

## India wedded to strategic autonomy: S Jaishankar after US claim on Russian oil imports

**India asserts its energy purchases will be based on costs, risks and availability, not political pressure, amidst US sanctions on Russian oil. External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar emphasises India's commitment to strategic autonomy at the Munich Security Conference.**

**New Delhi.(Agency)** As Washington tightens the screws on Moscow's energy revenues, India has sent a firm signal from the global stage: energy purchases will be guided by "costs, risks and availability", not political pressure. The message came amid fresh US sanctions on Russian oil and claims by President Donald Trump and Secretary of State Marco Rubio that New Delhi has agreed to stop buying additional Russian crude. Speaking at the Munich Security Conference on Saturday, External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar pushed back against suggestions that a recent India-US trade understanding would dilute India's long-held policy of strategic autonomy. His remarks came as Rubio said Washington had secured a commitment from India to refrain from purchasing additional Russian oil following the latest US sanctions on Moscow's energy sector.



"The United States has imposed additional sanctions on Russia's oil. In our conversations with India, we've gotten their commitment to stop buying additional Russian oil. Europe has taken its set of steps moving forward," Russian news agency Tass quoted Rubio as saying at the conference. More than a week earlier, Trump had gone further.

While announcing a breakthrough after months of trade tensions, he declared, "India agreed to stop buying Russian oil and buy more from US," framing it as a key outcome of the deal.

**JAISHANKAR: 'WE ARE VERY MUCH WEDDED TO STRATEGIC AUTONOMY'**

On stage alongside German Foreign Minister Johanna Wadephul, Jaishankar made it clear that India's foreign policy compass would not shift easily.

"We are very much wedded to strategic autonomy because it is very much a part of our history and our evolution. And it is something which is very deep, it is something which cuts across the political spectrum as well," he said.

On energy procurement, he described the global oil market as "complex". "As far as energy issues are concerned, this is a complex market

today. I think the oil companies in India, as in Europe, as probably in other parts of the world, look at availability, look at costs, look at risks and take decisions that they feel are in their best interest," he said.

When asked directly whether India would stop buying Russian oil under the provisions of the trade deal, Jaishankar replied, "If the bottom line of your question is -- would I remain independent-minded and make my decisions and would I make choices which may not agree with your thinking -- yes, it can happen." India has neither confirmed nor denied Washington's assertion that it has committed to halting additional purchases of Russian crude.

The energy question has unfolded alongside a recalibration in trade ties. Following a recent phone conversation between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Trump, both sides announced a reduction in US tariffs on Indian goods to 18 per cent from 50 per cent.

## On Maha Shivratri, Arvind Kejriwal & CM Bhagwant Singh Mann pay obeisance at Sri Rankeshwar Mahadev Temple

**The Sikh Times**

DHURI, 16th February: On the sacred occasion of Maha Shivratri, Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) National Convenor Arvind Kejriwal and Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Singh Mann paid obeisance at the revered Sri Rankeshwar Mahadev Temple and performed Pooja at the historic Siddh Peeth, seeking blessings for peace, prosperity and continued progress for Punjab and the nation. Greeting people at the festival, the AAP Chief described Mahashivratri as a civilizational celebration rooted in India's ancient spiritual tradition and prayed that Lord Bholenath's grace always remain upon every citizen. CM Bhagwant Singh Mann reaffirmed that the Punjab Government remains firmly committed to preserving and promoting the state's rich spiritual and cultural heritage for future generations. He underscored that from commemorating the Shaheedi Diwas of Sri Guru Teg Bahadur ji to celebrating the Parkash Purab of Sri Guru Ravidass ji, Punjab continues to honour its glorious legacy with pride and devotion. Sharing a few snippets from the puja on X, AAP National Convenor Arvind Kejriwal stated: "On the sacred occasion of Maha Shivratri, I had the privilege of offering prayers at Shri Rankeshwar Mahadev Temple in Dhuri along with Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Singh Mann. The divine energy of Mahadev brings peace to the mind and renewed strength to the spirit. May

Lord Bholenath's blessings always remain upon all of you, and may the nation and Punjab continue to progress and prosper." Meanwhile, CM Bhagwant Singh Mann stated on X: "On the occasion of Maha Shivratri

today, I paid obeisance and sought the blessings of Lord Shiva at Shri Rankeshwar Temple in village Ranike, constituency Dhuri, along with AAP National Convenor Arvind Kejriwal and Punjab Incharge Manish Sisodia. I prayed for the prosperity of the nation, peace and harmony, and enduring brotherhood among all. May Lord Shiva's blessings always remain upon everyone." AAP National Convenor Arvind Kejriwal and CM Bhagwant Singh Mann said, "We paid obeisance at Sri Rankeshwar Mahadev temple and prayed for the peace, progress and prosperity of the state." They further said, "On the auspicious occasion of Maha Shivratri, we performed Pooja at

Siddh Peeth and extend our good wishes to all." Highlighting the essence of the festival, they said, "Maha Shivratri inspires people to strive towards the pursuit of truth that leads to the ultimate consciousness epitomized by Lord Shiva." They added, "The festival lays stress on the values of piety, devotion, mutual love and harmony." Emphasizing the cultural importance of the occasion, Arvind Kejriwal and CM Bhagwant Singh Mann said, "This is an important festival known as one of the cornerstones of the great Indian civilization." They added, "Sri Rankeshwar Mahadev is regarded as a revered Siddh Peeth in the Malwa region of Punjab." Explaining the spiritual legacy of such sites, they said, "Historically, Siddh

Peeths are considered sacred places where intense penance and spiritual practices were performed, leading to divine manifestation." Arvind Kejriwal and CM Bhagwant Singh Mann further said, "Such places hold immense importance in our tradition because they are believed to be spiritually energized through centuries of devotion and tapasya." They added, "This temple is traditionally associated with the Mahabharata period, particularly with Arjuna's penance to please Lord Shiva." Elaborating further, they said, "It is believed that after severe tapasya, Lord Shiva appeared before Arjuna and blessed him with divine weapons, the Gandiv Dhanush." Contd.....page-3

**Defending the CM, Shyam Rajak called Rabri Devi and Nitish Kumar "bhabhi-devar", saying their Magh-month bickering was personal and outsiders should stay away.**

Party on the streets—seeking to transform it from a failed challenger. He has launched 'Bihar Navnirman Abhiyan' to rebuild JSP's grassroots organisation and restore workers'



morale. By raising governance issues and pressurising the government on pensions, welfare and job creation, he said, he is positioning the party as Bihar's most active Opposition. He is betting on sustained village-level mobilisation to convert JSP from an electoral experiment into a durable political alternative.

## India-US trade deal will 'destroy and finish' textile industry; Rahul Gandhi ups ante

**New Delhi.(Agency)**

Upping the ante on the India-US interim trade deal, Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Saturday accused the government of cheating cotton farmers and textile exporters in the country and said the agreement is likely to inflict deep damage on both sectors.

In a post on X, he said the government as a visionary government would have negotiated a deal that protected both and ensured prosperity for both the sectors.

"18% tariff vs 0% - Let me explain how the PM and his cabinet are spreading confusion on this issue...", he said in his post. Gandhi said Bangladesh is being given 0% tariff benefit on garment exports to the US - the only condition is that they import American cotton.

"After the announcement of an 18% tariff on Indian garments, when I raised the question in Parliament about the special concession being given to Bangladesh, the reply from a minister in the Modi government was: 'If we also want the same benefit, we will have to import cotton from America'.

"Why was this fact hidden from the country till now? And what kind of policy is this? Is this really any kind of choice - or is it a trap designed to push us into a 'well in front, ditch behind' situation," he asked.

In another video message, Gandhi slammed Union Commerce Minister Piyush Goyal over the agreement, and urged him not to lie about the 'reality' of the deal. Gandhi said, "A minister in the Modi government is unaware of the fact that Bangladesh has decided to import cotton from the US instead of India. He argued that if the US grants Bangladesh zero-tariff access, it would severely hurt India's textile industry. He also rejected the argument that importing US cotton would benefit India. Indian cotton is largely exported to Bangladesh and sustains India's textile mills, he said.

## 'I only see losses': Omar warns of threat to Kashmir's fruit growers from new Indo-US trade deal

**New Delhi.(Agency)**

Jammu & Kashmir Chief Minister Omar Abdullah stressed that with American agricultural goods likely to enter Indian markets post the Indo-US trade deal, it is necessary to improve the quantity and quality of our produce. "I'm not sure what benefits this (the trade deal) would bring, but for now, I can only see the losses. Things that will now be allowed into the country duty free are things we produce — almonds, walnuts, apples and other fruits," he said.

Speaking on the sidelines of the three-day AgriTech Mela that he inaugurated at the Sher-e-Kashmir University of Agricultural Sciences and Technology of Kashmir

(SKUAST-K) in Srinagar, Omar said that while it has been said that there will be price restrictions, "does this mean that ours will be low quality and theirs will be good? Our growers have invested a lot in enhancing the quality of their produce over the last few years. There are new varieties, high quality produce and through controlled atmosphere stores, we are able to send better products into the market".

He added: "After all this investment, if growers are told that better quality products will come from outside, this would be unfair to them".

Speaking to growers at the event, he said their



sustained efforts are shaping the future of agriculture in the region and driving innovation under various government programmes aimed at modernisation and economic growth.

He emphasised that to compete at the global level, J&K must enhance both the quality and quantity of its local agricultural produce. He said that technology-driven and organic farming solutions are essential prerequisites for boosting the rural economy. Underlining the importance of adopting modern agricultural practices, value addition, branding and market linkage strategies, he said that initiatives like the Agro tech festival will provide a "crucial platform" for farmers to interact with experts, explore innovative tools and access new market opportunities, ultimately strengthening the agricultural ecosystem of J&K.

## PM Modi receives invite for Bangladesh PM-elect Tarique Rahman's oath ceremony

**PM Modi has been invited by**

**Bangladesh to attend the February**

**17 swearing-in of**

**Tarique Rahman as Prime Minister**

**following his BNP's**

**sweeping election**

**victory.**

**New Delhi.(Agency)**

Bangladesh has invited Prime Minister Narendra Modi to attend the swearing-in ceremony of its new Prime Minister, Tarique Rahman, whose party secured a sweeping victory in the first national election held after the ouster of Sheikh Hasina.

Rahman, the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) leader and son of former Prime Minister Khaleda Zia, is set to be sworn in as Prime Minister on February 17. India has not officially confirmed receiving the invitation, and a decision on whether Prime Minister Modi will attend the ceremony is awaited, even as both nations attempt to reset bilateral ties. Pakistan Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif is expected to attend the event in Dhaka.

India is among the 13 countries invited by Chief Adviser of the interim government,



Muhammad Yunus. The other nations are China, Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, Turkey, the United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Malaysia, Brunei, Sri Lanka, Nepal, the Maldives and Bhutan. Tarique Rahman, who spent 17 years in self-imposed exile in London, has emerged as Bangladesh's new leader, with the party founded by his father, Ziaur Rahman, poised to

return to power after a two-decade hiatus. The BNP secured a commanding 209 of the 297 seats, while the right-wing Jamaat-e-Islami, considered close to Pakistan, won 68 seats. Former Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's Awami League was barred from contesting the polls, which recorded a voter turnout of 59.44 per cent. After the results were announced on Friday, Prime Minister Modi spoke with Rahman and reaffirmed India's continued commitment to the peace, progress and prosperity of the people of both countries. "I conveyed my best wishes and support in his endeavour to fulfil the aspirations of the people of Bangladesh. As two close neighbours with deep-rooted historical and cultural ties, I reaffirmed India's continued commitment to the peace, progress, and prosperity of both our peoples," Modi wrote on X after the call.

## News box

## Gurgaon-Pataudi-Rewari highway service lanes to open this month

## Gurgaon.(Agency)

The National Highways Authority of India (NHAI) is planning to partially open the Gurgaon-Pataudi-Rewari highway by the end of the month. In the first phase, the service road will be opened to traffic, marking the initial step in the highway's phased rollout. Officials said that while most structural components of the project are nearing completion, the main carriageway at some stretches is still awaiting clearances. Delays linked to pending load-bearing drain works near the Dwarka Expressway and a transmission line passing over the stretch have prompted the authority to allow traffic movement on the service road as an interim arrangement.

"Most of the structures along the corridor are complete, but because of the pending stretch, we will first open the service road. We are hopeful of starting traffic movement on the service road within seven to 10 days," an NHAI official said. Once fully operational, the corridor is expected to improve connectivity between Gurgaon, southern Haryana and Rajasthan, while easing pressure on the congested Delhi-Jaipur highway. It will also offer a faster alternative for industrial hubs in Manesar, Bilaspur and Dharuhera, facilitating smoother movement for both commuters and freight traffic.

The Rs 900 crore project's foundation was laid in July 2020 by Union minister for road transport and highways Nitin Gadkari. Estimated at Rs 900 crore, the project was originally due for completion in Dec 2022, but construction began only in Nov 2021, with a revised 2-year deadline. However, utility shifting issues and delays in approvals resulted in repeated extensions of project deadlines. The work stalled in Sept 2022 after the National Green Tribunal intervened, following an appeal by environmentalists over a forest clearance issue. The petitioners raised concerns about the compensatory afforestation plan, arguing that planting trees 300 kilometres away in Panchkula would not restore the green cover lost within the highway's construction area. In April 2024, the Supreme Court allowed NHAI to resume work on the project but mandated that compensatory afforestation be conducted

## Night temperature to rise, rain likely this week in Gurgaon

## Gurgaon.(Agency)

IMD has forecast isolated rainfall on Tuesday and Wednesday, with thunderstorms and lightning likely in some parts of the state, including Gurgaon.

On Saturday, the city recorded a minimum temperature of 9 degrees Celsius, marginally down from 9.9 degrees Celsius on a previous day. However, the weather department said there will be no major change in night temperatures over the next 24 hours, followed by a gradual rise of 2-3 degrees Celsius in the subsequent days. The day remained pleasantly warm and comfortable, with ample sunshine bringing the maximum temperature to 25.4 degrees Celsius, as against 24.5 degrees Celsius a day earlier.

According to IMD, an upper air cyclonic circulation lies over the east Equatorial Indian Ocean and the adjoining southeast Bay of Bengal. The subtropical westerly jet stream continues to prevail over North India, and the upper air cyclonic circulation lies over northeast Assam and the neighbourhood. A western disturbance is expected to affect northwest India from Monday, triggering light rainfall at isolated places across the state. Districts likely to receive showers include Sirsa, Fatehabad, Mahendragarh, Rewari, Gurgaon and Nuh. "Nights are likely to be relatively warmer due to cloudy conditions and a change in wind directions owing to the western disturbance. Isolated pockets in Haryana may also see some rainfall activity on Feb 17 and 18," an IMD official said. The IMD forecast shows that the skies will be generally clear on Sunday, with minimum and maximum temperatures expected to hover around 10 and 26, respectively. Meanwhile, the city's air quality index deteriorated further into the poor category, with a reading of 276 compared to 237 on Friday.

## Cop injured as dumper rams police patrol car in Bilaspur, driver booked for murder bid

## Noida.(Agency)

A sub-inspector was injured after a Haryana-registered dumper truck rammed into a police patrol car in Bilaspur on Thursday. Police said the driver tried to run over the personnel when the patrol car signalled it to stop. The driver and the cleaner abandoned the truck on the road and fled. Sub-Inspector Rakesh, along with SPO Hemant and head constable Narendra, were on night patrol on Thursday. When they reached near the Electricity Board office, two men on a scooter, Krishna and Anup, alerted them that a dumper bearing the number HR38AG9961 had struck an auto rickshaw near TLC Company. They told the cops the rickshaw driver was injured, but the dumper had fled. Police chased the dumper. Near Bilaspur Chowk, the truck slowed after the patrol car intercepted them. The car was parked on the left side of the road. The cleaner allegedly provoked the driver to ram into the police car. The dumper hit the vehicle from behind at high speed and pushed it 10 to 15 feet ahead. The SI sustained injuries to the left side of his head and ear and on his left thumb and the right side of his stomach. Police said the dumper driver and the cleaner abandoned the truck and fled, taking the keys with them. The cops alerted the police control room, following which an emergency response vehicle reached the spot. Police have seized the dumper. The injured SI was first taken to CHC Pataudi and later referred to Civil Hospital, Sector 10, Gurgaon, for further treatment. Police registered an FIR against the driver and the cleaner on Friday under sections 109(1) (attempt to murder), 121(1) (voluntarily causing grievous hurt to a public servant), 132 (using assault or criminal force to deter a public servant from discharging their duty).

## Gun in man's hand, ex-lovers found dead inside locked car in Noida; last WhatsApp message hints at relationship fallout before deaths

## Gurgaon.(Agency)

A 32-year-old man and a 28-year-old woman were found dead with gunshot wounds inside a locked car in Sector 107 on Saturday afternoon. Police are investigating the twin deaths as murder-suicide, based on a message in the man's phone that indicated he had killed his ex-girlfriend before turning the gun on himself. The two were identified as Rekha, a resident of Salarpur in Noida, and Sumit Kumar, a resident of Trilokpuri in Delhi. Rekha worked in a private company in Sector 62, while Sumit had a mineral water plant business. The deaths were discovered around 1pm on Saturday when locals found a suspiciously parked car near Dadri Road, close to pillar no 84, police said. The vehicle had been stationary for a long time. Passersby found a man, with a gun in his hand, and a woman, bleeding and unconscious in their seats, after which they alerted the police. A team from the Sector 39 police station broke open a window and discovered both dead from head gunshot wounds. They recovered a pistol, two spent

cartridges, and confirmed the weapon was illegal. Separately, police are also looking at a message purportedly typed by Sumit on WhatsApp at 3.39pm on Friday. In the message, Sumit wrote that the two had been in a relationship for 15 years and had plans to get married. However, he wrote, Rekha recently decided to marry someone else, which prompted him to take the extreme step. It was not immediately clear if he sent the message to anyone or saved it for himself. Rekha's family, meanwhile, claimed Sumit had been harassing her and a complaint was filed in the past. The matter was later resolved after he apologised and assured that he would not trouble her again, the family alleged. Rekha's brother said the couple's relationship had become strained in recent months as her family was arranging her marriage elsewhere because they belonged to different castes. Both families had filed missing person complaints on Friday – Rekha's

at Sector 58 police station in Noida and Sumit's in Delhi. Investigators said it was likely the two planned the meeting in advance. Police are scanning CCTV footage from over 50 cameras in the area to determine when Rekha left her office



and where she met Sumit. According to police sources, Rekha's family said she usually returned home by 7pm. When she did not on Friday, they approached a local police outpost later in the night. Her phone remained off through Friday but was switched on around 7am on

Saturday. Calls to it went unanswered. This indicates one or both was alive at the time and the shootings happened later in the morning on Saturday. Sumit's brother Sachin questioned the circumstance of their deaths and said the spot where the car was found was less than a kilometre from Rekha's house. He demanded a thorough investigation to rule out foul play. Additional deputy commissioner of police Manisha Singh told reporters, "Forensic teams were called to the spot. Blood samples, the weapon, and other material evidence were collected. Ballistic examination of the pistol will help determine the sequence of firing, the distance from which the shots were fired, and other crucial details," she said.

Officials said mobile phone data of both the deceased will be examined to reconstruct their movements and conversations prior to the incident. This is important because it will determine whether they spent the entire time in the car since they met on Friday evening, went somewhere or met someone.

## 67,000 challans last year, still Gurgaon drivers skip seatbelts

## Gurgaon.(Agency)

Despite an enforcement push, seat belt violations remain rampant on city's roads. Traffic police challaned around 67,000 people last year for not wearing seat belts, yet compliance has shown little improvement. In Jan alone, around 4,700 drivers were challaned for not wearing seat belts, with fines amounting to Rs 47 lakh.

Apart from seat belt violations, traffic police cracked down on vehicles using illegal black film on windows. During the same period, 809 vehicles were challaned for violating black film norms, and fines worth Rs 80.90 lakh were imposed. Last year, traffic police challaned 12,290 persons using black film. Police said some motorists continue to ignore safety rules by driving without number plates, indulging in triple riding on two-wheelers, and using black film, which can aid in committing crimes by concealing identities. During the campaign, traffic police conducted awareness campaigns at metro stations, railway stations, major intersections, schools, companies and offices of auto and taxi unions. "These programmes focused on educating commuters about traffic rules and responsible driving practices. Residents should not allow minors to drive vehicles, and only two persons should travel on two-wheelers while wearing helmets. Motorists should also refrain from driving in the wrong direction, using mobile phones while driving, consuming intoxicants before driving, and using black film on vehicle windows," a traffic police officer said.

Gurgaon traffic police spokesperson Vikas Verma said similar enforcement drives and awareness campaigns will continue in the coming months to make roads safer and ensure stricter adherence to traffic norms.

Data shared by the police highlights the scale of violations last year. Helmet violations led to 3.9 lakh challans, while 4.5 lakh motorists were fined for triple riding or pillion rider violations. Police also recorded 5,812 cases of mobile phone use while driving, flagged as an emerging cause of

## Gurgaon tops Haryana with 6,153 stray cattle on roads despite relocation drives

## Gurgaon.(Agency)

Gurgaon has the highest number of stray cattle among Haryana's municipalities, with 6,153 animals still on its roads as of January 1, 2026, despite large-scale drives to catch and relocate them to cow shelters, according to official state data accessed by TOI. Figures show that the MCG caught 5,387 stray cattle between August 2024 and December 2025, but the city continues to record the largest remaining population within the state. Gurgaon has two cow shelters designated for this purpose. Many of the stray cattle are owned by dairy farms and in some cases, owners leave their cattle during the day and bring them back in the evening. During the same period, authorities issued only 24 challans and collected about Rs 2.78 lakh in fines, indicating limited penal action against cattle owners. Gurgaon is not expected to be free of stray cattle till December 31, 2026, according to official projections and relocations, and requires a longer timeline than several smaller municipalities that set March or June deadlines. Cities such as Faridabad and Hisar also continue to report high numbers, with around 1,000

and 2,000 animals, respectively. "We hired two agencies recently to catch stray cattle and shift them to shelters. While the target was set to become a stray cattle-free city by this year-end, we will work on a war footing to achieve the result within a few months," said a senior MCG official. Official records show that despite catching nearly 49,507 stray cattle in the past 17 months, most urban local bodies across Haryana are still far from eliminating the problem, with 19,206 stray animals still on roads as of January 1, 2026, and only eight municipalities, declared stray cattle-free, underscoring how far most urban bodies still have to go. The cattle-free municipalities include Ganna, Kharkhoda, Gohana, Yamunanagar, Radaur, Sadhaura, Nissing and Tarori. While civic bodies are catching animals and shifting them to shelters, enforcement against owners remains weak, allowing cattle to return to roads. In multiple municipalities, hundreds of stray cattle were recorded, but no fines were issued at all. For example, Manesar has around 2,000 stray cattle still roaming free, but no challans have been issued to

the owners. Stray cattle have long been cited as a major traffic hazard and sanitation issue in Gurgaon, particularly on arterial roads and near markets. Latest data suggests that removal drives alone are not enough to solve the problem. MCG, in December 2025, launched a comprehensive campaign to pick up stray cattle from city roads, with a stern warning that dairy operators should not leave their animals on roads. Stray cattle on the roads caused fatal accidents in the city. Under the campaign, any dairy operator found letting cows roam on roads will face an FIR and fines. Residents said that unless accountability measures against owners are strengthened alongside catching operations, Gurgaon's goal of becoming stray cattle-free may remain more of a target on paper than an imminent reality.

Commuters also said that the situation became increasingly dangerous across key stretches of the city. "I commute to work daily and got several close calls on the Gurgaon-Faridabad road when stray cows suddenly wander onto the roadway. It's becoming increasingly dangerous for

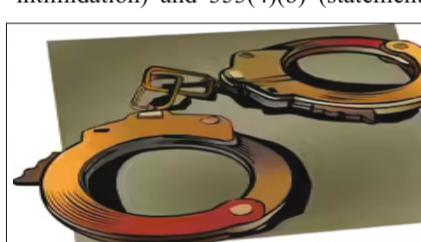
## Bomb threats to 20 schools sent from betting app's office

## Noida.(Agency)

The Noida unit of the Uttar Pradesh Special Task Force on Friday arrested six people linked to threat emails sent to 20 schools in the district last month. Investigators traced the emails — originating from US servers — to a house in Bisrakh. Police said the men were running an online betting operation using fake email IDs and VoIP numbers. Noida STF's additional superintendent of police Rajkumar Mishra said on Jan 23 about 20 schools in Noida received bomb threat emails. With Republic Day round the corner, senior police officers swept the campuses alongside the bomb disposal squad, dog squad and the fire department. The threats turned out to be hoaxes.

To trace the origin of these emails, a case

was registered at Surajpur police station under sections 351(4) (criminal intimidation) and 353(4)(b) (statements



conducive to public mischief) of BNS and Section 66 of the IT Act. The STF team initially traced the emails to the USA, but they later found the email id was linked to a recovery email ID originating in Bangladesh. Further scrutiny made them

zero in on a house in Bisrakh. The team conducted a raid on Friday and found that the house was being used to run an illegal betting racket. The team found nearly 30 people working in the house and six of them — Amish Jang Kari, Lekhnath, Kedarnath, Ananth Kumar, Divyanshu and Sahil Kumar — were taken in for questioning. Three of them, Kari, Lekhnath, and Kedarnath, are Nepalese citizens. Electronic devices, including four laptops and 22 mobile phones, 16 debit and credit cards, two Nepalese passports, identity cards, a chequebook and Rs 19,500 cash were seized from them.

Police claimed the men told them they were running an online betting operation and often cheated American, Indian and

## As SC looks for ways to reduce stray dog numbers, Lucknow offers a template to NCR

## Noida.(Agency)

As Supreme Court explores ways to manage the stray population and disturbing reports come in from Telangana on mass poisoning of street dogs, the template on how to bring down the numbers — and do it scientifically and humanely — could well come from UP.

In SC hearings, state capital Lucknow has been cited as an example for running one of the most efficient ABC (animal birth control) programmes. The Lucknow municipal corporation has sterilised 85% of the 1.35 lakh stray dogs on its streets, well above the threshold of 70% recommended by World Health Organization (WHO), a mark Indian cities in general are struggling to reach.

Other UP cities are now trying to follow the Lucknow model. Ghaziabad, for example, recently achieved parity with Lucknow in the number of dogs it can sterilise in a month — at 2,100. This month, capacity will increase to 3,000 in the NCR city as another ABC centre opens, making Ghaziabad the

only corporation in UP to operate 3 ABC centres. Noida is catching up as well, with a capacity to sterilise 1,500 dogs a month. Lucknow has also effectively shown that ABC does not necessarily need many centres to be successful.

Rather, it's consistency that's important. The base year from which Lucknow has been conducting targeted sterilisations is 2019 when a dog census estimated the stray population to be around 75,000. Abhinav Verma, animal welfare officer at Lucknow Municipal Corporation, told TOI the city's sole ABC centre, which is run as a private-public partnership with NGO Humane World for Animals India (HWAI), has eight operation theatres and eight veterinarians conducting surgeries. The centre has a holding capacity of 300 dogs. "In 2020 and 2021, the number of sterilisations per month dropped because of Covid restrictions. However, since 2022, we have regularly sterilised 2,100 dogs in a month, which helped us achieve 1 lakh

sterilisations by Dec 2025," Verma said. The Lucknow ABC also invested time and resources in data management. The total dog population in the UP capital is currently estimated by the ABC at 1.35 lakh. But Lucknow did another dog census in 2025 for a better scientific assessment of its programme.

The NGO has, meanwhile, been carrying out a monitoring survey of the dog population every six months to assess the targets of the sterilisation programme. According to officials, a key to Lucknow's success is community engagement. While most animal welfare NGOs rely on feeders or caregivers to catch dogs for sterilisations, HWAI and the Lucknow corporation go beyond that with community awareness programmes at residential areas, slum clusters, schools and colleges about ABC as well as understanding dog behaviour, which is essential to prevent conflict within the community — something NCR is struggling with. "When we educated people about the

programme and the rules, we found more and more stray dogs being brought for sterilisation. This also helped maintain harmony within the community and the stray dogs, as they are also informed about dog behaviour and how to control it," Verma told TOI.

HWAI senior director Keren Nazareth said since 2019, they had reached out to over 500 localities in Lucknow under the community engagement programme. "Under the 'Abhay Sankalp' initiative, teams regularly engage with people on safe interactions with dogs and feeding practices. Residents are also informed about ABC Rules that prohibit relocation of stray dogs. Relocation creates territorial vacuums and increases aggression," she said. Explaining the biannual surveys carried out by HWAI, Keren said they generate a reliable estimate of the relative dog population per street kilometre. "For example, if the Lucknow municipal corporation area extends across 900 km, we take around 15-20% of that area

and divide that stretch into wards or zones.

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# Fat Udaipur wedding 'funded' by Rapido driver: How money trail led ED to Rs 331 crore 'mule' account

New Delhi: Investigating a trail of more than Rs 331 crore deposited in a bank account over eight months in an illegal betting app-linked money-laundering case, ED officials landed at the doors of a bike-taxi driver working with a well-known cab aggregator to earn two square meals a day. The stunned investigators lost no time to detect that this was a classic case of a "mule" account being used to pump dirty money. Officials said that the Enforcement Directorate (ED) stumbled upon the Rapido bike driver while investigating the 1xbet online betting-linked money-laundering case. It was found that the driver's bank account received deposits worth Rs 331.36 crore between August 19, 2024, and April 16, 2025, the officials said. Alarmed by the 'suspicious' multi-crore-rupee transactions in a short period of eight months, the federal agency conducted a raid at the address provided in the driver's bank records.

The sleuths found out that the driver lived in a two-room shanty in a modest Delhi locality and



could be summoned for questioning soon. The driver is understood to have told the ED investiga-

owner is not its user. Such accounts are created using fake or hired KYC, where someone lends their account in lieu of a commission. The ED found that the account received "large" deposits from multiple unidentified sources and these were "swiftly"

re-routed to other suspicious accounts. One of the sources of the funds sent into this bank account is linked with illegal betting, the officials said. The agency is now verifying more sources and destinations of the transactions that took place in this

account. The agency had recently attached assets worth crores of rupees of former cricketers Shikhar Dhawan and Suresh Raina as part of the 1xbet probe, even as it questioned a number of other cricketers and celebrities.

## Diary of murdered DU student reveals 6-yrs of sexual assault

New Delhi: Nearly five months after the murder of an 18-year-old Delhi University student, her mother discovered a two-page letter while cleaning her room, in which the girl detailed the six years of sexual abuse she suffered at the hands of her uncle's son. Shocked by the revelation, the mother immediately went to Jahangirpuri police station and lodged a complaint. Police have now registered a case under sections related to rape, POCSO and criminal intimidation, and have begun an investigation. On June 1, the student from Jahangirpuri was stabbed to death in a park in Mehrauli. The accused, Arshdeep, was arrested soon after. Investigations revealed he had been pressuring her because of his one-sided love and killed her after she rejected him. He also attempted to set her ablaze by dousing her in petrol. A charge-sheet in that case has already been filed in court. The diary note, found during cleaning on November 20, has now thrown up another disturbing aspect of the girl's life. The deceased's mother is a teacher, while her father works in a shop in Chandni Chowk. According to the letter, the girl had written about her trauma when she was in Class VII. She stated that at the age of six, her uncle's son took her away on the pretext of playing hide-and-seek and sexually assaulted her. This continued for the next six years. Her cousin, who had free access to the house, would rape her whenever he pleased. If she resisted, he threatened to kill her and made lewd comments. Out of fear and shame, she never told her family. She also wrote of her mental anguish and suicidal thoughts. The letter submitted by the mother was examined by a handwriting expert. After confirmation, an FIR was registered on Tuesday.

On Maha Shivratri, Arvind Kejriwal & CM Bhagwant Singh Mann pay obeisance at Sri Ranakeshwar Mahadev Temple

Contd.....Front page

Linking the shrine to India's epic heritage, Arvind Kejriwal and CM Bhagwant Singh Mann said, "This connection links the shrine to one of India's greatest epics, giving it deep mythological and historical resonance." They added, "Sri Ranakeshwar Mahadev represents this continuity of Shaivite devotion in the Malwa belt." They further said, "This sacred place stands as a reminder that Punjab's cultural identity has been shaped by multiple layers of spiritual history." Emphasizing the broader significance of the festival, they said, "Mahashivratri is not merely a religious observance but a civilizational festival rooted in ancient tradition." Arvind Kejriwal and CM Bhagwant Singh Mann said, "The festival commemorates the divine union of Lord Shiva and Goddess Parvati and symbolizes spiritual awakening and self-discipline." They added, "Celebrating Mahashivratri at such a historically significant

Tapashali reinforces the continuity of age-old customs and faith practices."

They further said, "Annual celebrations at Sri Ranakeshwar Mahadev help preserve it as a living heritage site rather than a forgotten monument of the past." Underscoring the cultural continuity of the shrine, Arvind Kejriwal and CM Bhagwant Singh Mann said, "This sacred place reflects centuries-old devotional practices that have been passed down from one generation to another." They added,

"The continuity of rituals demonstrates how faith traditions adapt over time while maintaining their core essence, and it is an important part of the region's intangible cultural heritage." They further said, "Such events strengthen regional identity and social unity in the Malwa area and bring together people from different walks of life under a shared spiritual and cultural banner." Highlighting the state government's commitment towards preserving heritage, Arvind Kejriwal and Bhagwant Singh Mann said, "The state government is already working hard to perpetuate the glorious cultural heritage of the state amongst younger generations." They added, "The state government has already commemorated the 350th martyrdom day of Sri Guru Teg Bahadur ji in an unsurpassed manner." They further said, "It is now all set to celebrate the 650th parkash purab of Sri Guru Ravidass ji also in an unprecedented manner." Concluding, they said, "The state government wants to ensure that our coming generations are made aware of the rich cultural heritage of the state."

## Occultist under police radar after 3 persons found dead in parked car

New Delhi: The police believe that an occultist is the prime accused behind the death of three persons whose bodies were found in a parked car on the Peeragarhi flyover in outer Delhi, with police sources pointing to his past involvement in similar cases. As per the sources, the 'tantric' has been linked to similar cases in the past, but was acquitted due to lack of evidence. "The police have traced one such case and are trying to gather evidence from it to prove the point," the sources added. The sources further mentioned that the 'tantric' was known for luring people with promises of doubling their wealth through occult practices. He used to lure people with the promise of financial gains, claiming their

wealth would be doubled within a short span of time. However, later his

Sunday. After the meeting, they left for north-east Delhi via Ring Road and returned to the same area around 3 pm. Family members of Naresh and Randhir did not know about their affiliation with the oculist.

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## NEWS BOX

## Who Was Saketh Sreenivasaiah, IIT Madras Graduate Found Dead In California

NEW YORK. (Agency)

A 22-year-old Indian student Saketh Sreenivasaiah, was found dead in California six days after he went missing. Saketh, who was pursuing his master's degree at the University of California, Berkeley, had disappeared on February 9. His body was later recovered by the police, the Indian Consulate in San Francisco confirmed while assuring all assistance to send his remains back to India. Saketh Sreenivasaiah belonged to Karnataka and was enrolled in the Chemical and Biomolecular Engineering department at UC Berkeley.

His LinkedIn profile said, "I'm a Masters student in the Chemical and Biomolecular Engineering department at UC Berkeley, with an undergraduate degree from IIT Madras. I'm passionate about deep-tech innovations in soft and active materials, semiconductors, and advanced materials."

Before moving to the United States, Saketh worked with the Polymer Engineering and Colloid Science Lab at IIT Madras for nearly two years. His roles included as an Undergraduate Researcher (September 2024 - May 2025) and as a Young Research Fellow (September 2023 - August 2024). He also worked as a Young Research Fellow at Unilever from September 2023 to June 2024. Saketh gained industry exposure as a Research and Development Intern at Dr. Reddy's Laboratories in Hyderabad from May 2024 to July 2024.

## ICE Continues Illegal Detentions Despite 4,400 Court Rulings Against Them

CAIRO. (Agency)

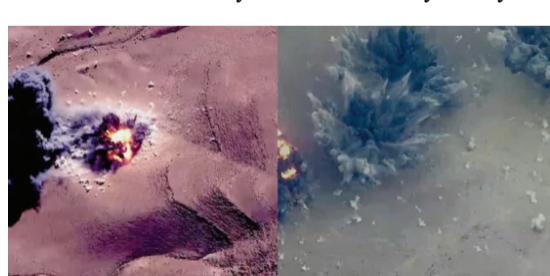
Hundreds of judges around the country have ruled more than 4,400 times since October that President Donald Trump's administration is detaining immigrants unlawfully, a Reuters review of court records found. The decisions amount to a sweeping legal rebuke of Trump's immigration crackdown. Yet the administration has continued jailing people indefinitely even after courts ruled the policy was illegal. "It is appalling that the Government insists that this Court should redefine or completely disregard the current law as it is clearly written," US District Judge Thomas Johnston of West Virginia, an appointee of President George W Bush, wrote last week, ordering the release of a Venezuelan detainee in the state.

Most of the rulings centre on the Trump administration's departure from a nearly three-decade-old interpretation of federal law that immigrants already living in the United States could be released on bond while they pursue their cases in immigration court. White House spokeswoman Abigail Jackson said the administration is "working to lawfully deliver on President Trump's mandate to enforce federal immigration law." Soaring Number Of Immigrant Detainees Under Trump, the number of people in ICE detention reached about 68,000 this month, up about 75% from when Trump took office last year. A conservative appeals court in New Orleans last week gave the Trump administration a victory in its drive to lock up more immigrants. Just because prior administrations did not fully utilize the law to detain people "does not mean they lacked the authority to do more," U.S. Circuit Judge Edith Jones wrote in a decision reversing rulings that led to the release of two Mexican men. Both remain free, their lawyer said.

## US Army Conducts 10 Strikes On 30 Islamic State Targets In Syria In 2 Weeks

World. (Agency)

The US military said that it had struck more than 30 Islamic State group targets in Syria over the last two weeks as a response to an attack on US troops last year which killed two US soldiers and one American civilian interpreter. In a statement, the US Central Command said that American aircraft had conducted 10 strikes against more than 30 IS targets between February 3 and Thursday, hitting weapons storage facilities and other infrastructure. The Central Command stated that at least 50 members of the IS have been killed or captured, and 100 IS targets have been struck since the US began its strikes after the December ambush. The Syrian Defence Ministry said that government forces took control of a base in the east of the country that was run for years by US



troops as part of the fight against IS. The Al-Tanf base played a major role after IS declared a caliphate in large parts of Syria and Iraq in 2014. The US military on Friday completed the transfer of thousands of IS detainees from Syria to Iraq, where they are expected to stand trial. The prisoners were sent to Iraq at the request of Baghdad, in a move welcomed by the US-led coalition that had for years fought against IS. The detainees in Syria were transferred to Baghdad's al-Karkh prison, once a US Army detention centre known as Camp Cropper, where former ruler Saddam Hussein was held before his execution. "We appreciate Iraq's leadership and recognition that transferring the detainees is essential to regional security," said head of CENTCOM Admiral Brad Cooper. "Job well done to the entire Joint Force team who executed this exceptionally challenging mission on the ground and in the air," he added.

# Bangladesh's new cabinet to take oath on February 17

**The ceremony is expected to take place at the National Parliament complex's South Plaza, a departure from the tradition of holding it at the presidential palace.**

DHAKA. (Agency)

Bangladesh President Mohammed Shahabuddin will administer the oath of office to the new cabinet of BNP chairman Tarique Rahman on February 17, according to officials. The ceremony is expected to take place at the National Parliament complex's South Plaza, a departure from the tradition of holding it at the presidential palace. "We have been informed that the President will administer the oath of office (to the new cabinet) on Tuesday at the Jatiya Sangsad (parliament) complex," a Bangabhaban (presidential palace) official said on the condition of anonymity on Saturday. According to Prothom Alo and Ittefaq newspapers, the



ceremony would be followed by Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) AMM Nasir Uddin administering the oath of office to the newly elected parliament members instead of Speaker Shirin Sharmin Chowdhury, as stated in the Constitution. According to the Third Schedule of the Constitution, the CEC is the third choice for the job in the absence of the outgoing parliament's speaker and

deputy speaker. Earlier, Cabinet Secretary Sheikh Abdur Rashid said that in line with the Constitution, the President would administer the oath to the new cabinet at Bangabhaban. He, however, did not give a date for the ceremony.

"If we are instructed or indicated that it will be held on a certain date and at a certain time, we will work accordingly. Even if it is tomorrow, we will have to

prepare for tomorrow," the top bureaucrat said. The Constitution requires the cabinet oath-taking ceremony to be followed by the swearing in of new parliament members. Earlier on Saturday, one of Rahman's key aides, who did not wish to be named, said the existing scenario made things a little complicated. The speaker of the last parliament is supposed to administer the oath of office to the MPs, but she resigned and is living in an undisclosed location while the deputy speaker is in jail," he said. In these circumstances, he said, the President might select someone to administer the oath and "the Constitution kept a provision for that". Meanwhile, the public administration issued a statement saying that Muhammad Yunus' interim government had scrapped Cabinet Secretary Rashid's contractual appointment, replacing him with Siraj Uddin Mia, who is currently serving as Chief Adviser Yunus' principal secretary. Rashid, however, told reporters that he resigned a few days ago and his resignation was accepted on Saturday. Yunus' interim government appointed Rashid, a retired additional secretary to the government, as the top bureaucrat on October 14, 2024, for two years.

## Dawn raids in Niger state leave at least 32 dead after gunmen attack three communities

ABUJA. (Agency)

At least 32 people have been killed after gunmen launched simultaneous attacks on three communities in the north-central region of Nigeria, the police and a resident said Saturday. The dawn raid were targeted on the communities of Tunga-Makeri, Konkoso, and Pissa, in the Borgu area of Niger state. Niger State police spokesman Wasiu Abiodun said six people died in the attack on Tunga-Makeri, adding that a "yet to be ascertained number of persons were abducted." Abiodun confirmed that the Konkoso community was attacked, but provided no further details. "Joint security teams have been mobilised to the scene for assessment and effort to rescue the

victims is ongoing," he said. Abdullahi Adamu, a resident of Konkoso,



said 26 people were killed in the attack on his community. "They were operating freely without the presence of any security," he said.

Northern Nigeria is in the grip of a complex security crisis featuring both

Islamic militants and armed gangs kidnapping people for ransom.

Saturday's attacks follow a deadly attack earlier this month in neighboring Kwa State that killed 162 people.

In the past few months, Nigeria has been in the crosshairs of the U.S. government, which has accused the Nigerian authorities of not protecting Christians, although attacks affect both Christians and Muslims.

The accusation has resulted in a security partnership between both countries that has involved U.S. strikes targeting armed groups in Nigerian territories in December, as well as presence of a team of U.S. military in the West African country.

## Israel To Attend India AI Impact Summit 2026, Strengthen Tech Ties

**The delegation comprises senior government officials, technology leaders, researchers and policy experts, underscoring Israel's intent to deepen cooperation with India across critical domains**

DHAKA. (Agency)

In a display of growing collaboration in artificial intelligence and emerging technologies, a high-level Israeli delegation will be participating in the India AI Impact Summit 2026, scheduled to be held in New Delhi from February 16 to 20.

The delegation, announced by the Embassy of Israel in New Delhi, will be led by Ilan Fluss, former Ambassador and Emerging and Disruptive Technologies (EDT) Policy Coordinator at Israel's Ministry of Foreign Affairs. It comprises senior government officials, technology leaders, researchers and policy experts, underscoring Israel's intent to deepen cooperation with India across critical domains such as AI, climate resilience, Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) investment, digital

governance and responsible innovation. The summit is expected to serve as a key platform for advancing bilateral engagement at a time when artificial intelligence is increasingly shaping economies, governance systems and global power structures. Addressing the significance of the visit, Fluss said that India and Israel share a responsibility to lead global innovation with strong ethical foundations. He described the delegation's participation as the beginning of a new chapter in bilateral relations, marked by co-creation in AI, deep tech and digital public goods that

can serve as a model for global cooperation. Throughout the summit, Israeli delegates will take part in high-level panel discussions and bilateral meetings focusing on AI-driven solutions for climate adaptation, precision agriculture, digital public infrastructure and workforce transformation. Ethical governance of emerging technologies will be a recurring theme, alongside conversations on impact investment, innovative ESG frameworks and public-private partnerships aimed at fostering inclusive and sustainable growth.

surroundings after more than 18 months of siege. The 29-page U.N. report detailed a set of atrocities that ranged from mass killings and summary executions, sexual violence, abductions for ransom, torture and ill-treatment to detention and disappearances. In many cases, the attacks were ethnicity-motivated, it said. The RSF did not respond to an e-mailed request for comment. The paramilitaries' Gen. Mohammed Hamdan Dagalo has previously acknowledged abuses by his fighters, but disputed the scale of atrocities. "Like a scene out of a horror movie" The alleged atrocities in el-Fasher, the provincial capital of North Darfur, mirror a pattern of RSF conduct in its war against the Sudanese military. The war began in April 2023 when a power struggle between the two sides exploded into open fighting in the capital, Khartoum and elsewhere across the country. The conflict created the world's largest

humanitarian crisis with parts of the country pushed into famine. It has also been marked by heinous atrocities which the International Criminal Court said it was investigating as war crimes and crimes against humanity. The RSF was also accused by the Biden administration of

## Saudi Arabia warns of SR50,000 fine for unreported visa overstays, jail and deportation risk

World. (Agency)

Visitors who remain in the Kingdom beyond their permitted stay are not the only ones facing consequences. Saudi authorities have now placed clear responsibility on sponsors, warning that failing to report a visit visa overstays could lead to heavy fines, prison time and even deportation.

Sponsors face strict legal consequences

Saudi Public Security has called on citizens and residents to immediately report visit visa holders who remain in the country after their visa has expired.

Authorities stated that penalties for failing to notify officials of a visitor's departure can reach up to SR50,000. The punishment may also include imprisonment for up to six months.

In cases where the sponsor is a non-Saudi resident, authorities warned that failure to report an overstaying could result in deportation. Officials stressed that such violations expose sponsors to strict legal accountability under existing regulations.

Nearly 20,000 administrative decisions issued in Rajab The warning comes alongside newly released enforcement data. According to recent statistics issued by the General Directorate of Passports, a total of 19,559 administrative decisions were issued during the month of Rajab 1447AH (2026). These decisions targeted citizens and residents found violating residency, labour and border security regulations.

The penalties imposed included imprisonment, financial fines and deportation, in line with relevant laws and regulatory frameworks.

Warning against assistig violators The Passports Directorate also issued a broader advisory to citizens, residents, business owners and individuals. It urged them not to transport, employ or shelter individuals who violate residency, labour or border security laws. Authorities further warned against concealing violators or providing any form of assistance, including help in securing employment, housing or transportation. Officials emphasised that cooperation is essential in enforcing regulations and maintaining compliance.

Confidential reporting assured

Authorities encouraged the public to report any violations, reaffirming that all reports will be handled with complete confidentiality.

They also assured that individuals who report violations will bear no legal liability. The message from officials is direct. Overstays are not treated as minor infractions, and responsibility extends beyond the visitor to those who sponsor or assist them.

## At least 6,000 killed over three days during RSF attack on Sudan's el-Fasher, UN says

CAIRO. (Agency)

More than 6,000 people were killed in over three days when a Sudanese paramilitary group unleashed "a wave of intense violence ... shocking in its scale and brutality" in Sudan's Darfur region in late October, according to the United Nations. The Rapid Support Forces' offensive to capture the city of el-Fasher included widespread atrocities that amount to war crimes and possible crimes against humanity, the U.N. Human Rights Office said in a report released on Friday. "The wanton violations that were perpetrated by the RSF and allied Arab militia in the final offensive on el-Fasher underscore that persistent impunity fuels continued cycles of violence," said U.N. High Commissioner for Human Rights Volker Türk. The RSF and their allied Arab militias, known as Janjaweed, overran el-Fasher, the Sudanese army's only remaining stronghold in Darfur, on Oct. 26 and rampaged through the city and its

surroundings after more than 18 months of siege. The 29-page U.N. report detailed a set of atrocities that ranged from mass killings and summary executions, sexual violence, abductions for ransom, torture and ill-treatment to detention and disappearances. In many cases, the attacks were ethnicity-motivated, it said.

The RSF did not respond to an e-mailed request for comment. The paramilitaries' Gen. Mohammed Hamdan Dagalo has previously acknowledged abuses by his fighters, but disputed the scale of atrocities. "Like a scene out of a horror movie" The alleged atrocities in el-Fasher, the provincial capital of North Darfur, mirror a pattern of RSF conduct in its war against the Sudanese military. The war began in April 2023 when a power struggle between the two sides exploded into open fighting in the capital, Khartoum and elsewhere across the country. The conflict created the world's largest

and Oct. 27, while more than 1,600 others were killed as they were trying to flee the RSF rampage. The report said it drew its toll from interviews with 140 victims and witnesses which were "are consistent with independent analysis of contemporaneous satellite imagery and video footage."

In one case, RSF fighters opened fire from heavy weapons on a crowd of 1,000 people sheltering in the Rashid dormitory in el-Fasher university on Oct. 26, killing around 500 people, the report said. One witness was quoted as saying that he saw bodies thrown into the air, "like a scene out of a horror movie," according to the report.

In another case, around 600 people, including 50 children, were executed on Oct. 26 while taking shelter in the university facilities, the report said. The report, however, warned that the actual scale of the death toll of the week-long offensive in el-Fasher was "undoubtedly significantly higher."



carrying out genocide in the ongoing war. The U.N. Human Rights Office said it documented the killing of at least 4,400 people inside el-Fasher between Oct. 25

## NEWS BOX

400 kg ganja hidden in onion boxes seized in Ahmedabad, 2 Maharashtra residents arrested

**Ahmedabad. (Agency)**  
The Detection of Crime Branch (DCB) of Ahmedabad City Police on Saturday said it has arrested two men ferrying 406.350 kg of Ganja worth an estimated Rs 2.03 crore, hidden in steel drums containing onions. "With the new corporations, funds must be distributed evenly. If elections are held soon, councillors will require ward grants. The Crime Branch received a tip off that a Mahindra pickup truck coming from Maharashtra to Gujarat was transporting ganja. Based on the information, a DCB team stopped a vehicle near Narol Circle in Ahmedabad city on February 13. Upon inspection of the vehicle, they found 14 steel drums used to store grains. They found bags filled with ganja hidden under the onions.

The Crime Branch seized the contraband and booked the two men, Dipak Tikam Jat (20), and Satesh alias Satej Temra Pawra (23), both residents of Dhule, Maharashtra, under sections of the Narcotics, Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (NDPS) Act. A statement from the Crime Branch on Saturday said, "Upon their interrogation, the accused revealed that two men named Sagar Pawra and Shantiram Pawra had given them the drugs which had been loaded into the vehicle in Karmala, Maharashtra, and asked them to transport it to Ahmedabad, Gujarat."

**Kanthapuram welcomes discussions on Sunni unity**

**CHENNAI. (Agency)**  
Indian Grand Mufti and Sunni leader Kanthapuram A P Aboobacker Musaliyar has welcomed the discussions on the unity of the Sunni organisations in Kerala, saying that such a unity is what time demands. Addressing the public meeting organised to declare the centenary celebrations of the Samastha Kerala Jem-Iyyathul Ulama here on Saturday, Kanthapuram however, cautioned that there should not be anything in words and deeds that adversely affect the unity. Referring to the split in the Samastha in 1989, Kanthapuram clarified that he along with others did not walk out of the organisation. "Respectful Thangal (Jiffiri Thangal) and others had stated that those who left Samastha can come back. We never walked out of Samastha. Members stage walkouts from assemblies and Parliament during discussions, but that doesn't mean that they have discarded their MLA post," he said.

Kanthapuram said that he along with others walked out of the meeting because they had disagreement over decisions taken at the meeting. People who are new in Samastha may not know what was the discussion at the meeting, he added.

"It is necessary to move forward with the efforts to achieve unity, sticking on to the declared positions of the Samastha. We should find ways to get united, not divided," Kanthapuram said. Both the factions of the Samastha had deputed four persons each for the unity talks and discussions have progressed under the committee. "We are ready for more such talks" Kanthapuram said.

**NISAR's soil moisture data revolutionises Indian agriculture, policy planning**

**BENGALURU. (Agency)**  
Officials in the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) said the information being obtained from the two radars – S-Band and L-Band – on the NASA-ISRO Synthetic Aperture Radar (NISAR) is empowering farmers, planners, non-governmental entities and policy makers with consistent information.

The ISRO team on Saturday made public information pertaining to the soil moisture products at 100m resolution obtained from NISAR data and termed it as a national asset for agriculture. The officials said the information with actionable intelligence is essential for sustainable agriculture, efficient irrigation and national food and water security.

The data showed multiple full-swath 100m soil moisture products over various agro-climatic regions of India. They assessed the semi-arid and moisture stress conditions in western India, the irrigation-driven viability of northern India, including the Indo-Gangetic plains, and the rain-fed agricultural zones of central India.

The physics-based algorithm, developed at Space Applications Centre, ensures scientific robustness and operational accuracy, officials said. "The results confirm the operational readiness, scalability and reliability of NISAR's soil moisture products. They highlight the complementary strengths of the two frequencies, L-Band and S-Band, of NISAR for operational soil moisture retrieval. While L-band enables deeper penetration and improved sensitivity under vegetation and crop cover, S-band provides enhanced surface sensitivity and finer spatial detail," the teams said. NISAR is systematically imaging the Indian landmass using the two frequencies to deliver high-resolution and wide swath data.

# One dead, three injured after Metro parapet collapses on LBS Road, Mulund

**A 60-year-old man was killed and three others injured after a parapet wall segment from an under-construction Metro Line 4 stretch collapsed onto vehicles on LBS Road in Mulund, prompting arrests, heavy fines and a high-level probe.**

## Mumbai. (Agency)

One person died and three others were injured after a segment of a parapet wall on the Metro Line 4 fell on an autorickshaw and a car travelling on the LBS Road, Mulund, on Saturday. The 6x4 feet boulder fell on a moving autorickshaw and Skoda car at around 12.15 pm, impacting the occupants of the rickshaw the most. Sixty-year-old Ramdhan Yadav, who was in the auto died, while his relative, Rajkumar Indrajeet Yadav, 45, who was the driver of the rickshaw, was seriously injured and fighting for his life, as per family members.

The third occupant of the rickshaw and another member of the Yadav family, Mahendra Pratap Yadav, 52, who was also on his way for wedding celebrations, sustained serious injuries and was in an ICU, but is out of the critical stage. The fourth injured, Deepa Ruhya, 40, who was in the Skoda car, sustained injuries but is in a stable condition.

In the past three years, accidents on Metro sites have resulted in the deaths of three persons and injured at least one, adding to the MMRDA's track record of poor safety at work sites.



While Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis announced an ex-gratia of Rs 5 lakh for the family of the deceased, the MMRDA slapped a fine of Rs 5 crore on the executing contractor – referring to a trio of Reliance Infrastructure, Astaldi & Milan Road Buildtech – and Rs 1 crore on the general consultant appointed for work on the stretch. A high-powered committee has been set up to investigate the cause of the parapet fall.

The Mulund Police registered an FIR against supervisors of Milan Road Buildtech, the subcontractor responsible for building the stretch of the metro in question on charges of culpable homicide not amounting to murder,

attempt to commit culpable homicide among other sections. Late at night, the police arrested five persons including project directors, managers, site supervisor and two consultants. The incident took place shortly after noon right opposite the Johnson & Johnson office on the busy LBS Road in Mulund West, when one segment of the parapet wall of the Metro Line 4 (from Wadala to Kasarvadavali, Thane) came loose and fell off.

Preliminary inquiry has suggested the fastening of the segment was cut or was missing, leading to the fall, said an MMRDA official, although an investigation is ongoing. "We heard a loud thud and ran to see what had happened," said an onlooker who did not want to be named. "The slab had crushed a rickshaw and the front of a car. While one passenger on the rickshaw was not responsive, the slab had trapped the lower part of the rickshaw driver. People were scared of going near fearing that more slabs would fall, but many went ahead and took the injured rickshaw passengers and occupants of the vehicle to Upasani Hospital, which is right there. As for the driver, people were no match for the boulder and could not move it. The driver sat in disconnected shock, unblinking, till he was finally pulled out from under the boulder, his lower half crushed."

# Union govt tried to stop Magalir Urimai Thogai, says TN CM Stalin

## Tirupattur. (Agency)

Chief Minister and DMK president MK Stalin on Saturday directly blamed the BJP for trying to stop the disbursal of cash assistance to woman beneficiaries under the Kalaignar Magalir Urimai Thogai (KMUT) scheme, which made the state government credit the money for three months in advance on Friday in a surprise move. Without naming any party, in a video released on Friday, Stalin blamed certain vested interests in Delhi and their vassals in Tamil Nadu for trying to thwart KMUT on the pretext of upcoming Assembly election.

However, addressing the DMK's north zone booth committee conference in Mandavadi on Saturday, the CM alleged that there were plans to stop such welfare measures by filing a petition, through a BJP person, in the Supreme Court. "As far as the union government is



concerned, they would neither do good for people themselves nor allow others to do," he alleged. "That is why we surprised the people (by crediting the money) and shocked those who are anti-people," he said, adding that is his

style. Stalin further said that every household in Tamil Nadu has benefitted from various welfare schemes of the government. He said whatever political trends may exist in India, in Tamil Nadu the trend is 'Black and Red' and that the 'Dravidian Model 2.0' has started. "The rule of the rising sun will begin again," he said. "We came to power promising to deliver, and we have done even more than what we promised. We stand proudly before the people," he said. In Tirupattur, Stalin visited a couple of homes of the public to enquire whether the government's welfare schemes have reached them. At the conference, former AIADMK labour welfare minister Nilofer Kabil joined the DMK. Turning his attack on the AIADMK, Stalin alleged that the party has become an offshoot of the NDA and said its general secretary, Edappadi K Palaniswami,

# Madurai bench of Madras HC confirms lifer on couple for killing intellectually disabled kid

## Madurai. (Agency)

Observing that it is the bounden duty of parents to take care of their child, irrespective of whether the child is born with or without any physical or intellectual disability, the Madurai bench of the Madras High Court refused to interfere with the conviction and life sentence imposed on a couple for murdering their nine-year-old daughter, who had an intellectual disability, in Virudhunagar in 2018.

A bench of justices G K Ilanthyaran and R Poornima said that although it sympathises with the accused parents for the difficulties they faced in bringing up the child, it must be borne in mind that the child did not come into this world on her own but was born to the accused themselves. "If the law permits the parents to eliminate children born with an intellectual disability, no such child would

survive in this world," they added.

The bench made the observations while dismissing an appeal filed by the couple — S Muneeswaran and Revathi — challenging the conviction and punishment imposed on them by a fast track mahila court in Srivilliputhur on August 6, 2022.



According to the prosecution, the couple gave birth to the child in May 2009. Since the girl was born with an intellectual disability, Revathi, who worked as a professor in a private college, resigned her job to look after her. However, the couple couldn't care for her and decided to end her life. On October 1, 2018, they

took the girl to a temple and administered pesticide to her by mixing it in soft drinks. Hearing the child's cry, passersby intervened and the child was taken to Srivilliputhur Government Hospital and later to Government Rajaji Hospital in Madurai. However, she died five days later.

Virudhunagar police filed a case and the couple was found guilty. However, the accused denied the charges and moved the HC.

The couple pointed out that eye witnesses turned hostile and the postmortem report did not indicate poisoning.

However, the judges noted that the owner of the fertilizer shop identified Muneeswaran and testified against him. They also explained that before her death, the deceased child had undertaken medical treatment for more than five days and that could have removed the poison from her body resulting.

# Govt's Sabarmati Ashram revamp in Ahmedabad runs into resistance — one family holds out

## Ahmedabad. (Agency)

On the 55 acres of land where workers are busy restoring rows of neat cottages with terracotta-tiled roofs as part of the Rs 1,200 crore Sabarmati Ashram Redevelopment Project, one cottage on the north-west corner stands untouched.

Clothes hang on a line, a scooter is parked outside, the walls are stained with water leakage, the lime plaster has peeled off at places exposing the bricks, and the roof tiles are run down or broken. But the family of the late Mohanbai Rathod is holding out on the government's rehabilitation plan and resisting moving out, unlike the other 250-odd families which once lived on the premises.

The Dalit family, comprising Rathod's wife, children and other relatives, occupy the house — located near a statue of Babasaheb Ambedkar — as tenants. The redevelopment of the Ashram, set up by Mahatma Gandhi, is being implemented jointly by the Central and state governments, under the Mahatma Gandhi Sabarmati Ashram Memorial Trust. Its

masterplan was launched by Prime Minister Narendra Modi in March 2024, and the state government hopes to finish the project by 2027. Three properties located on the Ashram premises – A, B and C – however, have been in litigation before the Small Causes Court in Ahmedabad. Property B comprises the residential area where the



Rathods are now the lone residents, while Properties A and C are plots of land measuring together 6,000 sq yards.

The Rathods claim that all the three properties were handed over to their ancestors by a trustee of the Ashram, sometime in 1930. The Rathods sought an order to restrain the trust from dispossessing them of the three properties, and applied for an injunction order in 2014, while claiming tenancy rights.

# Cabinet clears Rs 3,320-crore NH-160A upgrade in Maharashtra: How this project will divert heavy freight from Nashik city

## Mumbai. (Agency)

The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs Friday approved the rehabilitation and upgradation of the Ghoti-Trimbak (Mokhada)-Jawhar-Manor-Palghar (Nashik to Palghar) stretch of National Highway 160A in Maharashtra's Nashik at a capital cost of Rs 3,320.38 crore. Chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the panel cleared the 154.63-km project to be executed under the Engineering, Procurement and Construction (EPC) mode. The highway will be developed as a two-lane corridor with paved shoulders, with select urban stretches, particularly between Manor and Palghar, widened to four lanes. The approval comes amid rising traffic pressure on key arterial

roads feeding Nashik's industrial clusters at Ambad and Satpur. Freight traffic currently enters the city via NH-848 and NH-60, both operating near their Level of Service (LOS) C thresholds. Officials said the upgraded NH-160A will serve as an alternative route, allowing vehicles from Mumbai and southern Maharashtra to bypass Nashik. Traffic is expected to move through the Mumbai-Nagpur Samruddhi Mahamarg up to Igatpuri, connect to NH-848 till Ghoti, and then take NH-160A towards Trimbak and Nashik. Government estimates suggest that by 2028, daily traffic on parts of the corridor will exceed 10,000 Passenger Car Units (PCUs), meeting the threshold for



four-laning.

The stretch west of Trimbak will connect NH-160A to the Delhi-Mumbai Expressway and National Highway 48, and extend to the western coastal belt. While traffic between Trimbak and Manor currently stands at about

4,300 PCUs per day, the Manor-Palghar segment carries over 12,000 PCUs daily and will be widened to ease congestion in built-up areas. The Centre said the project aligns with the PM GatiShakti framework and will link economic zones, industrial estates, railway stations, airports and ports in the region. It is also expected to improve connectivity to tribal areas in Palghar district. The government estimates the project will generate nearly 20 lakh person-days of direct employment and close to 25 lakh person-days of indirect employment. Officials said the improved corridor would reduce travel time and vehicle operating costs, while strengthening freight movement between northern Maharashtra.

# Sabarimala controversy fuels intense battle in Kazhakkottam as elections near

Thiruvananthapuram. (Agency) With assembly elections inching closer, Kazhakkottam in Thiruvananthapuram district is fast emerging as one of the most closely watched constituencies in the state. Senior BJP leader V Muraleedharan has officially declared his candidature for the seat, setting the stage for a high-stakes contest.

Historically a UDF bastion, but an LDF stronghold since 2016, Kazhakkottam is now witnessing a sharp rise in the BJP's grassroots presence, paving the way for strong electoral dynamics.

The LDF finds itself on the defensive following the recent local body elections and the controversy surrounding the alleged Sabarimala gold theft. With the opposition raising allegations regarding the involvement of CPM members and former Devaswom Minister Kadakkampally Surendran, the sitting Kazhakkottam MLA, the gold theft case has emerged as a key issue influencing local voter sentiment, according to both the BJP and the UDF. Both fronts have launched aggressive campaigns, seeking to capitalise on the controversy and wrest control of the constituency.

The 2025 local body elections signalled a shift in political fortunes in the Kazhakkottam area. Left insiders admit that the Sabarimala issue may have had an impact on the local body results.

In the ward-level contests covering 28 corporation wards within the constituency, the BJP emerged as the single-largest party, winning 14 seats. The LDF secured 10 seats and the UDF 3, with one independent candidate too emerging victorious. However, Kadakkampally asserted that the local poll results and the Sabarimala controversy will not alter the assembly outcome.

"In the local body elections, we lost a few wards by very narrow margins, which helped the BJP improve its tally. But if you total the votes polled, the LDF secured more votes than the BJP and the UDF combined. Development and public engagement decide assembly elections here."

## Let them live like a child with a sense of belonging

Mental health issues among children are becoming increasingly prevalent. Community studies in India estimate the prevalence of psychiatric disorders at around 6%, while school-based studies frequently report rates exceeding 20%. The most common conditions include anxiety, conduct disorders, oppositional disorders, depression, and ADHD. Beyond these diagnostic labels, mental health professionals frequently encounter children exhibiting behavioural issues rooted in a lack of belongingness to their social and nurturing environments.

A twelve-year-old boy who ran away from home was brought in for mental health intervention. He was going through a period of academic decline after developing a tendency toward increased screen time indulgence. He was a good student before that. Hence, parents imposed controls on screen time. In response to harsh parental controls, the child exhibited significant oppositional behaviour and physical aggression, eventually fleeing with a sum of money. He returned only after his funds were exhausted, citing feelings of alienation stemming from the disciplinary conflict. This case serves as an example of how discipline, when implemented without creating a feeling of belongingness, can result in severe adverse reactions. Many living in adverse family and social situations go through the same feeling. Their search for a place where they feel safe and comfortable may drive them to dangerous behaviours. The tragic incident in Ghaziabad, where three minor girls jumped from a flat to their deaths, raises serious concerns about the environments our children inhabit. Interestingly, the theme for this year's Children's Mental Health Week is 'This is My Place'. This theme emphasises the importance of creating inclusive, nurturing environments where children feel safe, valued, and supported—whether at home, in school, or within their community. Creating the right spaces for children

We must ask ourselves: are we making conscious efforts to provide developmentally appropriate spaces for our children? Are we creating environments suited to their growth and inspiring them to engage with those spaces with a sense of belongingness? Adult-created environments must foster a sense of belonging; otherwise, children will seek out their own spaces. While these alternatives may feel pleasurable or comfortable to them, they can often be harmful to their character formation.

Children should feel welcomed and valued in a place they can call their own. For some, home may not provide this due to various challenges; however, schools and other environments can step in to offer a sense of belonging that is vital to their development. When children feel included in peer groups, it significantly boosts their well-being, whereas exclusion can lead to isolation. Establishing the right social connections provides a sense of connectedness that reduces stress and anxiety. Ultimately, being accepted for who they are fosters a deep sense of belonging, which is essential for their growth. Tips to foster a sense of belonging: Here are several strategies to help foster a sense of belonging in children. Establish rituals and routines: Create consistent shared time as a family through family time, bedtime stories, or play. These activities help children feel accepted and loved. Create a safe emotional environment: Ensure the home or classroom is a non-judgmental space where children feel comfortable expressing their thoughts and emotions. Show genuine interest: Be inquisitive about their interests and passions to ensure that they feel seen and valued.

Facilitate peer experiences: Encourage shared activities like team sports or collaborative games to help children feel part of a group.

## Revenues flow overwhelmingly to Central utilities. The resource is local. The land is local. The risks are local. The profits are not.

FOR nearly seven decades, the Indian Republic has recognised a foundational truth of federal governance: not all states are born with equal economic capacity, and some, especially mountain and border states, carry structural disadvantages. The revenue deficit grant (RDG) emerged from this understanding. It was an instrument meant to balance geography, history and national priorities. The 16th Finance Commission's decision to withdraw the RDG from Himachal Pradesh marks a rupture in India's federal compact — one that threatens to push the state towards fiscal subordination and political marginalisation. Himachal Pradesh was never carved out on the assumption that it would be a revenue-surplus state. It was carved out because the Indian State believed that political integration, border security, ecological stewardship and social development in the Himalayas were national responsibilities. Since the time of the earliest finance commissions, revenue deficit support recognised that governing a mountainous, sparsely populated, fragile region costs more and yields less by conventional revenue logic.

The 16th Finance Commission's approach dismantles this legacy. Over the next five years, Himachal is set to lose around Rs 50,000 crore. Last year, the state's revenue receipts stood at roughly Rs 42,000 crore. Even a Rs 10,000-crore annual shortfall — the scale of RDG withdrawal — amounts to 25% of the state's revenue base. This will hit pensions, salaries, healthcare, education and basic service delivery. A state government cannot absorb a quarter of its revenue without severe social and political consequences. At this scale, fiscal autonomy collapses into fiscal survival. The question, therefore, is: Can a state continue to function as a state under such conditions? Himachal Pradesh is a border state, supported by the Centre as a strategic necessity. The withdrawal of revenue support signals a dangerous shift — from shared responsibility to abandonment. This move reflects a mindset of over-centralisation, where the Union consolidates fiscal power while states are reduced to implementation agencies. Federalism, in this vision, is no longer a partnership of equals but a hierarchy of dependence. When states are stripped of predictable revenue flows, they are forced into debt, compliance and political acquiescence. One is compelled to ask whether this fiscal strangulation reflects a reimagination of states as administrative extensions of the Centre. Is Himachal being virtually nudged towards the status of a union

territory? This fiscal assault must be read alongside Himachal's experience with extractive development. Hydropower is a glaring example. For decades, the state has borne the ecological, social and infrastructural costs of dam construction: displacement, destabilised mountains, altered river systems and irreversible ecological stress. Yet the financial returns barely touch the state. The royalty — at around 12% of generated power, misleadingly termed "free power" or "distress cost" — is negligible. There is no equity participation for the state, except in a few cases. Revenues flow overwhelmingly to Central utilities and private corporations. The resource is local. The land is local. The risks are local. The profits are not.

innovation is permitted — rightly, in ecological terms — but with no compensatory fiscal mechanism. In this context, the revenue deficit grant is a legitimate constitutional compensation for providing national ecological services. To withdraw it is to penalise environmental responsibility. Perhaps the most perverse feature of the 16th Finance Commission's logic is its disregard for what Himachal has achieved despite constraints. The state has emerged second only to Kerala on key human development indicators. It was the result of decades of investment in education, healthcare, nutrition and social welfare. The very expenditures that built this success now appear to be treated as fiscal inefficiencies. Instead of rewarding social investment, the Finance

Commission's approach effectively punishes it. Beyond numbers and balance sheets lies a deeper moral question. Himachal has given more than resources — it has given lives. Visit villages in Kangra, Hamirpur, Una and adjoining regions. Attend gram sabha meetings. In many villages, you will find women assembling in overwhelming numbers because generations of men have been lost — to wars, border conflicts and military deployments. Himachal has one of the highest per capita representations in the armed forces. Its people have guarded borders, served in hostile terrain and paid a disproportionate price for national security. The fiscal hollowing is compounded by the steady erosion of the state's legitimate claims over Bhakra-Beas revenues and land-based income linked to water flows. Water flows on land. Land is a state subject. Any serious federal arrangement would recognise

land revenue as a legitimate income stream. The systematic denial of these rights leaves the state with responsibility but no resources — a model guaranteed to fail. All this unfolds amid rising unemployment, youth anxiety and social stress. Fiscal contraction under such conditions is destabilising. When the Centre withdraws support without building alternative revenue pathways, it pushes the state towards alienation and political resentment. History teaches us that such alienation does not remain silent for long.

The question must be clearly asked: Does the Centre intend to reduce Himachal Pradesh to a fiscally dependent adjunct or will it honour the constitutional promise that held the Union together for 70 years? The present may choose to ignore this warning. The future will not.



This is extractive capitalism: the periphery supplies resources, the centre accumulates surplus and the state absorbs the damage. When revenue deficit support is simultaneously withdrawn, the cycle of extraction is completed. The injustice deepens when one considers forest governance. Following forest nationalisation and regulatory tightening after the 1980s, states like Himachal were left with a vast green cover but no meaningful fiscal instruments to derive revenue from it. Forests in Himachal are ecological shields, contributing to climate stability, water security and biodiversity for the entire country. Yet the costs of protection, conservation, disaster management and opportunity loss are borne almost entirely by the state. No economic activity, no sustainable extraction, no revenue

## Agri debt burden

### Punjab, Haryana farmers caught in a vicious cycle



small and fragmented landholdings, erratic monsoons, procurement delays and mounting household expenditures have established a cycle of credit dependency. Easy access to institutional loans has spurred productivity, but it has also normalised borrowing as a means of survival. The Centre claims that it is prioritising farmers' interests. The rollout of AgriStack, digital IDs for 8.48 crore farmers, geo-referenced crop surveys and streamlined direct benefit transfer promise efficiency and transparency. The RBI's proposed revamp of the Kisan Credit Card scheme — aligning loan tenures with crop cycles — signals recognition that credit must evolve with changing farm realities. Technology and better-designed credit are welcome steps, but they alone cannot alleviate deep-rooted distress. If incomes do not keep pace with costs, if crop diversification remains dormant, and if climate change intensifies, debt will persist — no matter how efficiently loans are disbursed. The onus is on the Central and state governments to lift the all-important annadata out of the crippling debt trap.

## The perilous allure of social media

### As teachers and parents, we should encourage children to distinguish the real from the virtual.

NOT everything, it seems, is fine with our growing indulgence in social media — particularly, the way the fascination with platforms like Facebook, Instagram and YouTube is affecting the mental health of our children: their process of growing up, their socialisation and education and their ways of engaging with the virtual world. Is it the reason why Australia has already imposed a ban on social media for children under 16, and several European countries are set to follow the same path? Even in India, a debate around banning social media for children under 16 is gaining momentum.

Think of what could happen to your child if you ask him/her not to use the smartphone for a couple of days, and instead, concentrate on focused study or face-to-face interaction with his/her friends and loved ones. It really frightens me as I reflect on the fate of the three sisters aged 16, 14, and 12 who jumped to death from the ninth floor of their apartment in a housing society in Ghaziabad. As reports suggest, it was a conflict-ridden family, and most importantly, their father was not particularly happy with the addiction of his three daughters to social media, and task-based online Korean games. They, it appears, could not bear this 'shock' and chose to end their lives. These days, I am becoming increasingly convinced of the dialectic of technology. Think of, for instance, a device like a smartphone. Yes, it is magical. Give this device to a child or a teenager. She/he can connect instantly with the world, watch a film, listen to a song, play a video game, read a book, make reels and videos, send messages and use Facebook, Instagram and WhatsApp in his/her own way.

This techno-savvy 'smartness' might impress them, yet the fact is that this indulgence with the smartphone also takes away something vital from them. The more addicted they are to the screen, the more dissociated they become from

Fatehpur sets example of social commitment; MLA Bhawani Pathania among 73 donate blood

Dharamshala.(Agency)

In a remarkable display of social responsibility, 73 people, including local MLA Bhawani Pathania and BJP OBC leader OP Chaudhary, donated blood at the fifth annual blood donation camp organised by the Press Club Fatehpur at the PWD Rest House in Fatehpur.

The camp witnessed enthusiastic participation from public representatives and local residents alike, collecting a total of 73 units of blood for patients in need. Press Club Fatehpur president Ravindra Chaudhary said this was the fifth consecutive annual camp organised by the club.

He thanked all donors, volunteers and the medical team for their support and affirmed that the club would continue to undertake such social initiatives in the future. MLA Bhawani Pathania personally donated blood and lauded the initiative, describing blood donation as a noble act that can give a new lease of life to the needy.

He urged the youth to come forward and donate blood regularly. BJP OBC leader OP Chaudhary also donated blood and appreciated the efforts of the organisers.

The Rajput Kalyan Sabha, Fatehpur, extended full cooperation in organising the camp, with its members actively engaged in service throughout the day. SDM Fatehpur Vishruth Bharti, Satbir Guleria, JE Ganesh Sharma, Prem Sharma, social worker Raghuvir Guleria, BMS leader Madan Rana, Surajkant, BDO Fatehpur and Dr Vineet Parashar, among other dignitaries, were present on the occasion.

**Himachal's 410 panchayats connected with high-speed minister broadband under BharatNet**

Dharamshala/New Delhi.(Agency)

As many as 410 panchayats in Himachal Pradesh have been provided high-speed broadband services under the BharatNet project, the union Government informed Parliament.

Minister of State for Communications Dr. Pemmasani Chandra Sekhar told Rajya Sabha MP Indu Bala Goswami in the Rajya Sabha that under Phase I and Phase II of the BharatNet project, a total of 2,22,341 panchayats across the country are to be provided high-speed broadband connectivity, out of which 2,14,904 have already been covered.

He said that in Himachal Pradesh, 410 panchayats have been connected so far. Uttar Pradesh accounts for the highest number of connected panchayats at 35,746, while no panchayat in Goa has been covered under the scheme.

The Minister further informed that under the first two phases of BharatNet, 6,082 panchayats in Haryana, 1,993 in Uttarakhand, 12,668 in Punjab, 1,101 in Jammu and Kashmir, and 12 in Chandigarh have been provided broadband connectivity. He added that under the BharatNet project, 783 kilometres of optical fibre cable had been laid in Himachal Pradesh up to December 31, 2025, to facilitate high-speed broadband services. Meanwhile, Minister of State for Food Processing Industries Ravneet Singh informed the Rajya Sabha that a budget allocation of Rs 630 crore has been made for the financial year 2024-25 under the Pradhan Mantri Kisan Sampada Yojana.

**Jai Ram Thakur slams Sukhu govt over economy**

Jwalaji (Kangra). (Agency)

Jwalaji (Kangra) Feb 15 (UNI) Jai Ram Thakur, former Himachal Pradesh Chief Minister and Leader of Opposition, attacked the Congress government led by Sukhwinder Singh Sukhu, accusing it of mismanaging the state's economy and indulging in "petty politics" over the Revenue Deficit Grant (RDG).

During his visit to the Jwalaji Assembly constituency in Kangra district, Thakur paid obeisance at the historic Jwala Ji Temple and prayed for the happiness, prosperity and bright future of the people of the state.

He was accorded a warm welcome by BJP leaders and workers and later attended the Lakhdata Peer Dangal fair as chief guest, where he lauded efforts to preserve traditional wrestling as part of the state's cultural heritage. Addressing the media, Thakur said the Chief Minister was misleading the people on the RDG issue, asserting that its phased reduction had been indicated since the 14th Finance Commission.

He claimed the state received Rs 7,800 crore during the 13th Finance Commission, but secured Rs 40,000 crore under the 14th and Rs 48,000 crore under the 15th Finance Commission under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi. Thakur alleged that the present government had failed to take concrete steps to augment the state's own revenue resources in the past three years.

The Leader of Opposition further alleged contradictions within the government, stating that while officials admit the treasury is under strain and unable to sustain subsidies and allowances, the Chief Minister is simultaneously making "unrealistic" claims of turning Himachal self-reliant by 2027 and the most prosperous state by 2032.

Accusing the government of halting development works and scrapping public welfare schemes initiated during the previous BJP regime, Thakur charged that the state's resources were being "squandered for the comforts of the Chief Minister's friends" while common people were suffering.

## PGI all set to get a new critical care block

**The block will come up on vacant land opposite the School of Nursing on the PGI campus. Once operational, it will allow treatment of critically ill and infectious disease patients under one roof, enhancing the institute's emergency response capacity.**

Chandigarh. (Agency)

With the long-pending clearance now in place, work on the 150-bed Critical Care Block is set to begin, PGI Deputy Director, Administration, Pankaj Rai confirmed. The delay in environmental clearance had stalled the project for several months, but following approval, construction work has been allotted.

The block will come up on vacant land opposite the School of Nursing on the PGI campus. Once operational, it will allow treatment of critically ill and infectious disease patients under one roof, enhancing the institute's emergency response capacity.

The Critical Care Block was not part of the institute's original master plan. However, the COVID-19 pandemic underscored the urgent need for dedicated critical care infrastructure. Recognising this, the Centre approved the project under PM-ABHIM, making it one of PGI's key upcoming facilities.

At present, two major projects, the Neurosciences Centre and the Mother and Child Care Centre are

expected to be operational this year. Work on both projects had been delayed due to the COVID-19 pandemic. According to Rai, the

an unprecedented surge of critically ill patients. At the time, several departments and the Nehru Extension Block had to be converted into COVID care facilities to manage the crisis.

Once functional, the new Critical Care Block will cater to patients requiring intensive monitoring and advanced life support, including those arriving at the emergency and trauma centres in critical condition. Experts believe that in the event of a future pandemic or similar public health emergency, the facility will play a crucial role in managing patient load efficiently.

The Critical Care Block will function as a multi-specialty centre equipped with intensive care units (ICUs), step-down units (SDUs), isolation wards, oxygen-supported beds and surgical units. It will also include two labour rooms, delivery and recovery rooms, and a dedicated unit for neonatal care and related conditions.



Critical Care Block is a strategically important project for the institute and has been under planning for a considerable time. "The facility is expected to significantly benefit patients requiring specialised and intensive care," he said. The project was conceptualised during the COVID-19 pandemic, when the institute faced

## Teachers oppose mandatory TET condition for service, write to PM Modi

**Currently, TET is essential for both new appointments and existing teachers to maintain quality education.**

Jalandhar. (Agency)

In response to the Supreme Court's last year judgment mandating the Teacher Eligibility Test (TET) as a compulsory condition for continuation in service and promotions for teachers appointed before 2010, members of the Democratic Teachers Front (DTF) convened at Gandhi Park in Garhshankar to voice their opposition to the ruling.

Currently, TET is essential for both new appointments and existing teachers to maintain quality education. Teachers with more than five years of service left must clear the exam within two years, or risk forced retirement. In various states, departments are halting promotions for teachers who have not passed the TET, forcing them to take the exam. Under the leadership of DTF representatives

Mukesh Kumar, Sukhdev Daanseeval, and Gyan Chand Noorpurbedi, teachers gathered in large numbers and submitted a letter carrying the demands addressed to Prime Minister Narendra Modi. The memorandum was forwarded through former Rajya Sabha MP Avinash Rai Khanna.

The teachers expressed deep concern over the implications of the Supreme Court verdict, stating that the mandatory imposition of TET as a prerequisite for job security and career advancement has created widespread uncertainty among educators appointed prior to 2010. They argued that the decision has placed the future, seniority, and service stability of thousands of

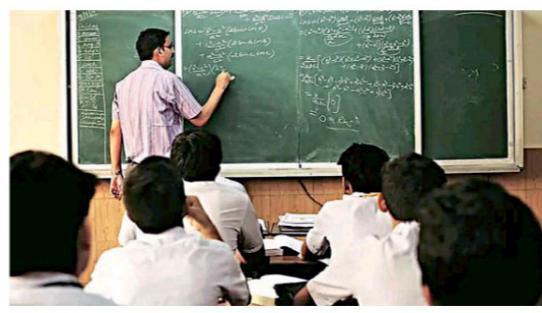
teachers in jeopardy. Speakers at the gathering emphasized that teachers form the backbone of the education system. Any instability in their service conditions, they noted, would directly affect

currently experiencing significant mental stress and professional insecurity as a result of the ruling, the association said.

The DTF leaders demanded that the central government introduce an appropriate bill in

Parliament to either nullify or suitably amend the judgment in favor of teachers. They urged the government to take necessary legislative steps to safeguard teachers' employment rights and ensure long-term job security. "If concrete and effective measures

are not taken in this regard teachers across the country will be compelled to launch a united struggle to protect their rights," the DTF said in a statement.



## Northeast Frontier Railway to operate Four pairs of Holi Special Trains

The Sikh Times

Friday from 20th February to 27th March 2026, departing Gorakhpur at 16:55 hrs and

Special Train No. 05735 (Amritsar-Katihar) will run every Friday from 20th February



arriving at Narangi at 21:40 hrs the next day. Both the trains will run for 06 trips each. Special Train No. 05736 (Katihar-Amritsar) will run every Wednesday from 18th February to 25th March 2026, departing from Narangi at 13:20 hrs and reaching Gorakhpur at 13:00 hrs the next day. Similarly, Special Train No. 05634 (Gorakhpur-Narangi) will run every

27th March 2026, departing Amritsar at 13:25 hrs and arriving at Katihar at 23:45 hrs the next day. Both the trains will run for 06 trips each. Special Train No. 05974 (Dibrugarh-Jhanjharpur) will run every Tuesday from 17th February to 31st March 2026, departing from Dibrugarh at 05:20 hrs

and reaching Jhanjharpur at 11:30 hrs the next day. Similarly, Special Train No. 05973 (Jhanjharpur-Dibrugarh) will run every Wednesday from 18th February to 1st April 2026, departing Jhanjharpur at 13:00 hrs and arriving at Dibrugarh at 20:20 hrs the next day. Both the trains will run for 07 trips each. Special Train No. 05932 (Dibrugarh-Kolkata) will run every Saturday from 21st February to 7th March 2026, departing from Dibrugarh at 17:00 hrs and reaching Kolkata at 00:30 hrs, Monday. Similarly, Special Train No. 05931 (Kolkata-Dibrugarh) will run every Monday from 23rd February to 9th March 2026, departing Kolkata at 02:30 hrs and arriving at Dibrugarh at 06:30 hrs the next day. Both the trains will run for 03 trips each. The train services aim to connect key destinations and ease congestion on regular trains, ensuring that passengers can celebrate the festival of colours with their families in a safe, convenient and timely manner. The details of stoppages and timings of these special trains are available at IRCTC website and are also being notified in various newspapers and social media platforms of NF Railway. Passengers are requested to verify the details before undertaking their journey.

## Long queues for darshan of Shri Kashi Vishwanath, gifts from 62 temples across the country and abroad

Varanasi. (Agency)

Devotees from across the country and abroad have arrived in the religious city of Kashi to visit Baba Vishwanath on the occasion of Mahashivratri on Sunday.

On Sunday, devotees coming to see Lord Shri Vishweshwara were greeted and welcomed with a grand flower shower on the auspicious occasion of Mahashivratri.

A flood of devotees has been pouring into Vishwanath Dham since the Mangala Aarti on Sunday morning. Long queues have formed on the streets outside the temple for darshan. Chants of "Har Har Mahadev" are echoing throughout Shiva-filled Kashi. It is estimated that over 2 million devotees will have darshan of Kashi Vishwanath while since early morning a 5 km queue of devotees were witnessed, who were eager to offer Ganga Jal and milk on the Shivaling.

Temple Trust Chief Executive Officer Vishwa Bhushan Mishra stated that Baba Vishwanath has received sacred gifts from various temples across the country and abroad. These gifts have already arrived from a total of 62

different temples in India, including temples in Malaysia and Sri Lanka. On the occasion of Mahashivratri, the Shri Kashi Vishwanath Temple Trust has launched a unique and innovative spiritual initiative.

Under this initiative, the tradition of offering sacred offerings, revered clothes, dust, holy water, and devotional gifts from major Jyotirlingas, Siddhateethas, Shaktipeethas, and ancient pilgrimage sites in India and abroad at the feet of Lord Shri Vishweshwara Mahadev has been started.

These 62 temples include the Sri Ratnagiriswar Temple (Chennai), Sri Anantha Padmanabha Swamy Temple (Chennai), Ten Sabanayaka Temple (Kovilur) and many other temples in Tamil Nadu. Similarly, sacred offerings and gifts have reached Kashi Vishwanath Dham from the Shri Krishna Janmabhoomi Seva Sansthan in Mathura, the Shri Mata Vaishno Devi Shrine Board in Jammu and Kashmir, the Shri Maha Mariamman Temple in Malaysia, the Shri Kedarnath Temple in Uttarakhand, the Lalbaugcha Raja and Shri Siddhivinayak

Temples in Mumbai, the Dwarkadish Temple in Gujarat, the Shri Aishwarya Lakshmi Temple (Colombo) in Sri Lanka, and the Nathdwara Temple in Udaipur in Rajasthan.

These offerings include holy water from various pilgrimage sites, venerated garlands, dust, sandalwood, clothes, and other worship materials. Devotees are being allowed to have darshan through six gates. Mishra stated that, in view of the crowds, arrangements have been made for easy tableau darshan for devotees. He appealed to devotees not to

come for darshan on an empty stomach due to the crowds.

Police Commissioner Mohit Agarwal stated, "Providing a safe, organised, and positive experience to every devotee visiting Varanasi on the auspicious occasion of Mahashivratri is our top priority. To ensure the safety of devotees visiting the district, smooth traffic flow, and peace, on-site inspections were conducted at various sensitive and important sites, and necessary guidelines were issued to the concerned officials. The entire area has been divided into four zones, 13 sectors, and 30 sub-sectors, and adequate police force has been deployed at each level. Strong barricading and controlled entry/exit systems have been implemented for better crowd management. CCTV cameras are being monitored continuously and the control room is monitoring. Help desks and information centers have been activated to provide necessary guidance to devotees arriving from outside districts and states. Adequate deployment of women police force has been ensured for the safety of female devotees."

MLA Malender Rajan inaugurates district-level Maha Shivratri festival at Kathgarh Shiv temple

Indora.(Agency)

The three-day district-level Maha Shivratri festival commenced on Saturday with a grand Kalash Yatra and traditional rituals at the historic Kathgarh Shiv Temple. MLA Malender Rajan attended the inaugural ceremony as the chief guest.

The event was organised by the Ancient Historical Shiv Temple Sudhar Sabha, Kathgarh. The Sabha president welcomed the MLA and other dignitaries by presenting traditional turbans and Himachali caps and highlighted the temple's history and the legacy of the festival.

Addressing the gathering, Rajan said fairs and festivals are symbols of faith and culture and preserving them is a collective responsibility. He extended Maha Shivratri greetings to devotees and noted that the Shivratri fair at Kathgarh Mahadev Temple has been accorded district-level status.

He added that the Gangath Kyal Baba Maharaj Dangal and Indora Utsav have also been granted similar status. The MLA said efforts are underway to develop religious sites, including Kathgarh Mahadev Temple, Gangath Kyal Baba Maharaj Temple and Damtal Ram Temple, as religious tourism centres. These sites will also be featured in promotional displays at Himachal Pradesh Tourism Department hotels.

He informed that the upgradation of the Indora-Kathgarh road, being undertaken at a cost of Rs 12 crore, is 70 per cent complete. Solar lights will be installed along the stretch and a welcome gate will be constructed at a cost of Rs 10 lakh.

Rajan also announced Rs 51,000 from his discretionary fund for development works and installation of lights in the temple.

During the programme, meritorious students selected under a scholarship competition were honoured with certificates and cash prizes.



# Failed marriage promise after long-term consensual relationship not rape: Court

**In the case examined, the court heard a woman who accused a person named Suraj Bora of establishing physical relations on the pretext of marriage, which he later refused after assuring marriage within 45 days.**

**New Delhi.(Agency)** The Uttarakhand High Court has ruled that when two adults are involved in a long-term consensual relationship, the subsequent failure to fulfil a promise of marriage cannot be categorised as rape under Section 376 of the IPC unless it is proven that the promise was false from the outset. In the case examined, a woman from Mussoorie accused Suraj Bora of establishing physical relations on the pretext of marriage, which he later refused after assuring marriage within 45 days. Following the investigation, the police filed



a chargesheet, which Bora challenged in the High Court. The defence argued that both parties were adults and had maintained a consensual relationship for an extended period. As

stated, "There is no concrete evidence in the FIR that shows the intention of the accused was fraudulent at the beginning of the relationship. It was merely a 'failed relationship' and initiating criminal proceedings would constitute misuse of legal process."

On the other hand, lawyers representing the state government and the woman opposed the petition. They argued, "The victim's consent was solely based on the assurance of marriage, which the accused later failed to fulfil." They further added,

"Whether the promise was false from the start can only be determined during trial based on evidence; therefore, proceedings should not be quashed."

Justice Ashish Naithani stated during the hearing, "The consent given by an adult woman does not become tainted merely because the relationship did not culminate in marriage. To consider it an offence under Section 376, it must be shown that the promise of marriage was only a means to obtain consent and the accused never intended to marry."

The court observed that both parties were in a long-term relationship and engaged in repeated physical relations, which suggested mutual consent rather than initial fraud. The High Court determined that, without concrete grounds, continuing criminal proceedings would amount to harassment of the accused. The criminal case pending before the Chief Judicial Magistrate, Dehradun, and the chargesheet dated 22 July 2023 against Suraj Bora were fully quashed by the High Court.

## ASI to relocate Purana Quila antiquity collection to Red Fort, Greater Noida

**New Delhi.(Agency)**

After nearly five decades, the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) will relocate its rare collection of antiquities from the Central Antiquity Collection (CAC) housed at the 16th-century Purana Quila to new facilities at the Red Fort and the Pandit Deen Dayal Upadhyaya Institute of Archaeology in Greater Noida, officials said.

The CAC, one of ASI's key repositories, houses over 2.72 lakh antiquities including pottery fragments, tools, seals, and artefacts recovered from excavations across the subcontinent. The collection features items from prominent archaeological sites such as Harappa, Mohenjodaro, and Taxila, along with artefacts from Kalibangan, Hastinapur, and several other locations.

Officials said the relocation aims to improve preservation and management. "CAC is our rich and important collection, currently stored in old cells at Purana Quila where moisture and humidity pose a serious threat. The site lacks space and modern conservation facilities, which may lead to irreversible physical, chemical, and biological degradation. Therefore, it has been decided to shift the collection to larger, better-equipped structures. This will also ensure easier access for researchers," they said.

Under the plan, part of the collection will be moved to a British-era barrack within the Red Fort complex, while the remaining antiquities—primarily pottery—will be transferred to the Greater Noida institute.

The relocation will be carried out under the supervision of senior officials, with antiquities transported in sealed boxes. Authorities have been directed to ensure proper arrangements, safe custody, and accurate inventory management. The CAC was established in the 1910s to house antiquities from British archaeologist Aurel Stein's Central Asian expeditions. It was initially located in the ASI's main building, later shifted to Safdarjung Tomb in 1958, and then to Purana Quila in 1974. The repository also stores antiquities confiscated by agencies such as the police, Central Bureau of Investigation, Directorate of Revenue Intelligence, and Customs.

## NDMC, MCD tighten civic preparedness ahead of India AI Impact Summit at Bharat Mandapam

**New Delhi.(Agency)**

Ahead of the India AI Impact Summit 2026, civic agencies in the capital have intensified preparations, with the New Delhi Municipal Council (NDMC) and the Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD) reviewing arrangements across key areas.

The summit will be held from February 16 to 20 at Bharat Mandapam. On Saturday, a review was conducted at the NDMC Integrated Command and Control Centre (ICCC), described by NDMC Vice-Chairperson Kuljeet Singh Chahal as the "third eye of



the city". Chahal said 333 NDMC CCTV cameras, 183 Delhi Police cameras, and 214 PWD cameras have been integrated into the ICCC for round-the-clock surveillance. NDMC is also coordinating with Delhi Traffic Police and has set up a dedicated traffic helpline.

"All sanitation and service vehicles are GPS-tracked, including 959 RFID-enabled bins, jetting machines, road sweepers, anti-smog guns, and water tankers. Alerts are generated if any vehicle exits NDMC limits," he said. Around 99 garbage hotspots have been identified at hotels, markets, and high-footfall areas for frequent waste collection. Additionally, 20 air quality sensors have been installed to monitor multiple environmental parameters and trigger alerts.t

The counsel appearing for the state

## All-Weather Road To Cut Through Rajaji National Park, Commercial Vehicles Won't Be Allowed

**New Delhi.(Agency)**

The Supreme Court on Thursday modified its earlier stay order and allowed metalling of the 11.5-km Laldhang-Chillarkhal road in Uttarakhand to benefit thousands of people of the state's 18 remote villages.

A bench of Chief Justice Surya Kant and Justices Joymalya Bagchi and Dipul M Pancholi, however, refused to allow plying of commercial vehicles on the road which includes an ecologically sensitive 4.5-km stretch from Chamaria bend to Siggadi Sot area and is the only functional wildlife corridor connecting Jim Corbett Tiger Reserve and Rajaji Tiger Reserve. "The people of remote villages are entitled to the benefit of developments happening in the country," the bench said as it modified its January 11, 2023 order putting a stay on the road project for violation of environmental norms.

The counsel appearing for the state

government assured the court that though metalling of the road would have shortened the distance between Kotdwara and Haridwar by 65 kilometres for the commercial vehicles, the state government would abide by any conditions which the court would impose for allowing the project. He assured the bench that commercial vehicles will not ply on the road, and instead, they will take a detour via Uttar Pradesh to reach their destinations.

CJI Kant said that it is necessary for preserving the flora and fauna of the forest and the court will not allow heavy load trucks and dumpers to ply on the 11.5-km stretch.

BJP MP Anil Baluni, who was also an intervener in the matter, told through his counsel Bansuri Swaraj that the road which at present is unmetalled was essential for over 40,000 villagers residing in 18 remote villages in the area.



"People in these areas are facing difficulty because the road gets washed away in the monsoon season. The government has planned an elevated 400-metre stretch to allow wildlife to move from one side to other," she submitted.

The bench, which noted that the road needs to be metalled for providing better access to the villagers, however, did not comment on allowing buses to ply on the road saying if it creates one exception, then others will also seek it.

Advocate Gaurav Kumar Bansal, on whose petition the order was passed in January, 2023, said that his concern was only the plying of commercial vehicles which would affect the wildlife in the area and he was never opposed to the construction of a metalled road for the villagers. The bench noted that the state government had earlier proposed to allow 150 commercial vehicles through the stretch in a day which was objected to by the petitioner and other expert bodies.

It directed the state government to ensure that no commercial vehicles ply on the route. The top court had earlier observed that construction through the corridor violated provisions of the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972, and the Forest Conservation Act, 1980, and directed the state government to secure all statutory approvals before proceeding ahead with the project. Several nature and wildlife activists have raised concerns.

## NEWS BOX

**Usman Tariq chatter a psychological win for Pakistan over India: Hafeez**

New Delhi. (Agency)

Former Pakistan captain Mohammad Hafeez feels that the chatter around Usman Tariq is already a psychological win for Salman Ali Agha and his side over India ahead of their T20 World Cup clash on Sunday, February 15. Tariq and his unorthodox bowling style have been the talk of the town ever since he made his international debut and especially in the build-up to the India vs Pakistan match. Both Agha and India captain Suryakumar Yadav were asked questions about the spinner during the pre-match press conferences, with fans and pundits on both sides commenting on the impact he could have on the game. Tariq has played just four T20Is for Pakistan and has 11 wickets to his name, averaging 7.9. While previewing the India vs Pakistan game, Hafeez pointed out how there is panic within the Indian camp about the spinner, and special practice is being done to tackle him.

"If we go inside the cricketing aspect, the hype created around Usman Tariq is another psychological victory for us. Right now, no one is talking about Babar Azam or any other player. People are talking only about Usman



Tariq. He has played just one or two games for Pakistan, but just imagine the amount of panic he has created in the Indian camp. They are specifically practicing against him in their sessions. "How many times have you seen so much discussion about just one player? The entire media, the hype, the world — they are not only thinking about the match result, but about what Usman Tariq will do tomorrow," said Hafeez.

**HOW SHOULD PAKISTAN USE TARIQ VS INDIA?**  
Hafeez claimed that Tariq is a strong character and can single-handedly win matches for Pakistan. He urged Agha to only use the spinner as an attacking option, where he feels the 28-year-old can create the best impact during the clash against India. "Now I want to see how positively Salman Agha makes decisions as captain and how he uses Usman Tariq.

**IND vs PAK: Pakistan's dugout gets an uninvited guest as snake pops up in Colombo**

New Delhi. (Agency)

Colombo woke up to T20 World Cup fever, and even more so with the stage set in Sri Lanka's capital for the marquee India vs Pakistan clash on February 15. But, Pakistan's dugout got a surprise guest before the cricket even began. A bizarre moment unfolded at the R Premadasa Stadium on Saturday when a snake was spotted inside Pakistan's dugout during a practice session on the eve of the India clash. The video spread rapidly across social media, adding an unexpected dash of chaos to an already electric build-up. Ground staff and officials moved quickly to rescue the snake safely, ensuring preparations for Sunday's blockbuster went ahead without further drama.

**STAGE SET FOR IND VS PAK IN COLOMBO**

After days of political noise and boycott threats cricket's biggest fixture has held its ground once again. India vs Pakistan is



back, and the T20 World Cup is ready for its marquee night. Both teams are unbeaten so far, locked on four points each. India currently sit atop Group A with a superior net run rate, while Pakistan follow closely in second. A Super Eight berth and top spot are firmly in play. India opened with a 29-run win over the USA, led by captain Suryakumar Yadav, before crushing Namibia by 93 runs. Pakistan, meanwhile, edged past the Netherlands in their opener and then beat the USA comfortably, with Sahibzada Farhan starring. All roads now lead to Colombo, where the rivalry takes centre stage once more.

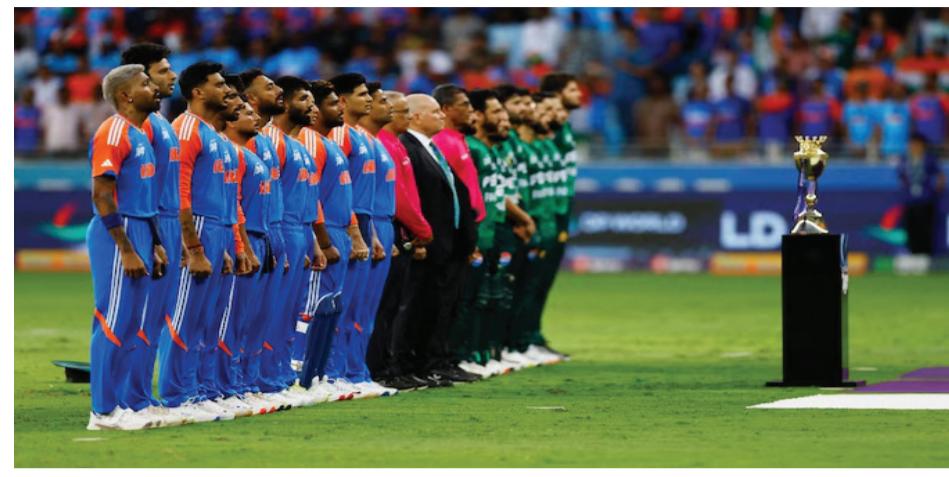
**WHO IS FAVOURITES IN IND VS PAK?**  
India start as favourites, driven by recent dominance in this rivalry and a strong, settled unit firing early in the tournament. Their form and balance have given them the edge heading into Sunday,

**India to face toughest test yet against Pakistan in Colombo clash: Dinesh Karthik**

**T20 World Cup: Dinesh Karthik feels India could face their toughest Pakistan test in Colombo. With Usman Tariq's spin threat and Pakistan's improved T20 World Cup 2026 form, Sunday's clash promises a real battle.**

NEW DELHI. (Agency)

India's blockbuster T20 World Cup clash against Pakistan in Colombo could be their toughest test against the arch-rivals in recent memory, believes former batter Dinesh Karthik. The high-voltage encounter is set for Sunday at the R Premadasa Stadium after days of off-field uncertainty. The match carries its usual weight, but this time Pakistan arrive with greater belief in the conditions and momentum of their own. Speaking to Cricbuzz, Karthik warned that India's batting could face a serious examination on Colombo's slower surfaces. "Tomorrow will be one of India's



biggest challenges against Pakistan in recent memory. Pakistan start as close as they've ever been in a game, going up against India in terms of their familiarity with the conditions. They have a better chance of pushing India than any other time in the near past. India's batting will be the one tested more in the Colombo conditions," Karthik said. "India's batting against spin on pitches which are slow and holds a bit hasn't been as good as they are on flatter pitches. There is a stark

difference in numbers. That's an area India will be wary about," he added.

**WILL INDIA GET A FIGHT FROM PAKISTAN?**

Pakistan may not have the historical record in their favour, but their T20 World Cup 2026 campaign has given them a platform to challenge India more strongly than before. Two wins so far, even if one was a tight escape against the Netherlands, have helped them build confidence heading into the

biggest game of their group stage. A major factor could be Pakistan's bowling threat in Colombo, especially through mystery spinner Usman Tariq. On pitches expected to be slow and gripping, Tariq's variations could become a key weapon, particularly against an Indian batting line-up that has looked far more comfortable on flatter surfaces. Pakistan's familiarity with these conditions, as Karthik pointed out, makes them a more dangerous opponent than in previous editions.

**WHY ARE INDIA FAVOURITES VS PAKISTAN?**

Despite the warnings, India still walk into Sunday's clash with the upper hand. Their form in the tournament has been dominant, and they carry the momentum of a side that has been clinical across departments.

History also provides India with a psychological edge. At the T20 World Cup, India have won seven of their eight meetings against Pakistan, repeatedly managing to handle the pressure moments better on the biggest stage. Add to that their recent dominance over Pakistan in overall international cricket, most recently a three-peat in the Asia Cup 2025, and it is easy to see why most would still place India as firm favourites.

**T20 World Cup: Lockie Ferguson on paternity leave, to miss New Zealand vs Canada**

Colombo. (Agency)

New Zealand will be without fast bowler Lockie Ferguson for their final group-stage match at the ongoing T20 World Cup as he returns home to attend the birth of his first child with his wife, Emma. Ferguson's parental leave was planned before the tournament, having been confirmed when the squad was announced in January. His absence leaves New Zealand considering their bowling options as they prepare for a crucial clash against Canada, where victory would guarantee advancement to the Super Eight phase. The Black Caps suffered their first defeat of the tournament against South Africa after recording wins over Afghanistan and the United Arab Emirates. If New Zealand secures a win over Canada, their place in the Super Eight stage will be confirmed. However, a surprise loss would complicate their qualification chances, though it would not result in immediate elimination from the tournament. Kyle Jamieson is the likely replacement for Ferguson in the Canada match, with the Blackcaps expected to consider Ish



beat Pakistan in a match highlighted by a special Virat Kohli century. The airport clip does not confirm Rohit's destination, but that has hardly stopped the buzz from spreading ahead of cricket's biggest night.

**WHY IS THIS IND VS PAK MATCH SO IMPORTANT?**

India vs Pakistan is back, just as it always does, cutting through all the boycott noise and politics to become the T20 World Cup's marquee fixture. Sunday's clash in Colombo sees both teams unbeaten and

level on four points each. India lead Group A with a stronger net run rate, while Pakistan sit close behind in second. With a Super Eight berth and top spot up for grabs, the stakes are already sky-high.

India began their campaign with a 29-run win over the USA, led by captain Suryakumar Yadav, before crushing Namibia by 93 runs. Pakistan, meanwhile, edged past the Netherlands in their opener and then beat the USA comfortably, with Sahibzada Farhan starring. India start as favourites, powered by form, balance, and recent dominance in this matchup. The T20 World Cup numbers only add to that case. India have beaten Pakistan seven times in their eight meetings on this stage so far, making it a familiar script Pakistan will be desperate to rewrite.

**Abhishek Sharma will haunt Pakistan again: Harbhajan slams Amir for slogger remark**

NEW DELHI. (Agency)

Harbhajan Singh slammed Mohammad Amir for calling Abhishek Sharma a slogger and sent a warning that if the Indian opener gets going, then he will come back to haunt Pakistan once again during the IND vs PAK clash on Sunday, February 15. Amir recently talked about Abhishek during a talk show, saying that the southpaw wasn't a technically sound batter and could be easily dismissed with sound plans. The pacer received backlash for the comments but stood firm with his evaluation, saying that Abhishek doesn't know how to defend the ball and claimed that the Indian opener hasn't been tested yet. While talking to SportsTak's Vikrant Gupta on his YouTube channel, Harbhajan said that Abhishek is a proper batter who can play all the shots in the book. "I mean, come on — what am I even supposed to say to that? He just gets up and says anything. If you call him a slogger, then fine, let him smash sixes — but he's a proper batter who has every shot in the book. He's a complete batter who knows exactly where the ball is coming and plays

accordingly. He plays the over-cover shot, hits through point. He can go long-on, long-off, midwicket — he has every shot. After



that, you can't label him just a slogger," said Harbhajan. The former Indian spinner refrained from taking the debate further and said that Abhishek has proven his worth in world cricket. However, he ended his comment by sending a warning to Pakistan that if Abhishek does get set in Colombo, then he can take the game away from them. "If I start naming real sloggers, some people

might get offended, but I don't want to create more drama. Still, calling anyone just a slogger like that — I don't think it's fair.

Abhishek is a top-class batter who has proven his worth in world cricket. "And just wait and watch tomorrow. If Abhishek stays at the crease, he'll remind everyone who he is. For the last 4-5 months, he's already been in your dreams. If he goes big tomorrow, then for the next six months, he'll be in your dreams again. That's it," said Harbhajan. WHY IS ABHISHEK DANGEROUS VS PAKISTAN? Abhishek has faced Pakistan only three times in his career, with all three appearances coming during the Asia Cup last year. Abhishek has scored 110 runs, including a fifty against Pakistan, with a stunning strike-rate of 189.65 and has already hit 11 boundaries and seven sixes.

Abhishek is expected to come back into the side for the contest after overcoming a stomach bug and is already considered to be key in the result of the India vs Pakistan clash in Colombo. "If I start naming real sloggers, some people

Sodhi as well.

**HOW WELL HAS FERGUSON PERFORMED?**

Ferguson has picked up four wickets in three matches for New Zealand so far in the T20 World Cup. He has an average of 27 and an economy-rate of 9.67. It's an incredibly exciting time for Lockie and Emma and we're pleased that he'll be at home for such a special occasion," said New Zealand coach Walter.

"At this stage, we won't be replacing Lockie in the squad as the plan would be for him to return for the Super 8 phase of the tournament. But our travelling reserves Ben Sears and Cole McConchie are ready to be called into the squad should we need them."

**Matchday Preview: Dominant India, West Indies look to seal Super 8 spots**

**T20 World Cup: Day 9 of the tournament starts with West Indies facing Nepal at the Wankhede Stadium. Thereafter, Namibia and USA will face off in a Group A clash before India and Pakistan lock horns in Colombo.**

CHENNAI. (Agency)

Day 9 of the T20 World Cup promises high drama as the race for Super 8 spots heats up. The action begins at the iconic Wankhede Stadium in Mumbai, where West Indies will play on Nepal in a crucial Group C clash. West Indies can secure a Super 8 berth with a win, while Nepal aim to stay alive in the competition after consecutive losses. Next,

the United States of America face Namibia at the MA Chidambaram Stadium in Chennai. The Americans, buoyed by their historic victory over the Netherlands, will be eager to continue their strong form, while Namibia will look to bounce back and keep their Super 8 hopes alive.

The day concludes with the tournament's marquee clash at the R Premadasa Stadium in Colombo, where India and Pakistan go head-to-head in a high-stakes Group A encounter. Both unbeaten teams have a golden opportunity to secure their Super 8 spots, making this one of the most eagerly awaited matches of the tournament. Here is a quick preview of the three games scheduled on Day 9 of the T20 World Cup.

**MATCH 1 Prediction: West Indies vs Nepal in Mumbai**

West Indies and Nepal are set to clash in a crucial Group C match at the Wankhede Stadium in Mumbai. West Indies will qualify for the Super 8 with a win, while Nepal are fighting to stay alive in the tournament.

They began with a 35-run victory over Scotland, powered by Shimron Hetmyer's 64, and followed it up with a commanding performance against England, where



Sherfane Rutherford's unbeaten 76 guided them to a 30-run triumph. These back-to-back wins have firmly established West Indies at the top of the group. Nepal, meanwhile, will be disappointed after mixed results. They came agonisingly close to defeating England at the Wankhede, losing

by just four runs, but were then outclassed by Italy, who chased 124 without losing a wicket for a 10-wicket win. Sunday's match offers Nepal a chance to revive their campaign, but they will need more consistent performances with both bat and ball against a confident West Indies side in red-hot form. A win for the Windies guarantees their Super 8 berth, making this encounter a high-stakes, must-watch clash for both teams.

**Pitch Report**

The pitch at the Wankhede Stadium has not been particularly batting-friendly, with not a single 200-plus total recorded so far, which is unusual for a venue known for high-scoring games. Spinners have played a significant role, making it difficult for batters to score freely. Most notably, chasing has proven tough, with teams batting second losing all three matches at the venue.

There is no forecast of rain, with temperatures expected to be around 33 degrees Celsius. Humidity levels are likely to remain in the high 20s.

## CNH India to resume US tractor exports; invest 1,800 cr after tariff cut

New Delhi.(Agency)

Italian-American agriculture equipment firm CNH's India unit plans to resume full-scale tractor exports to the US and invest approximately 1,800 crore over the next two to three years, capitalising on a recent India-US trade agreement that reduced tariffs on Indian goods to 18 per cent from as high as 50 per cent. The New Delhi-based subsidiary, which operates brands like New Holland and Case IH, halted most US-bound shipments late last year after higher duties made them unprofitable. Production for the US market was paused in the final months of 2025, except for limited-compact tractor models used for testing and customer trials. In an interview with PTI at its Pune plant site, CNH India President and Managing Director Narinder Mittal said the company has now given the green light to restart production and supplies. "With the US tariff now reduced to 18 per cent, we have immediately resumed full-fledged tractor exports from India to the US," Mittal said. "Volumes will be higher than last year, thanks to the addition of new compact tractor models, maintaining our US contribution at around 30 per cent of overall exports despite the current downturn in the American market." Exports had previously included utility light tractors (under 75 horsepower) and utility medium models (up to 120 horsepower), alongside components. The resumption aligns with CNH's "India for Global" strategy, which positions the country as a key hub for small and medium tractors and aggregates supplied to plants in the US, Europe and Latin America. The trade deal, announced in early February 2026, has also opened avenues for potential relief on steel and aluminium tariffs, further enhancing competitiveness for Indian-made components.

To support rising domestic demand, resumed exports and long-term growth, CNH India has outlined a fresh investment of about 1,800 crore over the next two to three years. Of this, roughly 1,500 crore will go toward the agriculture segment, including tractors, harvesters and crop solutions, and 300 crore will support construction equipment.

"We are committing a fresh investment of approximately 1,800 crore over the next two to three years," Mittal said, out of which an estimated 1,000 crore will go for a new greenfield standalone tractor manufacturing plant.

## 3 senior bankers depart Raine Group India to launch new investment firm

New Delhi.(Agency)

Three senior bankers at Raine Group in India, including the country head, are set to leave the boutique adviser to set up a new investment banking firm, according to people familiar with the matter.

Gaurav Mehta, a partner and head of Raine in India, and managing directors Naveen Asopa and Girish Punjabi are departing the firm, the people said, asking not to be identified because the information is private. Prior to joining Raine in 2017, Mehta led India investment banking at UBS Group AG. He also worked at Morgan Stanley and HSBC Holdings Plc, according to his LinkedIn profile. Punjabi joined Raine in Mumbai after working at UBS and PwC. Asopa was previously at Morgan Stanley and PwC.

Raine co-founder Jeff Sine is now leading the Mumbai office and building up the team to help push forward a significant pipeline of deals, Raine spokesman Dan Gagnier said in response to a Bloomberg News query. He declined to comment on individual personnel matters as a policy. "Over the last year we have been actively structuring our business in India to support the velocity of cross-border transactions that tie into our multi-office, team-based approach," Gagnier said, adding that the company continues to see significant opportunity for its advisory and investing mandates in the region.

Raine provides advisory services including mergers and acquisitions, divestitures and private capital raising. The New York-based firm also manages strategies across growth equity and venture capital, with assets under management of more than \$3.1 billion.

## S&P Global chief: India's post-Covid expansion among most consistent for any major economy

New Delhi.(Agency)

Driven by structural reforms, entrepreneurial energy and a forward-looking approach to debt and development, India's post-Covid expansion has been among the most consistent for any major economy, with expectations remaining strong for the medium term, Yann Le Pallec, president, S&P Global Ratings said on Saturday. "In our latest report, we explored how India is navigating a new global reality and what we found was a story of resilience, but also one of ambition which is at the core of Viksit Bharat 2047," Le Pallec said, while highlighting India's sustained commitment to fiscal discipline, targeted public investments and credible policy frameworks that have enhanced confidence in the country's long term growth trajectory. Pointing to the link between trust, transparency, confidence and capital flows in a rapidly changing world economy, he said that few economies understand better than India that the "price of trust is truly the price of growth" and when trust breaks down, the cost of capital becomes a tax on progress. Referring to the growing depth of India's domestic bond market and rising foreign participation, Le Pallec said inclusion of Indian govt bonds in global indices can significantly increase overseas investment and expand funding opportunities for domestic companies over coming years.

# Marico's string of pearls M&A play gathers pace as digital growth becomes central to strategy

**Within weeks, the FMCG major has announced three transactions -- a 75% stake in Vietnam-based D2C skincare company Skinetiq; a 60% stake in digital-first wellness brand Cosmix in India; and a 93.27% stake in gourmet snacking brand 4700BC from PVR INOX**

New Delhi.(Agency)

Marico Ltd's recent acquisition spree across skincare, wellness nutrition and gourmet snacking is not a set of isolated bets, but part of a clearly articulated strategy to build a portfolio of premium, digital-first brands that can be rapidly scaled using the company's distribution, backend and go-to-market strengths. Within weeks, the FMCG major has announced three transactions -- a 75% stake in Vietnam-based D2C skincare company Skinetiq; a 60% stake in digital-first wellness brand Cosmix in India; and a 93.27% stake in gourmet snacking brand 4700BC from PVR INOX

a 93.27% stake in gourmet snacking brand 4700BC from PVR INOX.

Together, these deals underline what management describes as a 'string of pearls' approach to acquisitions -- targeting smaller, high-potential, founder-led brands that fill portfolio gaps and can be scaled fast, instead of pursuing large, expensive buyouts. Vietnam bet strengthens international D2C platform through its wholly-owned subsidiary Marico South-East Asia Corporation. Marico will acquire 75% in Skinetiq at an equity valuation of about Rs 350 crore. Founded in 2020, Skinetiq owns science-backed skincare brand Candid and has exclusive distribution rights for global clinical skincare brand Murad in Vietnam. The company scaled to about Rs 152 crore in revenues in CY2025 with mid-twenties EBITDA margins, driven largely by e-commerce and social commerce. Vietnam's beauty market, where nearly 50% of category consumption is now driven by online and social channels, fits neatly into Marico's digital-first international

playbook. Cosmix deepens wellness and D2C presence in India, Marico signed definitive agreements to acquire 60% in Cosmix Wellness at an equity valuation of about Rs 375 crore. Cosmix, founded in 2019, is a plant-based nutrition and functional wellness brand that has scaled to about Rs 100 crore annual run rate in the last six months with a high-teens EBITDA margin. The brand is built primarily through its D2C website and e-commerce platforms, with strong repeat purchase and customer lifetime value metrics. Cosmix strengthens Marico's presence in the fast-growing nutraceuticals and plant-protein segment, alongside digital brands such as Plix, True Elements, Beardo and Just Herbs. 4700BC fills premium foods gap

Earlier in January, Marico agreed to acquire 93.27% in Zea Maize Pvt Ltd, which owns gourmet snacking brand 4700BC. The brand, known for popcorn, makhana, popped chips and nachos, has built a strong premium positioning across offline, online and institutional channels. Marico sees 4700BC as filling a gap in its

foods portfolio in premium gourmet snacking, a segment aligned with its 'better-for-you' foods strategy.

According to Elara Securities, 4700BC and True Elements will have accelerated path to profitability due to synergy benefits. "Gross contribution margin of the brand is ahead of Marico's Foods business," it says. Implementation of revised pilot duty and rest norms by the civil aviation regulator. The fresh recruitment will include trainee first officers, senior first officers and captains, according to the notice on the company's website. One of the hiring notices also states that the airline is open to recruiting pilots without prior experience on the Airbus A320 aircraft, the primary aircraft type in its fleet. Scrutiny following the flight crisis. The disruption stemmed from new rest regulations introduced by the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA). The rules capped the number of landings a pilot can perform between midnight and 6 am and increased 25 first officers to captains each month through its internal training pipeline.

## India forex reserves drop \$6.7 billion from record high to \$717.1

New Delhi.(Agency)

India's foreign exchange reserves declined by USD 6,711 billion to USD 717,064 billion in the week ending February 6, according to the latest data released by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI). The decline came after the country's forex reserves had touched a record high of USD 723,774 billion in the previous week.

The drop in reserves during the reported week was mainly due to a sharp fall in gold reserves, even as foreign currency assets (FCA) — the largest component of forex reserves — increased. According to RBI data, foreign currency assets rose by USD 7,661 billion to USD 570,053 billion, while gold reserves declined by USD 14,208 billion to USD 123,476 billion. Despite the weekly decline,

India's forex reserves have remained on an overall upward trend in recent weeks. RBI data shows that the country's reserves have increased by



around USD 56 billion so far in 2025. In comparison, foreign exchange reserves rose by just over USD 20 billion in 2024, while India added about USD 58 billion in 2023, following a decline of around USD 71 billion in 2022. After its

latest monetary policy review earlier this month, the RBI said that India's foreign exchange reserves are sufficient to cover more than 11 months of merchandise imports, indicating a strong external position. The central bank also noted that the external sector remains resilient, and India is well-placed to meet its external financing requirements. Foreign exchange reserves are assets held by the central bank in foreign currencies such as the US dollar, euro, Japanese yen, and pound sterling, along with gold and other reserve assets. The RBI uses these reserves to manage liquidity and stabilise the rupee, typically buying dollars when the rupee strengthens and selling them during periods of depreciation.

## India market shows strong volume growth for Unilever, says CEO Fernandez

New Delhi.(Agency)

British multinational consumer goods maker said "fundamentals" of its business in India, its second largest market after the US, are improving.

In the fourth quarter, Unilever, in the home care segment, reported a 4.7 per cent underlying sales growth along with a volume growth of 4 per cent, which, according to the company, was supported by "continued strong volume in India". India was a key contributor to this momentum, with Home Care delivering mid-single-digit volume growth, led by strong performance in liquids across fabric wash and household care, and reaching its highest ever market share," said its CEO, Fernando Fernandez, in Unilever's earnings calls for the fourth quarter.

Fernandez said across geographies US and India are clear "anchor markets" for Unilever. Replying to a query over growth, he said: "India, it's improving both in terms of economic backgrounds and the fundamentals of the business,

particularly the strengthening of our brand equities... brand superiority scores in India are improving across the board." Moreover, its execution is also improving, particularly in rural areas and traditional trade,



independent trade, Fernandez added. And we are growing shares, particularly in home care. We have achieved that is, is 40 per cent of our business there. We have achieved the highest ever share there in the last reading," he added. Its Indian subsidiary has Hindustan Unilever, has delivered a 5 per cent Underlying Sales Growth

**Hindustan Unilever (HUL) is consistently ranked as Unilever's second-largest market globally by revenue, after the United States, with India contributing around 12-14 per cent of total sales**

(USG) led by 4 per cent Underlying Volume Growth in the December quarter.

While in 2025, its India business has "4 per cent underlying sales growth with 3 per cent volume" which was supported by "gradually improving market conditions and a competitive performance with share gains".

Unilever also acknowledged HUL's sales growth of 5 per cent with 4 per cent volume growth "reflected a step up in performance and recovery post Goods and Services Tax related disruption

## Have Rs 5,000 Here's why an emergency fund should come before your SIP

**You've heard the advice, i.e., "Start a SIP immediately." But is that the smartest first move with Rs 5,000? The choice might surprise you.**

New Delhi.(Agency)

Imagine this: You just received your first salary and feel on top of the world. Everyone around you is talking about mutual funds and wealth creation, so you decide to start a Rs 5,000 SIP (Systematic Investment Plan) immediately. The excitement is real, you check your portfolio daily, imagining the wealth you would accumulate over the years. But life, as it often does, had other plans. A sudden accident, a medical emergency, or an urgent expense hits. With no emergency fund to rely on, that SIP you were so proud of has to be broken at a loss. The joy of investing evaporates, replaced by frustration, and a shaken confidence in the very idea of growing your

wealth. IndiaToday.in spoke to Ritesh Sabharwal, certified financial planner and personal finance expert; Gaurav Makijani, Tax Head at Makijani Gera and Associates; and Mayank Bhatnagar, Co-founder and COO of FinEdge, to understand: if you have Rs 5,000 to spare, what should come first—SIP or emergency fund?

### WHY THE ORDER MATTERS

Ritesh Sabharwal explains the key issue, "FOMO-driven investing without a safety net is a common trap. Beginners see friends making money in mutual funds, feel they're 'missing out,' and immediately start SIPs, only to break them at a loss when an emergency hits six months later. The investment isn't the problem—the sequence is." The numbers back it up. "70% of people who start SIP without an emergency fund break it within 2 years. Those who prioritise a safety net first—85% stay invested for over five years," Sabharwal adds.

**EMERGENCY FUND: YOUR FIRST SHIELD**

So how should a first-time investor with only Rs 5,000 spare approach this? Mayank Bhatnagar explains, "An emergency fund is a goal in itself, and a SIP can be one of many tools to achieve it.



For individuals with irregular income, dependents, or limited job security, building a basic emergency buffer may take precedence to avoid dipping into investments during unforeseen events."

Put simply: SIPs are for building wealth, not for emergencies. If money is needed tomorrow, your investments won't help, but a ready emergency fund will.

### HOW MUCH SHOULD YOU SAVE FIRST?

Bhatnagar suggests a practical benchmark,

"An emergency fund that covers 6–12 months of essential expenses is ideal. The exact amount depends on income stability, dependents, and potential unforeseen expenses."

And it doesn't mean letting your money sit idle in a savings account. "Emergency funds can also be built through low-risk mutual funds such as liquid funds, ultra-short duration funds, or arbitrage funds. What matters is liquidity and access during emergencies, not the instrument," he explains. A staggered approach works best: start building a small emergency buffer while also investing a tiny SIP. This balances safety with the habit of investing and keeps your long-term goals on track, Bhatnagar says.

**A STEPWISE PATH TO FINANCIAL STABILITY** Gaurav Makijani underscores the importance of sequencing. "If you lack an emergency cushion, the aim should be to create that as a starting point. Once immediate cash requirements and a reasonable buffer are in place, systematic investing becomes a sensible next step."

# Mrunal Thakur

Says She Believes In Love At First Sight, Recalls Crying Herself To Sleep After Heartbreak

Mrunal Thakur and Siddhant Chaturvedi are busy promoting their upcoming film, Do Deewane Seher Mein. They recently appeared on MensXP's podcast and weighed in on how men and women respond to love and heartbreak. They also revealed that Mrunal believes in love at first sight, but Siddhant does not agree with this notion. In a promo for the episode, Mrunal said she believed in love at first sight. Siddhant didn't agree. He said, "No. Pehle hota tha. Ek hi baar hua hai, college main and then not after that." When asked if the notion that boys don't forget their first love is true, the actor said, "Ladke apna kaunsa wala bhi pyaar nahi bholte hain. I think sab yaad rehta hain."

He also said in the promo, "Women move on faster than men do." Mrunal interjected, "Women will pretend that they're okay, but they'll never move on. But when a man moves on, he moves on." Siddhant disagreed with Mrunal and said, "A man never moves on... Men always... abhi bhi uska phone aa jayega na, I'll go." Mrunal Thakur also recalled how she dealt with heartbreak by crying herself to sleep. However, she stopped after watching a video of Rihanna. Meanwhile, the two actors are gearing up for the release of their film, Do Deewane Seher Mein, directed by Ravi Udyawar, is produced by Sanjay Leela Bhansali, Prerna Singh, Umesh Kumar Bansal, and

Bharat Kumar Ranga, and will be released by Zed Studios and Bhansali Productions. The film is scheduled to open in theatres on February 20, 2026. Set against the chaos and enchantment of a bustling city, the story follows two wounded souls who discover love in one another.

Amid the promotions, it was also reported that Mrunal Thakur was about to get married to Dhanush. It was reported that the actress would tie the knot on February 14 and that she has been dating Dhanush for quite some time now. However, in a recent chat with Galatta Plus, Mrunal has put an end to the marriage rumours.

**'You're The Best!'**

# Ananya Panday

Pens Love-Filled Birthday Note For Rumoured Beau Walker Blanco

Actress Ananya Panday, who is quite active on social media, has reigned dating buzz around her and Walker Blanco, getting everyone talking all over again. On February 14, the actress took to Instagram to wish him on his birthday. Interestingly, Blanco's coincides with Valentine's Day. In her sweet birthday note, she called him 'best'.

#### Ananya Panday's birthday wish for rumoured beau Walker Blanco

Ananya and Walker's relationship rumours started after the duo attended Anant Ambani and Radhika Merchant's wedding together. Since then, their social media PDA keeps grabbing attention. Her birthday post for him has yet again sparked dating speculations. She shared a picture of him sitting on a balcony and flashing his million-dollar smile. He has donned a blue t-shirt, denims and a matching cap. It seems like Ananya captured him while he was busy talking to someone on the phone. Along with the picture, the Student of the Year 2 actress wrote, "Happy birthday Walkie, you're the best", followed by a blue heart and dolphin emojis. She even shared a video of a chocolate cake adorned with flowers. However, it is not certain if it was for Walker or not. While sharing the video, she wrote, "This may be the most perfect cake ever."



interview with Variety India, Ananya spoke about the biggest misconception about herself that she's tired of hearing. She was quick to reply, "I am tired of people obsessing over who I am dating. Not going to tell you, I think you should just give up." On the work front, Ananya Panday will be next seen in Chand Mera Dil with Lakshya. She also has Call Me Bae Season 2 alongside Vir Das.



**'It's Disgusting': Yuzvendra Chahal Faces Backlash For Referring To 'Sugar Daddy' Remark In New Ad**



Indian cricketer Yuzvendra Chahal has yet again made headlines following a new advertisement where he once again took an indirect dig at Dhanashree Verma by referring to the viral "sugar daddy" remark that had gone viral during their divorce proceedings. Chahal's dig didn't sit well with social media, which is now calling Chahal "disgusting".

#### What did Chahal do?

She left with a composed demeanor, calling the game "interesting" despite the drama. Last year, Chahal grabbed attention after he flaunted "Be your own sugar daddy" written on his T-shirt after the final divorce hearing with ex-wife Dhanashree Verma. Now, in a recent collaboration with micro-drama platform Story TV, the cricketer was introduced as the platform's Chief Story Officer. In the ad, he was seen entering his cabin, where the phrase "Zero Sugar (Daddy) Diet" can be seen written on the wall behind him. Meanwhile, in another moment, he was seen discussing a story about a star couple's messy divorce proceedings and alimony involved, hinting at an indirect dig at his divorce with Dhanashree.

The screenshot of the "Zero Sugar (Daddy) Diet" written on the wall has circulated on social media, with Reddit calling Chahal out for his behaviour. One wrote, "This whole sugar daddy thing associated with Yuzi & Dhanashree for some silly ad campaign or marketing is so below the line. It's disgusting. Idk what happened between them, but seeing him do all this makes me happy for her." Another wrote, "He is acknowledging all that he brings to a relationship is his net worth. In other words, he is showing his low self-esteem." A third comment read, "I never thought I would develop respect for Dhanashree." One shared, "The guy has hardly any cricket left in him and that's why he's milking his divorce to the max to keep himself afloat."

#### About Dhanashree and Chahal's divorce

The former couple, who tied the knot in December 2020, officially ended their marriage on March 20, 2025, after a family court in Gurgaon granted them a divorce on mutual grounds. While both Chahal and Dhanashree released a joint statement confirming their separation, neither shared specific details about the reason for their split.

## Malavika Mohanan Breaks Silence After Stunt Double Pic From Prabhas' The Raja Saab Set Sparks Debate



Actress Malavika Mohanan was last seen in Prabhas' The Raja Saab. The horror-comedy directed by Maruthi didn't manage to impress the audience as it failed to perform at the box office. In the film, Malavika had some action sequences, and she claimed that she did the stunts on her own with a body double. However, clips from the set revealing a stunt double began circulating recently, with several netizens accusing Malavika of not doing her own stunts. On February 13, the actress finally decided to break her silence and put an end to the ongoing accusations and speculations. She also clarified why a body double was present on the set.

#### Malavika Mohanan reacts to body-double allegations

Malavika took to her X (previously known as Twitter) handle and shared BTS clips of herself performing her own stunts, along with visuals of her preparing for the action scene. In the scene, she is seen taking on a group of rowdies. Along with the clips, she wrote, "Been seeing a lot of tweets and articles about how I claimed to do my own stunts for 'The Rajasaab' but a body double did it as there's a photo circulating online of a stunt artist who was my stunt double on the film. Firstly, I do action because I really enjoy doing action. I've been a sporty girl since a young age and I enjoy physically challenging my body and learning new things."

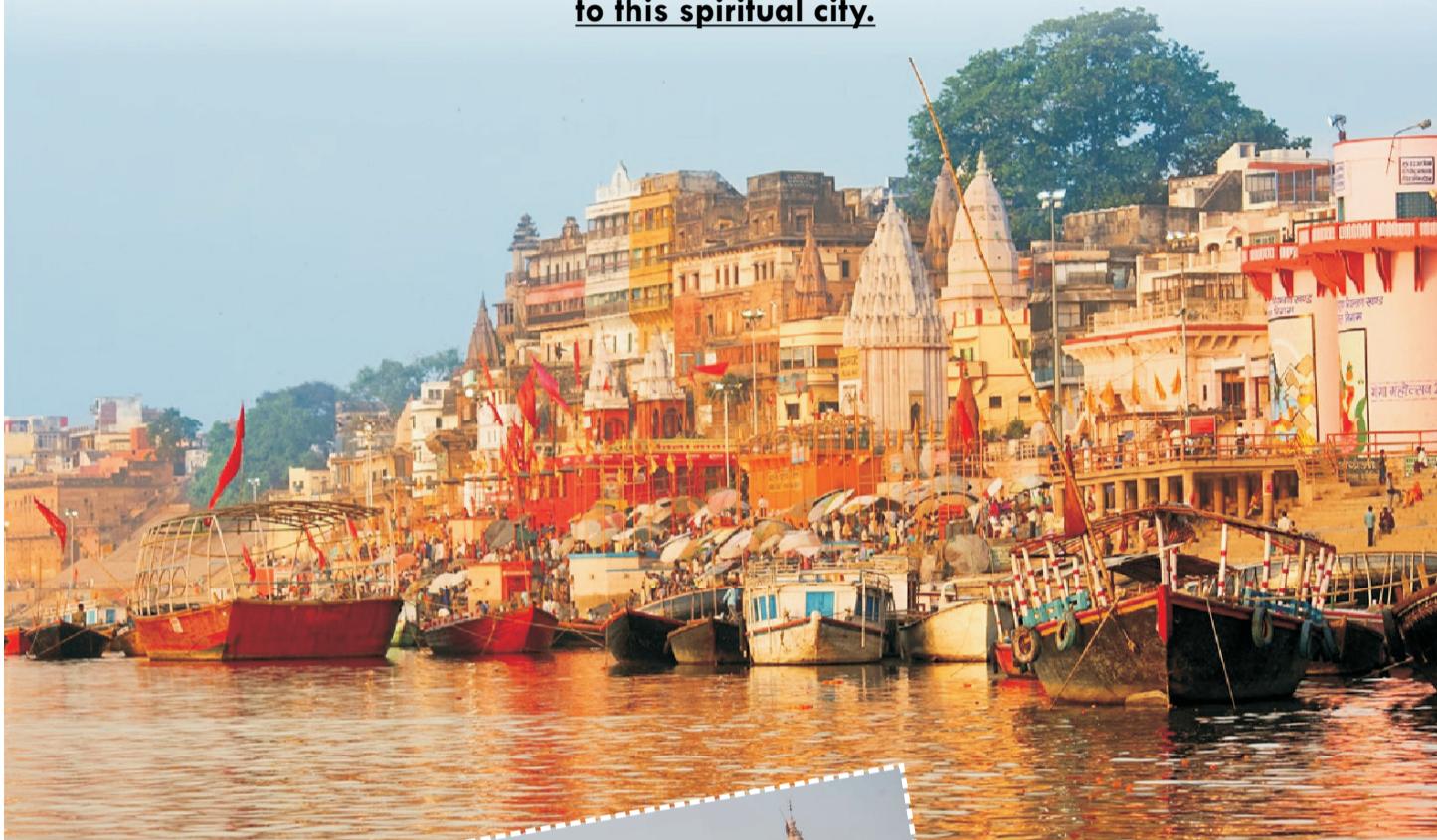
She further went on to clear as to why a body double was present on the set. The actress continued, "Secondly, there's always a stunt double on sets even when the actors are doing their own stunts as the action director gets them to do the rehearsals of the shot as they're the experts, before getting the actor to do a final shot. Or in the case of certain shots when they feel it's too risky for the actor to do it - they feel it's better for a professional to execute the shot so you're not doing anything too risky without knowing how to do it correctly. So here's some bits of me doing some fun shots & a big hug to my stunt double who taught me how to execute them right :)"

After she shared the clarification post, a lot of people were seen apologising to her in the comments. A comment read, "BTS clears the noise. People forget films are teamwork - actor + stunt team together make it work. BTS Looks Cool though." Another comment read, "You don't have to clarify all these. Just ignore those posts and comments! Have witnessed few stunts from you in #Thangaalan itself. Keep going."



# 48 hours in Varanasi

**One of the oldest living cities in the world, Varanasi is situated on the western banks of the Ganga and extends beyond the riverbank into a labyrinth of alleys. Filled to the brim with temples and teeming with pilgrims, the city is a magnet for travel enthusiasts. From witnessing vibrant evening prayers at Varanasi's oldest ghat to touring one of the most significant Hindu temples in India—here is a guide to making the most of your two-day trip to this spiritual city.**



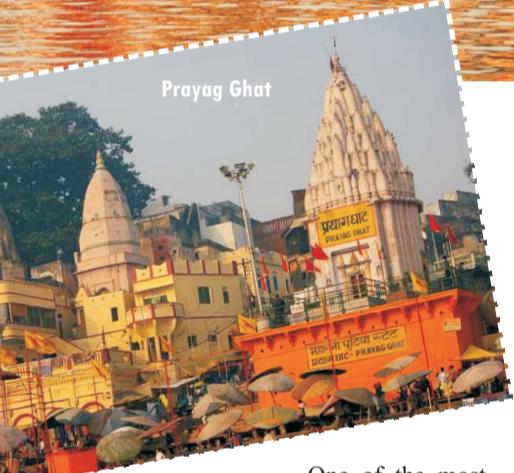
## Breakfast at Kachauri Gali

Dotted with weathered, blackened cauldrons bubbling with hot oil, Varanasi's Kachauri Gali is one of the city's main landmarks near the ghats. The Vishwanath Gali transforms into the Kachauri Gali as soon as you pass the famous Vishwanath temple. This is where the famous kachauris are fried and served fresh with chana and imli chutney. Arrive as early as 7 AM to beat the rush and dig into the hot fried kachauris. Make sure you are not too late, as the street falls into a lull soon after breakfast.

### Visit Prayag Ghat

Overflowing with devotees that come to offer their prayers day and night, the Prayag Ghat is another significant ghat in Varanasi. Located on the immediate left of the Dashashwamedh Ghat, it was built by Balaji Bajirao in 1778 and is a replica of the Prayag holy city in Allahabad. Fortune tellers, seated under rattan umbrellas, read fortunes for the visiting pilgrims.

### Watch the rituals at Manikarnika Ghat



One of the most unique aspects of the city of Varanasi is that the cremation grounds at Manikarnika Ghat are located in the city itself and in the vicinity of some of Varanasi's most sacred temples. Piles of firewood line the shore and the fires continually burn as a stream of dead bodies, each wrapped in cloth, is carried through the lanes on makeshift stretchers. It was said that Lord Shiva gave Lord Vishnu a boon, that whoever dies in Kashi would be liberated from the endless cycle of birth and death and his soul would be set free.

### Head to Assi Ghat

Situated at the confluence of Ganga and Asi rivers, Assi Ghat is the southernmost Ghat in Varanasi, where pilgrims bathe before paying

their homage to Lord Shiva in the form of a huge lingam situated under a peepal tree. To most visitors to Varanasi, it's known for being a place where long-term foreign students, researchers and tourists live. It was at Assi Ghat where the famous Indian poet, Tulsi Das had written the much-celebrated Ramcharitmanas and the ghat can accommodate about 22,000 people at once during festivals like Shivratri. In the evenings, around 7 pm, a full-fledged aarti takes place here and many visitors prefer watching it from the boats that can be hailed from the ghat.

### Catch evening prayers at



flowers and calligraphy using precious gems like agate and jasper, and the main archways are carved with passages from the Holy Qur'an.

### Take a guided tour of Agra Fort

Aside from the Taj Mahal, Agra has one of the finest Mughal forts in India, the Agra Fort. A massive red sandstone structure located on the banks of the Yamuna River, construction on the fort was started in 1565 by the Mughal Emperor Akbar, and further additions in white marble were subsequently made up till the reign of his grandson Shah Jahan. Originally built for military purposes, it was later used as a palace, and eventually even served as a prison where Shah Jahan was confined for 8 years by his son Aurangzeb, who seized power in 1658. The fort runs along a length of 2.5 kilometres within enclosed walls, it encompasses several exquisite



Dashashwamedh Ghat

### Dashashwamedh Ghat

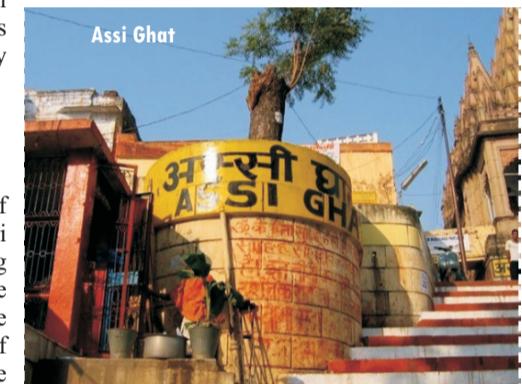
One of the oldest and most important ghats, the Dashashwamedh Ghat is also Varanasi's liveliest. Two Hindu mythologies surround the ghat, one being that Lord Brahma created it to welcome Lord Shiva and another where he sacrificed ten horses during the yajna performed here. Around dusk the Dashashwamedh Ghat comes to life with the evening Ganga Aarti. Performed by young pundits dressed in saffron, the aarti is an elaborate ceremony complete with puja, dance and fire. The riverbank lights up with flaming lamps and the smell of sandalwood envelops the ghat. Close to the ghat, overlooking the Ganga, lies the Jantar Mantar—an observatory built by Maharaja Jai Singh of Jaipur.

### Breakfast at Phulwari

A gang of playful monkeys keeps you company till the food arrives at Phulwari. Situated in the backdrop of an ancient kaali temple with massive graffiti on the main wall, Phulwari is as much a visual delight as a culinary one. The pizzas and yoghurt muesli are especially delicious.

### Head to the Sri Kashi Vishwanath Temple

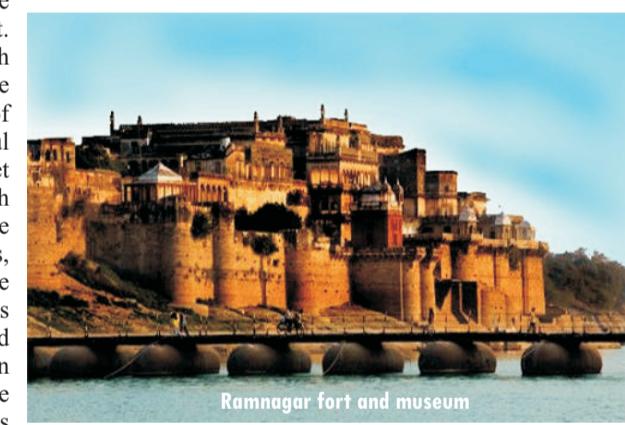
Not far away from the Ganga is one of the oldest temples in Hinduism, Sri Kashi Vishwanath Temple. Deriving its name from the city Kashi, the temple was built in 1780 by the Late Maharani Ahilya Bai Holkar of Indore and is one of the twelve Jyotirlingas, the holiest of Shiva temples. The main deity housed within its premises is known by the name Vishwanatha or Vishweshwara, both translating to mean 'ruler of the universe.' The temple is also the starting point of the sacred Panchkoshi



Yatra—a 88.5 km long barefoot walk encircling Kashi.

### Explore the Ramnagar fort and museum

A repository of the history of the kings of Varanasi, the Ramnagar fort and museum is located opposite Varanasi's Tulsi Ghat. This crumbling 17th century fort and palace on the eastern banks of the Ganga is a beautiful place to watch the sunset over the river. Built with red sandstone by the Maharaja of Banaras, the fort houses a temple and a museum within its compound. Carved balconies, open courtyards and intricate pavilions highlight its



Ramnagar fort and museum

The construction of this walled city took almost 15 years to complete, and the complex included several royal palaces, a harem, courts and a mosque. The buildings have been made from red sandstone and have been designed in keeping with Persian architectural concepts, although the overall style is Mughal.

### Shopping at Sadar Bazaar

This is the best place for shopaholics, and probably one of Agra's most popular shopping areas. In close proximity to the Taj Mahal and Agra fort, Sadar Bazaar is a bustling marketplace that houses hundreds of tiny shops selling everything from ethnic clothes and accessories to leather goods and shoes.

### Dinner at Dasaprakash

Something of an institution in the city, Dasaprakash dishes out the most authentic and delicious south Indian cuisine. Despite being jam-packed with both locals and tourists at all times of the day, the service is quick and the food's served hot and fresh. You could go with the dosa-idli combination, or alternatively try the thali, which is loaded with south Indian staples.

# 24 hours in Agra

**Drawing in hordes of tourists on a regular basis, Agra is perhaps one of the most visited cities in India for both Indian and global travellers. Although tourists mostly flock to the Taj, there are several other places of significance which are worth visiting when you're in the city. For visitors who have only a day to spare, we highlight the top attractions for you to fit into your itinerary. From touring the Taj Mahal to sampling delicious local cuisine—pack it all into a day without missing out on a thing. Here's how you can make the most of your 24 hours in Agra.**

Kick-start your day with the Taj Mahal. The Taj Mahal is considered by many, to possess architectural beauty unsurpassed by any other structure in the world. Constructed over a period of 22 years, employing twenty thousand workers, it was completed in 1648 C.E. and cost a whopping 32 million Rupees. Built entirely of white marble, it almost seems to glow in the moonlight, with the shimmering Jamuna river situated just across. The Muslim emperor Shah Jahan built this monument in the memory of his wife Mumtaz, whose grave is housed within the premises at the lower chamber. The grave of Shah Jahan was added to it later. The Taj stands tall and regal on a raised, square platform, forming an

unequal octagon with its four truncated corners. The architecture uses the interlocking arabesque concept, where each element is singular in its entirety, but integrates seamlessly with the whole. The central dome spans 58 feet in diameter and soars to a height of 213 feet. It is flanked on four sides by smaller domed chambers, and four slender minarets rising to a lower height of 162.5 feet. The entire mausoleum is decorated with an inlaid design of



palaces such as the Shah Jahani Mahal, Jahangiri Mahal, Khas Mahal, audience halls named Diwan-i-Am and the Diwan-i-Khas, a Fish Pavilion, the Nagina Masjid, Garden of Grapes and the Pearl Mosque. A world heritage site, it is a testament to architecture which deserves a visit.

### Drive out to Fatehpur Sikri

Fatehpur Sikri is a town located about 40 kilometres from Agra, and has been given the status of a World Heritage site by UNESCO. Founded in 1569 by the Mughal emperor Akbar, this was the Mughal capital from 1571 to 1585, during which the empire reached its pinnacle of success. The site was chosen to honour the Sufi saint Salim Chishti and the city within was built to honour the birth of his child, Salim.

