"This is a smart city of the new model. In this model there is no clean drinking water, the people are intimidated. In Indore, people die after drinking water. This is the urban model. This is not just happening in Indore but also in various other cities. It is the government's responsibility to ensure clean drinking water and less pollution, which the government is not able to deliver," he said. Gandhi demanded that the government fix accountability.

"There must be somebody who must be responsible... Somebody from the government who did all of this. The government must take responsibility for this. I spoke to the families and they told me that there is no drinking water. It is like a



bandaid has now been applied. The minute the media attention is off this case, the situation will go back to where it was. The government must fulfill its responsibility, that's all they are asking," Gandhi said.

He also brushed off the ruling BJP's allegations of the Opposition "playing

politics" over the tragedy. "As a leader of the Opposition it is my duty to come here and stand by the people... You can call it whatever you want... I don't care, I stand with them."

The Madhya Pradesh government's death audit report into the Indore water contamination case, presented before the High court, revealed a total of 23 deaths in Bhagirathpura, of which at least 15 were suspected to have died after drinking contaminated water. In its status report, the state government detailed the medical response based on hospital admissions gathered from various districts. It said, "440 patients were reported across various hospitals, eight patients were admitted to ICU, 411 patients were discharged after treatment, [and there are] 21 active patients across hospitals."

News box

Heavy vehicles passing through Gurgaon to be diverted to KMP Expressway for Republic Day

Gurgaon.(Agency)

To ensure smooth traffic movement and foolproof security during Republic Day 2026 parade rehearsals, heavy vehicles passing through the city towards Delhi will be diverted via the KMP Expressway.

The diversion will be enforced on Jan 22, when rehearsals will be conducted, and again on Jan 26 to ease congestion on key arterial roads linking Gurgaon with the national capital and to facilitate security arrangements. DCP (traffic) Rajesh Mohan briefed truck union drivers about the advisory and appealed to them to strictly adhere to the guidelines to maintain smooth traffic arrangements across the district. Police said multiple traffic checkpoints will be set up at strategic locations throughout the city. Heavy vehicle drivers were directed not to park their vehicles on roads and to use only designated safe parking areas to prevent obstruction to traffic flow. Meanwhile, DCP headquarters Arpit Jain said the police are fully prepared to ensure security during the event. "We have already held a coordination meeting with our Delhi counterparts and are staying vigilant to ensure security and avoid any untoward situation. Heavy vehicles will not be allowed on the key roads in Gurgaon, and maximum deployment will be carried out on Republic Day," he said. Traffic police also appealed to heavy vehicle drivers to follow traffic rules.

MCG team visits Okhla waste plant to study ops for its Manesar project

Gurgaon.(Agency)

Senior MCG officials visited Delhi's Okhla Tehkhand waste-to-energy (WTE) plant to study its technology and operations, as Haryana govt is planning to set up a similar facility at Manesar. The exposure visit, organised by the Association of Municipalities and Development Authorities, came months after the state announced plans for three WTE plants, including one at the already overburdened Bandhwari landfill site. The third facility will be set up in Faridabad.

The MCG delegation included the state's Urban Local Bodies director Ashok Kumar Meena, MCG commissioner Pradeep Dahiya, additional commissioners Yash Jaluka, Ravinder Yadav, Ankita Chaudhary and executive engineer (SBM) Sundar Sheoran, along with other senior officials.

The Tekhhand WTE plant processes nearly 1,550 metric tonnes of waste daily. The plant operator gave MCG officials a detailed technical presentation on solid waste processing, segregation, combustion, emission control systems and electricity generation. The delegation also undertook a guided tour of the facility and interacted with technical experts to understand day-to-day operations and environmental safeguards. Officials said the visit aimed to familiarise urban local bodies with modern waste-to-energy technologies that could be replicated in the state. "Such projects provide solutions to solid waste management while also contributing to clean energy generation and environmental conservation," an official said. TOI reported on Sept 17, 2025, that over a year after being announced, the proposed waste-to-charcoal (WTC) plant at Bandhwari was shelved and the project shifted to Manesar. Officials said the technical understanding gained from the Tekhhand visit would help MCG and other urban bodies in planning and implementing waste-to-energy projects, in line with the Swachh Bharat Mission and sustainable development goals. Environmentalists, however, consistently opposed both the WTC and WTE plants. "Establishing a waste-to-energy plant contradicts the Solid Waste Management Rules of 2016."

'Raiding refrigerators, attacking kids': Noida looks for co to catch monkeys

Noida.(Agency)

A private agency will be hired by Noida Authority to catch monkeys and relocate them to protected forest areas in Greater Noida. An official of the Authority said complaints were received from various sectors regarding the growing monkey menace. "A tender was issued to hire an agency for catching monkeys. The agency will install nets at identified locations and lure the animals with food. Once a monkey attempts to eat, the net will automatically lock," he said. After being captured, the monkeys will be released in designated protected forest areas in Greater Noida. The agency will be paid around Rs 500 to Rs 600 for every monkey caught and released. The cost of daily food supplies will be borne separately for each monkey. Residents of sectors 11, 12, 14, 15, 19, 29 and 51 have flagged the issue. They claimed monkeys often damage property, snatch food from people, enter homes and offices and create panic among residents. The rising population of monkeys, their dependence on food waste generated by humans and shrinking natural habitats have led to frequent human-monkey conflicts in urban areas. A Sector 51 resident, Sanjeev Kumar, said the monkey menace has become a serious concern in the city. "They move in groups and sometimes attack children. They also climb water tanks and remove the covers. At times, they enter kitchens, open refrigerators and flee with food," he said, urging the Authority to expedite the catching and relocation process. Earlier this month, the Allahabad High Court had criticised the state govt for failing to present a concrete action plan to deal with the escalating human-monkey conflict. A bench comprising of Chief Justice Arun Bhansali and Justice Kshitij Shailendra observed that the "helplessness, as expressed, cannot be accepted" and granted the govt another opportunity to comply with its earlier directions.

Gurgaon.(Agency)

A 27-year-old software engineer drowned after his SUV went through a damaged boundary wall and plunged into a flooded pit dug for a commercial project in Sector 150 in the city around Friday midnight. Yuvraj Mehta, who did not know how to swim, tried to stay afloat - getting out of his Grand Vitara and climbing onto its roof, calling his father and repeatedly flashing the phone's torch through fog, hoping that rescuers would hear his cries and spot him. Mehta, who worked with customer data science company Dunnhumby India in Gurgaon, was on his way home when the accident happened as he negotiated a sharp turn near ATS Le Grandiose. Fog made visibility low and the lack of lights in the area or reflective boards at the construction site meant Yuvraj could not spot the danger ahead. Since Yuvraj lives in the same sector, his father Raj Mehta and police reached the spot in minutes. In thick fog, they could

not locate Yuvraj but could hear him. The first one to attempt a rescue was Moninder, a passerby who jumped into the freezing water to search for Yuvraj. He said he spent about 30 minutes in the water but could not locate him. "Yuvraj kept pleading for help," he said. Yuvraj's friend Pankaj Tokas said, "He was screaming at the top of his voice for help while standing on the car roof. The cops who went initially said they could not swim. Cranes were called but no one entered the water to save him." The police team that reached the spot first called the fire department and disaster response forces. "Initial rescue efforts were made with the help of local divers. Subsequently, SDRF and NDRF teams reached the spot," a police officer said.

According to sources, the SDRF team reached the spot first, but lacked the equipment to carry out the rescue in the 30ft deep pit. The NDRF was then called

from Ghaziabad, which took another hour. But the voice calling for help had fallen silent by 1.45am as his loved ones



stood helplessly at the edge of the pit. When Yuvraj's body was eventually found, it was around 4.30am, four hours after his car fell into the drain. According to sources, Yuvraj gradually lost strength and drowned when the vehicle sank with nothing to prop

himself up. A senior official involved in the rescue said fog made the search almost blind. "We could only see a thin ray of light, likely from his phone," he added. Another official claimed rescue teams used torches and flashlights to locate him, but they could not see even 10 metres. Raj Mehta, a retired SBI director, alleged the spot had long been a hazard and that repeated warnings to Noida Authority had gone unheeded. "Yes, visibility was extremely low due to fog. But had the boundary wall not been damaged, the car may not have plunged into the drain," he said. Residents pointed out that a similar accident took place around 10 days ago when a truck driver hit the same drain wall, but he was "saved in the nick of time". "No repair work was done even after that."

Engineer dies as car rams divider in Golf Course Road underpass in Gurgaon

Gurgaon.(Agency)

A 30-year-old civil engineer died and his colleague was grievously injured after their Honda City crashed into a divider at high speed inside Golf Course Road underpass a little after Friday midnight. Police said airbags helped save two men seated in front, but the rear-seat passengers suffered severe injuries. The deceased, Anil Kumar, was from Neemkathana in Rajasthan and worked with a private company in Udyog Vihar. His colleague Mithlesh, who was with him in the rear seat, is being treated at a private hospital. Four employees of the same Udyog Vihar firm were in the Honda City. Mohit was driving, with Bilal in the front passenger seat, while Anil and Mithlesh were seated in the rear. The group was travelling from Bristol Chowk towards

Sector 56 and was on its way to drop Bilal at his home in Faridabad. The crash occurred around 12.30am as the car cruised into the underpass. As Mohit lost control of the vehicle, it rammed the divider at a point where a gap had been closed with barriers to prevent U-turns. The impact left the car mangled, especially on the driver's side, and it came to rest after turning sideways on the road. Shattered glass and debris lay scattered across the underpass. Local residents and passersby rushed to help. Anil was found oozing blood and unconscious on the road. People tried to revive him, but there was no response, a police officer said. After being alerted, police teams reached the spot. "The severely injured passengers were shifted to Paras Hospital, where Anil was declared dead. The other injured

colleague was admitted to the ICU. The damaged car was later removed from the spot with the help of a crane to streamline traffic and avoid further damage," the officer said. According to cops, the front airbags deployed, which prevented injuries to the driver and the front passenger. "Those seated in the rear suffered severe injuries to the head, neck, back and arms. One of them could not be saved," the officer added. Police said Anil's family had been preparing for his marriage next month. According to Chandgi Ram, the investigating officer, it was not immediately clear if the driver or the other occupants were under the influence of alcohol. "The body was sent to the mortuary for an autopsy. An inquest proceeding was initiated and further investigation is underway," he said.

Haryana Human Rights Commission disposes 5.6k complaints in 2025, pendency drops to 1k

Gurgaon.(Agency)

Haryana Human Rights Commission (HHRC) recorded a major surge in efficiency, disposing of 5,610 complaints between Nov 27, 2024, and Dec 23, 2025—an average of 468 cases a month. Starting with 2,991 pending matters and 3,632 fresh complaints, the Commission reduced its total pendency to just 1,013 cases. Under the leadership of chief justice Lalit Batra and members Kuldeep Jain and Deep Bhatia, HHRC also adopted a proactive rights-based approach, taking suo motu cognisance in 20 serious matters, ranging from dilapidated roads and custodial torture to child safety, environmental concerns, and discrimination, strengthening accountability across departments. According to registrar (judicial) Sanjay Kumar Khanduja, at the time of reconstitution, the commission inherited a legacy of 2,991 pending complaints. Between 27 Nov 2024 and 23 Dec 2025, 3,632 new complaints were registered, taking the total number of pending cases to 6,623. "Through organised, coordinated and sustained efforts, the commission disposed of 5,610 complaints during this period, with an average of 468 cases per month," said Khanduja. At the time of filing this report, only 1,013 complaints remain pending.

In cases involving human rights violations, the commission took suo motu cognisance in 20 cases between 27 Nov 2024 and 23 Dec 2025.

Key cases include complaints on dilapidated roads from Safidion to Panipat, posing grave risks to public safety; lack of infant-friendly facilities for women and newborns at the Aadhar Registration Centre in the main post office, Hisar; a case of gang rape of a 14-year-old girl in Shahbad; ragging incidents at Jindal Global University, Sonipat; severe neglect of specially abled children at SIRTAR, Rohtak; and Gurgaon Municipal Corporation's inaction after the Chintels Corporation incident.

Residents refuse to pay hiked upkeep fee, realtor cuts power in Greater Noida condominium

Gurgaon.(Agency)

Residents of Eros Sampoornam in Greater Noida West were left without electricity for several hours on Friday after the developer allegedly snapped the power supply following protests over a hike in maintenance charges. Families said the outage crippled daily life in the 21-tower condominium, which has nearly 1,768 flats, disrupting water supply, stalling lifts and causing particular hardship to children, the elderly and those with medical needs.

Residents alleged the power cut was deliberate, coming after a large number of occupants refused to pay the revised maintenance fee and demanded justification for the increase. The outage triggered protests inside the complex, with residents accusing the developer of using essential services to pressure them into accepting the hike. AOA president Dipankar Kumar said repeated visits to the Greater Noida Authority and the police had failed to

restore services. "Power was disconnected on Friday, leading to a complete breakdown of essential services," he said. "Water supply stopped, lifts shut down and several residents were



briefly trapped."

The developer, however, blamed a technical fault for the power cut, which he said had been restored. Alakshendra Singh, head of corporate communications at Eros Group, said the developer had been managing maintenance since the flats were handed over in 2017 at a rate of Rs 1.95 per square

foot. He said the charges had not been revised for nine years despite a clause allowing an annual 8% increase, and that the company had refrained from hiking fees during Covid on humanitarian grounds. Singh said an attempt to raise maintenance charges to Rs 2.5 per square foot in 2022 was withdrawn after resident protests. Recently, the developer issued advance notices warning that services would be difficult to sustain without a revision of fees. Singh said that on Friday, security and housekeeping services were withdrawn, and diesel generator (DG) sets were restricted to operating lifts. According to the developer, a technical fault at the power distribution company around 2pm on Friday led to a disruption in electricity. With DG sets running in a limited manner, residents faced a prolonged outage that sparked protests. Singh said DG supply resumed around 9 pm after administrative intervention, while the discom restored regular power by Saturday morning.

16 sailors in detention in Tehran, families move Delhi HC

Gurgaon.(Agency)

Families of 16 Indian sailors detained after oil tanker MT Valiant Roar was intercepted by Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) have moved Delhi high court, seeking urgent directions to the Centre to secure consular access and ensure the crew's safe repatriation to India. They have also sought intervention from the Prime Minister's Office and ministry of external affairs (MEA). Among the petitioners are families of the ship's master Captain Vijay Kumar, who is from Meerut, and 27-year-old third engineer Ketan Mehta, whose parents based in Ghaziabad told TOI they were unaware for weeks that their son had been detained.

MT Valiant Roar was intercepted on Dec 8 in international waters off the port of Dibba in the United Arab Emirates. Iranian authorities have alleged the vessel was involved in smuggling 6,000 tonnes of fuel, an allegation the families and crew representatives strongly contest.

Capt Vinod Kumar, a merchant navy officer based in Noida and

Capt Vijay Kumar's cousin, told TOI that the tanker was carrying 18 crew members at the time of interception — 16 Indians, one Bangladeshi and one Sri Lankan. "On Dec 8, my cousin called me from the ship," Vinod said. "He sounded shaken and said, 'We are being chased.' He told me Iranian patrol boats were closing in fast. There was panic on board. Soon after that, the line went dead."

Vinod said he heard nothing further for nearly two weeks. When Vijay finally managed to call again on Dec 22, the news was stark. "He told me that they had been detained in Iran," Vinod said. "All of them were confined, under armed guard. He is a professional officer with 25 years at sea. There was no crime. Yet, he is being treated like a criminal in a foreign land," he said. Before that confirmation, Vinod had begun reaching out to Indian authorities. From Dec 12, he wrote to the Directorate General of Shipping (DGS), MEA, the Indian embassy in Tehran and the consulate in Bandar Abbas, under whose jurisdiction Bandar-e-Jask—the port where

the vessel was later taken — falls. He also contacted the families of other Indian crew members. On Jan 10, along with nine other families, he filed a petition before the high court on behalf of the 16 detained Indian sailors. For the Mehtas, who live in IN Ghaziabad's DLF Colony, the reality of their son's detention surfaced slowly and painfully. They last heard from Ketan on Dec 31, more than three weeks after the tanker had been seized. During that call, Ketan told his parents that his six-month contract was coming to an end and that he would be home soon. "Bas do-teen din aur, phir main ghar aa raha hoon (I'll be home in another 2-3 days)," his father Mukesh Mehta told TOI on Saturday. "We were counting the days. He didn't say anything about what happened. He knew his mother has a heart condition. We believe he didn't want to frighten her."

Ketan left home on June 29, 2025, and joined MT Valiant Roar in Dubai on July 1. A third engineer with eight years of experience at sea, he had been working with the shipping company for two years.

On Jan 6, Mukesh received a call from a woman he did not know. "She told me, 'Your son has been arrested by Iranian authorities,'" he said. When he asked how she knew, she told him to contact the company. The family reached out to Ketan's shipping agent in Mumbai, who confirmed the tanker had been seized. Calls to the Dubai office where Ketan was deployed went unanswered. Two days later, Mukesh received another call, this time from Vinod, who told him families of the detained sailors were preparing to approach Delhi high court. "That was the first time we spoke to other parents like us," Mukesh said. "Everyone was equally confused, equally desperate for information." When Mukesh contacted the shipping company again seeking clarity, he said the response was dismissive. "The official told us the company had no responsibility," he alleged. "He shouted at us and said we should go to Iran and bring our son back ourselves." Inside the Mehtas' home, time appears frozen. Rajni Mehta, Ketan's mother,

sits quietly clutching a framed photograph of her only son. Mention of her son makes her emotional. According to Vinod Kumar, the tanker was carrying only very low sulphur.

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People will not allow SGPC Chief's ploys to push Punjab back into beadbi & goondagardi to succeed: Mann

MAJITHIA (AMRITSAR), : At a public function in Majithia on Sunday, Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Singh Mann delivered a clear message on faith, governance and the future of the constituency while laying the foundation stone for 23 rural link roads worth ?11.32 crore. The Chief Minister said it would have given him heartfelt happiness if the Shiromani Gurudwara Prabandhak Committee (SGPC) President, Advocate Harjinder Singh Dhami, considered himself as a soldier of Sri Guru Gobind Singh ji, but expressed concern that he instead calls himself a soldier of Sukhbir Singh Badal.

In the same address, the Chief Minister announced that Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) leader Talib Singh Gill will be the party's candidate from Majithia for the 2027 Assembly elections, asserting that the people will not allow any attempt to push Punjab back into beadbi (sacrilege) and goondagardi, and that development, dignity and respect for Sri Akal Takht Sahib will remain paramount.

Addressing a public gathering after laying the foundation stone of 23 new rural link roads in Majithia, CM Bhagwant Singh Mann said, "Earlier, this area lived



under constant fear. A self-proclaimed 'jarnail' of the region used false cases as a weapon against ordinary people. With deep connections in both Congress and Akali governments, he unleashed a reign of terror, and people were afraid to speak." He said that this fear has now completely vanished, as the will of the people is prevailing and such politics has been decisively rejected.

The Chief Minister said that people have charted a new path by rejecting the

politics of intimidation pursued by the Majithia and Badal families. He said, "This very Majithia area was once controlled by people who hosted General Dyer for dinner on the same day as the Jallianwala Bagh massacre in 1919. Such acts of betrayal can never be forgotten. The people of Punjab will never forgive those whose hands were stained with the blood of innocent masses."

CM Bhagwant Singh Mann warned that bringing the Akali Dal back to power

would mean dragging Punjab back into a dark era. "It will mean the return of 'Beadbi' (sacrilege) of Sri Guru Granth Sahib ji, firing on innocent protesters and atrocities against the common man," he said.

He added that it was due to the misdeeds of the Akalis and the Shiromani Gurudwara Prabandhak Committee (SGPC) that the state government was compelled to constitute a Special Investigation Team (SIT) to probe the missing 328 saroops of Sri Guru Granth Sahib Ji. "Our only objective is to trace the missing saroops. We have no intention of interfering in religious institutions," he said.

CM Bhagwant Singh Mann said it was unfortunate that instead of focusing on his primary responsibilities, the SGPC President Advocate Harjinder Singh Mann was busy making arrangements for political rallies. "Instead of calling himself a soldier of Sri Guru Gobind Singh ji, he proudly calls himself a soldier of Sukhbir Singh Badal. What good can be expected from such a person, who takes pride in serving someone who ruined Punjab with his every move," he noted.

NAME CHANGE

I, HEMRAJ SINGH S/O JAGDISH R/O HOUSE NO-607, MODHA MOHILLA, NEHRU SHIV MANDIR, NATHUPUR (67), GURGAON, HARYANA-122002, HAVE CHANGED MY NAME TO HEMRAJ FOR ALL FUTURE PURPOSES

NAME CHANGE

I, PAVAN KUMAR alise Mukesh Jain S/O Deep chanj R/O Fakharpur Mohammad Shahpur, po khehra, Baghpat Utter Pradesh - 25101, Have Changed My Name to Mukesh Kumar Jain for All Future Purposes.

NAME CHANGE

I, Mukesh Kumar alise Mukesh Jain S/O Deep chanj R/O Fakharpur Mohammad Shahpur, po khehra, Baghpat Utter Pradesh - 25101, Have Changed My Name to Mukesh Kumar Jain for All Future Purposes.

NAME CHANGE

I, ABDUL WAQAR S/O ABDUL JABBAR HOUSE NO.1246 GALI MAHAL SARAI PUNJABI PHATAK BALLIMARAN DELHI 110006 . HAVE CHANGED MY NAME TO ABDUL WAQAR

NAME CHANGE

I, ABDUL VAQAR S/O ABDUL JABBAR HOUSE NO.1246 GALI MAHAL SARAI PUNJABI PHATAK BALLIMARAN DELHI 110006 . HAVE CHANGED MY NAME TO ABDUL WAQAR

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NEWS BOX

Russian drone strike kills woman in Ukraine's Kharkiv

KYIV. (Agency)

A Russian strike on Ukraine's northeastern city of Kharkiv killed a 20-year-old woman and wounded several others overnight, regional officials said early Sunday. "There is information about one person killed as a result of an enemy drone strike on a private house," Kharkiv mayor Igor Terekhov said on Telegram. Regional governor Oleg Synegubov later said a UAV slammed into the residence, killing a 20-year-old woman and wounding another. Synegubov also said a 41-year-old woman suffered an "acute stress reaction" after the strike. The strikes extended beyond Kharkiv. In the northeastern Sumy region, emergency services said an air strike on a residential neighbourhood wounded three women and a seven-year-old child. Preliminary assessments showed damage to 15 residential buildings.

In the Odesa region, Izmail district officials reported another Russian attack, again targeting critical infrastructure sites. Initial information indicated no casualties, though officials said the strike continued a



pattern of repeated assaults on the Danube port region. The strikes come as Ukrainian negotiators arrived in the United States Saturday for talks with President Donald Trump's administration on how to end four years of war with Russia, expected to focus on security guarantees and post-war recovery. The war is Europe's worst conflict since World War II.

Al-Qaeda Affiliate Leader Linked To December Attack In Syria Killed By US

World. (Agency)

US military forces on Friday killed an al-Qaeda affiliate leader linked to an Islamic State attack on Americans in Syria last month, US Central Command said in a statement on Saturday.

Bilal Hasan al-Jasim had "direct ties" to an ISIS gunman who killed and injured US and Syrian personnel on December 13 in Palmyra, Syria, Central Command said. "The death of a terrorist operative linked to the deaths of three Americans demonstrates our resolve in pursuing terrorists who attack our forces," said Admiral Brad Cooper, the head of US Central Command, in a statement. Since the December 13 attack, US forces have been conducting strikes in Syria, with the US military saying it has hit more than 100 ISIS targets.

Saudi Arabia bans use of Allah's name on disposable packaging and bags

World. (Agency)

A new directive from Saudi Arabia's Ministry of Commerce is reshaping how religious expressions appear in everyday commerce, as authorities move to prevent the sacred names of Allah from being placed on items that could be mishandled or discarded.

Saudi Arabia has banned commercial establishments from printing or writing the Divine Name of Allah or any of the names of Allah on bags, packaging, and other materials that may be exposed to misuse or disrespect. The decision was announced on Monday by Abdulrahman Al Hussain, the official spokesperson for the Ministry of Commerce, who said the measure is intended to protect religious sanctity and prevent any form of disrespect.

Al Hussain explained that the prohibition applies to items commonly used in commercial activity, including shopping bags, product packaging, and promotional materials, particularly those designed for short term or disposable use. Such items, he noted, are often used inappropriately or thrown away, which could subject sacred names to disrespect.



— spokesman_mc (@spokesman_mc)

In a statement posted on the ministry's official X account, Al Hussain said the ban reflects the Kingdom's commitment to honouring and safeguarding the Divine Names of Allah. He stressed that these names hold profound religious and spiritual significance and should not be placed on objects that may be mishandled, discarded, or treated carelessly. The Ministry of Commerce reiterated that commercial establishments must refrain from using the name of Allah on bags and packaging that could be exposed to disrespect, in order to uphold their sanctity. The ministry called on chambers of commerce across the Kingdom to formally convey the directive to their members and to all commercial establishments. It also affirmed its commitment to monitoring compliance in markets throughout Saudi Arabia and confirmed that legal action will be taken against any businesses found violating the instructions. Officials said the decision forms part of broader efforts to regulate trade names and branding practices in the Kingdom. Al Hussain pointed to the Law of Trade Names, approved earlier this year by the Ministry of Commerce, which outlines

Iran's leader calls Trump a 'criminal' for backing protests and blames demonstrators for deaths

DUBAI. (Agency)

Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei on Saturday branded U.S. President Donald Trump a "criminal" for supporting protesters in Iran, and blamed demonstrators for causing thousands of deaths. In a speech broadcast by state television, Khamenei said the protests had left "several thousand" people dead, the first indication from an Iranian leader of the extent of the casualties from the wave of protests that began Dec. 28 and led to a bloody crackdown. "In this revolt, the U.S. president made remarks in person, encouraged seditious people to go ahead and said: 'We do support you, we do support you militarily,'" said Khamenei, who has final say on all state matters. He reiterated an accusation that the U.S. seeks domination over Iran's economic and political resources. "We do consider the U.S. president a criminal, because of casualties and damages, because of accusations against the Iranian nation," he said. He described the protesters as "foot soldiers" of the United States and said they

had destroyed mosques and educational centers. "Through hurting people, they killed several thousand of them," he said. In response, Trump called for an end to Khamenei's nearly 40-year reign.

"The man is a sick man who should run his country properly and stop killing people," Trump told Politico in an interview Saturday. "His country is the worst place to live anywhere in the world because of poor leadership." "It's time to look for new leadership in Iran," he added. Trump had sounded a conciliatory tone.

The back-and-forth rhetoric came a day after Trump sounded a conciliatory tone, saying that "Iran canceled the hanging of over 800 people," and adding that "I greatly respect the fact that they canceled." He did not clarify whom he spoke to in Iran to confirm the state of any planned executions. His comments were a sign he may be backing away from a military strike. The official IRNA news agency reported that Tehran

Prosecutor Gen. Ali Salehi, referring to Trump's remarks about the cancellation of the death sentence of 800 protesters, said: "Trump always makes futile and irrelevant statements. Our attitude is severe,

that was imported from abroad, without naming any countries.

"We do not plan, we do not take the country toward war. But we do not release domestic offenders, worse than domestic offenders, there are international offenders. We do not let them alone either," he said, and urged officials to pursue the cases. An uneasy calm has returned to an uneasy calm after harsh repression of protests that began Dec. 28 over Iran's ailing economy. The crackdown has left at least 3,308 people dead, according to the U.S.-based Human Rights Activists News Agency, exceeding that of any other round of protest or unrest in Iran in decades and recalling the chaos surrounding the

1979 revolution. The agency has been accurate throughout the years of demonstrations, relying on a network of activists inside Iran that confirms all reported fatalities. The AP has been unable to independently confirm the toll.



preventive and fast." He did not elaborate. In recent days, Trump had told protesting Iranians that "help is on the way" and that his administration would "act accordingly" if the killing of demonstrators continued or if Iranian authorities executed detained protesters. In his speech, Khamenei said rioters were armed with live ammunition

Amazon Confirms Outbreak Of 'Victorian Disease' At UK Warehouse, Union Calls For Immediate Closure

World. (Agency)

Amazon confirmed an outbreak of tuberculosis (TB) - a bacterial infection often referred to as a 'Victorian disease', at its fulfillment center in Coventry, UK. According to a BBC report, the GMB Union has raised concerns about multiple TB cases at Amazon's Coventry warehouse, which has around 3,000 employees, and is calling for the site to be shut down immediately. Amazon has confirmed 10 cases of non-contagious TB were identified in September, and they are working with the National Health Service (NHS) on a screening program.

A spokesperson said no additional cases had since been identified, and its site continued to run as normal amid a "screening programme" being carried out amid "an abundance of caution."

"In line with best practice safety procedures, we immediately followed guidance from the NHS and UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA) and made all potentially affected employees aware of the situation. We

will continue to follow guidance from the experts in the NHS and would respectfully remind public organisations of the need for responsible communications where matters of public well-being are



concerned," the spokesperson said. Amazon described the cases as "non-contagious" and noted that they were identified in 2025. The company is currently working with the NHS and the UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA) to conduct an expanded screening program as a precaution.

Dr. Roger Gajraj from UKHSA West Midlands said tests are offered to those who may have had close contact with

affected workers at Amazon's Coventry warehouse. He noted that the overall risk remains low, and TB is fully treatable with antibiotics. The GMB union, however, has called for the immediate temporary closure of the warehouse and for all 3,000 staff members to be sent home on full pay until infection control measures are fully assessed.

Zarah Sultana, MP for Coventry South, has slammed Amazon's decision not to close the Coventry warehouse despite multiple TB cases, calling it "outrageous" and accusing the company of treating employees like they're disposable. She said, "With multiple confirmed cases on site, the warehouse must be shut down immediately and workers sent home on full pay. This is a corporation that clearly thinks it's above the law, forcing people into conditions that belong in the Victorian era. It's a stark reminder of why the trade union movement was founded in the first place."

NASA Rolls Out Rocket For Artemis 2, 1st Crewed Moon Mission In Over 50 Years

World. (Agency)

NASA on Saturday rolled out its towering SLS rocket and Orion spacecraft as it began preparations for its first crewed mission to the Moon in more than 50 years. The maneuver, which takes up to 12 hours, will allow the US space agency to begin a string of tests for the Artemis 2 mission, which could blast off as early as February 6. The immense orange and white Space Launch System rocket and the Orion vessel were slowly wheeled out of the Vehicle Assembly Building at the Kennedy Space Center in Florida, and painstakingly moved four miles (6.5 kilometers) to Launch Pad 39B. If the tests are all satisfactory, three Americans and one Canadian will head to the Moon sometime between February 6 and the end of April -- they will not land, but instead fly around Earth's satellite. The mission -- which would last about 10 days -- would be a huge step towards Americans once again setting foot on the lunar surface, a goal announced by President Donald Trump in his first term. "We're making history," Artemis 2 mission management team chair John Honeycutt told a press conference on Friday.

'Pretty pumped'

US astronauts Reid Wiseman, Victor Glover and Christina Koch, along with Canada's Jeremy Hansen, were on site Saturday for the rocket's rollout.

"I'm actually pretty pumped to see that," Hansen told reporters. "In just a few weeks, you're going to see four humans fly around the moon, and if we're doing that now, imagine what we can do next."

Glover added: "We're swinging for the fence, trying to make the impossible possible." Before the mission can take off, engineers must ensure the SLS rocket is safe and viable. After a battery of tests, a pre-launch simulation will be carried out. The uncrewed Artemis 1 mission took place in November 2022 after multiple postponements and two failed launch attempts.

NASA hopes to put humans back on the Moon as China forges ahead with a rival effort that is targeting 2030 at the latest for its first crewed mission. Its uncrewed Chang'e 7 mission is expected to be launched in 2026 for an exploration of the Moon's south pole, and testing of its crewed spacecraft Mengzhou is also set to go ahead this year.

NASA is hoping that the Moon could be used to help prepare future missions to Mars.

But the programme has been plagued by delays.

The US space agency surprised many late last year when it said Artemis 2 could happen as soon as February -- an acceleration explained by the Trump administration's wish to beat China to the punch. Artemis 3, currently scheduled for 2027, is expected to be pushed back, as industry experts say Elon Musk's SpaceX is behind on delivering the Starship megarocket needed for the mission.

US Kills 'Leader Affiliated With Al-Qaeda' In Syria

world. (Agency)

The United States military has carried out a third strike in Syria in response to a deadly ambush that killed three Americans last month, with US Central Command confirming the death of an Al-Qaeda-affiliated leader linked to the attack. US Central Command (CENTCOM) said the strike was conducted in northwest Syria on January 16 and resulted in the death of Bilal Hasan al-Jasim, whom US officials described as a senior terrorist figure with direct ties to the ISIS gunman responsible for the December 13 ambush in Palmyra, Syria, that killed two US service members and an American civilian interpreter. The death of a terrorist operative linked to the deaths of three Americans demonstrates our resolve in pursuing terrorists who attack our

forces," said Adm. Brad Cooper, the commander of US Central Command. "There is no safe place for those who conduct, plot, or inspire attacks on American citizens and our warfighters. We will find you." According to CENTCOM, al-Jasim was an experienced terrorist leader who plotted attacks and was directly connected to the ISIS gunman who carried out the Palmyra ambush. US officials said the gunman killed two US service members and an American interpreter during the attack, which also injured other American and Syrian personnel.

The strike marked the latest phase of a series of US military actions in Syria following the December attack. US officials said this was the third round of retaliatory strikes launched by American forces against terrorist

targets in the country since the ambush. CENTCOM said the latest operation was part of a broader campaign launched after the December 13 attack, which it described as "large-scale strikes" aimed at degrading ISIS capabilities across Syria. The operation has been dubbed Hawkeye Strike. In a statement, CENTCOM said US and partner forces have struck more than 100 ISIS infrastructure and weapons site targets across Syria as part of the operation, using more than 200 precision munitions. The command said the strikes were intended to disrupt the group's ability to plan and carry out attacks against US forces and its allies. In addition to airstrikes, CENTCOM said US and partner forces have intensified ground operations over the past year.

Thousands march in Greenland to support Arctic island in the face of Trump's threats to take it over

CAIRO. (Agency)

Thousands of Greenlanders carefully marched across snow and ice to take a stand against U.S. President Donald Trump on Saturday. They held signs of protest, waved their national flag and chanted "Greenland is not for sale" in support of their own self-governance in the face of increasing threats of an American takeover. Just as they finished their trek from the small downtown of Greenland's capital city Nuuk to the U.S. Consulate, the news broke: Trump, from his home in Florida, announced he will charge a 10% import tax starting in February on goods from eight European countries over their opposition to U.S. control of Greenland. "I thought this day couldn't get any worse but it just did," Malik Dollerup-Scheibel said after The Associated Press told him about Trump's announcement. "It just shows he has no remorse for any kind of human being now." Trump has long said he thinks the U.S. should own the strategically located and mineral-rich island, which is a

self-governing territory of Greenland. Trump intensified his calls a day after the military operation to oust former Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro earlier this month. Dollerup-Scheibel, a 21-year-old Greenland, and Greenland Prime Minister Jens-Frederik Nielsen were among what others described as the island's biggest protest, drawing nearly a quarter of Nuuk's population. Others held rallies and solidarity marches across the Danish realm, including in Copenhagen, as well as in the capital of the Inuit-governed territory of Nunavut in Canada's far north. "This is important for the whole world," Danish protester Elise Riechie said as she held Danish and Greenlandic flags in Copenhagen. "There are many small countries. None of them are for sale." In Nuuk, Greenlanders of all ages listened to traditional songs as they walked

to the consulate. Marie Pedersen, a 47-year-old Greenland, said it was important to bring her children to the rally "to show them that they're allowed to speak up."

"We want to keep our own country and our



own culture, and our family safe," she said. Her 9-year-old daughter, Alaska, crafted her own "Greenland is not for sale" sign. The

girl said her teachers have addressed the controversy and taught them about NATO at school. "They tell us how to stand up if you're being bullied by another country or something," she said.

Meanwhile, Tom Olsen, a police officer in Nuuk, said Saturday's protest was the biggest he's ever seen there. I hope it can show him that we stand together in Europe," he said. "We are not going down without a fight." Tille Martinussen, a former member of Greenland's parliament, said she hopes the Trump administration will "abandon this crazy idea." "They started out as sort of touting themselves as our friends and allies, that they wanted to make Greenland better for us than the Danes would," she said as others chanted in the background.

"And now they're just plain out threatening us."

NEWS BOX

IT-Bombay celebrates its inaugural Mental Strength Week from Jan 12 to Jan 18

Mumbai.(Agency)

IIT-Bombay is celebrating its inaugural Mental Strength Week from Jan 12-18, commemorating Swami Vivekananda's birth anniversary and promoting focus, emotional wellbeing, and mental resilience within the campus community. The week-long initiative, the first one taken by any institute, saw participation from over 1,500 students.

As a highlight, the Student Wellness Centre hosted a two-day Manashakti Mind Gym on Jan 15 and 16, which was open to students, faculty, and staff. The exhibition offered hands-on, technology-assisted yet non-screen activities designed to explore the mind's potential. Participants engaged in challenges such as concentration-based ball control and meditation feedback, gaining real-time insights into the effects of focus, calmness, and attention.

The idea of the Mind Gym philosophy is balancing the left and right brain. The exhibition's guided activities and brain-boosting games aimed to activate both hemispheres, enhancing attention, memory, executive function, and holistic thinking, mentioned a statement issued by the institute. By emphasizing physical, movement-based exercises over digital engagement, the Mind Gym highlighted the importance of mental strength, sustained focus, and inner resilience.

Police nab thief after 10-day operation; recover jewellery

Ahmedabad.(Agency)

The city crime branch arrested a 19-year-old man for his alleged involvement in the theft of silver ornaments worth Rs 1.75 lakh by drilling a hole through the rear wall of a jewellery shop.

The stolen items were recovered from the possession of the accused after a meticulous 10-day operation, police said. Ashwin Khadiya, allegedly committed the theft on the night of Jan 8, bypassing high-security shutters. The officials reconstructed the thief's psychology, theorising that someone capable of such a labour-intensive breach likely possessed a background in construction or manual labour. "It was also believed that he would seek refuge in familiar labour colonies," said a police officer.

This reasoning allowed the team to narrow their focus specifically to the settlements near the Ramol canal and Jamfalwadi.

Police inspector S J Jadeja said that police synchronised feeds from hundreds of CCTV cameras across the Hatkeshwar-Ramol corridor, looking for subtle movement patterns, specifically individuals carrying heavy, concealed loads in the dead of night. "We scanned CCTV cameras and could identify the physique of the accused but could not see his face. It was then clear that he entered Jamfalwadi," he said.

Jadeja said that by merging this technical surveillance with a network of human informants, the crime branch tracked the suspect's "digital breadcrumbs" with precision.

However, once it was clear that Khadiya was involved, he was found missing, and after nearly 10 days he came back. The cops anticipated his attempt to move the stolen property and set a strategic trap near the Shaktimata Temple in Jamfalwadi.

Telangana government finalises reservations for ULB chiefs; polls likely in early February

Hyderabad.(Agency)

The state government has finalised reservations for mayors of municipal corporations and chairpersons of municipalities across Telangana, indicating that elections to Urban Local Bodies (ULBs) are likely to be held shortly.

The reservations were finalised through a draw of lots conducted at the office of the Commissioner and Director of Municipal Administration (CDMA) in Hyderabad on Saturday, in the presence of representatives of various political parties. Elections are expected in the first week of February, with the notifications due soon.

Among municipal corporations, the mayoral posts in Hyderabad, Nizamabad, Khammam and Nalgonda have been reserved for women (general category). Karimnagar, Mahbubnagar and Mancherial have been reserved for BC (general), Ramagundam for SC (general), Kothagudem for ST (general), while Warangal has been kept unreserved.

38 of 121 ULB posts reserved for BCs

After the draw of lots, CDMA Commissioner TK Sreedevi told the media that reservations had been allotted in 121 municipalities. Of these, five posts have been reserved for Scheduled Tribes (ST), 17 for Scheduled Castes (SC) and 38 for Backward Classes (BC), including 19 reserved for women. The remaining 61 posts fall under the unreserved or general category.

Will the session be anything more than political posturing?

Karnataka. (Agency)

The State Government's decision to take up a special discussion in the legislature on the economic and social impact of the Viksit Bharat-Guarantee for Rozgar and Ajeevika Mission Gramin (VB G-RAM G) Act appears to be more an act of political posturing against the Union Government. It is unclear if such a discussion would yield any tangible outcome for lakhs of poor citizens in rural areas who depend on the government scheme for employment and livelihood.

The legislative session, from January 22 to 31, could just end up being yet another political platform for ongoing public outreach efforts by Congress and the BJP-JDS. The Congress is vehemently opposing the new Act that replaced the UPA government's flagship Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA).

The party has decided to launch a series of campaigns accusing the Union Government of depriving the rural poor of their employment opportunities, while the state government is attempting to send a message from the legislature and exploring possibilities for a legal battle to restore the MGNREGA.

Politically, it is a shrewd move by the Congress to up the ante on the issue with far-reaching implications for the rural economy and channelise public anger against the Union Government and the BJP. Clearly, the party is using all available opportunities and platforms to drive home its argument. The Congress's key concerns revolve around the change in the funding pattern - from a 90:10 to 60:40 Centre-State sharing arrangement - which burdens already stretched

state finances.

Another major concern expressed by Congress is that the powers vested with Gram Panchayats under 73rd Constitutional Amendment have been taken away, undermining

letter to Prime Minister Narendra Modi. A detailed discussion in the session could be part of a larger strategy to ensure that the message resonates more widely, attempting to pressure the Union Government to address the state's concerns.

In the pre-budget meeting called by the Union Finance Minister this week, the state government stated that

"to continue to provide livelihood security to the tune of 13 crore person-days, Karnataka would require approximately Rs. 2,000 crore, which is fiscally unsustainable.

New cost-sharing has increased the state burden." The state requested reconsideration of the scheme design, restoration of demand-driven employment, and adequate and uncapped Central funding.

federalism and local self-governance.

The grounds on which Congress is opposing the Central Act have been highlighted by the party leaders on several occasions on different platforms, including Chief Minister Siddaramaiah's



US ambassador Sergio Gor, Fadnavis hold talks on trade, investment

Mumbai. (Agency)

US Ambassador to India Sergio Gor on Saturday met Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis, with the two leaders holding wide-ranging discussions on strengthening cooperation across key sectors including trade, investment, technology and manufacturing. The meeting focused on shared strategic priorities aimed at deepening the partnership between the US and Maharashtra. Areas of collaboration discussed included trade and investment, entertainment, technology, manufacturing, energy and health.

Taking to social media platform X after the meeting, Gor described the interaction as "fantastic," highlighting the significant potential for collaboration. "We discussed our shared strategic priorities to strengthen the bilateral relationship between the United States and Maharashtra across key sectors... So much we can do together," he said.

Fadnavis said the discussions covered a wide range of subjects, including boosting US investments in Maharashtra and encouraging

companies from the state to expand their footprint in the US. Fadnavis said he shared details of several flagship and

closely to deepen the US-Maharashtra partnership," he said.

Earlier in the day, Gor met Reserve Bank of India (RBI) Governor Sanjay Malhotra to discuss increased cooperation, particularly in the technology sector. In a post on X, Gor said that discussions included the adoption of new, state-of-the-art US technology.

Gor also visited the Gateway of India on Saturday. On Friday, the US Ambassador visited the US Consulate in Mumbai as part of his first trip to the city.



strategic initiatives, including the Navi Mumbai International Education City project. "Both sides agreed to work more

Three gangsters clash in Burail Jail, one injured

Chandigarh.(Agency)

Recently, a violent clash broke out between three gangsters lodged in Burail Jail here, leaving one inmate seriously injured.

The incident had occurred inside the factory area of the jail on January 7, prompting swift intervention by jail staff and the registration of a criminal case by the police on Friday. According to the police, the

and was shifted to the Government Medical College and Hospital (GMCH), Sector 32.

Police sources said Chauhan, a native of Faridabad, is an alleged gangster who was arrested in connection with a conspiracy to murder gangster Bhupi Rana. The other two accused inmates also have criminal backgrounds. Manjeet, alias Mota Rahal, is allegedly involved in the Sonu Shah murder case of Burail, while Amritpal Singh, alias Gurjar, was arrested earlier for allegedly opening fire at the residence of businessman Kuldeep Singh Makkhar in Sector 5. In his complaint, jail warden Tarun stated that he was on duty in the factory area when, around 11.30 am, the three inmates suddenly ran towards the area, picked up iron angles lying there and began attacking each other.

When Tarun and other wardens tried to intervene and stop the fight, the inmates allegedly pushed and manhandled the jail staff. All three inmates were lodged in the same barrack after separating them.

Police officials said further investigation is underway to ascertain the exact sequence of events and how the inmates gained access to iron rods inside the jail premises. Jail security arrangements and possible lapses are also being examined.

case was registered at Sector 49 police station on the complaint of Tarun, a jail warden posted at the Model Jail Complex, Sector 51, Chandigarh.

As per the police, inmates Kailash Chauhan, Amritpal Singh, alias Gurjar, and Manjeet, alias Mota, were involved in a quarrel and attacked each other with iron rods inside the jail around 11.20 am. During the scuffle, Chauhan suffered serious injuries

and was shifted to the Government Medical College and Hospital (GMCH), Sector 32.

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Long before it became a place of quiet reflection, Sabarmati Ashram was a crucible of ideas that shaped India's freedom struggle. One of its silent witnesses was Nandini, a modest guesthouse that hosted some of India's most influential minds in the 1920s. Within its walls, the austerity of simple living met the fire of intense debate, shared by a spectrum of poets, politicians, and pacifists including Rabindranath Tagore, Motilal Nehru, Charles 'Deenbandhu' Andrews, Sarojini Naidu and Dr Rajendra Prasad.

After a careful nine-month restoration, Nandini — the seven-room guesthouse constructed in 1920 to the right of Gandhi's residence, Hriday Kunj — is once again ready to tell its stories. The space, which has

been restored by Ahmedabad-based architect Rabindra Vasavada and his team, offers visitors a glimpse into how Mahatma Gandhi's philosophy was lived, not just preached.

The restored premises now offer visitors a deeper look at the ashram's lesser-known residents. Dr Priti Nambiar, senior programme director at the Centre for Environment Education (CEE), who conceptualised the exhibits, said the narrative goes beyond famous names. Among those highlighted are British pacifist Reginald Arthur Reynolds, author and Jawaharlal Nehru's sister Krishna Hutheesing, and writer and peace activist Horace Alexander.

According to Dr Nambiar, the displays



combine archival images, contextual text and interactive panels to show how Gandhi's philosophy shaped the lives and thinking of those who lived at the ashram. "The focus is on the time they spent here and how

Chandigarh Golf Club polls: It's a battle of two army veterans

Chandigarh. (Agency)

Two former Indian Army officers, Major Rajinder Singh Virk (retd) and Captain (retd) Mohan Bir Singh, popularly known as Bunny, are contesting for the post of president of the Chandigarh Golf Club in the elections scheduled for January 25. Both are leading teams for the club's governing council.

In a conversation with The Indian Express, the two candidates speak about their vision for the club, governance priorities, financial concerns, stalled infrastructure projects, accessibility, and the future of golf in Chandigarh.

Major Rajinder Singh Virk (retd)
Q: Why are you interested in serving as president, and what do you see as the most significant challenge and opportunity facing the club? What is your vision if elected?

I am interested in serving because I believe in the legacy of this club and feel a deep sense of responsibility toward its future. The greatest opportunity we have is to unify our membership around a shared vision of excellence, where both tradition and progress are honored. The most significant challenge is restoring full confidence in how the club is run (financially, operationally, and transparently) so that every member feels assured, heard, and proud. My time on the Executive Committee, and even as a vocal member without office, has shown me how the club truly operates. I've learned from past presidents both what to do and what not to do. The most successful terms have been defined by inclusive leadership - grounded in listening, integrity, and decisions made for the long-term good of the club, not short-term visibility.

Q: What will be different from the present administration if you are elected as president?

The difference will be defined by clarity of purpose, with transparency and consistency in execution. Our administration will focus on three pillars:

- Golf-first governance, with professional course management as our top priority.
- Transparent operations, including fair tournament systems and open financial oversight.
- Action on longstanding issues, such as parking and caddie facilities, with clear timelines and accountability.

Hopes high as excavation begins in Karnataka's Lakkundi

Gadag.(Agency)

After the Lakkundi Development Authority (LDA) began excavations on Friday on the premises of the Kote Veerabhadreshwara Temple, one of the around 20 places it has shortlisted at the historical village, several historians who visited the place from different parts of Karnataka are hoping to see the 10th century Lakkundi. On the second day, a stone that appeared like part of a Shiva linga was found at Lakkundi village.

Lakkundi village is located around 12km from Gadag and 70km from Hubballi along the Hubballi-Hosapete highway. The place was ruled by the Kalyana Chalukyas, Rashtrakutas, Hoysalas, Kalachuris, Vijayanagar kings and Danachintamani Attimabbe. The land is not only famous for sculptures, it is believed that the place has a lot of gold, silver, diamond and other treasures buried under it. Many foreign tourists who visit Badami, Hampi and Aneburgi also visit Lakkundi.

With the recent find of gold ornaments

from a field, people are excited about the excavation work carried out by the LDA. An LDA member said the authorities may relocate the whole village if the excavations find many historical artefacts and remains of monuments. The first excavation was done in 2004-05 in the southern part of the

Prabhu Devar Mutt in Lakkundi, which unearthed many inscriptions and monuments from the Kalyana Chalukya period. Another round of excavations were carried out in 2024 and 2025, and the collected historical artefacts inscriptions have been kept in an open museum inaugurated by Chief Minister Siddaramaiah in June.

Mahatma shaped their thoughts," she said. One of the central rooms has been furnished to reflect the striking simplicity that defined daily life at the ashram. Visitors are shown how there was little distinction between guests and residents, with the only exceptions being Gandhi's accommodation of individual religious food practices and the provision of a western-style toilet. This austere lifestyle is vividly captured in Reynolds' book, To Live in Mankind: A Quest for Gandhi. Describing his stay at the ashram, he wrote: "My room was a square stone cell, with two shelves and two built-in cupboards. There was also a rough bedstead (an unexpected luxury), and on my arrival the only chair in the ashram had been put at my disposal. But I soon managed to be rid of it."

A slice of India's history restored at Mahatma Gandhi's Sabarmati Ashram in Ahmedabad

Ahmedabad.(Agency)

Long before it became a place of quiet reflection, Sabarmati Ashram was a crucible of ideas that shaped India's freedom struggle. One of its silent witnesses was Nandini, a modest guesthouse that hosted some of India's most influential minds in the 1920s. Within its walls, the austerity of simple living met the fire of intense debate, shared by a spectrum of poets, politicians, and pacifists including Rabindranath Tagore, Motilal Nehru, Charles 'Deenbandhu' Andrews, Sarojini Naidu and Dr Rajendra Prasad.

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been restored by Ahmedabad-based architect Rabindra Vasavada and his team, offers visitors a glimpse into how Mahatma Gandhi's philosophy was lived, not just preached. The restored premises now offer visitors a deeper look at the ashram's lesser-known residents. Dr Priti Nambiar, senior programme director at the Centre for Environment Education (CEE), who conceptualised the exhibits, said the narrative goes beyond famous names. Among those highlighted are British pacifist Reginald Arthur Reynolds, author and Jawaharlal Nehru's sister Krishna Hutheesing, and writer and peace activist Horace Alexander.

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Raid and counter-raid in Kolkata: How Mamata reframed the narrative

The routine of raids by the Enforcement Directorate or the Central Bureau of Investigation in search of evidence of crime and money laundering is not shocking. Not even when such raids are conducted on politically consequential persons from the opposition prior to an election.

But it is indeed shocking—if not scandalous—when a sitting chief minister is accused of “gross obstruction” and theft of crucial data, files and evidence by the ED. On January 8, when Mamata Banerjee stormed into a building an ED team was raiding because it housed an office of the Indian Political Action Committee or I-PAC, a consultancy advising the Trinamool Congress, she had her reason ready: “I intervened as the TMC chairperson, not as chief minister. They came to steal my party data. I will expose everything if needed.” In response, the ED was compelled to issue a denial: “The search is evidence-based and not targeted at any political establishment. No party office has been searched. The search is not linked to any elections, and is part of regular crackdown on money laundering.” The central agency went to the Calcutta High Court and then the Supreme Court, accusing Banerjee of “theft of digital devices and other evidence, and wrongful restraint and confinement of central government officers”. The court hearings as well as the West Bengal government’s caveat—that “such targeted seizure amounts to an impermissible intrusion into TMC’s right to privacy under Article 21 and its constitutional right to participate meaningfully in the democratic process under Article 19”—have set the stage for a litigation that’s likely to proceed at the regular pace of such contests.

There are, however, two sides to the incident—the legal and the political. The ED is essentially saying that it acted independently and that its search of the I-PAC office and its co-founder and director Pratik Jain’s residence are “not linked to any elections”. In other words, it is defending its action from the accusation levelled by Banerjee. To go on the defensive after an aggressive move is a sign of weakness. Banerjee’s counter-attack raises a fundamental question: are public institutions neutral or are they subject to pressures exercised by ruling regimes? The question is not limited to central institutions like the ED; it also addresses the role of the West Bengal police on the one hand and the impartiality of adjudicating institutions on the other. By broadening the context of the raid into an aggressive act violating free and fair participation in the democratic process under Article 19, the Banerjee government has questioned the role, responsibility and conduct of a number of public institutions including the Election Commission. The CM’s latest letter to the Chief Election Commissioner on the special intensive revision (SIR) of rolls, released on January 12 along with a petition by TMC MP Derek O’Brien, challenges the commission’s role as a law-abiding institution. The petition demands that the EC “stop issuing instructions for compliance by the booth level officers (BLOs) and other officers in the SIR exercise through WhatsApp or other such informal channels”. It also calls on the judiciary to declare all such instructions issued so far as illegal. Banerjee’s letter points to “internal record-keeping deficiencies” and complains: “Such administrative lapses are being unfairly forced upon citizens, causing severe harassment and resulting in the denial of their constitutional rights. This defeats the very objective of the SIR, which is intended to strengthen and purify the electoral rolls, not to exclude genuine and eligible voters.”

India has overtaken China to become the world’s largest rice producer with 150.18 million tonnes, as per the Union Agriculture Ministry data. Wheat acreage across states has risen to a record 334.17 lakh hectares during the current rabi season (2025-26), as farmers favour wheat amid weak prices of other crops, raising prospects of another bumper harvest and easing export curbs. This ascent may appear, at first glance, as an unalloyed success. For Punjab, however, these milestones are less a cause for celebration than a reminder of a deepening structural crisis. The state that once powered the Green Revolution now finds itself trapped by its legacy—a farming system built for food security in the 1960s that has become ecologically and economically unsustainable in the 21st century. Punjab’s agriculture remains overwhelmingly dominated by the wheat-paddy cycle. Together, these two crops account for nearly 85 per cent of the state’s gross cropped area. This dominance is a matter of policy design. Decades of assured procurement at minimum support prices (MSPs), subsidised electricity for irrigation and a procurement infrastructure unmatched anywhere else in the country have made wheat and paddy the safest choices. In an environment of rising costs and uncertain markets, farmers grow what the system rewards.

This explains why crop diversification has remained more rhetoric than reality. Successive governments have urged Punjab’s farmers to shift towards maize, pulses, oilseeds and horticulture. Yet these alternatives rarely come with the same guarantees. Market prices fluctuate sharply, procurement is patchy or absent and processing and storage infrastructure weak. Faced with such uncertainty, diversification becomes a gamble rather than a transition. Not surprisingly, security trumps sustainability. However, the ecological costs of this model are now impossible to ignore. Paddy cultivation in a semi-arid region has driven groundwater depletion to alarming levels. Official estimates say that over three-quarters of Punjab’s groundwater blocks are overexploited. Recent reports from the Central Ground Water Board (CGWB) reveal that Punjab records the highest rate of groundwater extraction in India. The water table is falling by nearly a metre annually in several districts. Paddy cultivation—a water-intensive crop in a semi-arid region—is the primary driver for this dire situation. Tube wells are drilled ever deeper, electricity consumption soars and the cost of cultivation rises year after year. Soil health has also suffered. Repeated mono-cropping of wheat and rice, combined

with heavy fertiliser use, has depleted organic carbon and micronutrients. Stubble burning, a byproduct of mechanised paddy harvesting and compressed cropping cycles, has become an annual environmental crisis, choking cities beyond Punjab’s borders. These problems are structural outcomes of a cropping pattern frozen in time. Economically, the picture is equally troubling. While MSP procurement ensures price stability, farm incomes have stagnated. Input costs—seeds, fertilisers, diesel and labour—have risen faster than returns. Small and marginal farmers, with limited land and high

remain piecemeal. A one-time payment cannot offset the absence of assured buyers, storage facilities or processing units. Nor can it compensate for the institutional familiarity farmers have with wheat and rice. Diversification, to be credible, must offer a similar certainty of returns. Punjab’s predicament also exposes a national policy contradiction. On the one hand, India celebrates record rice production and expanding wheat acreage as symbols of food security. On the other, it urges states like Punjab to diversify for environmental reasons. As long as the Food Corporation of India procures rice and wheat in bulk while alternatives are left to the vagaries of the open market, farmers will stick to staples. You cannot preach diversification while rewarding monoculture. The solution, therefore, lies in redesigning incentives. If pulses, oilseeds and maize are genuinely national priorities for nutrition, import substitution and sustainability, they must enjoy procurement assurance, price support and infrastructure investment comparable to wheat and rice. Punjab’s farmers should not be asked to bear the cost of national food policy adjustments alone. Plus, Punjab has the potential to become a hub for high-value agriculture—dairy, vegetables, fruits and food-processing. But this requires investment in cold chains, logistics and agro-industries. It also requires land consolidation, cooperative models and market access that protect small farmers from corporate dominance.

There is also a generational dimension to Punjab’s agrarian crisis. Younger farmers are increasingly disillusioned with agriculture that requires high effort, but offers low dignity and uncertain returns. Many seek livelihoods outside farming or outside the country altogether. Without structural reform, Punjab also risks losing its human capital. Ultimately, Punjab’s crisis is a cautionary tale for the rest of India. It shows what happens when agricultural success is measured only in terms of tonnes produced, not in sustainability achieved. The state fed the nation when it was most needed. Today, it needs a new social contract, one that balances food security with ecological survival and farmer welfare.

India’s record grain production should prompt reflection. For Punjab, the challenge is stark: continue down a path of diminishing returns or undertake a difficult but necessary transition. The choice will determine the future of the state’s farmers as also the credibility of India’s promise of sustainable agriculture.

Road safety first: Don’t give free pass to violators

The Tribune Editorial: A bigger task is forging a social mandate for responsible road behaviour

THE road transport ministry figures are stark even by India’s shaky safety standards. That over 70 per cent of the 40 crore vehicles in the country do not comply with statutory norms presents a grim reality. Data shared with the states and UTs shows that over two-thirds of these non-compliant vehicles are two-wheelers. Whether it’s non-possession of vehicle fitness or pollution under control certificates, or having no insurance at all, this wilful defiance invariably gets a free pass. Such casualness can lead to a false sense of immunity, and the carefree driver then becomes a risk to himself and the other road users. Under the proposed framework, non-compliant vehicles will be automatically deregistered if the requirements are not taken care of. It is a much-needed step to cement



regulatory control. THE road transport ministry figures

are stark even by India’s shaky safety standards. That over 70 per cent of the 40 crore vehicles in the country do not comply with statutory norms presents a grim reality. Data shared with the states and UTs shows that over two-thirds of these non-compliant vehicles are two-wheelers. Whether it’s non-possession of vehicle fitness or pollution under control certificates, or having no insurance at all, this wilful defiance invariably gets a free pass. Such casualness can lead to a false sense of immunity, and the carefree driver then becomes a risk to himself and the other road users. Under the proposed framework, non-compliant vehicles will be automatically deregistered if the requirements are not taken care of. It is a much-needed step to cement regulatory control.

Budget must spur deeper reforms

Indian economy needs to grow faster in order to escape the middle-income trap

THE 2026-27 Budget proposals are being formulated in the backdrop of continuing geopolitical tensions and the imposition of hefty US tariffs. At this juncture, the first advance estimates for the 2025-26 financial year have brought some glad tidings. The prospect of 7.4 per cent GDP growth is a turnaround from earlier predictions by the RBI of a moderate 6.5 per cent. It has also shown that reforms make a difference and they need to be accelerated in order to sustain growth at this level. The restructuring and recalibration of the Goods and Services Tax (GST), for instance, has been a game-changer for the economy. It was a step that should have been taken much earlier, given the regulatory complexity in the system. The streamlining measures have led to a spurt in consumption during the festival season in October-November 2025 and this, in turn, looks set to revive the investment climate.

The other long-awaited measure taken recently has been the implementation of the four labour codes that were passed five years ago in Parliament. The codes replaced as many as 29 separate laws dealing with industrial relations, several of which had been on the statute books from colonial times. The multiplicity of legislation created enormous complexity in dealing with labour issues over the years. Compliance was consequently a confusing affair for business enterprises. This may not have been a reform that gave an immediate impetus to growth, but it has brought clarity and simplicity in an area of serious concern for potential investors. Besides, the codes bring labour regulations into the modern era by giving greater flexibility in terms of work from home while providing a measure of social security for workers in the fast-

growing gig economy. The codes may still have lacunae, which can be addressed in future, but scrapping the earlier laws has surely made doing business easier in the country.

The need for reforms in other areas is underlined by the fact that all is not positive in the first advance estimates. For instance, growth has slowed down in the second half



of the year from October to March. The first two quarters recorded growth of 7.8 and 8.2 per cent, respectively, but the second two quarters are assumed to be at a lower level of around 6.9 per cent. On the plus side, the advance estimates show a rebound in manufacturing from 4.5 per cent to 7.4 per cent and this has given a big push to higher growth in the 2025-26 financial year. It is also significant that the pace of growth has stepped up over the past three years, with the

average at nearly 8 per cent. Projections for the 2026-27 financial year made by institutions like the World Bank are lower at around 6.5 per cent, but it increasingly looks as if growth may now be sustained at higher levels. Though India has been the fastest-growing major economy for several years now, it needs to grow faster to escape the middle-income trap and become a developed nation by 2047.

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman will have to keep this in mind while drawing up the Budget, especially as external headwinds have been growing in recent months. Trade is the big issue on the horizon in a world with fast-changing alignments due to US President Donald Trump’s maverick economic and foreign policies. While exports to the US have to face 50 per cent tariffs, there is now talk of penal tariffs on countries trading with Iran. As for the India-US trade pact, it has clearly got bogged down by a variety of factors, including Trump’s ego. The positivity shown by the new US Ambassador to India Sergio Gor has

given a sliver of hope that the deal may ultimately go through. Even so, the Budget will now have to provide support for export-led industries which could face tough times. For the time being, however, the anticipated impact on labour-intensive industries like gems and jewellery as well as readymade garments has been muted due to rapid diversification of markets. The data for November 2025 shows a surprising rise in exports in these areas. These shot up by as much as 19

per cent during the month. The surge has largely been due to electronics, engineering goods, pharmaceuticals, petroleum products and readymade garments. What is even more unexpected is that exports to the US have risen by 22 per cent despite the hefty tariff barriers. A big component has been mobile phones which recorded a three-fold increase in the course of just one year. Another element of economic growth that is not captured by much of the data is the extent of joblessness. According to the Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy, the unemployment rate reached a three-month low of 8.6 per cent in December due to a decline in rural joblessness. The data does not reflect the fact that India has not been able to utilise its much-lauded demographic dividend by providing enough jobs to the youth. Agriculture continues to be the biggest employer with 45 per cent of the workers in this sector alone. Manufacturing has not yet expanded sufficiently to absorb unskilled or skilled personnel available in the market. It is in this sector that lessons can be learnt from other Asian economies that have managed to expand small and medium enterprises sufficiently to provide more labour-intensive employment. The new labour codes are bound to be helpful in this regard by making job issues easier to tackle, thereby removing one big hurdle in the way of new investors and existing employers. The Budget should thus be used as an opportunity to bring about greater ease of doing business in the economy. Reforms, especially in terms of eliminating the regulatory cholesterol in the system, need to be carried out much more quickly compared to the GST restructuring and the implementation of the labour codes. Only then will it be possible to push growth to the levels needed to become a developed economy.



FRINGE BENEFITS

Fringe benefits not only help the employees in terms of long-term growth, they are also equally important for the organisations for various reasons.

The corporate drone operates at every level across sectors in the industry. Fringe benefits are a new buzz doing the rounds of corporate halls. It is generally combined or part of the total rewards system. Fringe benefits broadly include health, security and retirement benefits offered to all full-time employees. They are offered in addition to the defined compensation structure. Recent explosion of the digital platform industry led to an epiphany among the top executives and leadership teams at large, on talent management. To increase the level of attraction for young and exceptionally skilled talent, the focus on leading edge

practices has become critical. Thus, an innovative bucket of fringe benefits is introduced in the market. Some of these are voluntary and taxable in nature, but aid the employee in different aspects of his/her life. Some of the popular ones are education assistance, adoption assistance, Employee Assistance Programme (EAP), bonus allocated, meals offered by the organisation, flexible hours, transport facility provided, etc. Elango R, president HP Business Unit and chief human resources officer, Mphasis shares his views on the fringe benefit that people appreciate the most. He suggests, "It is anything that includes employees' family, that has high social and peer recognition. We

should encourage giving a compensation that benefits their whole family. For instance, where an employee gets promoted or recognised for their work, without telling it to them, we can send a letter to their parents or spouse informing about the same. This gives them surprise and happiness. Second, at senior levels, people still like exclusive club memberships and offers which are difficult for them to get individually. This has a huge impact on them. The third is giving people enough opportunities to get together and socialise as peers either through conferences or similar learning exercises. Many people cut it calling it an expense, but it is really a fringe benefit because others like to travel with their peers and their group and they look forward to these events. It is just another way to renew their relationships with their colleagues. The distinction in company size relates more prominently to the extent to which initiatives are implemented and the

processes relating to how they are implemented. But acting as an outlier to this industry trend, these benefits are more popular among the start-ups who aspire to operate at a global level with employee-friendly policies and compensation structure. This aspect offered as an additional perk is often used as a bargaining chip with the prospective employees. The emphasis on the subject has increased to such an extent that some universities have actually started designing dedicated courses around the same. It can help manoeuvre the employee value proposition to the external and internal population and benefit the organisational repute. While the benefits offered are enjoyed by the employees and employer bears the expense, it's a mutually-beneficial programme for both involved parties. Healthy and secure employees will have better productivity, attendance, and vigour to take on new challenges. This will help the organisation perform better. Generally, the scale of operations also

determines the benefits offered as volume or headcount helps to spread the cost and gain discounts or work out better deals through collective bargaining for higher employee base. Also, these benefits are subject to Fringe Benefit Tax (FBT) which takes away time, energy and requires the expertise or knowledge to be there in the tax audit team.

In the ultimate user experience, fringe benefits can be viewed as a distributed consensus system that allows management and employees at different levels to come on the same page and concur to achieve common organisational goals while contributing in their capacity. Industry experts advocate further growth and penetration of fringe benefits in the industry at large in the long range. While certain deficits are overlooked by the fact that an increase in the percentage of fringe benefits in the compensation structure will reduce the cash pay, an ideal scenario would be where benefits and cash components both increase at a similar pace, but that is too idealistic in a crunch economy like ours.

All you need to know about fringe Benefits

Give yourself time to live, laugh and love

An exclusive with Saloni Mardia Kothari, CEO and Founder, Mtlexs Research... Managing work-life balance. Time management is the key to balance. Once I'm out of the work place, I strive to focus strictly on my personal life. Spending time with friends and dedicated 'me' time



are what keeps me in balance.

Being a fit woman

I'm not a fitness freak but I believe being healthy is important. Exercising regularly and keeping a strict watch on what is cooked in my kitchen are the key for keeping myself fit. Although, having a foodie husband makes this a daily struggle!

Energy high and happiness

I love the festive season. Feeding my friends and family and pampering them puts a big smile on my face. Seeing them around me give me joy.

Risk taker or a micro-planner

It depends on the situation. I believe in planning well, setting goals and achieving them and taking calculated risks.

Spiritual diet

Yoga in the morning and deep meditation during the day helps me a lot. Giving myself time to live, laugh and love. Do good and do the right thing.

Handling failure and success

There is a lesson in every failure and the joy of success comes from overcoming obstacles. The challenge is to keep putting one foot in front of the other.

Crisis management

Always stay calm. Evaluate the situation and focus on the core issues. Think of a quick fix followed by a more proactive sustainable solution. Be level headed

while dealing with a crisis.

Destress mantra

Films are the best escape for me. My aim is to keep stress to the minimum by pre-planning work. I try to stick to a planned schedule and always keep time for emergencies.

The song you like to hum

'You lift me up' by Mikey Wax.

A book that means a lot to me

'The Monk Who Sold His Ferrari' by Robin Sharma.

A movie that moved me

'Shawshank Redemption'.

The manager of your team has been the best mentor you ever had in your professional life. He has guided you through all the ups and downs that you faced in this organisation and has been a strong pillar of strength for you during your present stint. You have prospered well and feel totally in control of things at work. But now, he has decided to move on to explore better avenues and things have suddenly become not so clear for you. As you prepare yourself to deal with situations without having him around, you get an offer to join him at his new workplace. Now, the big question haunts you as to whether or not to join him in his new venture.

Although, the most obvious and natural progression in this situation would be to instantly grab the offer and move along, there might be certain pros and cons that need to be weighed before one takes the plunge. Working with the same boss would definitely mean the same old level of comfort and understanding.

Sandeep Budhiraja, CEO of DOOR Training & Consulting India Pvt Ltd, puts it into perspective as he says, "Change brings

uncertainty and the manager who has moved to a new role may be driven by his or her own need to establish himself/herself quickly. Therefore, he would also be interested in bringing the trusted team members along. Also, it is well understood in HR circles that when people move together to a new organisation, they are taking the same risk as the organisation they are coming from. Unless the company is desperate for that kind of talent, it is highly avoidable for them. Groups come with their own cultural and political

issues. So, the new company that the employee has followed his manager to, will already start discounting the capabilities and trustworthiness of the employee, which does not bode well in the long run."

Any change will always have uncertainties associated with it. Nonetheless, it cannot be

ruled out that moving out with your boss may bring in some good results for you as the rapport you share with him will also help you settle down better in the new role. With him already working to create a credibility for himself, chances are high that you will benefit alongside. However, in such work relationships, the employee often loses his own ability to take the best decision for himself. Moving to a new role would definitely mean risking the growth opportunities that might have come your way in your present assignment. At the same time, it would also mean losing on the remaining support systems that one might have in the present organisation.

Shalini Pillay, head-people, performance and culture, KPMG India, says, "If you understand and believe in the growth platform that your present organisation provides, it is not difficult

to see the wider landscape of opportunities that present themselves in such a context too. What might seem like an easy path of going with the flow, might actually quite often be walking away from the imminent opportunity besides having to establish oneself in an entirely new organisational ecosystem. Similarly, the rapport that an individual builds with his manager and the trust he has in his ability to support individual growth is an outcome of a larger ecosystem. This ecosystem is a result of the culture and values that the organisation believes in. It may not be realistic to believe that similar culture-value systems exist in all organisations."

The same is reckoned by Geetika Joshi, a senior HR professional. "Not only will such a move bring uncertainty along, it will affect most other relationships that you might have fostered over time, and your relationship with your boss may even affect the relationships you make at your new workplace. Therefore, it is extremely essential to choose wisely and think deep before taking this plunge."

While an opportunity to work with your existing boss may sound extremely good at the first time, it is extremely crucial to weigh the pros and cons and then take an informed decision about the same.

Should you follow your boss to his new Workplace?

While you may have the best rapport with your boss, moving with him to the new workplace may bring unexpected consequences. Choose wisely.



Air India Express' Customised Boeing 737-8 MAX Takes 1st International Flight

Was onboard the flight, which offered a first-hand look at the custom-configured narrow-body aircraft now operating on international routes.

New Delhi.(Agency)
Air India Express on Saturday operated its first international commercial flight of its newly inducted, fully custom-configured Boeing 737-8 Max aircraft. The inaugural overseas service, operated by aircraft registered as VT-RNT, flew from New Delhi to Oman's capital city of Muscat. NDTV was onboard the flight, which offered a first-hand look at the airline's first custom-configured narrow-body aircraft now operating on international routes. The 180-seater aircraft with all-economy cabin, features ergonomically designed seats with enhanced cushioning, improved legroom, and fast-charging power outlets at every seat. The aircraft is equipped with larger overhead bins for cabin baggage, onboard ovens for hot 'Gourmair' meals, a quieter cabin environment, and Boeing's Sky Interior with mood lighting. The aircraft's call sign, VT-RNT, honours the late Ratan Tata, former Chairman Emeritus of the Tata Group. Air

India Express said the naming commemorates his legacy and leadership. The aircraft also carries a dedicated livery in his memory.

Improvements In Passenger Comfort, Operational Convenience

Onboard the inaugural flight, crew members highlighted improvements in passenger comfort and operational convenience. An air hostess described the aircraft as more spacious, pointing to upgraded galley equipment and charging facilities.

Speaking to she said, "The passengers are

now offered hot and fresh meals with the built ovens we have. The feel is modern with the seating changed and fast-power charging units provided with each seat. It is an experience of its own kind."

VT-RNT is the 51st Boeing 737-8 MAX inducted by Air India Express since its transition to the Tata Group and is also the first aircraft to reflect the airline's new cabin and



branding philosophy integrated at the manufacturing stage. The aircraft was flown directly from Boeing's facility in United States' Seattle to India. The flight marks the airline's first international deployment of a line-fit aircraft—one delivered directly from Boeing with specifications designed exclusively for Air India Express. Until now, the airline had largely inducted "white-tail" aircraft, originally built for other

carriers and later reconfigured for its use. Air India Express officials said that the induction represents a shift from retrofit-led upgrades to fully customised, factory-fitted aircraft as part of a broader expansion and product transformation programme.

Air India Express: India's Largest Boeing Operator

The airline currently operates a fleet of over 100 aircraft, including Boeing 737 and Airbus A320 family jets, making it the country's largest Boeing operator. In 2025 alone, the airline has inducted four A321neos, four A320neos, and three A320ceos, reflecting the scale and pace of its expansion. Air India Express also announced a parallel programme to retrofit its existing Boeing 737-8 fleet to ensure consistency across cabins. Under this initiative, 50 aircraft will be upgraded to a standardised 189-seat configuration, with two aircraft already having completed the process.

Cops and his father watching, Noida techie drowns two hours after car falls in drain

New Delhi.(Agency)

After screaming for help for around two hours while standing atop his partially submerged car, with policemen allegedly watching, a 27-year-old man drowned in a nearly 70-foot-deep drain in Noida's Sector 150 early Saturday. Yuvraj Mehta, a Noida-based techie employed by a Gurgaon-based private company, was returning home when his car plunged into the drain, which allegedly had a damaged boundary wall, around 12.30 am. "The visibility was extremely low due to fog, and the boundary wall near the drain was already broken," Yuvraj's father Raj Mehta has alleged in a police complaint.

Yuvraj, who had lost his mother two years ago, lived with his father at Tata Eureka Park in Noida's Sector 150. He was the sole earning member of the family.

Yuvraj's friend Pankaj Tokas alleged that after falling in the drain, the victim managed to get out of the car and climbed onto its roof, from where he called his father. "He was six-foot tall, a fit guy but did not know how to swim," he added. Pankaj said Raj initially reached the wrong location. "He was constantly on call with Yuvraj. He reached the correct spot in matter of minutes and alerted the police." "The police personnel who arrived at the spot kept saying they did not know how to swim. Cranes and ropes were also called, but no one entered the water to save my friend... And then he stopped pleading for help around 2.30 am," he added. Pankaj was informed of Yuvraj's death by Raj around 3 am. According to Pankaj, Moninder, a passerby, entered the drain around 1.45 am but did not find Yuvraj in a 30-minute search.

Speaking to The, Moninder said, "The administration is responsible for the death. He kept pleading for help. But these officials kept saying that the water was cold and maybe there were iron rods in the water and none of them jumped to save him." Police said they received information about the incident through the Police Response Vehicle (PRV) around 1 am. "The local police immediately reached the spot and informed the Fire department, along with SDRF and NDRF teams," an officer said.

Makeshift access roads to Pinangwan hills blocked to curb illegal mining in Aravallis: Police

New Delhi.(Agency)

In a joint operation to curb illegal mining in Aravallis, police officers and officials of the Forest department on Saturday blocked all unauthorised access routes to Pinangwan hills that fall under the Jhimrawat village of the Nuh district.

Police said the action targeted the network of makeshift roads and paths that had been allegedly created to transport illegally mined stones from the Aravalli hills. Officials said the routes were identified and permanently sealed to prevent further movement of heavy machinery and vehicles into the mining sites. The administration is maintaining strict vigil against illegal mining throughout Nuh, said a police spokesperson. "In close coordination with the Mining department, continuous and effective action is being taken to control such activities," he said.

The latest operation was led by Pinangwan Police Station House Officer Sub-Inspector Nikhil Kumar.

It follows a similar action earlier this month on January 13 when a team from the Mining department seized a tractor-trolley allegedly engaged in illegal mining in the area and issued a challan against the operator under relevant provisions, police said. Officers said that the campaign against illegal mining will continue in the coming days with strict legal action set to be taken against all individuals and entities found involved. The blocking of unauthorised roads is part of a long-standing effort to restrict access to illegal mining sites in the Aravalli range in Nuh, according to police.

Last July, the Haryana government informed the Supreme Court that the district administration had identified and blocked two such unauthorised roads carved through agricultural fields and forest land. These roads reportedly reduced travel distance from Rajasthan by approximately 25 km and were being used to facilitate the transport of illegally mined minerals.

Mining activities in the Aravalli hills in districts including Nuh, Gurgaon, Faridabad and Rewari have been prohibited since a Supreme Court order in 2002, which was further strengthened by directions in 2009. The ban is not applicable in Rajasthan.

For AIIMS patients and kin, subways become night shelters

New Delhi.(Agency)

Under the dim lights of the Delhi Metro subway near AIIMS, a cancer patient lies on a thin plastic sheet, wrapped in a worn-out blanket. She is undergoing a third cycle of chemotherapy and has recently had eye surgery. As she waits for her next appointment at the All India Institute of Medical Sciences, the poorly maintained, damp and filthy subway has become her only place to rest during the biting Delhi winter.

Around her, several other patients and attendants lie on the grimy floor, with nowhere else to go. One man sips tea through a tube attached to his nose, unable to drink directly due to arthritis in his mouth.

Others quietly ask passersby for blankets.

The floor is filthy, the smell unbearable, yet patients remain helpless, too exhausted to protest. For



many, the subway is not a choice but a compulsion.

Amriti, from Kasganj in Bihar, has not returned home for two months. She left her three-year-old daughter with

her in-laws to bring her 14-year-old daughter to Delhi for treatment of an eye tumour. Showing her daughter's bandaged face and complete hair loss, Amriti said, "This is her fourth chemotherapy.

Doctors have said we may have to wait another 12 days for the final check-up. This is the first time I have left my little daughter alone, but this was more important." Her daughter was supposed to appear for school examinations last November, but the family has been in Delhi since then.

Recounting their ordeal, Amriti said they were displaced repeatedly. "First, we stayed at Vishram Sadan after paying some amount. When our allowed period ended, we had to spend nights on the road.

Delhi Jal Board launches Rs 31.31 crore sewer project in Deoli, Ambedkar Nagar to check Yamuna pollution

New Delhi.(Agency)

In a major step towards cleaning the Yamuna and strengthening Delhi's sanitation infrastructure, the Delhi Jal Board (DJB) on Saturday launched a large-scale sewer development project covering unauthorised colonies in the Deoli and Ambedkar Nagar Assembly constituencies under the Okhla drainage zone.

The foundation stone for the project was laid by Delhi's Water Minister, Parvesh Sahib Singh, marking the restart of a long-pending sewer initiative aimed at stopping untreated household

sewage from flowing into stormwater drains that ultimately discharge into the Yamuna river. The project assumes

particular significance as the work was

originally sanctioned and initiated in

2018, with a planned completion

timeline of May 2020. However, despite

laying plans for nearly 57 kilometres of

sewer lines, only about 32 kilometres of

work could be completed, leaving large

parts of the project incomplete.

now being taken forward in mission mode.

Under the current DJB initiative, approximately 25 kilometres of underground sewer lines, ranging from 300 mm to 700 mm in diameter, will be laid at a total cost of Rs 31.31 crore.

The project is targeted for completion within nine months and is expected to benefit around three lakh residents who currently lack access to an organised sewer network.

The project covers 11 unauthorised colonies spread across Deoli and Ambedkar Nagar Vidhan Sabha areas, where the absence of sewer infrastructure has remained a chronic issue. Due to this gap, domestic wastewater from densely populated localities flows into open drains, eventually entering major drains and polluting the Yamuna.



As a result, out of 16 identified colonies, only five received partial sewer connectivity, while the remaining areas continued to discharge sewage into open drains. With the renewed push by the Delhi Jal Board, the stalled project is

Did US force India to pull out of Iran's Chabahar port? How big is the loss?

New Delhi.(Agency)

In the last few days, reports and opinions suggesting that India has been forced to "withdraw" from Iran's Chabahar port under US pressure have been doing rounds. This has triggered a political slugfest at home. A report in a leading financial newspaper on Thursday (January 15) noted that "India's decade-old, turbulent involvement in developing Iran's Chabahar port has collapsed after US President Donald Trump said on

January 12 that any country doing business with the Persian Gulf nation will face a 25% tariff on any and all business being done with the USA."

The Congress alleged that "Prime Minister Narendra Modi had surrendered to US President Donald Trump, compromising a key national interest. The BJP hit back, calling the charge 'pure fiction' and accused the Congress of

peddling lies. It shared a clip from the spokesperson of the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA), Randhir Jaiswal, stating the Centre's stand on the matter.

A day after the report was published, the MEA clarified that India continues to operate at Chabahar under a valid US sanctions waiver till April 26, 2026. The MEA said New Delhi is engaged with Washington DC to extend and operationalise the arrangement.

Experts, meanwhile, have questioned both the premise of an "exit" and the logic of sanctioning a project that undercuts China-Pakistan strategic gains by being a strategic counter to the Gwadar Port in Balochistan. Was India forced to leave Chabahar? And if yes, how big would the loss be?

WHAT HAS BEEN HAPPENING

ON IRAN'S CHABAHAR PORT

The immediate trigger for the buzz over the Chabahar port was a report in a section of The Economic Times which

suggested that India could be looking at a

took to the streets after the bazaars closed the bazaars over a depreciating rial and record inflation. The merchant demonstrations snowballed into intense countrywide protests.

The slogans demanded the ousting of Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei's regime. The clerical regime called 5,000 Iraqi militias and shut down the internet. A brutal response led to the killing of over 2,600 protesters.

The US sanctions in January on any entity doing trade with Iran brought up India's Chabahar port investments. However, according to The Economic Times report, the US had already imposed sanctions on India's Chabahar project from September 2025.

But to give it time to wind up the operations, the US gave it a six-month sanction waiver.

strategic withdrawal from the Chabahar port project as US sanctions pressure on Iran intensified.

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NEWS BOX

India tough place to play: Phillips plays down history talk ahead of series decider

New Delhi. (Agency)

New Zealand batter Glenn Phillips admitted the prospect of scripting another chapter of history in India was "pretty cool" but insisted his side would lean on process and adaptability rather than emotion as they chase a rare white-ball series triumph against a formidable host. The visitors have fresh memories of making history on Indian soil. In October 2024, New Zealand stunned the cricketing world by becoming the first touring side in 69 years to win a Test series in India, sealing a remarkable 3-0 clean sweep that included their first Test victory in the country since 1988. While that achievement serves as quiet inspiration, Phillips was quick to caution against drawing parallels between



red-ball success and the challenge that awaits in limited-overs cricket. Opportunities to make history are very few and far between and they're pretty cool. But focusing on that doesn't really help with anything. As professionals, we try to treat every moment like any other day," Phillips said on the eve of Sunday's series-deciding game. The 27-year-old underlined the scale of the task in the shorter format, acknowledging India's dominance at home. "India is a very tough place to play and they are an incredible side. A white-ball series here is completely different and very few teams have managed to do that," he said. Reiterating New Zealand's philosophy, Phillips stressed the importance of staying present. For us it's about taking every game one step at a time, trying to be where our feet are and putting out our best performance every time we show up. "Turning his attention to conditions at Indore's Holkar Stadium, Phillips felt dew could play a significant role later in the evening, particularly with the current playing regulations. "With the humidity around, it could get pretty wet as the air cools down. Keeping only one ball after 34 overs changes the dynamic - it can get softer and heavier," he noted.

Vaishnavi Sharma gets maiden ODI call up for Australia tour, Harleen dropped from T20Is

NEW DELHI. (Agency)

Left-arm spinner Vaishnavi Sharma has earned her maiden ODI call-up, while Bharti Fulmali has returned to the T20I setup for the first time since 2019, as the BCCI announced the squads for the upcoming Australia tour. India women's cricket team is set to tour Australia for three ODIs and as many T20Is, beginning on February 15.



Star batter Harleen Deol, who's a part of the ODI setup, has been left out of the T20I squad. The 27-year-old has had underwhelming returns in her T20I career so far, scoring 311 runs from 20 innings at an average of 17.27 and a strike rate of 92.01, with just one fifty to her name. Fulmali's return to the international stage comes on the back of standout performances in the ongoing Women's Premier League 2026 (WPL 2026), where she has amassed 92 runs in four innings at a blistering strike rate of 191.66 for Gujarat Giants. She also impressed in the previous season, scoring 133 runs across four innings at a strike rate of 172.72. Fulmali made her India debut against England in Guwahati seven years ago and has featured in only two T20Is so far. On the other hand, Vaishnavi recently impressed in her debut series against Sri Lanka, where she scalped five wickets across as many matches. Along with her, 17-year-old wicketkeeper G Kamalini has also earned her maiden ODI call-up. Off-spinner Shreyanka Patil, who last represented the country during the T20 World Cup 2024, has also been recalled to the T20I side after recovering from a string of injuries. Patil has been in top form in the ongoing WPL 2026, having claimed eight wickets from four matches so far, with her best figures of 5/23 coming against Gujarat Giants. Kashvee Gautam, who last donned the blue jersey in the tri-series against Sri Lanka and South Africa in May last year, has also returned to the ODI setup.

The Black Caps have toured India for bilateral ODIs since 1989 but have never won a series in India and this is arguably their best opportunity to break that barren run.

INDORE. (Agency)

There is little doubt that Aryna Sabalenka will walk into the Australian Open as the woman to beat. Finishing 2025 as the world No.1 and opening the new season by successfully defending her Brisbane International crown, the Belarusian arrives at Melbourne Park brimming with confidence and momentum. With two Australian Open titles already to her name, Sabalenka looks primed for a third,

The U19 World Cup promise: How many teen stars graduated to Team India

As the 2026 U19 World Cup unfolds, a look at how the tournament became Indian cricket's proving ground—and how many teenage sensations survived its glare to earn lasting India caps.

New Delhi. (Agency)

"Even a spare tyre is not used as much as Rahul," Navjot Singh Sidhu joked in his trademark tongue-in-cheek style during the Champions Trophy in 2025. In one line, he summed up the kind of cricketer KL Rahul has become. A five-in-one solution. An emergency opener. An anchor when the top order collapses. A middle-order floater. A wicketkeeper. A stand-in captain when required. Versatility has always been Rahul's greatest strength. It is also the reason he is so easy to overlook. He does not complain. He does not demand clarity. He does not publicly push back when roles change. Performing without noise. Without fuss. Without demanding the spotlight.

It is remarkably easy to take KL Rahul for granted. Indian cricket has done exactly that for years. Discussions around the Indian team

from the same city.

TWO RAHULS TWO DESTINIES

It would not be an exaggeration to say that what Rahul Dravid once represented for Indian cricket, his namesake now attempts to replicate in a modern, far more impatient era.

When KL Rahul bats, the similarities are subtle. Dravid's drives were defined by a pronounced backlift and a wristsy flourish. Rahul's bat moves in a smaller, gentler arc. He does not lean as low over the ball. The result is a minimalist elegance, particularly when he drives straight down the ground. Dravid, of course, was part of the Fab Four alongside Sachin Tendulkar, Sourav Ganguly and VVS Laxman. His career was woven into a golden era of Indian Test cricket. While he was often underappreciated in his playing days, history has been kind to him. Rahul, quietly, is walking a similar path. Performing without noise. Without fuss. Without demanding the spotlight.

That trait, inevitably, brings back memories of another stalwart with the same first name,

tend to orbit around superstars. Players who dominate headlines and social media trends.

In that churn, Rahul often slips through unnoticed. He is rarely the headline act. But whenever the team needs stability, he is the one they turn to. Technically sound.

successes are explained away as "doing his job". Trolling is inevitable for any Indian cricketer, but Rahul seems to shoulder more than his share.

What stands out is how he responds. Or rather, how he does not. No angry rebuttals. No cryptic social-media posts. No public sulking. He absorbs it all and moves on.

That restraint says as much about his temperament as his batting does.

THE WEIGHT OF NOVEMBER 19

Any conversation about blame inevitably circles back to November 19, 2023. The World Cup final. Ahmedabad. A night that still stings. Rahul's 66 off 107 balls became the symbol of India's failure. He was criticised, abused and, in many cases, bullied. Almost overnight, he became the villain. What tends to get lost is context. India's batting collapsed. Wickets fell around him. Conditions were tricky. Rahul chose to hold one end, read the situation and avoid reckless risks.



Tactically aware. Willing to take responsibility regardless of role. Opening the batting. Shuffling into the middle order. Keeping wickets. Leading the side when required. Rahul has done it all. His batting tempo is dissected. His intent is questioned. His failures are magnified. His

IND vs NZ: India look to solve selection puzzle as New Zealand eye historic series heist

NEW DELHI. (Agency)

New Zealand have visited India on 16 occasions for ODIs, including four World Cups and a Champions Trophy. During this time, they have never been able to get their hands on the trophy and left for home empty-handed. They have forced series deciders three times on Indian soil and were unsuccessful. Now, more than Blackcaps fans seeing these stats and feeling the cold sweat, it will be the Indian cricket supporters who will have flashbacks of the 2024 season. At that time, New Zealand came to India not winning a Test series, and they left by handing Gautam Gambhir his first reality check as coach and with a 3-0 scoreline. Some may say that the setting remains the same when both sides head to Indore for the final match of what has been an entertaining series. Many had written off New Zealand the moment the squad was announced with Kane Williamson missing and Mitchell Santner rested for the ODIs. They have had debutants in each of the first two games, yet



it was their batting that has excelled. Daryl Mitchell has kept haunting India, and he finally got that elusive win for his efforts last time in Rajkot. Adding to this, Michael Bracewell's smart captaincy and some tight bowling has ensured India has suffered a couple of batting collapses in the first two games. For India, it has been the bowling

that needs to step up, especially the spinners. Ravindra Jadeja seems to be off colour, and Kuldeep Yadav went for 82 runs in Rajkot, meaning that confidence will be a bit low. The batting has shown a dependence on the top three and KL Rahul to bail them out of tricky spots and will require Shreyas Iyer and others to make meaningful contributions.

While the attention is firmly on the T20 World Cup 2026, India will be hoping to maintain the winning momentum going and keep New Zealand's long wait going on.

IND vs NZ 3rd ODI: Indore Pitch report

If you're in Indore, it is a custom to treat yourself to some poha and, if you're watching cricket, a lot of runs. This is the same ground where Virender Sehwag scored 219 runs against the West Indies 14 years ago. India scored 399 and 385 in their last two games and the latter was against the Blackcaps three years ago. So expect a lot of runs to be scored at the Holkar Stadium, given its small boundaries and provided the pitch isn't an unusual one.

Smriti Mandhana falls prey to WPL's 90s curse, guides RCB to 4th successive win

NEW DELHI. (Agency)

The 90s curse of the Women's Premier League 2026 (WPL 2026) struck again as Royal Challengers Bengaluru (RCB) captain Smriti Mandhana missed out on a hundred during Match 11 of the tournament on Sunday, January 18, at the Dr DY Patil Sports Academy in Navi Mumbai. Mandhana played a sublime innings of 96 (61) against Delhi Capitals, helping her team register a comprehensive eight-wicket victory. The opening batter struck 13 fours and three sixes during her knock before being caught at point by Lucy Hamilton. It was the highest score of Mandhana's WPL career, as she became the tenth player to be dismissed in the 90s in the tournament's history.

WPL 2026: RCB vs DC Highlights

Interestingly, no batter has managed to score a century in WPL history, with the tournament now in its fourth season. Sophie Devine and Georgia Voll hold the joint-highest score in the competition, with both batters having scored 99. While Devine was unfortunately dismissed on 99 in the inaugural season, Voll was left



stranded on the score in 2025. Mandhana stitched together a massive 142-run partnership for the second wicket off 91 balls with Georgia Voll (54* off 42) after her opening partner Grace Harris (1 off 4) was dismissed cheaply.

DC's batting woes continue

Earlier, after being asked to bat first, DC endured a torrid start, losing two wickets in the form of Lizelle Lee and Laura Wolvaardt in the opening over. Skipper Jemimah Rodrigues, Marizanne Kapp, Niki Prasad and Minnu Mani also failed to help DC's cause, departing cheaply as the Delhi outfit slumped to 74 for 6 in 8.1 overs. Shafali, however, was at her destructive best, holding one end with her attacking batting. The opener played a stunning innings of 62 (41), with the help of five fours and four sixes in a counter-attacking display, rescuing DC from a precarious position of 74/6. Apart from her, 19-year-old debutant Lucy Hamilton played a quick-fire cameo of 36 (19) to guide DC to 166 in 20 overs.

Inter Milan wins at Udinese to fortify Serie A lead before facing Arsenal in Champions League

New Delhi. (Agency)

Inter Milan will be full of confidence when the Champions League resumes after consolidating its lead in Serie A with a 1-0 win at Udinese on Saturday. Lautaro Martínez scored in the first half and Inter moved six points clear of second-placed AC Milan and defending champion Napoli, which beat Sassuolo 1-0. Milan hosts lowly Lecce on Sunday.

Inter welcomes Arsenal in the Champions League on Tuesday. Arsenal tops the table having won all six of its matches. Inter, which has lost its past two, sits sixth. With that crucial match coming up, Cristian Chivu again rotated his squad on Saturday, with Pio Esposito partnering Lautaro. Those two combined in the 20th minute for the opening goal. Piotr Sebastian Zielinski played a through ball into the penalty area for Esposito to backheel it into the path of Lautaro, who muscled his way across before drilling into the bottom right

corner. Federico Dimarco thought he doubled Inter's lead in the 61st following another Esposito assist but it was ruled out for offside. High cost Napoli ended a run of three consecutive draws but it could have come at a cost.



Stanislav Lobotka scored his first goal in more than three years, volleying in a rebound in the seventh minute after Sassuolo goalkeeper Arijanet Muric could only parry a shot by Eljif Elmas.

Elmas and Napoli teammate Amir Rahmani came off injured in the second half.

Rahmani's will be more concerning as it

appeared to be a muscle issue in his left thigh, while Elmas felt dizzy after taking a knock to the head. Matteo Politano also

appeared to have a muscular problem in stoppage time but stayed on — albeit with little movement — because Napoli used up all of its substitutions. Napoli sits

dangerously close to the elimination zone in the Champions League table and visits Copenhagen on Tuesday. Shock loss

Fourth-placed Juventus surprisingly lost at relegation-threatened Cagliari 1-0. Cagliari scored in the 65th minute with a well worked set play. Instead of lifting a free kick into the area, Gianluca Gaetano sent it in low for Luca Mazzitelli to volley into the bottom corner. Mazzitelli almost gave away an early penalty for an apparent foul on Juventus midfielder Fabio Miretti but it was revoked on video review.

Australian Open: Sabalenka top favourite, but can Swiatek, Gauff take down the giant

The Black Caps have toured India for bilateral ODIs since 1989 but have never won a series in India and this is arguably their best opportunity to break that barren run.

INDORE. (Agency)

There is little doubt that Aryna Sabalenka will walk into the Australian Open as the woman to beat. Finishing 2025 as the world No.1 and opening the new season by successfully defending her Brisbane International crown, the Belarusian arrives at Melbourne Park brimming with confidence and momentum. With two Australian Open titles already to her name, Sabalenka looks primed for a third,

her power game perfectly suited to the hard courts that have become her fortress. Yet Grand Slam tennis has a way of humbling even the most dominant players, and Sabalenka's path will be anything but straightforward. The women's draw is stacked with challengers ready to test her supremacy. Coco Gauff's athleticism, Iga Swiatek's relentless baseline control, Elena Rybakina's firepower and Amanda Anisimova's shot-making all present genuine threats on their day.

Then there is Madison Keys, a name Sabalenka will not overlook lightly. It was Keys who brought an end to Sabalenka's remarkable hard-court run at Melbourne Park around this time last year, a reminder that in women's tennis, momentum can shift quickly. For all her dominance, Sabalenka knows the margins are fine — and the crown far from guaranteed.

HOW GOOD HAS SWIATEK BEEN?

Swiatek announced her dominance on grass in 2025, capturing the Wimbledon title in emphatic fashion by blanking Amanda

Anisimova 6-0, 6-0. That victory was more than just a title; it was a statement, proving her versatility and her ability to dictate play across surfaces. Yet as the 2026 season beckons, all eyes will be on her hard-court performances, where Swiatek has shown flashes of brilliance but also faced moments of vulnerability.

The Polish star concluded 2025 with a stellar 64-17 record, winning 79 percent of her matches on the WTA Tour. Her hard-court exploits included triumphs at the Cincinnati Masters and the Korea Open, the latter seeing her battle past Ekaterina Alexandrova 1-6,

7-6, 7-5 in a gripping three-set clash. Swiatek also reached the US Open quarterfinals, demonstrating her capacity to handle Grand Slam pressure, although a loss to Belinda Bencic in the United Cup final 6-3, 0-6, 3-6 highlighted the occasional challenges she faces on hard surfaces. Swiatek holds a slight career edge over Aryna Sabalenka, but their most memorable 2025 encounter came at Roland Garros, where Sabalenka ended Swiatek's long winning streak 7-6, 4-6, 6-0. Armed with power, precision, and unyielding hunger, Swiatek is primed to test Sabalenka again, promising a season of high-stakes, edge-of-the-seat battles.

GAUFF, A BIG THREAT

Gauff is shaping up as a formidable threat to Sabalenka, blending raw power, court craft, and fearless aggression that keeps opponents constantly guessing. The 21-year-old's rise in 2025 was nothing short of spectacular, particularly on hard courts, where her game matured into a seamless mix of precision, power, and relentless resilience.



Indian IT firms see shift away from discretionary work as RoI-led projects gain pace

New Delhi.(Agency)

India's top IT services firms say clients are increasingly approving technology projects based on return on investment rather than discretionary budgets. Infosys, Tata Consultancy Services (TCS) and HCLTech said artificial intelligence and automation are helping revive modernisation and transformation projects that were earlier put on hold, even as overall demand remains tight.

HCLTech said it delivered revenue growth in the December quarter despite what it described as a constrained demand environment, supported by AI-powered solutions and large-scale transformation programmes. "I believe there is little value in waiting for either historical or anticipated discretionary spending to resume. Instead, the focus should be on opportunity—identifying proactively where the spending is occurring and targeting those opportunities," HCLTech CEO C Vijayakumar said during the Q3 press conference. He added that the company is no longer waiting for discretionary spending to return to levels seen a few years ago or in the post-Covid period. "Traditional discretionary areas, like SaaS and some of these things, are not where a lot of spend is happening. But spending is happening in what I call day-minus-one work for AI. There is so much capex investment going into data centres, and there are a lot of professional services around that," he said. Additionally, Vijayakumar said spending is also happening on robotics and physical AI. "These are the areas—along with semiconductors and silicon for edge inferencing—where we see significant spend. We are really chasing where the money is getting invested." Wipro CEO Srinivas Palli also said the company is looking to service data centres. "Data centres are a big investment area. If you look at it, every year there is about a billion dollars of capital being spent on infrastructure for AI—whether it is data centres, GPUs and so on. By 2030, it is going to be \$3 billion per day," he said. He also joked: "And the interesting part is, soon there will be data centres in space. We've got to think about that too."

Infosys said the use of AI-driven software agents has made projects such as legacy modernisation more viable for clients. "If you take legacy modernisation, and you use software agents along with our expertise and knowledge, the whole economics from a client perspective becomes much better," Infosys CEO Salil Parekh said during the Q3 earnings press conference. "That allows a lot of these projects, which were not happening before, to start happening."

Mutual Fund: Eight NFOs open now; check all thematic funds to ETF FoFs

New Delhi.(Agency)

Despite volatile stock markets, the mutual fund industry in India continues to display vibrancy. As many as eight New Fund Offerings are open right now. These offer investors the opportunity to buy units of the scheme at Rs 10, which usually climbs after they hot the market. Three of the eight funds are Fund of Funds that are linked to gold and silver ETFs, thanks to the persistent surge in the price of these two commodities. Let's have a look at the details of each. Min investment: Rs. 1000/- and in multiples of Re. 1/- thereafter

Objective of scheme: The investment objective of the Scheme is to seek capital appreciation by investing in units of Gold ETF. However, there can be no assurance or guarantee that the investment objective of the Scheme will be achieved.

Exit Load: 0.25% if redeemed on or before 15 days from the allotment date. Nil if redeemed after 15 days from the allotment date

Min investment: Rs. 1000/- and in multiples of Re. 1/- thereafter Objective of scheme: The investment objective of the Scheme is to seek to generate returns by investing in units of Silver ETF. However, there can be no assurance that the investment objective of the Scheme will be realised.

Amid plans to induct Noel's son, Tata trust cancels meet

MUMBAI.(Agency)

The Sir Ratan Tata Trust (SRTT) cancelled its Saturday board meeting, which was expected to consider the induction of chairman Noel Tata's son, Neville Tata, as a trustee. In contrast, board meetings of Sir Dorabji Tata Trust (SDTT) and Tata Education and Development Trust (TEDT) proceeded as scheduled. The cancellation suggests that Neville's appointment may have been pushed back to give trustees more time for discussions—since appointing a trustee requires unanimous approval. No new date for the SRTT meeting has been notified. An email query to Tata Trusts on the cancellation of the board meeting received no response. Sir Ratan Tata Trust (SRTT), Sir Dorabji Tata Trust (SDTT), and Tata Education and Development Trust (TEDT) have several trustees in common. Except for Jehangir HC Jehangir and Jimmy Tata, the other SRTT trustees—Noel, Venu Srinivasan, Vijay Singh and Darius Khambata—also serve on SDTT's board and participated in its meeting on Saturday, people familiar with the matter said. Jimmy, Noel's older half-brother, usually does not attend SRTT meetings.

Saturday's development comes amid unresolved issues from the last round of inductions in Nov 2025 when the inductions of Neville and former Titan MD Bhaskar Bhat were approved by SDTT but failed to secure approval at SRTT. SDTT, together with SRTT, controls India's largest conglomerate, the Tata Group. At the Nov 11, 2025 SDTT meeting, Khambata proposed Neville's appointment, while Noel proposed Bhat, as TOI reported in its Nov 12 edition. Neither name was on the formal board agenda. All trustees of SDTT approved the appointments (Srinivasan did not attend the meeting as his term had expired).

Jewellery, coins, Sovereign Gold Bonds, gold ETFs, gold mutual funds, and digital gold may all mirror the same metal, yet each one produces a very different tax outcome. Read on to understand how gold taxation really works.

New Delhi.(Agency)

Gold prices are at record levels, and that is changing how Indians think about the metal. As prices climb higher, more households are buying gold than ever before, whether to protect savings, hedge uncertainty, or simply because gold still feels safer than most financial assets. For generations, buying gold in India was the simplest financial decision a household could make. People bought it, stored it, and forgot about it. There was little need to think beyond weight and

purity. That simplicity has quietly disappeared. Gold today comes wrapped in many forms. Jewellery, coins, Sovereign Gold Bonds, gold ETFs, gold mutual funds, and digital gold may all track the same metal, but they behave very differently once taxes enter the picture. Most investors realise this only at the point of sale, when the price looks great, but the post-tax outcome does not.

MANY SHADES OF GOLD TAXATION

"Indians invest in gold through several avenues today, including physical gold such as jewellery and coins, Sovereign Gold Bonds, gold ETFs, gold mutual funds and digital gold," says Jayant Manglik, Partner at Fortuna Asset Managers. He explains that although each instrument broadly tracks the price of gold, the tax results differ significantly. Physical and digital gold attract GST when purchased and capital gains when sold. ETFs and mutual funds are treated as financial assets. "Sovereign Gold Bonds are distinct because the interest is taxable,

but the capital gains at maturity are exempt from tax," he says.

Sneha Padhia, Partner for Direct Tax at Bhuta Shah and Co. LLP, says a large number of investors still assume all gold is



taxed identically. According to her, the biggest divide is between physical gold and what she calls paper gold.

"Physical gold, digital gold, gold ETFs and gold mutual funds are taxed similarly. Long term capital gains are taxed at 12.5 percent without indexation," she says. She adds that SGBs enjoy complete capital gains exemption at maturity if redeemed

with the RBI, a benefit that no other gold product offers.

WHY INVESTORS GO WRONG

Manglik believes the most common misunderstanding is the belief that holding periods do not matter. "Physical and digital gold require a longer holding period to qualify for long-term capital gains compared to gold ETFs and mutual funds," he says. He adds that selling early, even by a few months, can push the gains into the short-term category and trigger much higher taxes. "Long term gains are taxed as per prevailing rules, without indexation," he notes, and frequent changes in regulations have caused many investors to rely on outdated assumptions. Padhia sees the same pattern. "Most confusion arises because people think all paper gold is tax-free like SGBs," she says. She points out that investors also misinterpret digital gold and assume it functions like physical gold, even though documentation standards and cost calculations differ.

Budget 2026: What Is the Economic Survey And Why Does It Matter Key Facts Explained

New Delhi.(Agency)

The countdown to the Union Budget 2026 will officially begin with the presentation of the Economic Survey for FY2025-26, which Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman will table in Parliament on Thursday, January 29, 2026. Released every year a day before the Budget, the Economic Survey offers a detailed snapshot of India's economic health, key developments, and challenges faced over the past financial year. Prepared by the Department of Economic Affairs under the Ministry of Finance, the report plays a crucial role in setting the context for the government's budgetary decisions. While most Indians are familiar with the Annual Financial Statement, commonly known as the Budget, many are still unclear about what the Economic Survey is and why it plays such an important role in this yearly exercise. The Economic Survey is an annual report that takes a close look at how the Indian economy is performing. It is prepared by the Economic Division of the Department

of Economic Affairs under the Ministry of Finance, with guidance from the Chief Economic Adviser. It was first introduced in 1950-51 alongside the Union Budget. The Survey has been presented as a separate document since



1964. It offers the government's detailed assessment of the economy over the past financial year, covering key aspects such as economic growth, inflation, employment, trade, and the overall health of public finances. Who Brings Out the Economic Survey? The Economic Survey is put together by the Chief Economic Adviser of India

along with their team in the Ministry of Finance. Once ready, it is formally presented in Parliament by the Finance Minister, making it one of the key documents released ahead of the Union Budget each year. What Does the Economic Survey Tell Us?

The Economic Survey is structured in three parts, each offering valuable insights into India's economy. The first and most crucial section presents an overall review of key economic issues along with the Chief Economic Adviser's perspective, helping readers understand the government's view on the country's financial health. The second section focuses on sector-wise data, featuring detailed statistics provided by various ministries and departments. The third section dives into broader economic numbers, covering areas such as national income, production, employment, inflation, balance of trade, and export-import trends, giving a complete picture of the economy.

FII Selling Trend May Continue Till Some Positive Triggers Happen: Analysts

New Delhi.(Agency)

The foreign institutional investor (FII) selling trend may continue in India until some positive triggers for a market rally happen, analysts have said. The sustained selling by FIIs continued for the week ending January 16. The total FII selling for January (up to 16th) stood at Rs 22,529 crore.

"This month, FIIs were sellers on all days except one. The underperformance of India vis-a-vis other major markets is continuing in early 2026 also. Year-to-date (YTD) return from Nifty stands at -1.73 per cent," said Dr VK Vijayakumar, Chief Investment Strategist, Geojit Investments Ltd. A significant feature of the market behaviour in 2025 was that India's tepid performance last year (Nifty return of 10 per cent) was despite the massive DII investment of Rs 7.44 lakh crore, which completely eclipsed the total FII selling of Rs 166,283 crore. A key reason was the poor earnings growth and the consequent elevated valuations. The continuing suspense over the US-India trade agreement also impacted the sentiments, said analysts. "The AI trade which dominated stock market trend in 2025 is continuing in early 2026 also. A reversal of this trend might happen sometime in 2026," said Vijayakumar. Markets



largely consolidated last week amid mixed cues and ended almost unchanged. After a volatile start, benchmark indices remained range-bound in the subsequent sessions.

The Nifty and Sensex finally settled at 25,694.35 and 83,570.35, respectively. Broader indices moved largely in line with the benchmarks and ended with modest gains. "Optimism from better-than-expected Q3 earnings by select large-cap IT companies was offset by tariff-related uncertainties, geopolitical tensions, and continued foreign fund outflows," said Ajit Mishra-SVP, Research, Religare Broking Ltd. From a flows perspective, FIIs remained net sellers, extending their recent selling trend, he added. Next week is expected to be data-heavy and crucial for short-term market direction.

Will AI crash like the dot-com boom

Kolkata.(Agency)

In the late '90s, India fell in love with the internet. Neon-lit cybercafes were everywhere; companies were adding ".com" to their names to double valuations with little more than a URL and a pitch deck; investors believed they were sitting on a gold mine, dreaming of a future where clicks would replace commerce. Valuations soared. Startups with no revenue—and often no product—were going public. Then came 2000: the music stopped, and the mirage cleared. Trillions of dollars and inflated dreams evaporated. The dot-com bust didn't kill the internet—it killed the promise of an instant digital future. Instead, it cleared the runway for sustainable adoption. Out of that rubble rose Google, Amazon, and the foundations of the modern digital economy. Reality reset, driven by those who deliberately built for the future. The lesson is clear: most technology revolutions don't arrive

with a bang. They arrive disguised as slow, frustrating, incremental change. Hype cycles around technology are not new. Our amnesia around them seems to be. I first noticed AI entering enterprise use in deployable forms around 2013—embedded in chatbots, predictive analytics, and fraud detection systems. Years later, we have arrived at generative AI, a tremendous leap: systems that can create content, design workflows, write code, and even offer decision-making guidance. ChatGPT took the world by storm not just because it was powerful, but because it was accessible. Now, everyone can play. That level of unfettered access changed the conversation almost overnight. Artificial intelligence offers alluring dreams—promising to write better code, replace customer support, and even create unicorns run by a single founder and a dozen agents. But the enterprise has yet to catch up with the

dazzling headlines. Business-wide AI adoption is slower and more complex. It is often uneven and fragmented, with AI labs operating in isolated silos. This is not about plugging in a new tool; it is about rewiring an entire system—shifting how we work, learn, and even think.

Crash probability

The question is whether AI will crash like the dot-com bubble. The probability, I would argue, is around 33 per cent—not inevitable, but very possible. This is not alarmist. The ingredients are familiar: soaring valuations, inexperienced startups, overhyped demos, bold headlines, and investors chasing the next miracle without understanding the technology or its use cases. Many organisations remain stuck in pilot mode, with prototypes failing to translate into scaled impact—hobbled by incomplete data, a missing trust layer, and largely analog processes.

Tiger Global effect: Investment structures, exit valuations may alter

New Delhi.(Agency)

The Supreme Court's ruling denying tax treaty benefits to Mauritius-based entities of Tiger Global is expected to have far-reaching implications for venture capital (VC), private equity (PE) and foreign portfolio investors, potentially reshaping investment structures, exit valuations and deal timelines in India's startup ecosystem. Tax experts said the judgment marks a decisive shift towards a substance-over-form approach in treaty interpretation, significantly strengthening the tax department's ability to challenge offshore holding structures—including those earlier believed to be protected under grandfathering provisions.

The apex court held that mere possession of a Tax Residency Certificate (TRC) does not conclusively establish entitlement to treaty benefits, nor does it prevent tax authorities from examining whether intermediary entities were interposed primarily to avoid tax.

Impact on exits and valuations

Lokesh Shah, partner at CMS INDUSLAW, said the ruling would prompt PE, VC and FPI investors to re-examine their holding

structures and reassess exit-related tax exposure. "This risk will directly affect transaction structuring and startup exit valuations, including the need for tax gross-up and withholding protections, enhanced indemnities and other risk-allocation provisions. These factors are likely to extend deal negotiations and closure timelines," Shah said. Market participants noted that exit pricing—particularly in late-stage deals and secondary transactions—could be recalibrated to factor in potential capital gains tax exposure where treaty protection is uncertain. Venture capitalists and startup insiders said the judgment would not only discourage holding-company structures in Mauritius or Singapore, but also lead to tighter term sheets and higher fund holdbacks at exit. "This ruling doesn't stop investment, but it changes how risk is priced. Treaty structures without real substance will face more scrutiny, longer exits and lower net outcomes," said a venture capitalist at a domestic innovation fund. "Investors will respond with tighter tax clauses, holdbacks and more conservative

valuations. Founders may feel this most in the short term." Anurabha Sinha, founder and CEO of UClean, said setting aside a significant portion of exit proceeds in escrow is increasingly becoming standard



tax issue arises later. In several recent deals, that burden appears to be shifting towards founders or the startup itself," he said.

Substance over form

A key takeaway from the verdict is the court's clarification that the General Anti-Avoidance Rule (GAAR) can override treaty grandfathering. Experts said this could have significant implications for PE funds, hedge funds and FPIs using Mauritius- and Singapore-based structures, including for pre-2017 investments. The court also underscored the relevance of business intent in determining the substance of a transaction, drawing on principles laid down in the Vodafone ruling.

The judgment empowers tax authorities to independently examine treaty claims rather than rely solely on TRCs, reinforcing substance-over-form principles in cross-border transactions. Zeel Jambuwal, co-founder and partner at Aurtus, said the court's observations effectively extend the substance-over-form test to treaty eligibility itself.

Rupali Ganguly

Congratulates BJP-Mahayuti On BMC Win: 'Shows Faith In PM Modi's Leadership'

Popular television actress Rupali Ganguly on Saturday congratulated the BJP and its Mahayuti allies on their win in the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) elections, calling the mandate a reflection of Mumbai's faith in development and faith in Prime Minister Narendra Modi's leadership.

Rupali took to X, "Mumbai has made its choice loud and clear! Warm congratulations to BJP and Mahayuti on the BMC win. Our CM @Dev_Fadnavis ji's vision continues to guide Maharashtra forward." "This mandate shows Mumbai's faith in development, national pride and our PM @narendramodi Ji's leadership. #BMCResults #Mumbai #BJPWinsBMC," she added.

The BJP-led Mahayuti alliance took over the municipal corporation elections in Maharashtra on January 16 with Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis claiming victory in 25 of the 29 bodies. Elections were held for 2,869 seats across 893 wards in the state on Thursday, January 15, where over 1.03 crore voters participated in the civic polls this year.

Counting took place at 23 designated centres spread across Mumbai amid tight security arrangements and high police deployment. The process was held in each centre under the supervision of an Election Returning Officer. Talking about the actress, Rupali is one of the highest-paid television actresses in India and a member of the BJP. Best known for portraying Monisha Singh Sarabhai in the sitcom Sarabhai vs Sarabhai, the actress joined the party in 2024 and has been a vocal supporter of iconic leader Narendra Modi.

Rupali became a household name by playing Anupamaa Joshi in the drama Anupamaa. She made her acting debut at age seven, in her father's directorial venture Saahib in 1985. Rupali featured opposite Tapas Paul in her father's Bengali film Balidan. Despite the success of the film, she no longer had any further feat in Bengali cinema. The actress later had her breakthrough with her portrayal of Dr. Simran Chopra in the medical drama series Sanjivani: A Medical Boon. She also participated in Bigg Boss 1. The actress was also seen in Ek Packet Umeed and Parvarish - Kuchh Khatte Kuchh Meethi.

Rupali is currently seen in Anupamaa. The show is a remake of Star Jalsha's Bengali series Sreemoyee. It is one of the longest-running Indian television soap operas.

Rupali Ganguly plays the titular role and formerly starred Sudhanshu Pandey, Madalsa Sharma and Gaurav Khanna. Since October 2024, the series stars Rupali with Adrija Roy and Shivam Khajuria as second-generation lead. The show revolves around Anupamaa Shah, a selfless homemaker who reclaims her identity after being taken for granted by her family. After discovering her husband's infidelity, she chooses self-respect, independence, and personal growth, navigating relationships and societal expectations while redefining her role in life.



Namita Thapar

Calls xStep 'Magical' After Shark Tank India 5 Pitcher Tests Device On Vineeta Singh

Shark Tank India is back to keep viewers hooked with a fresh season full of innovative pitches, drama, insights and entertainment. Season 5 premiered on January 5, and in the latest episode, a Bengaluru-based entrepreneur impressed the sharks with xStep, a mobility device claiming to provide non-invasive treatment for paralysis and cerebral palsy.

Developed through 17 years of research by



Dr. Parag Gad and conceived during his PhD at UCLA, xStep is now being manufactured in India as of early 2025. Its impact has already crossed borders, including support for soldiers in Ukraine. Parag pitched the product before a panel of sharks, Namita Thapar, Vineeta Singh, Varun Alagh, Viraj Bahl and Kunal Bahl, seeking Rs 1 crore for 1 percent equity.

Dr. Parag Gad Left Sharks Stunned With His Mobility Device: xStep

Parag started his pitch with an emotional story. He shared, "Sharks, Khushi is a two-year-old girl. Let's listen to her growth milestones. At three months old, she couldn't move her head. At nine months old, she couldn't crawl. Finally, at one year, walking was just a dream to her. This is the reality of 25 lakh children in India, just like Khushi. The reason, cerebral palsy. A condition, where the brain fails to send signals to body parts, compromising their development. But it is said, where there's a will, there's a way. It's time to take xStep."

Calling xStep a revolutionary medical device, Dr. Parag Gad claimed it could treat paralysis caused by spinal cord injuries and cerebral palsy, all without invasive procedures. He wrapped up his pitch with: "When it comes to mobility treatment, it's time to take the next step with xStep." During the live demo, Parag tested the device on Vineeta Singh, who reacted with a simple yet impressive: "Great work."



Uorfi Javed Looks Unrecognizable In Throwback Photos From 2016, Says 'I Was So Obsessed With Fillers'



Uorfi Javed, known for her bold and unique fashion choices, has often spoken openly about fillers and cosmetic procedures. The actress and reality show star, who recently emerged as the winner of the reality show The Traitors on Amazon Prime, once again grabbed attention as she opened up about her obsession with fillers while sharing a set of throwback pictures from nearly a decade ago. She joined the viral 2016 throwback photos trend, and posted some lovely photos that left fans gushing over her.

Uorfi Javed Shares Photos From 2016

Taking to social media, Uorfi posted old photos from 2016, leaving many surprised as she looked completely different and almost unrecognizable. The throwback images captured a younger version of her, and in her caption, she wrote how she was obsessed with fillers in 2016. She captioned the post, "Postcard from 2016. Chubby cheeks, clear skin, long hair." The post stood out not just for the visual transformation but also for the honesty with which she addressed her cosmetic journey. Uorfi further revealed how deeply influenced she was by fillers at the time. Speaking openly about her obsession, she added, "I was so obsessed with fillers I used to outline my lips a lot." Check out the post below!

Soon after she shared the post, Pratik Sehajpal commented, "Cute," while Saisha Shinde wrote, "How far you've come and how much you've achieved! So inspiring @urf7i." Uorfi's sister Asfi commented, "The chubby cheeks (laughing emoji)! Looks cute though." Uorfi Javed recently won the reality show The Traitors, and has consistently remained in the spotlight for her unfiltered personality and unique fashion statements. She was also seen in the reality series Follow Karlo Yaar, which further showcased her candid and unapologetic approach to life and fame. She is currently seen on the reality show Splitsvilla, hosted by Karan Kundrra and Sunny Leone. She is seen as a Mischief Maker, along with Nia Sharma.

Bigg Boss 19 Winner Gaurav Khanna Recreates The 2016 Mannequin Challenge With Awez Darbar, Wife Akanksha



Bigg Boss 19 winner Gaurav Khanna recently teamed up with fellow contestants Abhishek Bajaj, Nagma Mirajkar, Awez Darbar and Ashnoor Kaur to recreate the viral Mannequin Challenge from 2016. They were also joined by Gaurav's wife, Akanksha Chamola and Awej's sister, Anam. The Mannequin Challenge, a viral internet trend that originated in 2016, has seen a resurgence in interest due to a growing nostalgia for the past. This trend involves participants freezing in place like mannequins while a camera captures them from different angles.

The video featured Akanksha planting a kiss on Gaurav's cheek, while Awej was frozen in a surprised pose. Anam was captured clicked a selfie with Nagma. Abhishek and Ashnoor, on the other hand, seemed to be engaged in a friendly fight. The side note read, "Mannequin challenge gives peak 2016, and since everyone is doing 2016 trends, I thought of making one with my biggboss buddies."

Gaurav Khanna Celebrates Wife Akanksha's Pre-Birthday Bash

Earlier this week, Gaurav Khanna hosted a pre-birthday bash for his wife, Akanksha. The couple twinned in red for the special occasion. While the Anupamaa actor dressed up in a suit, Akanksha looked ravishing in a shimmery short dress.

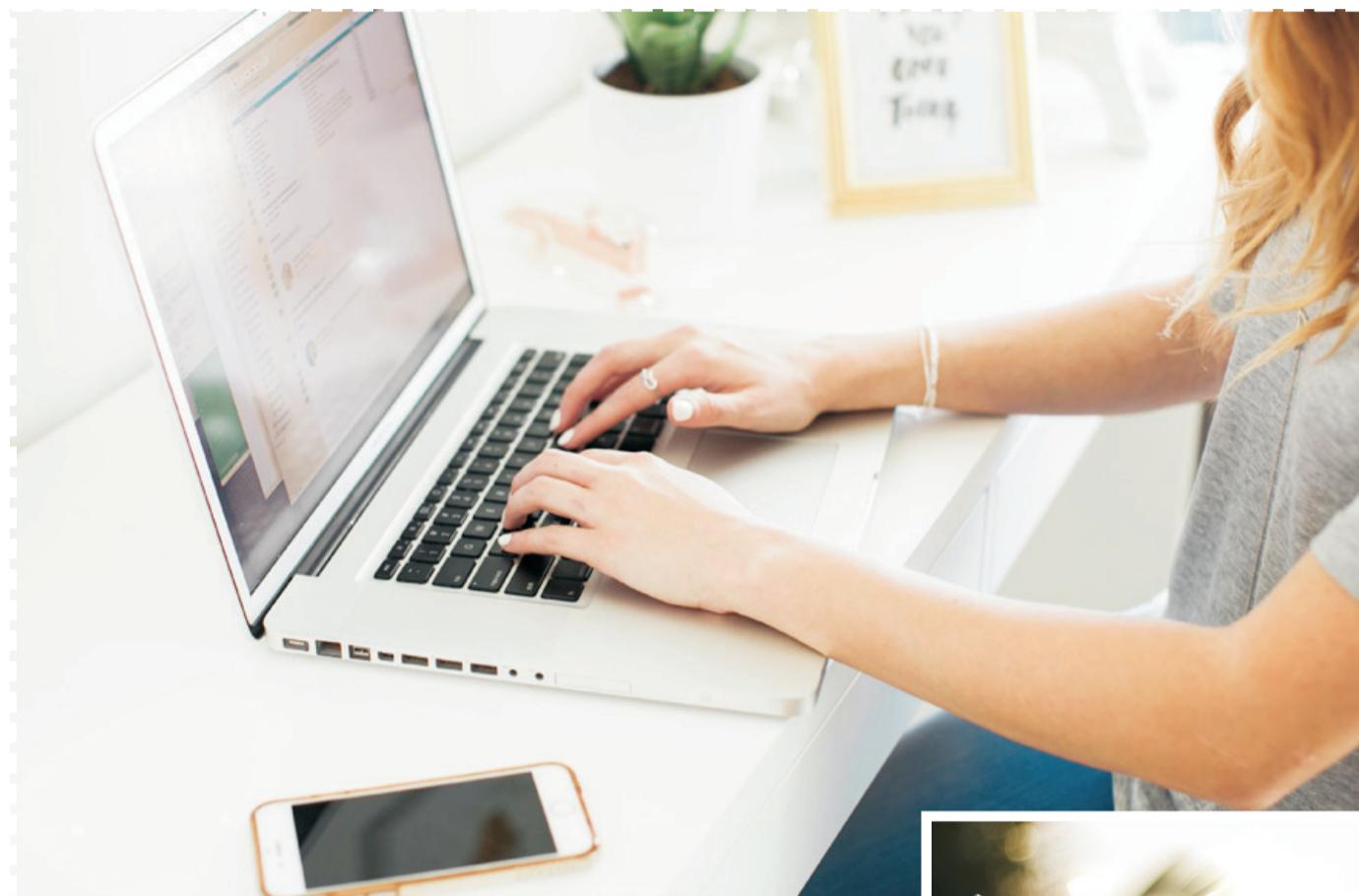
During the cake-cutting ceremony, Gaurav kept the moment light by cracking jokes with the paparazzi. As they sang the birthday song, he joked, "Humme se koi nahi jaa saka singing show mein." The photographers burst out laughing at Gaurav's comment.

As Akanksha went to share the cake with the paps, Gaurav playfully intervened and asked for a bite first. His wife handed him the piece, but the photographers requested a retake for a clearer shot. Gaurav promptly brought Akanksha back to the photo spot and posed again for the paps. Akanksha further stole the moment by giving Gaurav a sweet peck on the cheek.

Awez Darbar Shares Glimpses

Meanwhile, Awej Darbar shared some inside glimpses from the party on his Instagram Stories. The event was attended by Abhishek Bajaj, Ashnoor Kaur, Pranit More and more. They were seen grooving with the birthday girl.

10 tips for Email Etiquette



However, people often forget that they have to use a different, more formal tone for official email correspondence, and end up peppering their emails with too many emojis and abbreviations. Here are a few tips to keep in mind when you're sending out a work email.

1. INTRODUCTIONS ARE IMPORTANT: Always introduce yourself if you are writing to someone you don't know or haven't responded with previously. If you've got the sender's address from a mutual friend, mention that in your email. Introducing yourself is especially important if you're sending out a survey or questionnaire to people whose addresses you have got from a database.

2. ALWAYS RUN A SPELL-CHECK:

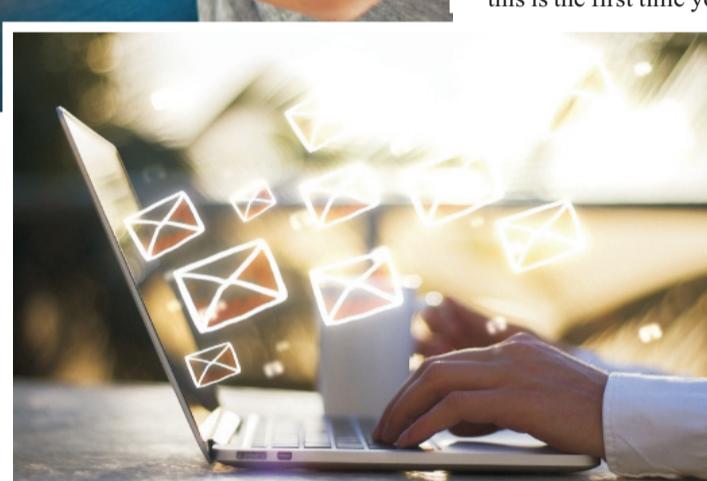
It's important to run a spell-check for official correspondence, especially if you're sending an email from your phone. You don't want the auto-correct feature to backfire on an official email, after all. Ensure your grammar and punctuation are correct as well.

3. USE THE REPLY-ALL FEATURE SPARINGLY:

Only use the reply-all feature for an email that really needs it. If the reply is meant for only one person, just reply to him/her. And don't use it to reply to a sender's greetings for the festive season — you could find yourself being blamed for starting an unnecessary email thread.

4. USE BCC FOR GENERIC MAILS:

Use the Bcc field for when you are sending out mails to a very large number of



people who may not all know each other. It's also a way to ensure that all your contacts' addresses are not out there for people unknown to them to access.

5. RESTRICT THE NUMBER OF ATTACHMENTS YOU SEND:



Send heavy files via file-hosting services so that you don't clog the recipient's inbox. You could also zip files or resize pictures. If you know you're sending an email to someone who accesses his/her inbox on the phone, don't send several attachments with it.

6. DON'T OVER-ABBREViate:

Don't use too many abbreviations or in your email, like FYI, PFA, PDF or FYR. It may confuse the recipient, who may also get the impression that you don't have the time to type out a proper email. If you must use them, restrict it only to the subject line.

7. FORMATTING FUNDAS:

Do not use all caps and bold fonts as this will give the recipient the impression that you are shouting at him/her. The same goes for underlining in the middle of a lot of text. Don't use fancy fonts or multiple font colours either.

8. WATCH YOUR TONE:

Always be careful about how your email sounds. It may be an official email, but it should not sound too abrupt. You shouldn't sound over-friendly either, especially if this is the first time you are corresponding with the recipient.

Moreover, don't send out an email if you're upset. Save it as a draft and re-read it when you're calmer.

9. FIX YOUR FORWARDS:

Make it a point to clean up forwards before you, in turn, forward them to other people. Not only does this

make the email look cleaner, but it also ensures that you don't give away anyone else's email addresses.

10. CHECK WHO YOU'RE SENDING AN EMAIL TO:

Always check the To field of an unsent email before you send it. You don't want

The digital age has made communication much easier and more hassle-free, what with several apps available for mobile phone chat.

the wrong email being sent to the wrong person.

What every official email should contain **Subject line:** This is the first thing that recipients will see in their inboxes and it will determine whether they will read it or not. It should be clear and direct.

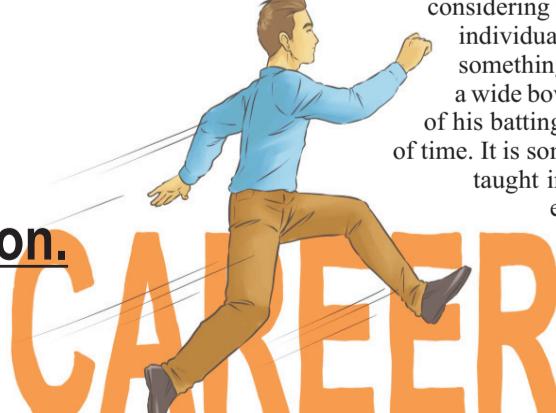
Salutation: Always start an email by greeting the recipient by using the word 'dear' followed by his/her name. If you aren't on a first-name basis with the recipient, use a title and a surname.

Concise body: Get straight to the point. If you have more than one issue to address, start with the most important, and list the rest point-by-point.

Sign off: Always sign off on your emails. Phrases like 'Yours sincerely' and 'yours faithfully' are acceptable for formal emails. 'Best regards' or 'kind regards' work in most other situations.

Why put your Career over Jobs

Three tips which can definitely boost and take your career to new heights are awareness, knowledge, experience implementation.



Rare people build careers and the rest are just doing their jobs. Taking a few simple steps could turn your job profile into a successful stepping stone of your career and you would reach where you always wanted to be. Well then, start right now to set your short-term and long-term goals and focus on the three tips mentioned below.

Awareness is a common word but is not used fully,

considering the benefits it can bring to an individual. For example, awareness is something which makes a spinner bowl a wide bowl when a batsman comes out of his batting crease at that short moment of time. It is something which is never really taught in schools and colleges but is equally important along with the knowledge and experience an individual has gained. Awareness is not only restricting yourself to grasping the work of your manager while playing a role of an assistant manager in an

organisation; it is much more than that. It requires compete alertness at all levels by an individual. Keeping an open mind is also crucial because it can help you complete a particular assignment in a couple of days rather than holding and stretching the same work for a week. A little awareness can increase your productivity

at work and take you to bigger roles at a quicker pace. With this, you can also learn from your superiors and even from your colleagues by experiencing the way they do the same work in a different way which may be better and quicker than what you usually do in certain circumstances.

Knowledge experience: After gaining theoretical knowledge and a degree at your college, with a little practical training you have landed in your dream job. When the real job begins, you have to start from scratch and need to grasp as much practical knowledge as you can about your job and experience will certainly come along with time. One can take additional responsibilities within an organisation depending upon one's likes, interests and passion. You can also voluntarily ask your superior about any extra helping hand they require after you are done with your work. A determination and dedication for work will definitely increase your knowledge and experience related to your job and will also help you gain the respect of your colleagues and superiors.

Attending seminars, visiting exhibitions and being social would increase the chances of meeting new people and discussing work related to your job profile would always be an asset. Sometimes, meeting new



people outside your work place could create new opportunities with higher chances of growth or an experimental idea you initiate in your free time, might be the beginning of something huge.

Technology is available easily everywhere. Wise use of the World Wide Web, television and other hi-tech sources could be a plus for an individual profile rather than wasting time and using it for the wrong reasons.

Implementation is the last step after your awareness and knowledge. In order to be an asset for an organisation, you need to execute all your work sincerely and reliably.

Reliability at work can increase your chances of being a team leader. If you get a chance to lead a group, try not to take all the responsibilities; rather distribute work equally and also try not to take all the credit after finishing the task. During implementation, try to create a comfortable atmosphere with your coworkers as it turns to be an important intangible factor of your growth plan. Once co-workers feel the pleasure to work with you, it becomes easier for you to lead them if an opportunity arises.

Last but not the least, I would like to share a beautiful thought from Steve Jobs who is behind the success of Apple Inc and which would keep you going in your entire professional life. "You can't connect the dots looking forward; you can only connect them looking backwards. So you have to trust that the dots will somehow connect in your future. You have to trust in something your gut, destiny, life, karma, whatever. This approach has never let me down, and it has made all the difference in my life."