

PM's Punjab visit: The significance of Deras in politics

Prime Minister
Narendra Modi's
recent visit to
Jalandhar, coinciding
with Sant Ravidas
Jayanti, highlighted
the enduring social
and political
significance of Deras
in Punjab ahead of the
2027 Assembly polls.

New Delhi.(Agency)
Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to Jalandhar on Sant Ravidas Jayanti today carried significance beyond religious observance, underlining the political weight of Deras in Punjab — especially among the Ravidasia and Ad-dharmi communities, a key segment of the state's Dalit population ahead of the 2027 Assembly polls. PM Modi reached Jalandhar around 3:45 pm and unveiled the Adampur airport, named after Guru Ravidas. From there, he virtually inaugurated the civil terminal at Halwara airport in Ludhiana, a project expected to benefit the region's industrial and agricultural sectors. He then travelled to Dera Sachkhand Ballan, reaching the premises around 4:30 pm, where he addressed a gathering before returning to the Adampur air base later in the evening. The visit was accompanied by extensive security arrangements.

WHY DERA SACHKHAND BALLAN MATTERS

Located about 18 km from Jalandhar, Dera

Sachkhand Ballan holds considerable influence among the Ravidasia community, a prominent Dalit group in Punjab. With Dalits making up nearly 32 per cent of the state's population — the highest proportion among Indian states — Deras often serve as powerful socio-religious as well as political platforms. Nearly 45 per cent of Punjab's Dalit population lives in the Doaba region, which elects 23 MLAs to the 117-member Assembly. Political observers estimate that while Dera Sachkhand Ballan does not openly endorse political parties, its social influence can shape outcomes in nearly 19 Assembly constituencies in the region.

PM Modi's visit also came soon after the Union government conferred the Padma Shri on Dera head Sant Nirjan Dass, a gesture widely seen as an attempt to deepen engagement with the Ravidasia community.

SHIFTING POLITICAL LOYALTIES

Historically, the Ad-dharmi and Ravidasia communities were considered a strong support base of the Congress. That equation began to shift with the rise of Kanshi Ram, when the



Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) emerged as an alternative, particularly when it appeared electorally competitive. The Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD), too, made selective inroads over the years, especially during the tenure of Parkash Singh Badal, through symbolic outreach and

welfare measures targeting sections such as Ramdasia Sikhs.

Electoral trends show a pragmatic voting pattern. In the 2019 Lok Sabha polls, the BSP managed to consolidate a notable share of Dalit votes in Jalandhar.

By 2024, however, broader national narratives around constitutional issues and political stability appeared to shift a section of Dalit voters back towards the Congress, sharply reducing the BSP's vote share. Census data reflects the internal diversity within these communities.

Among Ad-dharmis, the majority are recorded as Hindus, with smaller numbers identifying as Sikhs and Buddhists. In contrast, among Ramdasia/Ravidasia groups, a significant proportion is recorded as Sikh, alongside Hindus and a small Buddhist population. This religious and social diversity often translates into fluid political alignments, where electoral choices are shaped by perceived viability, leadership and prevailing narratives rather than symbolism alone.

BJP "Mastermind" Behind Sunetra Pawar's Appointment: Shiv Sena Editorial

An editorial in the Sena (UBT) mouthpiece 'Saamana' also alleged that the BJP leadership and Nationalist Congress Party leaders Sunil Tatkare and Praful Patel do not want the unification of the two NCP factions.

Mumbai.(Agency)
The Opposition Shiv Sena (UBT) on Monday claimed the BJP leadership was the "mastermind" behind NCP leader Sunetra Pawar taking oath as Maharashtra's deputy chief minister, just days after her husband Ajit Pawar's demise. An editorial in the Sena (UBT) mouthpiece 'Saamana' also alleged that the BJP leadership and Nationalist Congress Party leaders Sunil Tatkare and Praful Patel do not want the unification of the two NCP factions.

Sunetra Pawar took oath as the state's first woman deputy CM on Saturday, barely three days after NCP leader Ajit Pawar and four others died in an air crash at Baramati in Pune district, inviting criticism from some quarters over the pace at which the development took place. Rival NCP (SP) chief and Ajit Pawar's uncle Sharad Pawar on Saturday claimed that he had "no idea" about her swearing-in.

The 'Saamana' editorial said the question before Maharashtra is on whose wish did

Sunetra Pawar take oath as deputy CM because neither NCP (SP) president Sharad Pawar nor its working president Supriya Sule, nor members of the Pawar family were aware of this. Sunetra Pawar did not even give the slightest hint that she was leaving for Mumbai from Baramati to take



desire that these issues do not get sorted out," it added. After Ajit Pawar's death, some in the NCP became more ambitious and there was a race to take charge as the deputy CM within the party. There are differences between Patel and Tatkare. Sunetra Pawar was "installed" as deputy CM because the party of "Patil-Pawar" should not go to Patel, the editorial claimed.

Sunetra Pawar was made to steer the ship, but its engine and control are with Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis. Both Sunetra Pawar and Eknath Shinde-led Shiv Sena can maintain their existence at the mercy of Fadnavis, it charged.

The editorial further said Sunetra Pawar's deputy CM post should not be a mere ornamental. She may probably not be "gungi gudiyा" (mute doll) and work effectively, it

opined. The NCP is an alliance with the "sanatana-minded" BJP, and Sunetra Pawar taking oath even before the completion of her husband's post-last rites rituals does not fit into the Hindutva beliefs, it claimed.

Telangana got zero in Budget, says KTR; Deputy CM flags 'step-motherly' treatment

New Delhi .(Agency)
Senior BRS leader and party working president K T Rama Rao (KTR) on Sunday alleged that Telangana had suffered "grave injustice" in the Union Budget, accusing both the BJP-led Centre and the Congress-led state government of failing to secure any funds or projects for the state. Addressing the media, KTR said Telangana was left with "nothing but a big zero" in the Union Budget, holding Union ministers from the state and Chief Minister A Revanth Reddy responsible for what he termed a complete failure. He alleged that the BJP had not allocated a single rupee or sanctioned a single major project for Telangana for over a decade. KTR questioned what the Chief Minister had

"Something Fishy About The Crash": Shiv Sena, Congress On Ajit Pawar's Death

New Delhi .(Agency)

The death of Maharashtra Deputy Chief Minister and Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) president Ajit Pawar in a plane crash near Maharashtra's Baramati has triggered a political storm that shows little sign of abating. Opposition leaders have questioned the circumstances of the accident and alleged a conspiracy.

Pawar, 66, died on Wednesday when the aircraft he was travelling in crashed in Baramati, in Pune district. His death has left a vacuum within the NCP and injected uncertainty into Maharashtra politics, particularly at a time when talks of a

possible reunification between the two rival NCP factions had begun to gather momentum.

Shiv Sena (UBT) Rajya Sabha MP Sanjay Raut questioned the circumstances behind Pawar's death. "Questions should be raised about Ajit Pawar's accident. These questions are being raised even within his own party. There's something fishy about this. Something must have happened behind the scenes," he said. "Ajit Pawar was about to return to his old house, but the BJP said they had the irrigation files. Then a mysterious accident occurred. Ajit Pawar made a statement a few days ago that he had



some files on BJP leaders, and then accidents immediately followed. I've had my suspicions since day one. It was ingrained in my mind then. This means Ajit

Pawar decided to leave the NDA. These people are suspicious. I will raise this issue in Parliament," the Sena leader said.

Congress leader Vijay Wadettiwar questioned the speed with which political succession discussions began within the NCP following Pawar's death.

"Ajit Dada's sudden death could be a conspiracy. This is a plot, and it should be investigated. A conspiracy was hatched somewhere to prevent the two NCP factions from coming together, and that's why the Deputy Chief Minister's post was filled in such a hurry. Politics has become very dirty."

Union Budget 2026-27 will give new momentum to UP's development: CM Yogi

The Sikh Times

Lucknow: February 2: Addressing a press conference on Monday on the Union Budget 2026-27, Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath said that under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the development journey undertaken by the country over the past 11 years is now clearly visible at the grassroots level. He described the budget as a balanced document of reform, growth and fiscal discipline, which will not only contribute to building a New India but will also provide Uttar Pradesh with new opportunities for development, investment and employment. The Chief Minister expressed confidence that the Union Budget 2026-27 will enable Uttar Pradesh to play a leading role in achieving the goal of 'Viksit Bharat-2047'. CM said, "The budget clearly reflects balanced integration of reform, growth and fiscal discipline. By weaving these three elements together, the budget lays a

strong foundation for building a powerful and self-reliant India while connecting future generations. It has been prepared keeping in mind the aspirations of farmers, youth, women and the poor. Naturally, it opens new avenues to meet the expectations and development needs of Uttar Pradesh, the most populous state in the country." He further added that one of the most significant and far-reaching provisions in the budget is the allocation of ₹10,000 crore for MSMEs. Uttar Pradesh leads the country in this sector and has the largest MSME base in India. Currently, nearly 96 lakh MSME units are active in the state, providing direct or indirect livelihoods to around 3 crore people. He said this fund will be especially crucial for the ODOP (One District One Product) initiative, which Uttar Pradesh has successfully promoted by linking it with branding, design, packaging and exports. The budget will pave the way for MSMEs to adopt new technologies, skill training, modern

packaging and access to global export markets. The Chief Minister said, "The announcement of a massive infrastructure fund of ₹12.20 lakh crore will play a decisive role in accelerating infrastructure development in Uttar Pradesh, strengthening connectivity and energizing key sectors. Both the Eastern and Western Dedicated Freight Corridors pass through the state, leading to the development of the country's largest logistics hub within Uttar Pradesh. This will directly benefit industry, trade and employment generation in the state. CM Yogi said that Uttar Pradesh will play a crucial role among the 20 inland waterways announced in the country. India's first inland waterway between Varanasi and Haldia has already become operational and proposals have been prepared to extend waterways to Prayagraj and the Yamuna River. Strengthening cargo movement through the development of a ship repair and maintenance ecosystem, especially in Varanasi, will further

reinforce the state's inland waterway network, significantly reducing logistics costs and making transportation more efficient. Talking about the rail connectivity, CM said, "Out of the seven high-speed rail corridors announced in the budget, two major corridors will pass through Uttar Pradesh. Under these projects, trains will run at speeds of 300 to 500 km per hour, providing the state with fast, modern and world-class rail connectivity. This will not only drastically reduce travel time but also boost industrial, tourism and commercial activities." CM also said that the budget has further strengthened Uttar Pradesh's potential in the biopharma sector. The process of developing a bulk drug park over nearly 1,200 acres in Lalitpur has been expedited, while work on a medical device park in the Yamuna Authority area of Gautam Buddha Nagar has reached an advanced stage. A provision of ₹10,000 crore for the biopharma sector will help establish India

as a global pharma hub. The upcoming pharma conclave in Lucknow, with participation from stakeholders across the country, reflects UP's readiness for investment, innovation and expansion in this sector. While elaborating on data center investments, CM says, "Steps taken by the central government to develop India as a data center hub will give Uttar Pradesh a new direction. Data centers with investments exceeding ₹22,000 crore are being established in the state. So far, data centers with a capacity of about 700 MW have been set up and construction work is progressing rapidly. The funds earmarked for this sector will play a key role in establishing UP as a national data center hub." He also added that the announcement of the 'Mahatma Gandhi Gram Swaraj Yojana' will benefit Uttar Pradesh the most, as the state has the largest number of gram panchayats and a vast rural population. With over 105,000 revenue villages, UP has immense potential for effective

implementation of this scheme. The initiative will help connect rural products to global marketing networks, ensuring better prices for artisans and rural entrepreneurs. CM Yogi said that if the government ensures basic facilities and a robust security system, any religious or historical center can naturally become a world-class tourist destination. The unprecedented success of the Magh Mela has highlighted Uttar Pradesh's immense tourism potential. Earlier, the Magh Mela was largely limited to Kalpavas and attracted only a few lakh devotees, but this year it broke all previous records in terms of footfall. About the state tourism, CM said that the Union Budget 2026-27 provides for the development of 15 archaeological sites across the country, two of which are in Uttar Pradesh — Sarnath (Varanasi) and Hastinapur (Meerut). Development of these historical and mythological sites will give fresh impetus to the state's tourism sector.

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News box

3 lure man into car with fake ride offer, rob him in Gurgaon; arrested

Gurgaon.(Agency)

Three men have been arrested for allegedly assaulting a 42-year-old commuter and robbing him of Rs 25,000 after luring him into a car on the pretext of offering a ride. According to police, the incident took place on Jan 28 when the victim had come to the city for office work. Around 6pm, he was waiting for a bus to Dharuhera when a Swift Dzire car with four youths inside stopped near him. The driver offered to drop him for Rs 50, following which the man got into the vehicle. After travelling some distance, the occupants allegedly began assaulting the man. During the attack, they snatched his wallet, robbed him of Rs 24,000 in cash, and forced him to transfer Rs 1,000 through UPI. After committing the crime, the accused abandoned him on the road and fled, police said. The victim approached the Naharpur Rupa police post under the Sadar police station the next day and submitted a written complaint, following which an FIR was registered under the sections of assault and snatching. A police team conducted raids and arrested three accused from different locations in Gurgaon on Saturday. Those arrested include Ratan Singh Shekhawat (26) and Raghu Shekhawat (21), both residents of Jaipur, and Guddu Khan (25), a resident of Kotputli in Rajasthan. Police seized the car used in the crime and recovered Rs 6,000 in cash from the accused. During interrogation, police found that Ratan Singh works as a taxi driver in the city, while Guddu Khan is employed with a private company in Kurukshetra. A senior officer said the accused had allegedly premeditated the crime and targeted the victim by posing as passengers offering a cheap ride.

Speeding truck kills scooter rider near Jharsa Chowk; driver absconds

Gurgaon.(Agency)

A 21-year-old scooter rider was killed after a speeding truck hit him near Jharsa Chowk, close to Sector 15, around midnight on Friday. The truck driver fled the spot immediately after the accident, leaving the man critically injured on the road. The deceased was identified as Yash Chaudhary, a resident of Heera Nagar. According to police and eyewitnesses, the accident occurred around 11.40 pm when Yash was riding his black scooter and exiting Jharsa Chowk. A truck approaching from behind allegedly rammed into the scooter at high speed.

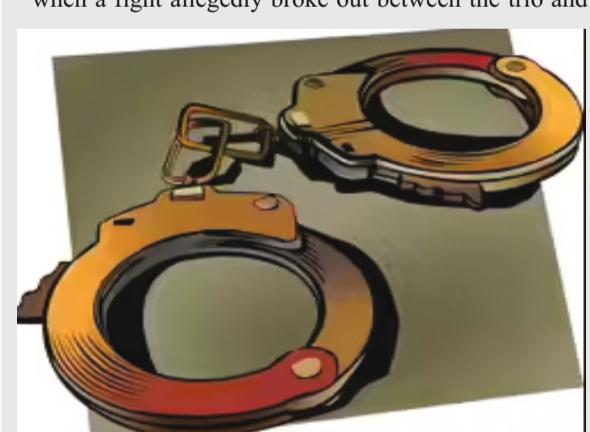
The impact threw Yash off balance, causing him to fall in front of the truck. Eyewitnesses said one of the truck's wheels also ran over him, resulting in severe injuries to his head and face. Passers-by rushed to help the injured youth. A Zomato delivery executive who witnessed the aftermath said the scooter was badly damaged and the rider suffered a serious head injury as he was not wearing a helmet. People at the spot immediately alerted an ambulance, which took him to the nearest hospital, where doctors declared him dead on arrival. Police teams reached the scene soon after and cleared the damaged scooter from the road. Using the vehicle's registration number, police contacted the owner. The identity of the victim was confirmed on Saturday morning after the owner reached the police station.

"CCTV cameras are installed near Jharsa Chowk. Footage from the area will be examined and statements of eyewitnesses will be recorded. Based on the evidence, further action will be taken," an officer said.

Ghaziabad dhaba owner who stabbed 2 to death held

Ghaziabad.(Agency)

The 42-year-old owner of the dhaba where two men were killed and another injured in a clash was arrested on Sunday. A fight had broken out between three friends and the staff over a delay in service at the dhaba in Khoda. According to police, Dharmendra Sharma, a resident of Etah, runs the dhaba called Vaishnav Pure Vegetarian Restaurant on Ambedkar Road in Khoda colony's Ajanta Park area where the incident took place. Around 10pm on Friday night, friends Shri Pal, Satyam Kumar and Anurag Kumar went to the dhaba for dinner. They were drinking in an e-rickshaw outside the dhaba when a fight allegedly broke out between the trio and



dhaba staff. The friends were brutally beaten and stabbed by the dhaba staff, police said. They were all brought to a hospital in Delhi for treatment, where Satyam and Shripal were later declared dead. Anurag is still undergoing treatment in Delhi. Shri Pal's brother Gopal Singh later filed a complaint in the case. An FIR was subsequently registered against multiple persons under BNS sections 103 (murder), 109 (attempt to murder), 191(2) (rioting), 191(3) (rioting armed with deadly weapon), and 190 (every member of unlawful assembly guilty of offence committed in prosecution of common object) at Khoda police station, said DCP (trans-Hindon) Nitish Patil. During interrogation, Dharmendra told cops that the three friends had gotten into an argument with one of the workers, Nagesh, over ordering food. One of the victims allegedly slapped Nagesh, and then returned to a lane near the dhaba.

Dharmendra, Nagesh and other workers became agitated and a group of them decided to attack the trio with sticks and knives.

Gurgaon.(Agency)

Narrow motorable roads, parking violations and house ramps and electrical installations occupying the internal stretches across the city — these formed part of the findings of a three-member joint commission constituted on the directions of the Punjab and Haryana high court. On Saturday, the commission conducted the physical inspection of internal residential roads in parts of Gurgaon to verify their actual width and condition, a key issue in the public interest litigation (PIL) challenging Haryana's stilt-plus-four (S+4) construction policy. The commission's findings are expected to play a crucial role when the HC hears the matter next on Feb 17, with potential implications for urban planning enforcement across Gurgaon and the wider NCR. The panel visited around eight locations — six in DLF I and two in Sector 28 — measuring the metalled

carriageway and the distance between opposing houses. Sources said the HC's order pertains specifically to two locations inspected during the exercise. According to officials familiar with the inspection, roads in DLF I have a wall-to-wall width of about 12 metres, but the motorable, metalled portion on the ground was found to range between four metres and 4.8 metres. In Sector 28, while the sanctioned right of way — the legal privilege of a road user — is 10 metres, the metalled carriageway measured only 3.9 metres to 4 metres at various points. The commission's report, supported by on-site photographs, notes that vehicles parked along the narrow carriageways severely restrict movement, making it difficult for two cars to pass simultaneously. It also records that although the overall corridor between boundary walls measures 10 to 12 metres, a significant portion is occupied by house ramps,

electrical installations, sewerage and drainage lines, water pipelines and trees, leaving limited space for vehicular movement. Representatives of the Haryana govt, the town and country

Sheel Nagu and Justice Sanjiv Berry observed that rival claims over road widths could not be resolved without a spot inspection to establish ground realities. The road-width dispute lies at the heart of the PIL against the S+4 policy. Petitioners have argued that "road" should mean the motorable carriageway available for vehicles, not the entire right of way that includes green verges and service areas. They have claimed that narrow carriageways hamper the movement of fire tenders, ambulances and garbage collection vehicles, posing safety risks in densely populated neighbourhoods.

The petition also alleges that vertical densification triggered by the S+4 policy has worsened traffic congestion, parking shortages and pressure on civic infrastructure, while unauthorised ramps and encroachments have steadily reduced usable road space.

UP man searches online for ways to die, then sets himself on fire; 'He spent 15 days looking for quick, painless methods'

Noida.(Agency)

A 25-year-old man died after allegedly dousing himself in petrol and setting himself on fire in Modinagar on Saturday. Madhur Yadav, police said, had spent around 15 days searching online for ways to die quickly and with less pain, including whether to hang himself or burn alive. While the police are suspecting suicide, Madhur's family has alleged it was a case of murder.

A resident of Mangal Vihar Colony in Modinagar, Madhur had completed training for a stenographer's job and was awaiting a joining letter for a post in the Rajasthan High Court. His father, Bijendra Yadav, is a section officer in the irrigation department.

Amit Saxena, ACP (Modinagar), said that the incident occurred around 8.30pm on Saturday. "Madhur left home and went to a secluded place 2km away. There, he poured petrol on himself and set himself on fire," he added. But before setting himself ablaze, Madhur undressed himself and folded his clothes nearby. "Some passersby saw him and took him to a nearby hospital. They also informed police. Later, he was sent to Safdarjung Hospital in Delhi, where he succumbed to his injuries," Saxena said. Police said around 80% of his body was burnt. According to a senior officer, Madhur was in a relationship with a woman, but his family was not ready for his marriage. The officer said that during Diwali last year, he had set fire to his hand, and had even blocked the numbers of his mother and other family members on his phone a few days ago.

"We are scanning his mobile phone. Initial investigation revealed that Madhur searched for 15 days for suicide methods that caused less pain. He also watched more than 25 such videos. Police found chats on his phone, which are being examined. The case is being investigated from all angles," the officer said. The family, however, alleged that Madhur was murdered.

His father, Jitendra Yadav, said he called Madhur at night and was told that he was at Bhagat Singh Chowk in

Parked cars, house ramps & utilities shrink roads in Gurgaon, finds Punjab and Haryana high court panel



planning department, the district legal services authority and counsels for the petitioner were present during the site visit. The panel was formed after a division bench led by Chief Justice

Caved-in footpath and debris make key stretch in Gurgaon unsafe for pedestrians

Gurgaon.(Agency)

Walking along Sushil Aima Marg, which connects Old Delhi-Gurgaon Road with Rezang La Chowk, has become increasingly unsafe for pedestrians, with large stretches of the pavement broken, uneven, or partially collapsed. The footpath, meant to provide a safe walking corridor, is now barely usable, forcing pedestrians to step onto the main road alongside moving traffic. Residents said the condition of the pavement deteriorated as the Leg-1 drain running alongside it weakened over time. In some places, portions of the footpath have caved in near the drain. Loose bricks, broken tiles, and construction debris are scattered across the stretch, while garbage piles have also accumulated along the side. Stray cattle and dogs frequently use the damaged stretch, adding to the challenges faced by pedestrians. The pavement is not serving its purpose at all. Sections near the drain

have collapsed, and the surface has become unsafe," said a resident of Sector 22, Sumit Nain. Apart from structural damage, residents pointed to encroachments and repeated digging work



along the pavement that have further reduced walking space. The uneven surface makes it difficult for elderly people, children, and those with mobility

issues to move safely. Residents also flagged the lack of consistent maintenance. "The attitude of civic authorities towards pedestrians is the most discouraging. Everywhere, encroachment is allowed. Agencies do not appear sufficiently focused on pedestrian safety in Gurgaon," said vice-president of Sector 23 RWA, Bhawani Shankar Tripathy. In addition, fallen tree branches remain unattended in several spots. Residents said this not only reduces the already limited walking space but also affects hygiene. Responding to the concerns, a GMDA official said the authority's enforcement wing regularly conducts anti-encroachment drives to reclaim public spaces. He added that a new master drain will be constructed at the site soon, following which the existing footpath will be removed and rebuilt to ensure pedestrian safety.

Just 2 'moderate' days: Gurgaon saw worst Jan air in 9 years

Gurgaon.(Agency)

The city has logged the worst Jan air in nine years — there were no 'satisfactory' and 'good' air days; just two 'moderate' days and the air quality index (AQI) breached 300 mark on 16 days of the month, one of which neared 400. The most polluted Jan in recent years offered virtually no respite, with most days stuck in the 'poor' or 'very poor' range in the city. The city recorded a monthly average AQI of 302, firmly in the very poor category. Average AQI for Jan 2016 was 308 and for Jan 2017, it was 276. This — the Jan average this year — surpassed the previous Jan peak of 263.9 in 2021 and marked a sharp deterioration from Jan 2025's average of around 204, data compiled from daily readings between 2016 and 2025 shows. "The absence of 'satisfactory' air days indicates that this is no longer a winter season problem but a serious environmental crisis. It is necessary that immediate steps

are taken to control emissions, along with more serious public health warnings and long-term air quality planning for urban areas," critical care and pulmonology head at Gurgaon's CK Birla Hospital Dr Kuldeep Kumar Grover told TOI.

Prolonged polluted spells were observed through the middle and latter half of the month, when readings repeatedly hovered above 350. Jan averages over the years highlight how steep this year's spike was. The city recorded about 255 in 2018, 255 in 2019, dipped to nearly 214 in 2020, rose to around 264 in 2021, fell to roughly 234 in 2022, climbed to about 268 in 2023, hovered near 252 in 2024, dropped to around 204 in 2025, before jumping to 302 this winter. For residents, the numbers mean nearly the entire month was spent breathing unhealthy air, wiping out improvements seen in recent years and pushing Jan pollution to its highest level in at least eight winters. The data

underscores a deeper concern: without sustained action on transport emissions, dust control and regional coordination, extreme winter air is fast becoming the norm rather than the exception. Grover (CK Birla Hospital) added, "Jan's air quality data from Gurgaon is serious and indicates a serious health warning. A monthly average AQI of 302 and several days around 350-400 indicates that the city breathed life-threatening air for several days without any chance of a recovery period. This poses an increase in the risk of respiratory infections, asthma attacks, heart attacks, strokes and chronic lung damage, particularly in children, the elderly, and those with pre-existing conditions." According to experts, the surge reflects a familiar pattern of adverse winter meteorology layered over steady local emissions. A senior official from Haryana State Pollution Control Board said.

Broken drainage links and rampant encroachments: Survey finds Najafgarh jheel under ecological stress

Ghaziabad.(Agency)

Disrupted drainage connectivity, encroachment pressures and the presence of globally threatened raptor species across the transboundary wetland spanning Haryana and Delhi — Najafgarh jheel is under ecological stress. The findings are part of a preliminary scientific assessment of Najafgarh jheel by a two-member team from National Centre for Sustainable Coastal Management (NCSCM). The exercise involved GPS-based ground mapping, visual documentation and qualitative assessment of land use and biodiversity to delineate the wetland's hydrological and ecological boundaries. The findings emerged from a two-day reconnaissance survey conducted on Nov 19 and 20, 2025, by the NCSCM team, comprising Dr Subbareddy Bonthu and Dr Hariharan G, along with officials from Delhi's irrigation and flood control department and Haryana's GMDA. The matter pertaining

to Najafgarh jheel is being heard by National Green Tribunal (NGT). The case arises from an application filed by Indian National Trust for Art and Cultural Heritage (INTACH) seeking protection and restoration of Najafgarh Jheel. The survey comes after NGT sought a report from the govt after INTACH sought compliance with the tribunal's Feb 2017 order to "designate Najafgarh Jheel as a wetland". The assessment recorded structural disruptions in natural drainage.

While Leg-2 (Badshapur drain) showed near-complete connectivity with the Najafgarh Drain, Leg-1 and Leg-3 were incomplete, resulting in disrupted conveyance and altered wetland hydrodynamics. GPS tagging identified multiple inflow points from urban run-off channels, while spatial observations revealed heterogeneous land-use patterns, including residential and industrial development, agriculture and flood-control structures, with cumulative anthropogenic pressures leading to discernible encroachment and hydrological modification," it stated.

On biodiversity, the survey confirmed the presence of globally threatened raptors, including the Steppe Eagle (Aquila nipalensis), Greater Spotted Eagle (Clanga clanga) and Imperial Eagle (Aquila heliaca), reinforcing Najafgarh Jheel's role along the Central Asian Flyway as a key staging, roosting and wintering habitat. Meanwhile, NGT on Jan 19 granted the Union ministry of

environment, forest and climate change (MoEF&CC) time until March 2026 to submit the final boundary delineation and ecological assessment. MoEF&CC informed the NGT that interim reports prepared earlier by (Wetlands International South Asia) WISA and World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) India are being revaluated by NCSCM. The order was passed by a bench headed by NGT chairperson Justice Prakash Srivastava, along with expert member Dr A Senthil Vel. The matter will next be heard on April 8, 2026.

In an additional affidavit dated Nov 26, 2025, the ministry said a preliminary scientific assessment was received from NCSCM on Nov 25, 2015 following the field survey. During the hearing, MoEF&CC counsel sought time to clarify whether the annexed document reflected only field observations or constituted NCSCM's preliminary report, adding that the final scientific assessment

would be completed by March 2026. The tribunal also directed the ministry to place WISA and WWF.

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Union Budget 2026-27 will give new momentum to UP's development: CM Yogi

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Other sites of historical and religious importance will also be developed on similar lines, further strengthening tourism and accelerating overall development. CM says, "The announcement of semiconductor parks in the budget will directly benefit Uttar Pradesh. The state has already received several major investment proposals in this sector, and the budget announcement will help accelerate and implement them. This will establish UP as a strong center for semiconductor manufacturing." To further strengthen tourism, a special nationwide campaign has been launched to promote tourist guides, under which 10,000 guides will receive training and skill upgrades. This will enhance facilities at tourist destinations and create new employment opportunities at the local level. The Chief Minister also mentioned that tourist site rankings have been released, based on which several centers in UP are being developed. The Chief Minister said that

Uttar Pradesh has established itself as a strong and leading state in electronic manufacturing. About 55 percent of the country's total mobile manufacturing takes place in UP, while nearly 60 percent of electronic component manufacturing is now done in the state. Currently, an electronic manufacturing ecosystem worth around 22 lakh crore has taken shape in Uttar Pradesh, directly benefiting the state's economy, investment climate and employment generation. CM said about the infrastructure development that the budget includes an important announcement for it in the cities with populations exceeding 5 lakh. Uttar Pradesh has 762 urban local bodies, of which around 200 have populations of five lakh or more, including 17 municipal corporations. This initiative will help develop modern, well-planned and citizen-friendly urban infrastructure, significantly improving the quality of urban life. CM also added that the budget has taken concrete and effective steps to enhance the capacity of district hospitals. Uttar Pradesh is steadily progressing towards the

NAME CHANGE

It is for general information that I, ABSAR ALAM S/o ABDUR RASID MONDAL R/o 3180, 2nd Floor, Street No-2, Dispensary Wali Gali, Sangataran, Pahan Ganj, Swami Ram Tirth Nagar, Central Delhi, Delhi-110055, declare that name of my father has been wrongly written as ABDUL RASHEED MONDAL in my Passport No. N4612340 and ABDUL RASHID MONDAL in my Driving Licence No. DL-062010021609. The actual name of my father is ABDUR RASID MONDAL, which may be amended accordingly.

NAME CHANGE

I, Mohd Saifullah S/o Jabbir R/o 136, old Modi Colony, Modipuram, Meerut, Meerut, Uttar Pradesh - 250101, have changed the name of my minor daughter Bibi Khushnadi aged 16 years and she shall hereafter be known as GULWASHI.

NAME CHANGE

I, Rishabh Kumar S/o Shiv Kumar Sharma alias Shiv Kumar S/o Prakash Chand, R/o A-16, Avasik Colony, Hapur, Sanjay Vihar meenut road, Hapur, Ghazibabad, Uttar Pradesh-245101 have change my name and shall hereafter be known as SHIV KUMAR.

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NEWS BOX

Russian drone attack on bus carrying mine workers in Ukraine's Dnipropetrovsk kills 12

KYIV. (Agency)

A Russian drone attack on a bus carrying mine workers in Ukraine's central-eastern Dnipropetrovsk region Sunday killed at least 12 people, officials said. The bus was driving in the vicinity of Ternivka, a town about 65 kilometres (40 miles) from the front line, according to police. DTEK, Ukraine's largest private energy firm, said those killed were travelling from one of its mining facilities in the region after they had finished their shift. Images published by Ukraine's state emergency service showed what appeared to be an empty bus, its side windows shattered and windscreens hanging from the front. "The enemy drone hit near a company shuttle bus in the Pavlograd district. Preliminarily, 12 people were killed and seven more were wounded," the head of the regional military administration, Oleksandr Ganzha, said on Telegram. AFP was not able to immediately verify the circumstances of the attack. An earlier drone attack in the region overnight killed a man and a woman in the central city of Dnipro, Ganzha said in an earlier post. The attacks came the same day a unilateral reduction in Russian strikes on Ukraine announced by US President Donald Trump was due to end. Trump said Thursday that Putin had agreed to stop strikes on Kyiv and "various towns" during cold weather. The terms of his agreement with Russian President Vladimir Putin were not clear, and the Kremlin did not link the alleged truce to the weather. Earlier Sunday, a Russian drone struck a maternity hospital in Ukraine's southern Zaporizhia region, wounding at least seven people, including two women receiving a medical examination, the region's governor said.

Nvidia CEO Denies Being "Unhappy" With OpenAI, Reaffirms Plans For Investment

World. (Agency)

Nvidia plans to make a "huge" investment into OpenAI, probably its largest ever, CEO Jensen Huang said on Saturday, denying he was unhappy with the ChatGPT maker. The chipmaker in September announced plans to invest up to \$100 billion in OpenAI, a deal that would give OpenAI the cash and access it needs to buy advanced chips that are key to maintaining its dominance in an increasingly competitive landscape. The Wall Street Journal reported on Friday that the plan had stalled after some inside the chip giant expressed doubts about the deal. The report said Huang had privately underlined to industry associates in recent months that the original \$100 billion agreement was non-binding and not finalised. Huang has also privately criticised what he has described as a lack of discipline in OpenAI's business approach and expressed concern about the competition it faces from the likes of Alphabet's GOOGL. O Google and Anthropic, the WSJ said. Speaking to reporters in Taipei, Huang said it was "nonsense" to say he was unhappy with OpenAI. "We are going to make a huge investment in OpenAI, the work that they do is incredible, they are one of the most consequential companies of our time and I really love working with Sam," he said, referring to OpenAI CEO Sam Altman. "Sam is closing the round (of investment) and we will absolutely be involved," Huang added. "We will invest a great deal of money, probably the largest investment we've ever made." Asked whether it would be over \$100 billion, he said: "No, no, nothing like that". It was up to Altman to announce how much he wanted to raise, Huang added.

US Partial Shutdown May End On Tuesday. How It Differs From Full Cease

World. (Agency)

The partial government shutdown is vastly different from the record closure in the fall. That is mostly because this shutdown, which started Saturday, does not include the whole of government and may not last long, even as it now drags into the new week.

The House had hoped to pass funding legislation quickly when lawmakers return Monday evening, and that would have ended the shutdown. But House Speaker Mike Johnson, R-La., now says he is hoping to have the package considered "at least by Tuesday" as he scrambles to round up votes and Democrats hold out for deeper changes to immigration enforcement. Congress already has passed half this year's funding bills, ensuring that several important federal agencies and programs continue to operate through September. Nutrition assistance programmes, for example, should be unaffected. Funding is lapsing, at least temporarily, for the Pentagon and agencies such as the departments of Homeland Security and Transportation. Essential functions are continuing, but workers could go without pay if the impasse drags on. Some could be furloughed. The government funding process had been going smoothly, with key lawmakers in the House and Senate finding bipartisan agreement. But the shooting deaths this month of two US citizens, Alex Pretti and Renee Good, by federal agents in Minneapolis, changed the dynamic. Democrats were incensed after Pretti's killing and demanded that one of the six remaining funding bills, for DHS and its associated agencies, be stripped from the package passed by the House. They said the bill must include changes to immigration enforcement, including a code of conduct for federal agents and a requirement that officers show identification.

Pakistan says it has killed 145 'terrorists' in Balochistan after deadly attacks

QUETTA. (Agency)

Pakistani police and military forces killed over a 100 terrorists in counterterrorism operations across the restive southwestern province of Balochistan over the past 40 hours, government officials said on Sunday, a day after coordinated suicide and gun attacks killed 33 people, mostly civilians. The raids began early Saturday at multiple locations across Balochistan, and left 18 civilians, including five women and three children, and 15 security personnel dead, authorities said. Sarfraz Bugti, the provincial chief minister, told reporters in Quetta that troops and police officers responded swiftly, killing 145 members of "Fitna al-Hindustan," a phrase the government uses for the allegedly Indian-backed outlawed Baloch Liberation Army, or BLA. The number of militants killed over the past two days was the highest in decades, he said. "The bodies of these 145 killed terrorists are in our custody, and some of them are Afghan nationals," he said. Bugti claimed that the "Indian-backed terrorists" wanted to take hostages but failed to make it to the city center.

He spoke alongside senior government official Hamza Shafqat, who often oversees such operations against insurgents in the province, and praised the military, police and paramilitary forces for repelling the assaults. Militant attacks erupted on Saturday in a resource-rich region where Pakistan is seeking to attract foreign investment in mining and minerals. In September 2025, a U.S. metals company signed a \$500 million investment agreement with Pakistan, a month after the U.S. State Department designated BLA and its armed wing as a foreign terrorist organization. Residents described scenes of panic after a suicide bombing killed several police officers on Saturday. "(It) was a very sad day in the history of Quetta," said Khan Muhammad, a local resident. "Armed men were roaming openly on the roads before security forces arrived."

Bugti repeatedly accused India and Afghanistan of backing the assailants and said senior leaders of the BLA, which claimed responsibility for the latest attacks in Balochistan, were operating from

Afghan territory. Both Kabul and New Delhi deny the allegations. He said on Sunday Afghanistan's Taliban had pledged under the 2020 Doha agreement not to allow Afghan soil to be used as a base for



attacking other countries, but "unfortunately, the Afghan soil was still being used against Pakistan." Tensions between Pakistan and Afghanistan have persisted since early October when Pakistan carried out airstrikes on what it described as Pakistani Taliban hideouts inside Afghanistan, killing dozens of alleged insurgents. Bugti said militants

stormed the home of a Baloch laborer in Gwadar and killed five women and three children. He condemned the killings. He said the attackers had planned to seize hostages after storming government offices in Quetta's high-security zone but were thwarted. "We were aware of their plans, and our forces were prepared," he said. The BLA is banned in Pakistan and has carried out numerous attacks in recent years, often targeting security forces, Chinese interests and infrastructure projects. Authorities say the group has operated with support from the Pakistani Taliban, known as Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan, or TTP. The TTP, a separate group, is allied with Afghanistan's Taliban, who returned to power in August 2021.

Balochistan has long faced a separatist insurgency by ethnic Baloch groups seeking greater autonomy or independence from Pakistan's central government. The BLA regularly targets Pakistani security forces and has also attacked civilians, including Chinese nationals among the thousands working on various projects in the province.

Tibetan spiritual leader Dalai Lama wins first Grammy for spoken-word album

NEW YORK (Agency)

Tibetan spiritual leader the Dalai Lama has won a Grammy Award for his spoken-word audiobook *Meditations: The Reflections of His Holiness the Dalai Lama*, marking a notable moment at the 68th Grammy Awards.

The album earned the top honor in the spoken-word category, beating out a diverse field of nominees that included US Supreme Court Justice Ketanji Brown Jackson for *Lovely One: A Memoir*, Trevor Noah for *Into The Uncut Grass*, Kathy Garver for *Elvis, Rocky & Me*, The Carol Connors Story, and Fab Morvan for *You Know It's True: The Real Story of Milli Vanilli*. The Dalai Lama did not attend the ceremony. Singer-songwriter Rufus Wainwright



accepted the award on his behalf, drawing laughter from the audience when he quipped during his speech, "I am not the Dalai Lama."

The Dalai Lama had collaborated with sarod maestro Amjad Ali Khan and his sons, Amaan Ali Bangash and Ayaan Ali Bangash, on the album, blending spoken word and music to celebrate universal values of peace, compassion,

kindness and hope. In a statement following the win, the Dalai Lama said, "I receive this recognition with gratitude and humility. I don't see it as something personal, but as a recognition of our shared universal responsibility. I truly believe that peace, compassion, care for our environment, and an understanding of the oneness of humanity are essential for the collective well-being of all eight billion human beings. I'm grateful that this Grammy recognition can help spread these messages more widely." The Dalai Lama joined a list of first-time Grammy winners this year that also included K-pop artists and acclaimed filmmaker Steven Spielberg.

Apartment Prices Have Risen Every Single Week For A Year In This City

World. (Agency)

Bohyun Lee followed South Korea's prescribed route to success. She entered the country's top university to study economics, moved to Seoul in 2010 and built an adult life there - working, forging relationships and treating the capital as home.

The one thing she doesn't have is an actual home of her own. Over the past 16 years Lee has packed her belongings and moved seven times, cycling through a dormitory and rental homes as two-year leases expired. The hope of owning an apartment in Seoul, once a realistic goal, has steadily slipped out of reach. "I've learned how to live without owning a home, but the dream hasn't disappeared," said Lee, 33, who works in the financial services industry. "Moving so many times wears you down, and it feels unfair." Homes she once considered buying in the mid-2010s that were priced around 400 million won (\$280,960) now trade at roughly three times that value, far exceeding what even a well-paid professional can accumulate through wages alone. For Lee, the market's relentless rise isn't an

abstract chart but a lived reality in which she's seeing the bottom rung of the property ladder float out of reach with every extension of the rally. The persistent increase in Seoul's property prices threatens to undermine support for President Lee Jae Myung as the young adults flocking to the capital for jobs decry their inability to put down real-estate roots. It also limits the central bank's scope to stimulate the economy at a time when persistent trade tensions threaten growth, as a rate cut might stoke excessive borrowing. Apartment prices in Seoul have now risen for 52 consecutive weeks, according to Korea Real Estate Board. The rally has defied repeated attempts by successive governments to cool the market with steps including tighter lending rules, extending pressure on would-be buyers. Tougher mortgage limits have transformed South Korea's capital into one of the most restrictive home-loan markets in the world, effectively locking out many potential buyers as prices advance further out of reach. Under the latest framework, buyers can borrow a maximum of 600 million won for homes valued up to 1.5 billion won.

For properties priced between 1.5 billion won and 2.5 billion won, the cap drops to 400 million won, while homes above that range qualify for loans of just 200 million won. The government lowered loan-to-value ratios to 40% in October in designated regulated districts that now cover all of Seoul, while maintaining a higher 70% cap for first-time buyers and those refinancing existing mortgages. The special restriction applying to properties in the nation's capital comes as apartment prices in Seoul rose almost 9% in 2025. Gains across the rest of the country were around 1%, underscoring the extent to which demand is concentrated in the capital. In global terms, South Korea is not alone in tightening access to home loans. Other markets, including New Zealand, Australia, Canada and Singapore, have imposed strict loan-to-value ratios, debt-servicing limits or stress tests to cool overheated housing markets, while cities such as Hong Kong have paired lending curbs with hefty stamp duties, according to Pamela Ambler, head of investor intelligence and strategy Asia Pacific at Jones Lang LaSalle Inc.

Indian-origin climate scientist Veerabhadran Ramanathan wins prestigious Crafoord prize in US

HOUSTON. (Agency)

Indian-origin climate scientist Veerabhadran Ramanathan has been awarded the 2026 Crafoord Prize in Geosciences by the Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences. Often described as the "Nobel of Geosciences," the prize recognises Ramanathan's decades of research on super-pollutants and atmospheric brown clouds, which have reshaped understanding of global warming. Ramanathan, 82, made a landmark discovery in 1975 while working at NASA: chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs), widely used in aerosols and refrigeration, trap heat in the atmosphere up to 10,000 times more effectively than carbon dioxide. "Until 1975, we thought global warming was mainly from CO2. I was shocked at the capacity of technology and human beings to change the environment," Ramanathan told the Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences. Born in Madurai and raised in Chennai, Ramanathan began his career as an engineer in a refrigerator factory in Secunderabad, where he first handled CFCs. He later earned degrees from Annamalai University and the Indian Institute of Science. His Indian roots informed his work in the Indian Ocean Experiment (INDOEX), which identified atmospheric brown clouds over South Asia. The study linked air pollution to a weakened Indian Monsoon and accelerated melting of Himalayan glaciers.

Now, a Distinguished Professor Emeritus at the Scripps



Institution of Oceanography, University of California, San Diego, he has also advised global leaders and the Vatican on climate ethics. The Crafoord Prize carries a cash award of 8 million Swedish kronor (approximately \$900,000) and a gold medal. The award will be presented during Crafoord Days in Stockholm and Lund in May 2026. Ramanathan's work underpins key international treaties, including the Montreal Protocol, which has prevented millions of tons of harmful emissions from entering the atmosphere.

Kennedy Center to close for two years for renovations in July, Trump says, after performers' backlash

WASHINGTON. (Agency)

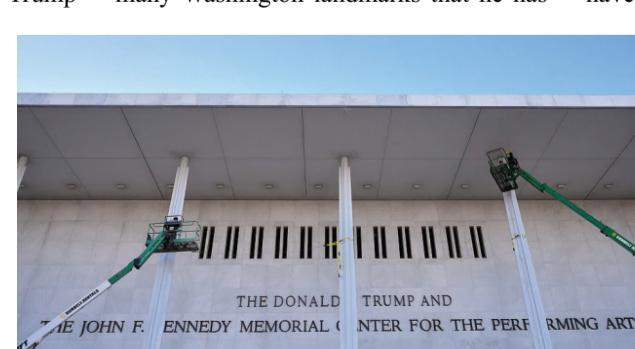
President Donald Trump said Sunday he will move to close Washington's Kennedy Center performing arts center for two years starting in July for construction, his latest proposal to upturn the storied venue since returning to the White House. Trump's announcement on social media follows a wave of cancellations by leading performers, musicians and groups since the president ousted the previous leadership and added his name to the building.

Trump made no mention in his post of the recent cancellations. His proposal, announced days after the premiere of "Melania," a documentary of the first lady was shown at the center, he said was subject to approval by the board of the Kennedy Center, which has been stocked with his hand-picked allies. Trump himself chairs the center's board of trustees. "This important decision, based on input from many Highly Respected Experts, will take a tired, broken, and dilapidated Center, one that has been in bad condition, both

financially and structurally for many years, and turn it into a World Class Bastion of Arts, Music, and Entertainment," Trump wrote in his post. Neither Trump nor Kennedy Center President Ric Grenell, a Trump ally, have provided evidence to back up their claims about the building being in disrepair, and last October, Trump had pledged the center would remain open during renovations. In Sunday's announcement, Trump said the center will close on July 4th, when he said the construction would begin.

The sudden decision to shutter and reconstruct the Kennedy Center is certain to spark blowback as Trump upturns the popular venue, which began as a national cultural center but Congress renamed as a "living memorial" to President John F. Kennedy in 1964, in the aftermath of the slain president's death. Opened in 1971, it is open year-round as a public showcase for the arts, including the National Symphony

Orchestra. Since Trump returned to the White House, the Kennedy Center is one of many Washington landmarks that he has



sought to overhaul in his second term. He demolished the East Wing of the White House and launched a massive \$400 million ballroom project, is actively pursuing building a triumphal arch on the other side of the Arlington Bridge from the Lincoln Memorial, and has plans for

Washington Dulles International Airport. Leading performing arts groups have pulled out of appearances, most recently, composer Philip Glass, who announced his decision to withdraw his Symphony No. 15 "Lincoln" because he said the values of the center today are in "direct conflict" with the message of the piece. Last month, the Washington National Opera announced that it will move performances away from the Kennedy Center in another high-profile departure following Trump's takeover of the U.S. capital's leading performing arts venue. The head of artistic programming for the center abruptly left his post last week, less than two weeks after being named to the job. A spokesperson for the Kennedy Center could not immediately be reached and did not respond to an emailed request for comment.

NEWS BOX

Domestic help rapes, kills woman in Bengaluru, hangs self

BENGALURU. (Agency)

In a shocker, a 65-year-old woman was allegedly raped and murdered by her domestic help at her house in KAS Layout, BTM 2nd Stage, within the Mico Layout police limits on Saturday night. The accused later hanged himself in the same room.

The victim's 27-year-old daughter, who stays on the first floor of the building, was unaware of the incident. She filed a rape and murder complaint on Sunday. The police are probing whether the victim was raped before she was murdered.

The accused, Devaraju (50), hailed from Hosur in Tamil Nadu. He was working at the victim's house for the past eight years. He also worked in multiple houses in the colony and stayed at the victim's house on Saturday night.

The police suspect that the accused allegedly raped the victim and later strangled her to death. She had injury marks on her neck.

'Accused hangs self out of fear'

The accused is believed to have hanged himself out of fear, the police said. The victim's husband, who holds a senior position in a reputed company, had gone abroad for work and returned home around 5 am on Sunday.

After his daughter opened the door, he went to his bedroom and screamed in shock on finding Devaraju hanging and his wife lying dead on the ground with injuries on her neck. Hearing his screams, the daughter rushed downstairs and alerted the police. The police shifted both bodies to a hospital for postmortems. A senior police officer said that whether the victim was raped would be ascertained after the forensic examination. The motive for the murder is yet to be determined, while cases of murder and rape have been registered.

Street vendors vulnerable sans town vending panel in Tambaram

CHENNAI. (Agency)

CHENNAI: Street vendors across Tambaram City Municipal Corporation (TCMC) limits are facing increasing livelihood insecurity due to the lack of Town Vending Committee (TVC), a statutory body mandated under the Tamil Nadu Street Vendors (Protection of Livelihood and Regulation of Street Vending) Scheme and Rules, 2015.

According to vendors' associations, nearly 1,500 individuals depend on street vending for survival within Tambaram city, while the number rises to about 6,000 across the expanded TCMC, comprising 70 wards in five zones. However, since Tambaram was upgraded into a municipal corporation, the legally required committee has not been constituted.

The absence of such a committee has deprived vendors of a formal grievance redressal mechanism, exposing them to frequent eviction threats and harassment by multiple agencies, including civic officials, the highways department, traffic police and even private commercial establishments.

"Evictions are carried out without prior notice, and our goods are seized arbitrarily. We have no forum to raise our grievances," said K Rajan Mani, president of Federation for Tambaram Street Vendors Associations.

Under the law, TVC is responsible for regulating street vending and safeguarding vendors' livelihoods through a participatory framework involving local bodies, police, traders' associations, NGOs and vendor representatives. Vendors, many of whom cater to lower-middle-class and economically weaker sections by selling essential goods, allege that the non-implementation of the law has resulted in arbitrary enforcement.

Hyderabad: Realty cheers infrastructure focus, flags gaps in housing

HYDERABAD. (Agency)

The Union Budget 2026-27 has drawn a measured but optimistic response from the real estate industry, with stakeholders welcoming its emphasis on infrastructure-led growth while flagging the absence of direct incentives for the housing sector.

The Hyderabad chapter of Confederation of Real Estate Developers' Associations of India said the Budget reflected a clear commitment to urban transformation. Its president, N Jaideep Reddy, said the focus on urban development, AI, bio-pharma research, IT and software services, along with tax holidays for data centres, would act as strong growth drivers for Hyderabad.

However, he said the Budget fell short on measures to stimulate housing demand, particularly in the affordable segment, and expressed hope for follow-up announcements on tax incentives.

President-elect B Jagannath Rao described the Budget as a blueprint for a 'Viksit Bharat', citing its emphasis on urban infrastructure, manufacturing, municipal bonds and modern construction equipment, while stressing the need for tax rationalisation to revive the 'Housing for All' mission.

Rajsekhar Reddy Allipuram, founder of Propgo, said the Budget reinforced the link between infrastructure and real estate growth. Gumm Ram Reddy, president-elect of CREDAI National, said the infrastructure push would indirectly support the sector but expressed disappointment over the unchanged definition of affordable housing despite rising costs.

Why this attack by the Bishnoi gang differs from past incidents in the city

In a first possible indication that the gang has been making calls to Bollywood personalities, the message warned Bollywood to "improve while there is still time" and that "whoever they have called should come to the phone and speak or they will have nowhere to hide."

Mumbai. (Agency)

THE MODUS operandi of the Bishnoi gang has remained the same when it comes to attacks in the city: carry out attacks, claim responsibility in a facebook post, take a screenshot and share on social media so that the IP address cannot be traced. However, this time around, the post claiming responsibility makes no effort to cloak it in 'noble purposes' but appears to be a straightforward hint of the gang trying to intimidate Bollywood.

Actor Salman Khan has been on the radar of the gang for years for allegedly killing a blackbuck – considered holy by the Bishnoi community – during the shooting of a film in 1999. Later, when a firing incident took place outside the actor's residence in April 2024, Anmol Bishnoi in a post had claimed "you consider Dawood

Ibrahim and Chhota Shakeel as divine. We however have two pet dogs named after these two". There was no demand for money.

Similarly, when the gang got NCP leader Baba Siddique murdered outside his Bandra residence in October 2024, Shubham Lonkar put up a message stating how they had gunned down Siddique as he was linked to Dawood and Salman Khan. It was also said to be a revenge for the death of Anuj Thapan, an accused arrested in the Salman Khan case, who allegedly committed suicide while in police custody. In this case too, no demand for money was made, as per police.

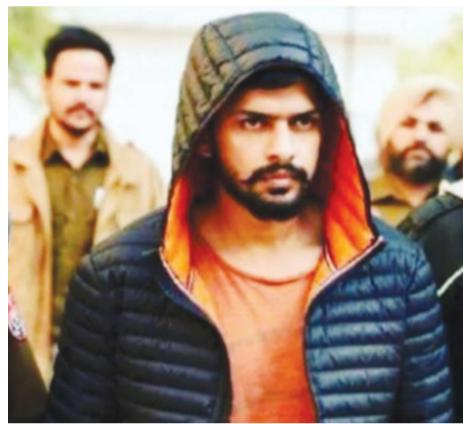
In the social media post in the aftermath of the firing outside Rohit Shetty's house, the account

did not provide any reason. All it said was that Shetty should not

gang has been making calls to Bollywood personalities, the message warned Bollywood to "improve while there is still time" and that "whoever they have called should come to the phone and speak or they will have nowhere to hide."

In the chargesheets filed by the Mumbai police in both the Salman Khan and Baba Siddique cases, the motive for these attacks was mentioned as the gang tried to create fear in the city using which they could later carry out extortion.

The Mumbai Police has so far maintained that they have not received any information about the Bishnoi gang making extortion calls to the city. An officer said, "We have not received any complaints from Shetty or any Bollywood actor that they have received extortion calls."



"interfere in their work". It later said, "if in the future he didn't understand or follow what they had to say they will fire at him"

In a first possible indication that the

Jailer suspended after inmate released despite pending warrant

Lucknow. (Agency)

The Uttar Pradesh Prison Administration has suspended the jailer of Banda district jail and initiated departmental proceedings against him after a controversy erupted over the release of inmate Ravindra Nagar alias Ravi Kana (43). The release triggered a row as it was alleged that Kana was let out despite a pending production warrant (B-warrant) issued against him.

Taking cognizance of the lapse, the Prison Department suspended jailor Vikram Singh Yadav and initiated departmental proceedings against him.

The action was taken on the basis of an inquiry conducted by jail superintendent Anil Kumar Gautam, according to a statement

issued by the department. However, Director General of Prisons PC Meena has ordered a detailed probe into the matter, the statement added.

According to the Prison Department, Kana was arrested in 2024 for his involvement in several cases, including under the Uttar Pradesh Gangsters and Anti-Social Activities (Prevention) Act. He was transferred from Gautam Budh Nagar jail to Banda jail in August 2024.

An official said that on January 28, the Banda jail authorities reportedly received a B-warrant,

in connection with a related case, directing them to produce the accused before the CJM court in

lodged in the prison solely on the basis of the B-warrant. He was produced before the court through video conferencing.

Officials claimed that after the virtual hearing, no fresh custody warrant was issued, nor was any date for his next appearance communicated to the prison authorities. The prison administration released the accused on January 29.

However, later in the evening, the Prison Department received the formal judicial warrant for Kana, by which time he had been released from jail.



Head-turners on wheels: From the only known Dodge Viper in India to Ratan Tata's iconic cars

In recent years, the rally has emerged as a landmark event amongst collectors and enthusiasts for supporting engineering milestones as well as the cultural impact of automobiles.

Mumbai. (Agency)

From the country's only known Dodge Viper owned by the Maharaja of Gondal to classic cars from late Ratan Tata's personal garage, over 140 automotive icons from the 1970s to 2010s turned heads at the

Mumbai's streets with a bevy of classic cars driving from the Grand Hyatt through the Sea Link and Coastal Road stretch on Sunday.

Curated by Perseus Bandrawalla, the rally is organised annually with the aim of celebrating rare machinery and strengthening India's modern classic movement. In recent years, the rally has emerged as a landmark event amongst collectors and enthusiasts for supporting engineering milestones as well as the cultural impact of automobiles.

Speaking about the event, Bandrawalla said, "Modern classics represent a golden era of driving, where engineering excellence and mechanical purity came together to create cars that continue to inspire generations." Autocar India editor Hormazd Sorabjee said modern classic cars are more than a collector's item.

"They're rolling history, they spark conversation, and they bring people together through a shared passion for driving. The Modern Classic Rally continues to champion that spirit."



Autocar India Modern Classic Rally 2026, which concluded on Sunday. Held over two days at the Grand Hyatt Mumbai, the fourth edition of the Modern Classic Rally culminated in a rally through

flipper tagged turtles at the same nesting site demonstrates a strong nesting site fidelity in the west coast. This is a significant finding which also highlights the success of the ongoing sea turtle conservation efforts along our coasts," said Kanchan Pawar, Deputy Forest Officer, Mangrove South Konkan of the state forest department.

This discovery comes amid a thriving nesting season unfolding across Maharashtra's vast coastline. In the past two months, over 407 nests have been built by Olive Ridley turtles to lay eggs across 57 beaches of Maharashtra's coastal districts of Raigad, Ratnagiri and Sindhudurg. The ongoing nesting season is slated to continue until March.

Deriving their name from the olive hue of their shells, Olive Ridley turtles are amongst the most abundant sea species, yet remain vulnerable and are protected under Schedule I of India's Wildlife Protection Act

of 1972. The protected species are most renowned for their unique mass nesting strategy wherein Olive Ridley turtles swim



up to the shores en masse, where they look for safe nesting spots. After ascertaining a safe spot, the turtles burrow into the sandy surface to build a pot-like nest using their

Welcome initiatives for cooperative ecosystem, dairy sector: Milk Marketing Federation

Ahmedabad. (Agency)

THE GUJARAT Co-operative Milk Marketing Federation Ltd. (GCMMF), which markets the dairy products under the brand name of Amul, on Saturday welcomed the budget initiatives announced for the cooperative ecosystem, dairy sector, animal husbandry infrastructure and rural livelihoods, reinforcing the Government's vision of "Sahakar se Samriddhi" and inclusive development. "The Union Budget 2026-27 presents a comprehensive growth framework for the dairy and cooperative sector, encompassing cooperative-friendly tax reforms, Improved milk logistics infrastructure, Incentives for bio-energy and sustainability, Rs 300 crore investment in cooperative education, Dedicated export support through NCE, Large-scale expansion of veterinary education and services. Together, these initiatives will empower millions of dairy farmers and cooperative institutions, strengthen the national milk grid, enhance rural incomes and accelerate India's journey towards a self-reliant, sustainable and globally competitive dairy economy," the Federation said in a statement. Appreciating the taxation reforms for cooperative institutions, the GCMMF said, "This reform holds particular significance for the dairy cooperative sector of Gujarat, which collectively produces and markets nearly 10,000 metric tonnes of cattle feed daily, with a business turnover of approximately Rs 10,000 crore per year."

The Federation said that the measure will "substantially simplify accounting and tax compliance for 18,600 Village Cooperative Societies (VCSs) in Gujarat, while extending similar benefits to thousands of dairy cooperatives across the country."

The Federation also welcomed the announcement of a new Dedicated Freight Corridor connecting Surat in the West to Dankuni in the East. "Similar to the existing Gujarat-Delhi Dedicated Freight Corridor, it will play a crucial role in facilitating the efficient transportation of milk and other perishable dairy products and reduce logistics and transportation costs while minimising transit losses and spoilage thereby strengthening integration of regional milk sheds into the national milk grid," GCMMF said.

Sabarkantha man shows rabies symptoms around 3 months after dog bite, under treatment in hospital

Ahmedabad. (Agency)

TWO DAYS after a 27-year-old old-man was admitted at the Civil Hospital in Palanpur after showing "extremely aggressive behaviour due to rabies infection", the hospital authorities said on Sunday that his condition was "stable". The man, a father of three, hails from Gora village and works as a farm labourer in Nalasar village. On January 30, he was taken to the Trauma Centre at Banas Medical College and Research Institute in Palanpur after he exhibited severe neurological symptoms linked to rabies, including walking on all fours, barking, aggressive behaviour and hydrophobia (fear of water). Videos of the man purportedly showing such symptoms surfaced online. On Sunday, however, the hospital authorities said the patient is "co-operating" and "stable". "The rabies case is under observation. Today (Sunday), he is co-operating and stable. He is also taking food orally and following verbal commands. He is not under sedation anymore," Medical Superintendent at the Banas Medical College and

Research Institute in Palanpur Dr Sunil Joshi. Meanwhile, 15 persons – including the man's family members and other villagers who came in contact with them – have been administered the Anti Rabies Vaccine (ARV), sources said. The man was bitten by a rabid dog around three months ago and did not take the vaccine. A few days ago, he started showing severe neurological symptoms of rabies. He attacked his family members and chaos prevailed at the hospital as well when he apparently broke free from the isolated ward he was restrained in, sources said. The hospital authorities informed the District Collector, the Superintendent of Police and the forest department. The hospital decided to involve multiple agencies, including the forest department, to ensure the safety of hospital staff and other patients, said Dr Joshi of Palanpur Civil Hospital, adding that forest department staff had to use specialised nets to safely restrain the man for treatment. Dr Joshi added that this is the fourth case of rabies reported from Banaskantha district over the past year.

It's nesting season for Olive Ridley turtles' across Maharashtra coastline: 407 nests recorded so far; previously tagged Olive Ridleys return

Mumbai. (Agency)

On January 31 last year, a female Olive Ridley Turtle nesting on the shores of Guhagar beach in Ratnagiri district was flipper tagged with metal tags. The flipper tagging formed part of a pilot exercise carried out by the Mangrove Cell and Wildlife Institute of India (WII) in a bid to study nesting trends amongst the vulnerable species along the western coast of India.

A year on, earlier this month, a beach manager patrolling the Guhagar beach spotted glistening tags on a female turtle, bearing identification numbers — IND 11109 and IND 11110 — that revealed that the same turtle had returned back to nest to a familiar spot. According to officials from the Maharashtra forest department, a total of four female turtles, of the 62 Olive Ridley turtles which had been flipper tagged in the pilot exercise last year between January and February along Konkan coast, have returned back to the same nesting site to lay eggs over the past month. "The return of the previously

flipped tagged turtles at the same nesting site demonstrates a strong nesting site fidelity in the west coast. This is a significant finding which also highlights the success of the ongoing sea turtle conservation efforts along our coasts," said Kanchan Pawar, Deputy Forest Officer, Mangrove South Konkan of the state forest department.

This discovery comes amid a thriving nesting season unfolding across Maharashtra's vast coastline. In the past two months, over 407 nests have been built by Olive Ridley turtles to lay eggs across 57 beaches of Maharashtra's coastal districts of Raigad, Ratnagiri and Sindhudurg. The ongoing nesting season is slated to continue until March.

Deriving their name from the olive

hue of their shells, Olive Ridley turtles are amongst the most abundant sea species, yet remain vulnerable and are protected under Schedule I of India's Wildlife Protection Act

of 1972. The protected species are most renowned for their unique mass nesting strategy wherein Olive Ridley turtles swim anywhere between 80-150 eggs each over a span of two hours, then covers the nest hastily with her flippers, following which she wades back into the waters. Over the course of the next 45-50 days, these eggs naturally hatch and the hatchlings wade into the seawaters where they spend their life. For every 1,000 hatchlings, experts estimate, only one Olive Ridley turtle survives to reach adulthood.

Unlike Odisha, which popularly records influx of lakhs of turtles, Maharashtra's coasts witness sporadic nesting where turtles typically lay eggs solitarily. While the eastern coasts of Odisha and Tamil Nadu witness mass studies show that Maharashtra for nearly 20 percent of the country's Olive Ridley turtle nests.

The GPU gap in India's AI dream

India has entered its AI awakening, driven by talent, investment and a fast-modernising digital population. But the country's ambitions face an undeniable bottleneck: the near-total reliance on foreign-made Graphics Processing Units (GPUs) and accelerators. India's AI momentum is real, but it is also fragile. The country seems to be entering a rare convergence of talent, capital and policy intent. AI-first startups are emerging fast, global investors are paying attention and the government is also moving fast on deep-tech infrastructure. As per a paper released by Bessemer, the Indian IT sector is projected to reach \$400 billion by 2030, with AI playing a key role in this growth.

However, the foundations of the AI boom rest on a narrow and vulnerable layer: the access to computer or hardware resources that make AI models work. For decades, India's tech dominance has come from scale through millions of engineers, global outsourcing contracts and cost efficiency. AI is reshaping that equation. Ranjit Tinaikar, CEO of Ness Digital Engineering, says, "GenAI is transforming the entire software development industry by significantly increasing productivity and accelerating innovation cycles, ultimately reducing time to market. However, its potential will not be fulfilled if it is viewed as a mere code generation tool, a flawed approach that is common in the world of software development."

The new winners are not service providers but platform builders, like companies that own models, data pipelines and automation systems. With players like Sarvam AI, NxtGen, and BharatGen, India is beginning to build core AI IP, foundation models, agentic platforms and developer tools. That shift is already visible. AI-native firms such as Graph AI and Leena AI are building software-first businesses with minimal human intervention. Hybrid players like Crescendo and Shopdeck are combining automation with human oversight to increase speed and reduce costs. Infrastructure firms like Scale and Turing are becoming essential enablers by supplying data pipelines and model evaluation layers. At the same time, a new class of founders, smaller teams, younger builders and solo entrepreneurs, competing directly in global categories, is emerging. NxtGen entered the AI space, bringing India's first full-stack agentic AI platform, "M," while powering the IndiaAI Mission alongside Jio Platforms, Tata Communications, Yotta and others. Solo founder Bishal Saha started building the Duolingo alternative, backed by AI and Bhashini datasets. Prominent AI-first founders include Bhavish Aggarwal (Krutim), who is building Indian language LLMs, Maithra Raghu (Samaya AI) for financial AI and Sharbel Cherian (KeyValue Software), known for bootstrapped AI products.

This signals a break from the traditional outsourcing mindset and the beginning of an IP-led ecosystem. Global capital is responding quickly. Google and Accel have announced investments of up to \$2 million in Indian AI startups through a new partnership. In September, Google also partnered with Sarvam AI, Soken AI and Gmani.ai, while IIT-Bombay's BharatGen initiative focused on advancing AI for Indian languages. Such initiatives show that India is being taken seriously as an AI development hub. Telecom players are also repositioning themselves as AI distribution platforms, bundling models into consumer services and accelerating adoption at scale.

But this expansion is running into a structural limit, namely hardware.

India's AI growth today depends almost entirely on foreign-made GPUs from NVIDIA, AMD and Intel. The IndiaAI Mission relies on roughly 34,000 GPUs, a modest number compared to what leading AI labs consume globally. And unlike software, hardware resources cannot be scaled overnight. Export controls, geopolitical tensions and supply concentration mean that GPU access is not guaranteed. Analysts warn that tighter controls, similar to those imposed on China, could eventually restrict availability or inflate costs.

The recent revelations about a decade-long government-funded Panchagavya research project on cancer at Nanaji Deshmukh Veterinary Science University, Jabalpur, Madhya Pradesh, raise concerns about public accountability, scientific rigour and responsible use of taxpayers' money. An official probe indicates that Rs 1.9-3.5 crore was spent on cow dung, cow urine, raw materials and travel expenses, though the market value of the materials was far lower. Also, there was little to show in terms of credible scientific outcomes after 10 years of work. At a time when India's health system is facing challenges, research funds should be used transparently and efficiently. Research must have a scientific basis. Fundamental disease treatment research requires strict methodology, peer review and evidence-based frameworks. The substantial spending on air travel, vehicles and non-essential equipment under this project suggests poor judgment as also possible mismanagement of public resources, especially when basic cancer research demands robust laboratory capacity. Even if the team believes that it followed the procurement rules, following procedure alone is not enough when the outcome lacks scientific credibility. Funding alternative or traditional remedies can be part of research portfolios, but clear hypotheses and rigorous oversight are needed. Research projects must also have transparent reporting and measurable results. In this case, after years of funding, tangible research outputs are missing. There is also no evidence of effectiveness against cancer. This calls the project's initial approval and oversight into question. The controversy underscores the need for stricter research governance, independent audits of publicly funded projects and a reaffirmed commitment to evidence-based science over speculative or symbolic pursuits. Nanaji Deshmukh Veterinary Science University's defence that all purchases were made according to procedure does not fully address the deeper issue: whether this project met the basic standards of credible scientific research worthy of significant public investment or it succumbed to the difference between science and pseudoscience. How to distinguish science from pseudoscience? 'Falsifiability' is one of the criteria. The research in question or such researches cannot be 'falsified' by another laboratory research and ad hoc hypotheses used in such researches keep them out of the purview of scientific testing. For example, the relation between treatment of cancer and cow dung/cow urine will always remain susceptible to one's faith and belief in the karma theory of diseases and diagnosis and the wrath of Sitala Mata. In this case, there is also another belief about religious sanctity accorded to the cow and cow dung; the same status is not accorded to

Faith-based science limits

At a time when India's health system is facing challenges, research funds should be used transparently and efficiently



other members of the cow family (Bovidae) or to their dung. This is called the 'protective belt of auxiliary hypotheses', which is not from science but religion and mythology. The cow will be hailed as 'gau mata'. In progressive research, theory tends to precede data, and theory about the Bovidae family hardly calls for collecting data from only one of its members or its dung or urine. There cannot be a clear demarcation between science and pseudoscience, but fuzzy boundaries (cow or desi cow?), an indefinitely extendable indicator list (first urine or dung of the morning or the later ones), and an unclear nature (age of the cow, does it matter or dairy cows or not?). This research is a project of pseudoscience. Similarly, this cannot be corrected. If the research had produced 'negative' findings, the researcher or methodology would get the blame, not the unscientific belief. This kind of research is expected to deliver 'confirmation' to our beliefs rather than reputation or falsification. Moreover, the 'burden' of reversal proof is shifted to the critic -- that you prove that cow dung does not treat cancer, aka ignorantum falacy. Anecdotal evidence, whether coming from mythologically guided patients or with no established connectivity, is the characteristic of such research across the world, including about aliens, UFOs or extrasensory perception. The use of obscurantist language and jargon (Kamdhenu) provides such research with family resemblance to science. Science may suffer from its own

unique concerns of idioglossia tautology as being a coded private language or seemingly appropriate repetitions, but it never breached the boundaries it had set. Astrology may claim validation akin to astrology but it is not. Decolonising science does not mean throwing rationality, validity and replicability out along with the content created and produced in the Western world. Science can play the pivotal role that we expected from it only when we perceive it as a subject matter for wonder and inquiry rather than taking it as a tool to reclaim Vishwagurudom. Ancient Indian health science and indigenous practices will lose their credibility due to such research. The rigour of systemic review of literature and asking the right questions can only take the 'Indian' science to newer heights. But to assert this, we also need to acknowledge that 'science' will remain science if no adjectives of black or Indian or Hindu or Islamic are added to it. The method of science and science as a discipline are two distinct domains; one may apply the method of science to study a religion, but when science is confined to a region or religion, it will only produce another dogma. Many years ago, Nehru insisted that 'Science alone can solve the problems of hunger and poverty'. Cultivating a scientific temper is not an abstract philosophy but an essential foundation for building a society liberated from superstition, fatalism and irrationality, for which people like Dabholkar, Kalburgi, Pansare and Gauri Lankesh lived and died.

Easing drug trials: Cutting red tape must not risk safety

The Tribune Editorial: The Central government aims to reduce regulatory friction and accelerate pharmaceutical innovation.

REGULATORY relaxation carries inherent risks, especially in a sector as sensitive as drug development, where public health, scientific integrity and commercial interests intersect. The Union Health Ministry's amendments to the New Drugs and Clinical Trials (NDCT) Rules, 2019 — easing trial norms and removing the requirement of test licences for several research activities — must therefore be assessed as much for what they loosen as for what they promise to deliver. The intent behind the reforms is clear. By replacing prior approvals with a system of intimation for low-risk research, waiving permissions for certain bioavailability and bioequivalence studies and shortening approval timelines where licences are still required, the government aims to reduce regulatory friction and accelerate pharmaceutical innovation. For an industry long hampered by procedural delays that added little to safety, these changes could shorten development cycles and lower costs, particularly for generics and early-stage research. Yet faster approvals must not translate into weaker scrutiny or reduced



accountability. India's reputation as a reliable supplier of affordable medicines rests on the credibility of its

regulatory oversight. Any perception that safeguards are being diluted in the name of ease of doing business risks eroding public trust and inviting global scepticism about the robustness of India's drug approval process. The shift from a permission-based system to post-intimation places a heavier burden on regulatory vigilance. It demands stronger monitoring mechanisms, transparent reporting and enhanced institutional capacity at the Central Drugs Standard Control Organisation. Without effective audits, real-time data scrutiny and meaningful penalties for violations, regulatory relaxation could open gaps rather than improve efficiency. These reforms, therefore, represent a critical test of balance. If supported by rigorous oversight and accountability frameworks, they can encourage innovation while protecting patient safety. If not, they risk substituting speed for science.

Clubbing anew to old chants

Trendy bhajan gatherings aren't new, but their structure has truly evolved. From George Harrison to Baaba Maal and Jai Uttal, many singers across eras have blended genres to deliver soulful music. The science behind the benefits of chanting align with the spiritual claims of past masters

When none less than the Prime Minister takes note of 'bhajan clubbing', it is time to deconstruct the cool. Speaking in his Mann Ki Baat broadcast last week, he called it a powerful blend of devotion, culture, spirituality and modernity, mentioning Gen-Z to make sure the young and the restless heard him out.

Trendy bhajans are not exactly new to me, though the phrase and the more evolved structure are. When large groups, especially of youngsters, come together in a community event to sing praises to gods, bhajan clubbing gets the 'sober rave' tag in a Hindu package. What is new is the high-energy and nightclub-like atmosphere along with a no-alcohol, all-clean feel.

We now have fancily-named bhajan groups like Backstage Siblings and Keshavam. What's more, their concerts carry ticket prices that resemble club gigs. They are not your everyday free session at the local temple. The phenomenon took me on a reverse swing in time. I had my own brush with bhajan cool in the 1970s and 80s when The Beatles era spawned its early seeds. Guitarist George Harrison embraced Hinduism with a zeal that coincided with the rise of the Hare Krishna movement. As a youngster, I heard 'I am missing you', produced by Harrison, composed by Pandit Ravi Shankar and sung by the sitarist's sister-in-law Lakshmi Shankar. The song expressed a longing to encounter Lord Krishna with English lyrics: "Though I can't see you, I hear your flute all the while." Frankly, I found it somewhat amusing, though melodic, and not quite spiritual, especially as it played as part of Western pop music shows on All India Radio.

Then in 1981, Afro-rock band Osibisa staged a live show on the India Gate lawns in the heart of New Delhi and sang 'Raghupati raghava raja ram' (officially titled 'Joy

of Om') that kept spiritual Indi-pop bubbling amid a growing fascination for rock. Spiritual pop goes back in time. Lucknow-born Cliff Richard, who spent his early childhood in Calcutta, embraced Christianity publicly at a rally by American evangelist Billy Graham in 1966, putting behind his hits like 'Bachelor boy' and 'Summer holiday'. His guitar embraced Christian gospel music.

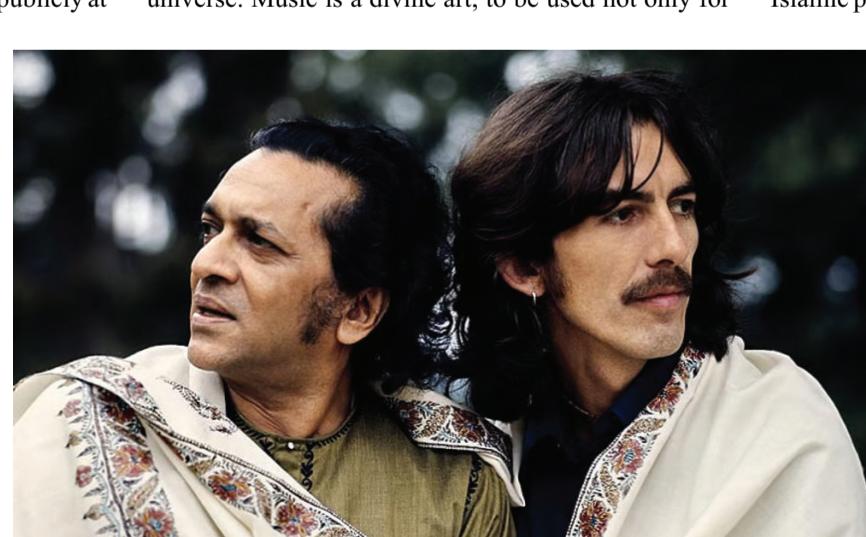
Hinduism was not far behind. In the early 2000s, I saw a bhajan-club act closer to the contemporary version in suburban Bengaluru at the 250-acre Art of Living headquarters founded by Sri Sri Ravi Shankar. The evening saw long-haired rockers wielding electric guitars singing energetic bhajans to thunderous claps.

Looking back, I found Harrison's plaintive 'My sweet lord', released in 1970 soon after the Beatles split, truly devotional because of its rhythmic chanting that blended "Hallelujah" with "Hare Krishna" in a non-denominational spirituality. It seemed to go beyond the shifting sands of cultural modernity. There is a spiritual logic and modern science to this that deserves attention. I have attended meditation sessions led by followers of Paramahansa Yogananda, which were preceded by simple words sung in chants that made way for long spells of silent meditation. Chanting is half the battle," Yogananda famously said. He released a book titled Cosmic Chants that contained songs that had a clearer purpose to invoke devotion. The guru said loud chanting was a good start to meditation in creating a "magnetic flow", but advised transitions into whisper chanting,

mental chanting, subconscious chanting and what he called "superconscious chanting". Yogananda said: "Sound or vibration is the most powerful force in the universe. Music is a divine art, to be used not only for

charitable thoughts. I also find solace in the soulful 'Dunya Salam' by 1 Giant Leap featuring Senegalese singer Baaba Maal, which praises god as Allah in an Islamic prayer. Its lyrics set to a haunting tune are like an

Afro version of John Lennon's piano ballad for peace, Imagine. On a more orthodox groove is Jai Uttal, an American devotee of Neem Karoli Baba. Born Douglas Uttal, the Grammy-nominated guitar-wielding singer is called a 'kirtan artist' and hailed as a pioneer in 'world spirit music', a derivative of the more popular world music genre. He sings bhakti-filled chants on Hindu deities and uses elements of jazz, reggae and ballads. That takes us to the neuroscience behind chants and meditation. The US government's National Library of Medicine says, "The simple act of repeating a sound may increase focused attention while decreasing awareness of bodily sensations. Further, if the repetition of the sound is vocalised, slowed breathing is likely to activate the parasympathetic nervous system," adding that "even if one is distracted, vocalisation is likely to have positive respiratory and hormonal changes that may contribute to feelings of relaxation and positive mood". Bhajan clubbing may thus be just a trendy word for what they call satsang in religious circles and the science behind chants does show the power of congregation as well as health benefits. But there is evidently a need to differentiate between headbanging decibels and soulful chants.



pleasure but as a path to god-realisation." That reminds one of Carnatic composer Thyagaraja's description of god as "Nada Brahmam" (Sound as the divine). I find chants spiritual when done in a coherent, enchanting fashion, irrespective of their origin or religion. I like listening to Gregorian chants that follow Christian traditions, and in a strange way, found Freddie Mercury's chanting chemistry with the crowd at London's Wembley Stadium in his Live Aid concert in 1985 uplifting in a soulful way. After all, the rock bands were raising funds for famine-hit Africans and nursed

"Blast" written on plain paper found in Indigo aircraft toilet on way to Varanasi

Varanasi. (Agency)

Panic gripped passengers aboard Indigo Airlines flight 6E-6719 on Sunday evening when a potential bomb threat was made while the aircraft was en route from Hyderabad to Varanasi. The alert came after a vigilant crew member discovered a piece of plain paper in the aircraft's toilet, on which the word "Blast" had been written in pencil. Airport authorities were immediately notified, triggering a swift security response.

According to airport officials, the Indigo flight was approaching Varanasi when a crew member found a piece of paper with something written on it in the toilet. The airport administration was immediately alerted.

Upon receiving the information, security agencies and police teams at Lal Bahadur Shastri International Airport immediately swung into action. A thorough search was launched immediately after the aircraft landed. However, no suspicious object was recovered after the search. The Central Industrial Security Force (CISF), bomb disposal squad, fire brigade, Anti-Terrorism Squad (ATS), Local Intelligence Unit (LIU), and local police immediately launched an investigation. A total of 237 people, including the crew members, were safely disembarked after security checks.

Phulpur Police Station in-charge Atul Kumar Singh said that the word "Blast" was found written in pencil on a piece of plain paper in the aircraft's toilet. After a detailed search, no suspicious object was found in the aircraft. The aircraft landed ahead of its scheduled time as a precautionary measure. Nothing was found after the investigation. After several hours of intensive investigation, security agencies declared the aircraft completely safe. According to sources, as part of the security protocol, some passengers were asked to write on plain paper to match their handwriting. Investigators are trying to determine how the paper ended up in the toilet.

Manipur NDA MLAs camping in Delhi to discuss government formation

Imphal. (Agency)

Most of the NDA MLAs from Manipur are currently in the national capital to meet central leaders and discuss the possible formation of a popular government in the state.

The one year of President's Rule in Manipur is set to end on February 13, and any extension would require both the announcement of an emergency and a declaration by the Election Commission that holding elections in the state is not feasible.

Some of the BJP MLAs indicated that a meeting will be held later today in the national capital. Former Chief Minister N. Biren Singh and Manipur BJP President Adhikarimayum Sharda Devi, Th Satyabrat, Speaker of Manipur Legislative Assembly, leaders of National People's Party (NPP) and Naga People's Front (NPF)—the two other constituent partners of the alliance, are expected to attend.

Speaking ahead of the meeting, Sharda Devi said that discussions on government formation are likely to be on the agenda. In the 60-member Manipur Assembly, the BJP holds 37 seats, NPP six, and NPF five, with three Independents supporting the alliance. A BJP leader noted that numbers are not expected to be an issue in forming the government.

Three independent MLAs are also supporting the alliance and the number is not an issue, according to a BJP leader. The term of the present Assembly expires in March 2027.

RLD stages protest against Tehsildar in Budhana, Alleges serious misconduct

The Sikh Times

Manoj Pal

Muzaffarnagar: On Monday, Rashtriya Lok Dal workers staged a strong protest against the Tehsildar at the Budhana Tehsil office. The protest was led by former RLD leader Vinod Malik. The workers accused the Tehsildar of misbehaving with the public and neglecting his duties. During the protest, Vinod Malik said that the Tehsildar's working style is causing distress to the common people. He alleged that the Tehsildar speaks rudely to villagers and delays essential work for months. He cited the example of Kajal from Kuralasi village, who has been visiting the Tehsil office for the past five years to get her land records updated, but to no avail. Similarly, a villager named Rajbir has been struggling for



three months to obtain a caste certificate for his granddaughter. The protesters alleged that the Tehsildar does not sit in court on time, causing people to wait for hours, and hundreds of revenue-related cases are pending. RLD leaders also leveled serious allegations against the Tehsildar, including demanding bribes and using casteist slurs. After the protest, the workers submitted a memorandum addressed to the District Magistrate to Sub-Divisional Magistrate (Judicial) Krishnakant Vishwakarma. Vinod Malik warned that if no action is taken soon, a large-scale agitation will be launched at the Tehsil office on February 12, in which Khap leaders and a large number of villagers from the area will participate. Several RLD leaders and villagers were present during the protest, including Bali Tyagi, Jitendra Malik, Sarwar Khan, Ritesh Rathi, Sajid Rana, Sompal, and Gajendra.

Ahead of 2027 Assembly elections SAD appoints circle chiefs in Mohali to strengthen booth-level presence

Chandigarh. (Agency)

To consolidate its grassroots presence in Mohali district in the run-up to the 2027 Punjab Assembly elections, the Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) has appointed circle presidents to strengthen the organisation up to the booth level.

According to the party leadership, the move is part of an organisational expansion drive to reconnect with workers and voters at the ground level. The appointments were made following the approval by SAD president Sukhbir Singh Badal, and the orders were issued by SAD Mohali district president Parvinder Singh Sohana on the recommendation of Derabassi Assembly constituency in-charge N K Sharma.

Emphasising the importance of the exercise, Sohana said, "Strengthening the party at the booth level is the need of the hour, and the appointment of office-bearers is a vital step in this direction."

Sohana asked the newly appointed presidents to actively carry the party's policies and

achievements to every household and build strong bonds with people in their respective areas. "Such groundwork will pave the way for the Akali Dal to form a government after the 2027 elections," he said. According to

of Jastana Kalan with Lalru Rural Zone-2.

In Lalru, Rohit Rattan has been appointed president of Zone-1, and Gurvinder Singh of Hasanpur of Zone-2. The responsibility of the Derabassi rural circle has been assigned to

Rajinder Singh of Isapur, with Dilbar Singh of Chadiala getting charge of Rural Zone-1, Karmapal Singh of Kheri Gujran for Zone-2, Narayan Singh of Bahera for Zone-3 and Sanjeev Singh Sanju for Zone-4.

Similarly, Ragbir Singh Mohi has been appointed circle president for Banur City, and Kulwinder Singh Tsauli will head Banur Rural.

Congratulating all newly appointed office-bearers, Sohana said, "Party workers are the real strength of the SAD, and only their dedication and active participation can take the organisation to new heights."

He expressed hope that the new team would effectively convey the party's ideology to the people and further strengthen the organisation in the district.



PGI doctors achieve breakthrough in aluminium phosphide poisoning

Chandigarh. (Agency)

Doctors at Postgraduate Institute of Medical Education and Research (PGIMER), Chandigarh, have reported a breakthrough in the treatment of aluminium phosphide, commonly known as Celphos — one of the deadliest forms of poisoning seen in North India.

Conducted at PGI's Department of Internal Medicine, this study is the first clinical study to demonstrate the effectiveness of intravenous lipid emulsion as a novel life-saving therapy in this otherwise highly fatal condition.

The important findings were published in the internationally reputed journal — 'European Review of Medical and Pharmacological Sciences' — bringing global recognition to

research that addresses a major public-health problem.

The study was carried out under the guidance of Sanjay Jain, Dean (Academics), Professor and Head of the Department of Internal Medicine, PGI. Jain's clinical leadership in emergency care played a crucial role in the management of these critically ill patients.

The research was funded by the Medical Education and Research Cell (MERC), PGI, underlining the strong institutional support for clinically relevant and socially impactful research.

This randomised clinical study was led by Mandip Singh Bhatia, Associate Professor of Internal Medicine, and Saurabh Chandrabhan Sharda was the co-

investigator, along with other authors from the department.

Encouraging results

Patients who received intravenous lipid emulsion in addition to standard medical treatment

complications. The findings clearly demonstrate that early administration of this therapy can significantly alter the clinical course of aluminium phosphide poisoning.

A major advantage of this novel treatment is its practicality. Intravenous lipid emulsion is inexpensive, widely available and already stocked in most hospitals across India, including district hospitals and peripheral healthcare facilities. Because of its low cost and easy availability, this therapy has the potential to save lives even in rural and far-flung areas, where Celphos poisoning is highest and access to advanced critical care is often limited.



showed a marked reduction in mortality. They also recorded faster correction of severe metabolic acidosis and improved hemodynamic stability, including those with shock and cardiac

Indian Railways Allocates Rs 11,486 Cr for Assam & Northeast in 2026-27 Record Railway Budget Boosts Connectivity

The Sikh Times

Maligaon, 02nd February: The Indian Railways Budget allocation for 2026-2027 marks a historic milestone for Assam and the North Eastern states under the Northeast Frontier Railway (NFR). The Government of India has earmarked a record Rs 11,486 crore for Assam and the North Eastern states, reflecting a fivefold increase compared to 2014 and reaffirming its commitment to faster, safer and future-ready rail connectivity across the region. A massive infrastructure push is underway in Assam and the Northeast with Rs 72,468 crore worth of railway projects currently in progress. Surveys for new railway lines are being conducted to further expand the network, while rail connectivity to Bhutan from Kokrajhar to Gelephu (69 Km) is being planned. Railway projects in Manipur have resumed and works in Sikkim and Nagaland are also progressing at a fast rate, significantly improving regional and international connectivity. One of the most significant infrastructure developments in Assam is the

launch of the nation's first Vande Bharat



Both services were inaugurated by Hon'ble



rail network. Railway network expansion and electrification have accelerated across Assam and the North East under NFR. Since 2014, about 1900 km of new tracks have been laid, while five NE states are fully electrified and Assam has achieved 98% electrification, with 2,839 km electrified across the region. Additionally, 502 flyovers and underpasses have been built and the Kavach safety system has been sanctioned for 1197 km, with works in progress on 235 km. Technology and safety remain key priorities, with the deployment of AI-based camera systems to prevent elephant deaths on railway tracks and the strengthening of Intrusion Detection System (IDS) for smarter operations. With investments now five times higher than 2014, Indian Railways is driving inclusive growth, boosting trade and tourism and ushering in a new era of sustainable rail development for Assam, Northeast and the nation. The expanded rail network under NFR plays a crucial role in advancing the Government of India's Act East Policy by enhancing cross-border and regional connectivity in the Northeast.

ESIC told to pay 90% wage pension with interest & compensation to widows of deceased workers

Nirmala (54), wife of Ram Singh, and a resident of Mohali's Phase 5, said she is issueless and was dependent entirely on her husband.

Chandigarh. (Agency)

The District Consumer Disputes Redressal Commission in Mohali has directed the Employee's State Insurance Corporation (ESIC), including its Regional Director, Chandigarh, and Branch Manager, Mohali, to release dependent benefits, along with interest and compensation, to the families of two deceased workers.

The Commission ordered ESIC to pay a monthly dependent pension equivalent to 90 per cent of the deceased workers' wages from the date of death, with an interest of 9 per cent, to be paid within 30 days, failing which the amount will have to be paid with an interest of 12 per cent. In addition, ESIC has been directed to pay a compensation of Rs 35,000 each to both families for mental agony, harassment and litigation expenses. Advocate Jasbir Singh, who represented the widows, told The Indian Express, "Both cases reflect a disturbing pattern, where

genuine employment injury claims were rejected despite complete documentation.

In the first case, Ram Singh, an employee of A & M Technologies, Mohali, fell seriously ill on duty on October 30, 2021. He was taken to an ESI hospital and later referred to Indus Hospital in Mohali, where he died during the treatment on October 31. Although the death was duly reported and all formalities were completed, ESIC refused to recognise it as an employment injury.

"In the second case, Hari Shankar, who was working with Swani Rubber Industries, Mohali, since 1998, collapsed at the factory on March 16, 2021. He was first taken to an ESI hospital in Mohali, and later shifted to Fortis Hospital after being denied a bed elsewhere. He died on March 18, yet ESIC rejected the claim," the advocate said.

Allowing both complaints, Commission President SK Aggarwal observed, "Under Para 58(2) of the ESI (Central) Rules, 1950,



dependents are entitled to benefits when an insured person dies due to an employment injury."

Speaking with The Indian Express, Bharti Devi (32), widow of Hari Shankar, who belongs to Bihar, said she had moved to Mohali after marriage. "After my husband's death, the responsibility of four young children fell entirely on me. I survive by doing daily-wage work wherever I can. This pension has finally given me some support and hope that I can raise my children with dignity," she added.

Nirmala (54), wife of Ram Singh, and a resident of Mohali's Phase 5, said she is issueless and was dependent entirely on her husband. "After his death, I had no idea what my future would be. After getting a pension, I can live without stretching my hands before others," she said, adding that she continues to serve at the PGI langar as she used to do with her husband.

Former Muruga Mutt pontiff faces fresh legal trouble over property sales

Chitradurga. (Agency)

Former pontiff of Muruga Mutt, Muruga Sharana, has landed in fresh legal trouble after a case was filed against him in the Hosadurga court for allegedly selling mutt properties in violation of a court order.

The complaint was filed by Shivayogi Kalasad, president of the Muruga Mutt Administrative Committee and a retired IAS officer. The committee, appointed by the government to manage the affairs of the mutt, approached the court following a complaint by one Prakash, who alleged illegal sale of mutt properties.

According to the petition, Murugashree is accused of violating a judicial restriction that barred him from dealing with mutt properties. Despite the order, he allegedly executed a General Power of Attorney in favour of M Manjunath of Hosadurga, who then sold four residential sites belonging to the mutt to two individuals, identified as Mamatha and Nalini.

The administrative committee stated that the transactions were carried out in clear defiance of the court's directive. After verifying documents and other details related to the alleged sales, the committee formally lodged the complaint on January 30. The court has taken cognisance of the matter and further legal proceedings are expected in the coming days.

Murugashree is already facing trial in a separate case under the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act, in which he is the prime accused. In view of that case, the court had earlier imposed restrictions preventing him from participating in administrative and financial matters of the mutt.

Commenting on the development, Shivayogi Kalasad said the committee was committed to safeguarding the assets of the mutt.

He said legal action had been initiated to prevent any misuse of institutional properties and that any illegal transactions would be firmly challenged.

Weeks after Delhi HC's rap, Lawrence Bishnoi rival Parvesh Mann sentenced to 7-year jail by sessions court

Along with Parvesh, five of his allies — Sachin Mann, Ajay Mann, Yudhveer, Sahil Dahiya and Gaurav Tyagi — were also convicted on January 28. Judge Chander Jit Singh sentenced the four — in jail since 2021 — to five-year imprisonment.

Pune Porsche crash: 3 accused get bail, Supreme Court cites long incarceration

New Delhi.(Agency)

The Supreme Court has granted bail to three accused in the 2024 Pune Porsche case, in which two people were killed. Aditya Avinash Sood, Ashish Satis Mittal, and Amar Santosh Gaikwad were arrested on charges of swapping blood samples of the primary accused, who were minors and inside the car at the time, with their own.

During the hearing, the bench comprising Justice BV Nagarathna and Justice Ujjal Bhuyan, said that there was no point in multiplying the witnesses in the case when the petitioners have been in undertrial custody for more than three years. As many as 159 witnesses are yet to be examined in the matter.

"Even if it is held that it was the juvenile who caused the accident, he is being proceeded against before the JJB. Thus, it was contended that continued incarceration of these appellants in the absence of any progress in the trial and the possibility of delay due to more than a hundred prosecution witnesses would cause them prejudice," the bench noted.

The Pune case had drawn nationwide backlash as the primary accused in the case was 17 at the time. He had driven the luxury sports car in a drunken state and

fatally knocked down two techies, Aneesh Awadhi and Ashwini Koshta, who were on a scooter. Hours later, the Juvenile Justice Board granted bail to the teen, directing him to do work in police for 15 days, write a 300-word essay on road accidents, undergo treatment for drinking habits and take counselling sessions. The decision invited even more nationwide outrage.

Sood and Mittal were arrested on August 19 last year after their blood samples were used for tests and swapped out with the two minors who were in the Porsche along with the 17-year-old at the time of the incident. The Bombay High Court rejected Sood and Mittal's pleas along with six others in December last year.

Delhi University case against blind equity policies

New Delhi.(Agency)

The Supreme Court has come to the timely rescue of the government by staying the UGC Equity Regulations 2026. Before the things could get out of the hands, more within the core supporters of the ruling BJP, the apex court may have given the ruling establishment breathing space by putting the matter onto the back burner.

Has such 'affirmative' measures in the higher education institutes like the UGC Equity Regulations 2026 always yielded desired results? If we were to take a case study of the Delhi University, the introduction of reservation for the OBCs has created a considerable loss to the academic environment. If one were to limit the study to the conduct of DU Students Union (DUSU) elections alone, the contests



for the main posts have come to be limited between two prominent OBC communities. What should ideally be a democratic exercise representing the collective student body has gradually turned into a contest dominated by caste consolidation.

Elections have ceased to be driven by ideological debate, policy vision, or student welfare. They have become vulgar ostentation of money power and community muscle. Campaigns are marked by extravagant spending, aggressive mobilisation, and patronage networks that resemble mainstream electoral politics rather than campus democracy. In such an atmosphere, the election machinery often appears reduced to the role of helpless minions.

New Delhi.(Agency)
Weeks after the Delhi High Court rapped the sessions court over the delay in the pronouncement of verdict in a 2019 Maharashtra Control of Organised Crime Act (MCOCA) case against gangster Parvesh Mann, a rival Lawrence Bishnoi, the sessions court in Karkardooma on Saturday sentenced the gangster to seven years in jail.

Parvesh Mann alias Sagar Mann was tried under sections 3 and 4 (conspiring, committing or facilitating organised crime) of MCOCA, stemming from a FIR lodged by the Delhi Police Special Cell, which took note of his involvement in organised crime. The case was probed by ACP Jasbir Singh.

Along with Parvesh, five of his allies — Sachin Mann, Ajay Mann, Yudhveer, Sahil Dahiya and Gaurav Tyagi — were also convicted on January 28. Judge Chander Jit Singh sentenced the four — in jail since 2021 — to five-year imprisonment. He directed that they "undergo the period of custody already undergone" and

also pay a fine of Rs 5 lakh. If they default on the fine, they would have to serve two years in jail. Mann and his aide Gaurav Tyagi — also sentenced to seven years in jail — have been behind bars since 2020 and 2021, respectively. Mann also has to pay a fine of Rs 5 lakh.

Tyagi, allegedly the key henchmen for Mann, was arrested after an exchange of fire with the Special Cell sleuths in November 2021. An officer said that Tyagi, once hailed as a wrestling prodigy, became a sharpshooter for Mann after he lost his chances of making it big as a sportsman due to an injury. The delay in trial

Even as the Delhi Police's Special Cell had arrested Mann in 2020, the trial was completed after nearly five years while the gangster remained behind bars in Northwest Delhi's Mandoli jail.

While the sessions court had concluded Parvesh's trial on July 4, 2025, and fixed July 30, 2025, as the date to pronounce the verdict, the final judgement was not announced on four

subsequent dates. On November 7, 2025, the sessions court again deferred the pronouncement, directing that the accused be produced physically not virtually, as it fixed November 28, 2025, as the date for the

Court, seeking that the order for fresh trial be set aside.

Justice Swarana Kanta Sharma of the HC last month ordered that the trial be completed in the sessions court in two-three weeks. Setting aside the lower court's decision, the Judge recorded in the order, "Judicial proceedings cannot oscillate between readiness and uncertainty in this manner, particularly after the trial has concluded..."

The bloody 'Mann' wars
Parvesh Mann, a key member of the Neeraj Bawana gang, had 14 cases lodged against him. He has been known for his rivalry with gangster Kapil Mann, a Lawrence Bishnoi ally and Parvesh's neighbour from Outer Delhi's Khera Khurd village.

Their rivalry, according to the police, began about 17 years ago, when Parvesh and Kapil's families got embroiled in a battle for control over Khera Khurd village — including a 100 yard long boundary wall.



pronouncement of the verdict. However, the judge, who had heard the matter, was transferred on November 18, 2025. The sessions court then issued directions that the final arguments be heard again. Mann had then moved the High

Traffic cops, officials blackmailed using video clips: 2 more linked to 'sticker extortion racket' arrested, 10 held so far

New Delhi.(Agency)

Two men linked to the 'sticker extortion racket' — involving gangs that allegedly targeted traffic police personnel and government officials in Delhi by covertly recording and manipulating videos to blackmail them — have been arrested, officers said on Sunday, adding that this takes the total number of arrests related to the racket to 10 so far. While one of the accused allegedly collected the extortion money, the other recorded videos used for blackmailing the officials and traffic police personnel, said police.



Three such gangs — that together operated the alleged syndicate violating the city's pollution-control and traffic regulations — have been busted by the Delhi Police over the last month. All three gang leaders — Raju Meena, Jeeshan Ali and Rinku Rana — have been arrested. The gangs allegedly assured transporters that no challan would be issued against their vehicles bearing the stickers that were sold to them by the syndicate. Sanjay Gupta, one of the two suspects recently arrested, was a member of the Raju Meena Gang, said police. He was apprehended on January 20. "He was trained for preparing videos for the purpose of extortion after manipulating traffic police personnel and officials," DCP (Crime) Sanjeev Yadav said. He is the third arrest from the Raju Meena gang.

Amir Chaudhary, the other suspect, worked for the Jeeshan Ali gang.

He was caught while he was blackmailing a Delhi Traffic police officer on January 17. "He is a cab driver by profession and also a key associate of Jeeshan Ali. He was apprehended red-handed during an extortion bid," DCP Yadav said.

Delhi wakes up to cleaner air after overnight drizzle. Here's the week's forecast

New Delhi.(Agency)

Light rain in several parts of NCR and calm winds overnight triggered dense fog across Delhi on Monday, prompting the India Meteorological Department (IMD) to first issue a red alert in the wee hours. This was later scaled down, and a yellow alert now remains in place for the forenoon hours. As a result of the dense fog stretching late into the morning, the visibility dipped to as low as 100 m for several hours at Safdarjung and Palam. The weather conditions, however, helped improve Delhi's air quality as it turned to 'Moderate' (181 AQI) by Monday morning, after the daily average AQI was reported at 265 in the 'Poor' range on Sunday. February, meanwhile, is expected to remain warmer and relatively dry.

What led to the dense fog?

Senior meteorologists attributed the fog formation to stable atmospheric conditions created after the overnight

rain spell. High moisture levels coupled with very weak winds allowed cool air to be trapped near the ground, resulting in condensation to fog.

"After the overnight rain, there were only very light winds which didn't allow the moisture to disperse. This is why,



earlier when rainfall was heavier on January 23 and 27, no such fog was seen because stronger winds had prevented it," said R K Jenamani, senior scientist and head of weather forecast services in IMD.

On Sunday, moisture-laden easterly winds of up to 15 kmph were recorded, which increased humidity across the

region. According to the IMD Meteorological Centre, Lucknow, the overnight rain was observed in parts of NCR, including Gautam Buddha Nagar (1 mm), Meerut (5 mm), Muzaffarnagar (6 mm) and Agra (2.2 mm). There was no rainfall recorded in Delhi. Impact of 'feeble western disturbances': No rain, increase in temperature The IMD has said that a fresh feeble western disturbance is likely to affect the higher reaches of the Himalayan region from Monday night. Another western disturbance is expected to impact northwest India from the night of February 5.

Dr Mrutyunjaya Mohapatra, Director General (IMD), had earlier on Saturday said that Northwest India, including Delhi, would see higher day and night temperatures because of "weaker western disturbances". He said the cloud cover will lead to increase in night temperatures, but a lack of rain would result in warmer days.

4.78% more funds for Delhi Police in Union Budget 2026-27, eye on modernisation

New Delhi.(Agency)

Delhi Police has been allocated Rs 12,846.1 crore in the 2026-27 Union Budget, an increase of 4.78% from the 2025-26 fiscal year.

The higher allocation is aimed at meeting routine expenditure while also supporting modernisation efforts, particularly in traffic management and communication infrastructure, across the National Capital Region (NCR).

For the current financial year 2025-26, the Budget allocated to the force was Rs 12,259.1 crore.

The funds will be used to pay for day-to-day operational costs, salaries, and pensions, as well as for specific schemes such as the development of a model traffic management system and the strengthening of an integrated communication network.

Officers said investments are also planned for upgrading technological capabilities, installing traffic signals at critical junctions, and training personnel

to handle emerging challenges in urban policing. Delhi Police is tasked with maintaining law and order in the National Capital Territory of Delhi, a responsibility that includes traffic regulation, crime control, crowd management, counter-terror operations,



and ensuring security during major public events.

With Delhi witnessing steady population growth, rising number of vehicles, and increasing interconnectivity with surrounding NCR cities, the force has repeatedly flagged

the need for improved infrastructure and technology-driven policing.

The 2026-27 allocation places particular emphasis on traffic management, an area that has emerged as a critical concern amid mounting congestion, frequent accidents, and the expansion of road networks in Delhi-NCR. The proposed model traffic system is expected to focus on better signal coordination, real-time monitoring, and improved enforcement mechanisms. Strengthening communication networks is also seen as crucial for enhancing coordination between police units and with other law enforcement agencies operating in the region. In recent years, budgetary allocations to the Delhi Police have shown a pattern of incremental increases rather than sharp jumps.

Funds worth Rs 12,259.1 crore allotted to the force in 2025-26 followed an allocation of around Rs 11,300 crore in 2024-25 and approximately

Finance Commission recommends Rs 66,100-cr grant for urbanisation, revamp of drainage in cities

New Delhi.(Agency)

Flagging the urgent need for improving the drainage system in cities and the slow pace of urbanisation, the 16th Finance Commission has recommended a Rs 56,100 crore grant for wastewater management projects in selected cities and a Rs 10,000 crore urbanisation premium.

The report of the 16th Finance Commission, which was tabled in the Parliament on Sunday, said it's primarily focussing on "accelerating urbanisation".

"First, there is an urgent need for the revamp of the drainage system in Indian cities. While the large metros are in a position to raise their own fiscal resources for this purpose, the same is not true of the smaller cities.

Therefore, taking into account the availability of limited resources, we have recommended the provision of some fiscal resources for revamping the drainage system in the middle-level municipalities on a cost-sharing basis," the report said. The Finance Commission recommended a Special Infrastructure Component of

Rs.56,100 crore for wastewater projects of selected cities. A total of 22 cities, including

Pune, Jaipur, Lucknow, Kanpur, Nagpur, Patna, Rajkot, Amritsar, Madurai and Howrah, are eligible for this component.

The report highlighted the example of Indore's wastewater management as a successful model, saying it had transformed itself, ranking number one in the Swachh Survekshan for seven consecutive years.

Incidentally, Indore has seen a spate of deaths of residents who drank contaminated water in the past month.

"Efficient liquid waste management was achieved through comprehensive interception of household and grey water sewage outfalls into rivers and stormwater drains, coupled with the establishment of a robust sewerage network," it said of Indore. The report also noted that the process of urbanisation was

taking too long. "Second, we have observed that there are unusually long delays in conferring a statutory urban status on areas that come to exhibit all urban characteristics. India's

continue to be governed by rural local bodies (RLBs), which are ill-equipped to manage the burgeoning demands of an urbanising population," the report said.

It recommended a Rs.10,000 crore urbanisation premium to incentivise the transition from rural to urban. The report recommended the incorporation of peri-urban areas, or rural areas that have acquired substantial urban features, into the adjacent municipal bodies.

The Finance Commission recommended a total of Rs.3,56,257 crore for urban local bodies from 2026-27 to 2030-2031, of which Rs.2,32,125 crore is the basic grant, Rs.29,016 crore ULB performance component, Rs.56,100 crore Special Infrastructure Component and Rs.10,000 crore as the urbanisation premium.



urbanisation process remains constrained by the slow and ad-hoc conversion of census towns into statutory towns and the hesitant merger of peri-urban areas into nearby urban local bodies. Such areas

NEWS BOX

Delhi Capitals edge past UP Warriorz to book WPL 2026 Eliminator spot, MI bow out

NEW DELHI. (Agency)

Delhi Capitals did just enough when it mattered, holding their nerve in a tense run chase to beat UP Warriorz by five wickets and secure a spot in the WPL 2026 Eliminator on Sunday. The win not only extended DC's remarkable record of making the playoffs in every season so far, but also confirmed the defending champions Mumbai Indians' exit from the tournament. Set a modest target of 123, Capitals appeared to be cruising early before a late wobble threatened to undo their work. They eventually reached 126 for five with eight balls to spare, thanks to a composed finish from captain Jemimah Rodrigues, who remained unbeaten on 34 off 18 balls, and youngster Niki Prasad, who stayed calm at the other end to seal the result. Bowlers set the platform for Capitals.

The chase was built on a solid foundation laid by Laura Wolvaardt and Shafali Verma. After an early blow with the dismissal of Lizelle Lee, the pair steadied the innings with a 73-



run stand. Wolvaardt anchored the effort with a patient 47 off 36 balls, striking seven boundaries, while Shafali played the supporting role with a measured 29.

Just when the finish line seemed comfortably in sight, Delhi lost their way. From 84 for one, they slipped to 101 for five, allowing UP Warriorz to sniff a dramatic turnaround. Sophie Ecclestone and Deepi Sharma kept things tight and picked up key wickets, but the lack of runs on the board ultimately hurt UPW. Jemimah ended any remaining doubts by striking two crucial boundaries off Deepi in the penultimate over.

Calm Jemimah wins it for Delhi, ends MI's run. Earlier in the evening, Delhi's bowlers set the tone. Marizanne Kapp led the charge with figures of 3 for 30, while Chinnelle Henry chipped in with two wickets as UP Warriorz were restricted to 122 for eight. UPW never quite recovered from losing an early wicket and struggled to build partnerships throughout the innings.

Gavaskar trolls Pakistan's India boycott: Like their cricketers, a U-turn awaits

NEW DELHI. (Agency)

Batting great Sunil Gavaskar did not hold back in his assessment of Pakistan's decision to boycott India's match at the T20 World Cup 2026, suggesting that, much like their retired cricketers who frequently reverse decisions, Pakistan could also be forced into a U-turn under pressure from voices within the game, both globally and domestically. Speaking to India Today's sister channel AajTak, Gavaskar took a swipe at Pakistan, remarking that their cricketers have set a precedent by often going back on major decisions—an indirect jab at the likes of Shahid Afridi, who repeatedly announced retirements only to reverse them. "I think in the next four or five days, when reactions start pouring in from across the world and even from their former players, there is a possibility that Pakistan will change their stance," Gavaskar said. India and Pakistan were scheduled to



meet in a league-stage match of the T20 World Cup in Colombo on February 15. However, the Pakistan government created a stir on Sunday evening by announcing that its national team would boycott the match against India. The decision comes after Pakistan cricket chief Mohsin Naqvi—who also serves as the country's Interior Minister—threatened to boycott the T20 World Cup in solidarity with Bangladesh, who were replaced by Scotland in the 20-team tournament starting February 7. "What's new in this? We all know Pakistan cricketers retire and then, four days later, take back their retirement, saying 'our fans told us to play more.' This might happen again," Gavaskar said. What's the problem with making U-turns in your decisions? There's no issue, as far as I know. "Pakistan players have set examples. They keep coming back from retirement. So something like that might happen before the 15th," Gavaskar also warned Pakistan of potential sanctions and penalties from the International Cricket Council (ICC) if it goes ahead with its decision to avoid playing India on February 15.

Boycott India match, but what about the final?

Ex-cricketers question Pakistan stance

Pakistan's decision to boycott the India match has opened a bigger question. If the teams meet again later in the tournament, will Pakistan walk away from a World Cup final too?

New Delhi. (Agency)

Pakistan's decision to boycott their marquee T20 World Cup clash against India has left the cricketing world more puzzled than persuaded. What was meant to be a political statement has instead opened up a flood of uncomfortable questions, especially about how far the stance is meant to go. The flashpoint is February 15 in Colombo, where India and Pakistan were scheduled to meet in the league stage of the T20 World Cup 2026. While the Pakistan government's announcement caught fans off guard, it has been former cricketers who have voiced the sharpest doubts, wondering whether



selective participation in a global tournament is even feasible. Pietersen and Ashwin question boycott stance. Former England captain Kevin Pietersen was among the first to publicly challenge the logic behind the move, questioning whether Pakistan would maintain the same position if the two sides crossed paths later in the tournament. "Not sure if India can meet Pakistan in this World Cup final due to groups and play-offs, but if they can, would Pakistan refuse to play the

World Cup final?" Pietersen wrote in his post. Soon after, former India spinner Ravichandran Ashwin also weighed in, pointing out the complications such a boycott could create in knockout scenarios. "An India-Pakistan clash, even in the knockout is ruled out? Sure? We get there it will be a 'World T20 bye'?" Ashwin's post read. Why did Pakistan threaten an IND vs PAK boycott? Pakistan's boycott announcement stems from comments made

Football hasn't left Man United's Casemiro: Carragher makes U-turn after Fulham show

London. (Agency)

Former Liverpool defender-turned-pundit Jamie Carragher has made a notable U-turn on Casemiro, admitting that "the football has not left him" after the Brazilian's standout display in Manchester United's dramatic 3-2 win over Fulham. Carragher's reassessment comes months after he had openly questioned whether Casemiro was still cut out for Premier League football. Speaking to Sky Sports after United's 3-2 win against Fulham on Sunday, Carragher acknowledged that his earlier criticism no longer holds, with Casemiro producing performances that resemble the elite midfielder United thought they were signing. "It is now fair to say the football has not left him. Considering what he's producing this season in the Premier League, and not just Fulham at home, you think what he did last week against Arsenal away and Manchester City at home," he said. With a touch of humour aimed at himself, Carragher said Casemiro's recent run of form demanded a rethink. "Casemiro is well within his rights to, if he wants to come back at me and say, 'leave the punditry before the punditry's left you!' He could

definitely get one of those back in. Credit to him, he looks a completely different player," Carragher said. "He looks like a different player physically as well. Even when I said that, you looked at him and he looked like an old man coming to the end of



his time as a player and whether he let himself go a little bit, or now he's being ultra professional, physically, he looks completely different," he added. What did Carragher say first about Casemiro?

The praise marked a sharp contrast to Carragher's stance in May 2024, when he was brutally critical of Casemiro after a heavy defeat at Crystal Palace, suggesting

the midfielder's legs were gone and that it might be time to step away from top-level football. At that stage, Casemiro's form had dipped noticeably and he appeared out of sync with the pace of the league. Fast-forward to this season, and the narrative has flipped. Casemiro has been one of Manchester United's most consistent performers, rolling back the years with commanding midfield displays. Against Fulham on Sunday, the 33-year-old dominated the centre of the pitch, opened the scoring in the 19th minute, and then even assisted United's second.

Man United continue on winning ways. The match itself was a thriller. United raced into a 2-0 lead through Casemiro and Matheus Cunha, only for Fulham to stage a late comeback with a Raul Jimenez penalty and a stoppage-time equaliser. Just when it seemed two points had slipped away, substitute Benjamin Sesko struck deep into added time to seal a 3-2 win and send Old Trafford into raptures. The victory continued United's resurgence under interim manager Michael Carrick, lifting them to fourth in the Premier League table, with Chelsea a point behind in fifth.

Novak Djokovic may have fallen short of the elusive No. 25 yet again, but at 38, he delivered a reminder that his greatest current era rivals, Carlos Alcaraz and Jannik Sinner, are still not coasting through this era unchallenged. The duopoly, Djokovic screamed loud, can be shaken. His run to the final of the season-opening Australian Open was proof. For Djokovic, and for those who still believe, Sunday in Melbourne may have felt more encouraging than some of his Grand Slam victories. That sounds strange. But at 38, Djokovic is doing things not many in sport, and no one in men's tennis, has ever managed.

A few months ago, it almost felt like Djokovic had given up. That isn't who he is. Yet there he was acknowledging the widening gap between himself and the two men who had seized control of men's tennis. Alcaraz and Sinner had won all eight Grand Slams over the last two years between them. Since winning the US Open in 2023, Djokovic had reached just one Grand Slam final. In 2025, he couldn't get past the semifinals of any of the four majors. And



when Alcaraz hammered him in straight sets in New York, Djokovic sounded beaten—a tone rarely heard from him. But time, finally, appeared to be winning, even against the man who once bent it to his will. The Sincaraz era felt inevitable.

The most telling moment came after his semifinal defeat in New York.

"It will be very difficult for me in the future to overcome the hurdle of Sinner and Alcaraz in best-of-fives at Grand Slams. I think I have a better chance in best-of-three, but best-of-five, it's tough," he said after the US Open exit.

He stressed he wasn't giving up. But the tone was subdued, almost doubtful—as if the chase for a record 25th Grand Slam title might never be complete.

BUT, DJOKOVIC IS DJOKOVIC

After skipping the preseason, he arrived in Melbourne with quiet hope—and very little external belief. The conversation revolved around Alcaraz's bid for a Career Grand Slam and Sinner's push for a third straight Norman Brookes Challenge Cup. Djokovic was placed in Sinner's half. His presence was barely discussed as a threat.

Carlos Alcaraz plans kangaroo tattoo to celebrate his Australian Open title win

NEW DELHI. (Agency)

Carlos Alcaraz is considering a permanent reminder of his maiden Australian Open title win, revealing that he may get a small kangaroo tattoo to celebrate the biggest milestone of his career. The 22-year-old said the idea came naturally after his victory over Novak Djokovic in the men's singles final, a win that made him the youngest male player to complete a career Grand Slam. The design is clear in his mind, but the location is still undecided. "I already know it's going to be a kangaroo. I just don't know the place," Alcaraz said. "I'm just thinking about the leg but I don't know which calf, whether it will be the right or left one." Alcaraz posed with the ornate Australian Open trophy on Monday during a photo shoot at Melbourne's Royal Exhibition Building, looking relaxed and stylish in black, wearing loafers without socks. A day earlier,



women's singles champion Elena Rybakina was photographed with her trophy along the banks of the Yarra River. According to Australian media reports, Alcaraz spent the night after his victory quietly with his family in his hotel suite, celebrating with pizza, beer and champagne.

In a social media message shared with fans during the photo shoot, Alcaraz admitted the scale of the moment was still sinking in. "I still can't believe that I just made it. A

dream come true for me, a career Grand Slam. I'm enjoying this amazing moment. I can't forget the support and the love I've received." After closing out a 2-6, 6-2, 6-3, 7-5 win over the 10-time Australian Open champion, Alcaraz spoke about the nerves he felt before the last point. "Before the last point, a lot of things came to my mind, to be honest," he said. "I was really nervous. I was shaking almost. So once I saw the ball go out, I was like, alright, I made it. It was a great feeling, thinking about my family and my team as well."

CHASING COMPLETION

With the career Grand Slam secured, Alcaraz has already turned his attention to what remains unfinished. He is aiming to win the three Masters 1000 titles that have so far eluded him, the Canadian Open, Shanghai and Paris, along with the season-ending ATP Finals and the Davis Cup with Spain.

IND vs PAK fiasco won't end here: Former Pakistan skipper on T20 World Cup boycott row

Rashid Latif has warned that Pakistan's T20 World Cup boycott threat could spark prolonged chaos beyond one tournament. With future ICC events at stake, the former captain believes the controversy is only beginning.

NEW DELHI. (Agency)

Former Pakistan captain Rashid Latif has warned that the T20 World Cup boycott controversy involving Pakistan is far from over, suggesting the standoff could trigger wider complications for international cricket. Latif believes the decision has been taken with long-term consequences in mind and could resurface across multiple ICC events. Speaking in an interview with Times

of India, Latif said Pakistan's stance should not be viewed as a one-off reaction and hinted that the ripple effects could extend well beyond the ongoing men's T20 World Cup. "Pakistan generally don't take such decisions. The PCB is not even scared of sanctions. It will have a big impact. There is a Women's T20 World Cup in England this year, and Pakistan might play India there as well. Then there is a Champions Trophy in 2028, hosted by India. So this will not end here. It seems that Pakistan has taken this step after a lot of thought," Latif said. Latif pointed out that relations between the two boards had appeared stable until recently, with both sides agreeing on a hybrid model for ICC events over the next three years. "Till now, everything was going well. Pakistan and India both agreed that we would play in a hybrid model for the next three years. The Asia Cup happened in Dubai. Pakistan's women's team played in Sri Lanka in the Women's ODI World Cup. Everything was

going well, but things have changed since the Bangladesh episode happened," he said from



Islamabad. Why did Pakistan threaten a boycott? The issue began when Pakistan announced it would boycott its league-stage T20 World Cup match against India in Colombo on February 15. The decision followed comments from Pakistan cricket chief Mohsin Naqvi, who spoke about a possible boycott in support of Bangladesh

after they were replaced by Scotland in the tournament. The International Cricket Council (ICC) has raised serious concerns over any team choosing to skip matches in a global event. The ICC said such a move is not in the best interest of the game or its fans. While it is still waiting for official communication from the Pakistan Cricket Board, the ICC has urged Pakistan to think carefully about the long-term impact this decision could have on world cricket. Latif explained why a prolonged standoff would affect more than just India and Pakistan. "Whether it is in India or Pakistan, 60-70 percent of people watch the World Cup because of India-Pakistan matches... You know how powerful broadcasters are. They will find some solution," he said. "Now that Pakistan has joined, it will impact Australia and England financially as well... The businessmen are above our governments. Now the game has gone out of their hands."

US futures, Asian shares slip, tracking Wall Street's retreat, while oil falls more than \$2

New Delhi.(Agency)

U.S. futures and Asian shares skidded Monday and oil prices fell more than \$2 a barrel.

In South Korea, the Kospi tumbled 4.6% to 4,982.54 as worries revived over a potential bubble in the craze for artificial intelligence. Samsung Electronics gave up 3.5%, while chip maker SK Hynix sank 5.6%.

The Kospi has been forging records for weeks as major tech companies piggybacked on the AI craze with deals with major players like chip maker Nvidia.

In other dealings, the price of gold fell 1%, while silver gained more than 2% after both plunged on Friday in a halt to record runs in precious metals markets.

Markets appeared jittery as investors studied what President Donald Trump's new nominee to lead the Federal Reserve, Kevin Warsh, will mean for interest rates. The future for the S&P 500 sank 0.9% while that for the Dow Jones Industrial Average fell 0.5%.

U.S. benchmark crude lost \$2.80 to \$62.41 per barrel. Speaking to reporters aboard Air Force One, Trump said Iran should negotiate a "satisfactory" deal to prevent the Middle Eastern country from getting any nuclear weapons. "I don't know that they will. But they are talking to us. Seriously talking to us," he said.

That comment apparently assuaged some worries over potential disruptions to oil supplies that had pushed prices higher, analysts said. Brent crude fell \$3 to \$66.32 per barrel. In Tokyo, the Nikkei 225 index edged 0.2% higher to 53,422.01, but other regional benchmarks retreated. Hong Kong's Hang Seng dropped 2% to 26,841.45, while the Shanghai Composite index sank 1.1% to 4,071.14. In Australia, the S&P/ASX 200 fell 1.1% to 8,766.70. Taiwan's Taiex lost 2.1%.

Budget holds little promise for election-bound states

New Delhi.(Agency)

As Kerala, Tamil Nadu, West Bengal and Assam gear up for fiercely contested Assembly elections in the coming months, the Union Budget 2026-27 has drawn criticism from Opposition-ruled states.

While the poll-bound states received allocations from rare earth corridor to high-speed rail corridor, turtle trails, and coconut promotion scheme, Opposition leaders argued that the proposals lacked allocations or new schemes that could provide immediate relief or long-term support to states facing fiscal stress.

While the BJP is eyeing a major breakthrough in Tamil Nadu in this election, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman announced sops including high speed rail links for Chennai, ecologically sustainable mountain trail in Podhigai Malai in the Western Ghats and a rare earth corridor for the state. "We now propose to support the mineral-rich states of Odisha, Kerala, Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu to establish dedicated Rare Earth Corridors to promote mining, processing, research and manufacturing." For Kerala, the Budget has proposed a Coconut Promotion Scheme to enhance productivity by replacing non-productive trees with new varieties.

While West Bengal received a new dedicated freight corridor linking Dankuni in West Bengal to Surat in Gujarat, an integrated East Coast Industrial Corridor with a major node at Durgapur to support industrial growth. Another state Assam received an infrastructure boost on Tier-2 and Tier-3 cities, as well as the announcement of Buddhist Circuits.

Customs duty tweaked to reduce manufacturing costs

New Delhi.(Agency)

The Union Budget 2026-27 has introduced a wide set of changes to customs duty aimed at lowering input costs for manufacturing and exports, while tightening tax rules in selected areas.

Customs duty on all dutiable goods brought in for personal consumption has been cut to 10% from 20%. This is expected to reduce the cost of items carried back from overseas travel. Medicines have also received significant relief. The government has removed basic customs duty on 17 cancer medicines and expanded duty exemptions for drugs used to treat rare diseases. Further, a series of exemptions targets manufacturing and energy security. Specified parts used to manufacture microwave ovens have been exempted from basic customs duty. Capital goods required for processing critical minerals in India will now attract zero duty, while exemptions on capital goods used for lithium-ion cell manufacturing, including battery storage systems, have been continued.

Inputs such as sodium antimonate used in solar glass manufacturing have also been made duty-free. The Budget extends relief to the aviation and power sectors. Aircraft manufacturing and maintenance will benefit from exemptions on specified components and raw materials. Imports required for nuclear power projects will remain duty-free until 2035. Fish caught by Indian fishing vessels in international waters have been made fully exempt from customs duty. Revenue Secretary Arvind Shrivastava said, "Customs duty reductions have a logic for each sector, based on the need for certain items to be brought into India and to ensure that customs duty does not add to their cost." He added that the focus was on boosting manufacturing volumes and exports rather than relying on higher tax rates. In cleaner energy, the entire value of biogas has been excluded while calculating excise duty on biogas-blended CNG, effectively lowering taxes on greener fuel blends. Exporters have also been given more flexibility. Exporters in textiles, leather garments, footwear and leather products will now get one year, instead of six months, to export finished goods after importing inputs duty-free. The Budget has also opened the door for foreign companies providing cloud services to customers outside India using data centres located in India, offering them a tax holiday until 2047.

Gold, silver prices continue to fall. Should you buy now

Gold and silver prices have tumbled sharply over the past few days. Read on to know the reason behind the rapid decline, and whether investors should buy or wait for further correction.

New Delhi.(Agency)

Gold and silver have dropped sharply from their recent record highs, raising the natural question for investors: is this dip a buying opportunity or the start of a deeper correction? According to Ponmudi R, CEO of Enrich Money, the latest fall is a cooling phase, not a trend reversal.

SHARP FALL IN GOLD PRICE

MCX gold futures have slipped back into

the Rs 1,38,000-1,48,000 band after touching fresh all-time highs near Rs 1,80,779. Ponmudi says the recent swings reflect short-term profit-taking, not long-term weakness. "The broader structure remains bullish," he says. "The rising channel is intact and pullbacks are still attracting buyers. Selling pressure is being absorbed efficiently." He highlights the Rs 1,43,000-1,45,000 zone as a strong support area. A sustained move above Rs 1,50,000 could re-open upside toward Rs 1,65,000-1,70,000.

Internationally, COMEX gold has cooled to the \$4,580-\$4,700 range after briefly crossing \$4,900. Ponmudi describes the correction as technical rather than structural. "The rally pushed indicators into overbought territory, so this cooling-off is healthy," he explains. "Prices are still holding above major

moving averages, which shows the correction is orderly." Strong demand is visible at \$4,400-\$4,500, which he calls a critical support zone. A breakout above



\$5,000-\$5,100 could restart the move toward earlier peaks.

SILVER CRASHES

MCX silver has dropped to the Rs 2,50,000-2,60,000 region after a massive surge above Rs 4,00,000 and record highs of Rs 4,20,048. Ponmudi

acknowledges the intensity of the pullback. "Silver had become extremely overbought, so fast intraday corrections were expected," he says.

However, he remains confident in the overall trend. "The broader trend is decisively bullish. The rising channel is intact and key EMAs are providing strong support." He identifies Rs 2,35,000-3,40,000 as a critical base zone for silver. Resistance lies near Rs 2,90,000-2,92,000, with room toward Rs 3,25,000 if momentum holds. "Dips continue to offer accumulation opportunities," he adds. Meanwhile, COMEX silver is now trading in the \$75-\$85 consolidation band after hitting a record high above \$121.6. Ponmudi says the sharp rise followed by an equally sharp fall is not a red flag.

Why LTCG tax is back in the spotlight after Budget 2026

New Delhi.(Agency)

Long-term capital gains, or LTCG, has suddenly become one of the most talked-about tax terms after the Union Budget 2026. Even though the government largely kept capital gains tax rules unchanged, investors across equities, gold and derivatives are paying close attention. The reason is simple: expectations were high, but the Budget chose stability over relief.

WHAT BUDGET 2026 SAID ON CAPITAL GAINS

In Budget 2026, the government decided not to disturb the existing capital gains framework for FY 2026-27. For equity investors, long-term capital gains continue to be taxed at 12.5% after one year, with the annual exemption limit staying at Rs 1.25 lakh. Short-term gains on equity remain taxed at 20%.

Many investors were hoping for a higher exemption limit or a lower tax rate, especially with markets touching record highs. That did not happen, which is why LTCG quickly started trending in searches and discussions. EQUITY INVESTORS REACT TO STATUS QUO

Equity investors form the largest group affected by LTCG rules. Since there was no tax relief, many are reassessing their selling plans. Investors sitting on long-term profits are now more cautious, as crossing the exemption limit still triggers tax liability. The Budget has overhauled share buyback taxation by shifting it from dividends to capital gains and increasing the effective tax on promoters. The new rules, once legislated, will apply to buybacks carried out after April 1. This has brought LTCG back into everyday money conversations, from social media to brokerage forums.

GOLD TAX RULES ADD TO THE BUZZ

Gold taxation has also played a role in pushing LTCG into the spotlight. The Budget continues to tax gold without indexation benefits. Whether it is physical gold, digital gold or gold ETFs, long-term gains are taxed at 12.5%. Short-term gains are added to income and taxed as per slab rates. With gold prices rising sharply over the past year, investors are realising that tax outgo on profits can be higher than expected. SOVEREIGN GOLD BONDS LOSE SOME SHINE

Another big reason LTCG is in the news is the change in Sovereign Gold Bonds. While original subscribers still enjoy tax-free maturity, those buying SGBs from the secondary market after April 1, 2026 will no longer get this benefit. Their gains will now be taxed like other capital assets, making investors rethink earlier assumptions.

Why the government raised STT, making F&O trading more expensive

New Delhi.(Agency)

The cost of trading in futures and options was raised in the Union Budget 2026, a move that has drawn attention from traders and retail investors. Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman made it clear in her Budget speech that the Securities Transaction Tax, or STT, will go up for derivatives trades from April 1, 2026. "I propose to raise the STT on Futures to 0.05 percent from present 0.02 percent. STT on options premium and exercise of options are both proposed to be raised to 0.15 percent from the present rate of 0.1 percent and 0.125 percent respectively," said the Finance Minister. The government says the decision is aimed at addressing excessive speculation in the derivatives market rather than targeting long-term investors.

WHAT EXACTLY HAS CHANGED IN



uniform rate of 0.15 percent. These revised rates will apply to all derivatives transactions entered into on or after April 1, 2026.

WHY THE GOVERNMENT FELT A NEED TO STEP IN

According to the Income Tax Department, the scale of futures and options trading in India has become extremely large when compared with the real economy. In a post shared by the Income Tax Department, the government pointed out that the total volume of transactions in options and futures is more than 500 times India's GDP. In simple terms, while India's GDP stands at around Rs 300 lakh crore, the volume of derivatives trading has crossed Rs 1.5 lakh lakh crore. The department said this gap shows that a large part of F&O trading is driven by short-term bets rather than genuine hedging or investment needs.

Sensex, Nifty open flat but surge ahead a few minutes into early trade

The S&P BSE Sensex was up 161.62 points to 80,884.56, while the NSE Nifty50 added 9.80 points to 24,835.25 as of 9:28 am.

New Delhi.(Agency)

Benchmark stock market indices opened flat but traded higher a few minutes after the opening bell, helped by gains in metal and energy stocks. The S&P BSE Sensex was up 161.62 points to 80,884.56, while the NSE Nifty50 added 9.80 points to 24,835.25 as of 9:28 am. Dr. VK Vijayakumar, Chief Investment Strategist, Geojit Investments Limited, said that it is important to understand that the Budget is a growth-oriented Budget with fiscal

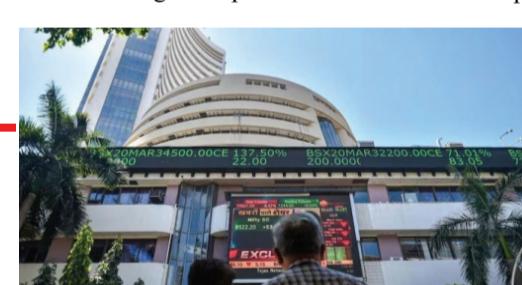
prudence. The 10% nominal GDP growth projected in the Budget is achievable and has the potential to deliver around 15% earnings growth in FY27. The market will soon start discounting this positive. But it is

2.20%, while Larsen and Toubro Ltd was up 2.15%. Reliance Industries Ltd gained 1.24%, and Eternal Ltd also opened higher, rising 1.11%.

On the losing side, Infosys Ltd saw the

sharpest fall, dropping 1.99%. ITC Ltd declined 1.95%, Titan Company Ltd was down 1.78%, Hindustan Unilever Ltd slipped 1.39%, and State Bank of India Ltd fell 1.01%. Retail investors should keep their cool and remain invested and continue to invest systematically. A significant upturn in the market may take time; perhaps a retreat from AI trade globally. We don't

know when this will happen. But we know that an earnings rebound is imminent in response to this growth-oriented Budget. That is a clear positive.



possible that FIIs may continue to sell impacting the market," he added. After the opening bell, Adani Ports and Special Economic Zone Ltd led the Sensex gainers, rising 3.26%. Asian Paints Ltd followed with a gain of

Modest rise in agriculture budget, but research funding cut amid calls for infrastructure investment

The budgetary allocation for 2026-27 represents an increase of around 2.56% over the previous year's Budget Estimates and over 6% compared to last year's Revised Estimates.

New Delhi.(Agency)

Despite describing agriculture as the primary engine of growth, Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman has announced only a modest increase in funding for the sector, while allocations for agricultural research have declined. The budgetary allocation for 2026-27 represents an increase of around 2.56% over the previous year's Budget Estimates and over 6% compared to last year's Revised Estimates. However, funding for agricultural research has been reduced by approximately 5%. The total allocation for the Department of Agriculture and

Farmers' Welfare stands at ₹1,30,661.38 crore for 2026-27, up from ₹1,27,290 crore in 2025-26. Nearly half of this amount will be disbursed directly to farmers through the PM-KISAN scheme, which provides income support of ₹6,000 per year to each farm household.

A significant increase has been announced for the Krishnati scheme, which has received a 40% boost compared to the previous year. The allocation for the scheme has risen to ₹11,200 crore from ₹8,500 crore last year. Krishnati serves as an umbrella programme encompassing 11 initiatives, including missions for fruits and vegetables and village uplift programmes in tribal areas. Funding for the Rashtriya Krishi Vikas Yojna (RKVY) has remained largely unchanged, with a marginal increase from ₹8,500 crore in 2025-26 to ₹8,550 crore in 2026-27. There is a renewed focus on natural farming, with allocations for the National Mission on Natural Farming (NMNF) increasing by over 21% from the previous year. While the Revised Estimate for the current year stands at ₹725 crore, exceeding the budget for

2026-27 has been set at ₹750 crore. For coconut cultivation, the Finance Minister has maintained the allocation at ₹37.16 crore, in line with the Revised Estimate for the current fiscal year, compared to ₹35 crore in the previous year. In addition, Sitharaman announced a



new support scheme for high-value crops, including coconut, sandalwood, cocoa and cashew in coastal regions, as well as almonds, walnuts and pine nuts grown in hilly areas. This push is aligned with recently signed free trade agreements with European countries and the UK. The

government aims to strengthen value chains for crops such as cashew, cocoa and almonds, which India largely imports and often sends abroad for processing despite domestic production. Commenting on the budget, Siraj Hussain, former Secretary of the Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers' Welfare, said, "The support for fisheries, animal husbandry, dairy, coconut, almond, walnut and sandalwood is commendable, but there is no allocation for direct investment in agricultural infrastructure. We need to invest in our Agricultural Produce Market Committees (APMCs) to develop at least some of them into world-class facilities."

Allocations for the Price Stabilisation Fund have been increased by around 4%, taking the total to ₹7,200 crore. The government has also proposed the introduction of a multilingual AI chatbot that will integrate the Agristack portals with Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR) packages on agricultural practices, leveraging artificial intelligence to support farmers.

Karan Kundrra On Falling In Love With

Tejasswi Prakash

on Bigg Boss 19: 'All Filters Are Dropped...'

Karan Kundrra and Tejasswi Prakash met on Bigg Boss, and their friendship soon turned into love. Now, five years later, the two are going strong and never shy away from giving major couple goals. Karan Kundrra, who is currently hosting the couple-based reality show alongside Sunny Leone, opened up about what it is like to fall in love in a captive reality space.

Speaking to Screen, Karan shared, "I was on a reality show when I found Tejasswi. What I really like about a captive reality show is that your true nature comes out very soon. All the filters are dropped within 7-8 days. There is no adulteration from the outside world, be it your managers, your family, or friends. You are alone, and you feel exactly what you feel. Nobody is guiding your judgment, so it's the purest feeling."

He further continued and spoke about how what people see on Instagram is very different from what a relationship means in real life and added, "I would like to tell everybody that love is not what you see on Instagram; it's very different from what is being told to you or shown to you in films or between couples you follow or idealize. It is so much more real, but I feel people take cues from all of these and start putting pressure on their relationships. That's not how it is. It's just the basic little things, not grand things."

Karan Kundrra on Constant Scrutiny

Earlier, while speaking to Pinkvilla, the actor opened up about facing constant scrutiny and shared that maturity plays an important part. He said, "The idea is that as long as Teju and I have the maturity to not get affected by all of this, then we are fine. Listen, we

chose to be actors, we chose to do a show like Bigg Boss, and we chose to be out there. So we cannot complain about it. We cannot be hypocritical and say, 'ki nahi yaar mat capture karo,' (...meaning, 'No, don't capture us.') We are there; we are public figures."

About Karan and Tejasswi

For the uninitiated, Karan Kundrra and Tejasswi Prakash have been dating since 2021, after their relationship blossomed on the reality show Bigg Boss 15. While Karan finished at number three, Tejasswi lifted the trophy of Salman Khan-hosted Season 15.

Bhumi Pednekar

Felicitated At Kala Ghoda Arts Festival Inauguration In Mumbai

The inauguration of Mumbai's iconic Kala Ghoda Arts Festival featured a memorable moment as actor and climate advocate Bhumi Pednekar was felicitated on stage during the opening ceremony. The honour was presented by Brinda Miller, Honorary Festival Director and Chairperson of the Kala Ghoda Association, recognising Bhumi's contribution at the intersection of art, awareness, and social responsibility. Held at the historic Kala Ghoda precinct, the inaugural evening marked the beginning of Asia's largest multidisciplinary street arts festival, bringing together artists, cultural leaders, and prominent voices from across creative fields.

'Without Art, There Is No Empathy,' Says Bhumi Pednekar

While accepting the honour, Bhumi Pednekar spoke about the deeper role art plays in shaping society. Emphasising the emotional power of creative expression, she said, "In a society where there is no art, there will be no empathy," drawing attention to how storytelling and creativity help foster understanding and compassion.

Her words resonated strongly with the audience, reinforcing the festival's core philosophy of art as a catalyst for social connection and reflection.

A Proud Mumbai Moment for the Actor

Bhumi also shared a personal note during the ceremony, describing herself as a "true blue Mumbai at heart." She expressed pride in being recognised at a festival that she said embodies the cultural soul of the city. The moment was met with warm applause from those present at the opening ceremony.

Brinda Miller on Bhumi Pednekar's Cultural Impact

Presenting the honour, Brinda Miller highlighted how the Kala Ghoda Arts Festival has always stood for the idea that art is inseparable from everyday life. She noted that Bhumi Pednekar's journey reflects a balance between meaningful cinema and responsible public engagement, making her a fitting presence at the festival's inauguration.

Kala Ghoda Arts Festival Celebrates Art as

Connection

As the evening continued with traditional lamp-lighting rituals and inaugural addresses, Bhumi Pednekar's felicitation stood out as a reminder that culture is not just about celebration, but about connection — to the city, its people, and shared human experiences.

The Kala Ghoda Arts Festival once again reaffirmed its role as a platform where heritage, performance, visual arts, literature, and dialogue converge, celebrating artists who use their voice to inspire empathy and awareness.



'Everyone Will Think...': Faisal Shaikh On Doing The 50 With Friends Adnaan And Faiz



Indian television's most popular names enter The 50, a new reality show, and among them are social media influencer Faisal Shaikh, aka Mr Faisu, along with his friends Adnaan Shaikh and Faiz Baloch. While having your close friends by your side in a show where you will not have any connection with the outside world can be a major advantage, it can also cause problems between the three. Speaking about being on such a show with two of his closest friends, Faisal Shaikh, aka Mr Faisu, shared its advantages and disadvantages.

Speaking to Screen, Mr Faisu shared, "Having your friends in the game has its advantages and disadvantages. Having my brothers when I break down will be an advantage; they will stand by me when needed. In every show, I have an emotional breakdown, so them being around is great. But yes, it will also be a disadvantage when it comes to nominations; everyone will think I have come with my group, so I am playing it safe."

"My fitness will also be an advantage in the game; physical activities will be a plus point for me. I haven't played any mind games yet. I am coming in real life, so I might show that on the show. I don't like it when someone keeps poking me or even comes at me; I cannot stand it, so it can be a disadvantage. In a captive reality show, people do anything when they get frustrated. I don't know what I will do," he continued.

The 50, India's newest high-voltage reality show, is set to debut on February 1, 2026, and has already generated immense buzz thanks to its ambitious format and star-studded lineup. Produced by Banijay Asia and streaming on JioHotstar, while also airing on Colors TV, the show promises to bring together 50 well-known personalities from television, film, and the digital world in a competitive environment that blends strategy, survival, and social gameplay.

The show is expected to run for approximately 50 days, with eliminations and twists keeping the competition intense. The show boasts a massive, attention-grabbing lineup that has already got fans talking. Contestants set to grace The 50 include popular names like Karan Patel, Divya Agarwal, Prince Narula, Urvashi Dholakia, Nikki Tamboli, Faisal Shaikh aka Faisu, Krishna Shroff, Shiv Thakare, Archana Gautam, and Bigg Boss 19 contestant Neelam Giri, among many others.

Shanaya Kapoor Is Listening To THIS Song On Loop From Tu Yaa Main, Ananya Panday Reacts



Shanaya Kapoor is all set for her second release, Tu Yaa Main, with Adarsh Gourav. The makers have recently released a teaser that grabbed attention. And today she shared a video in which she was seen enjoying the song on a balcony. The survival drama is releasing on February 13, 2026. Taking to her Instagram handle, Shanaya Kapoor shared a video in which she is seen singing the song Jee Liya and wrote, "saturday night lights with jee liya on loop." Ananya Panday immediately reacted, "be careful near railing". Fans too reacted.

Shanaya Kapoor Celebrates Tu Yaa Main Song 'Jee Liya'

Shanaya Kapoor is giving fans plenty to smile about with her latest Instagram post. The 12-slide carousel gives fans a behind-the-scenes glimpse of her recent promotional event, starting with a video that captures all the key moments in one fun compilation. The following slides capture her at the event, mingling with the film's team and sharing candid and joyful moments. One of the most playful highlights is a crocodile-themed setup inspired by the film, where Shanaya and co-star Adarsh Gourav are seen having a great time. From chic poses to fun, personal glimpses, the post perfectly showcases Shanaya's charm while building excitement for her upcoming film. The caption of her post read, "Jee Liya out now" Recently released, 'Jee Liya' from the film is crooned by Adarsh himself, along with Lothika.

Tu Yaa Main Teaser

The teaser takes audiences into the world of two content creators from completely different backgrounds who come together for a collaboration driven by curiosity, clout and chemistry. What starts off as a fun, high-energy adventure quickly takes a dark turn, turning into a pulse-pounding fight for survival as they come face to face with a menacing crocodile. Will they manage to escape, or will the croc turn their collaboration into a nightmare? Blending romance, adrenaline and danger with fresh, new-age storytelling, the Bejoy Nambiar directorial, starring Adarsh Gourav and Shanaya Kapoor, promises an experience that will turn an ordinary date into a chilling memory, making it the perfect #DateFright experience for audiences seeking something beyond the usual Valentine's watch. The film also stars Parul Gulati in a key role.



Top food Trends of Year



Indian street food going global

It's the turn of paranthas, tikkas, gol gapas and chaats to be the main course globally. Teppanyakis and stir fries, popular street food the world over, will make way for tawas and kadhai. Expect variety of dosas, cheelas, burgers with spicy Indian patties and fries in place of quesadillas and pizzas too while Indian sherbets will be the flavour of the season! In India, chefs won't shy away from presenting fusion mithais to local and international travellers. Expect anything from gulukand cupcakes and mithai jars to a famous French dessert giant selling mishti

doi and mango lassi.

Spiralising

Spiralising — cutting vegetables into strings — is going to reach new levels of popularity this year, owing to the 'eat healthy' wave. Spiraliser is the hottest kitchen gadget in the market right now. It won't be just confined to zucchini pasta (the most popular spiralised dish currently); seasonal vegetables like beets, turnips and sweet potatoes in spiralised form is becoming quite popular. Restaurants will use spiralised vegetables and fruits as appetisers and main course.

Super Bowls



Meals that pack a punch, conveniently tucked into portable bowls, are becoming the new 'it' food in both restaurants and grocery stores. They are nutritious and can incorporate protein, whole grains, vegetables, and delicious sauces into one dish. Super bowls are versatile, and easy to cook too.

Sriracha will get hotter

Sri racha (A hot sauce from Thailand made from a paste of chili peppers, distilled vinegar, garlic, sugar, and salt) will be increasingly used by chefs

Pop-up Party

Pop up was food stalls gained popularity last year, but will be a mainstay in 2019. Expect

cooks specialising in select recipes of forgotten cuisines to set a small stalls in large restaurants, and treat diners to lesser-known delights. Be prepared to tickle to your taste buds to the Kayastha, Bund, Bundelkhand, Assamese and Rampur meals being dished out from small stalls at leading restaurants.

Cream of Mushroom Soup

For 1-2 persons

Ingredients:

100 g sliced ??mushrooms, sliced ??1 onion, 2 glasses of water, 2 cloves coarsely-out, 2-inch piece cinnamon coarsely occurred, Kornflor 4 T spoon, 1 cup milk, 4 T spoon of butter, salt and pepper to taste

Method:

1. Put the butter in a pan and heat. Add onion fry.
2. Mushrooms, water and spices wrapped in a cloth insert. Cook until the mushrooms does not melt.
3. Put mixture in blender and blend to remove the bundle of spices. (Save some mushrooms for decorating.)
4. Donate now to flame Blend milk into the mixture. Then coming to the boil 3/4 Kornflor Mix dissolved in water. Add salt and pepper powder.

5. Stir and cook the kernels were becoming frequent. Garnish with sliced ??mushrooms, fresh cream and serve hot.

Chicken noodles soup

For 1-2 persons

Ingredients:

Vejetbl 2 tbsp oil 1 medium onion, chopped 1 medium carrot 1/4 inch pieces chopped 1 celery stick, sliced ??long pieces, 50 g chicken breast, 250 ml. Chicken stock or low-sodium stock, 150 ml. Cold water or as needed, 4 Dndian of parsley, fresh thyme twig 3 or 1/2 tea spoon of dried thyme, 1 cassia, salt and ground black pepper to taste 2 cups steamed egg noodles, chopped parsley to decorate

Method:

1. Put all the ingredients in a saucepan boil on high heat for about 6 minutes.

2. Garnish with parsley and serve hot, add egg noodles.

Executive Chef Bharat different



cab driver. Garnish with paprika, add garam masala over and serve hot.

Royal Cheese Balls in Green Gravy

Balls content:

150 g grated cheese, 20 g Kornflor, 1/2 cup chopped spinach, 1 green pepper, 1 tablespoon chopped coriander leaves, chopped 1 teaspoon ginger, salt to taste, oil for frying, roll semolina, 20 g chopped cashews, almonds, 1 large tablespoon, 1 large tablespoon raisins. For gravy - 200 g spinach puree, grated 2 onions, 1/2 cup tomato puree, 1-inch piece ginger, garlic bud lane was 8 1/2 tea spoon turmeric powder, 1/2 tsp red chilli and coriander powder, 1 tsp garam masala, 1 tbsp cashew nut paste, 1 tablespoon cream.

Method -

Kornflor in cheese, spinach and salt together to shake. Raisins, cashews, almonds, coriander, green chillies and ginger together, prepare the filling. Make small balls of cheese mixture filling the filling slightly. Fry the semolina golden wrapping. Wash spinach puree cooked without water make. Heat 4 tablespoons oil in pan, add. Onion, ginger, garlic, turmeric, chilli and coriander powder fry. Tomato puree and salt on low flame fry oil to escape. Cashew nut paste, garam masala, add spinach puree and run 2 minutes. Cook covered on low flame, add 2 cups water 5-6 minutes. Mix the cream off the heat. Cover and put cheese balls.

Girlfriend Recipe Competition

Spinach cheese

Content-

2 cups spinach, 2 cups shredded cheese into square pieces, 1 cup tomato puree 1 tbsp ginger - garlic paste, 1/2 tea spoon cumin, 1/2 cup chopped onion, 2 tbsp ghee, salt to taste, 1 T spoon garam masala, green chili paste 1 T spoon, 1/2 cup milk, 1/2 cup fresh cream. The first method grind boiled spinach. Ghee in a pan, add the cumin Ctaan now. Please add the onion is golden. Ginger - garlic paste and fry for pouring. Add the tomato puree and cook until the oil drop. Now add the milk and spinach puree. Salt, green chili paste and garam masala and cook for 10 minutes on low flame. When the sync is done, turn

off the gas. Cover 2 minutes, add cheese. Garnish with fresh cream. Serve hot.

Spinach With Corn

Content-

50 grams spinach, 2 paste interest, 2-3 clove garlic paste, tomato puree, 1, 50 g cheese, red and yellow bell peppers, cut into square pieces, 50 grams of corn kernels, chopped green pepper, red pepper, salt to taste, garam masala, oil.

Method -

Wash the spinach thoroughly grind and keep aside. Oil in a pan, add the cheese and bell peppers (red, yellow) make fried mushrooms and bell pepper and keep aside. In another pan, add oil, onion, ginger and garlic paste Fry the

