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Rekha Gupta's Solo Publicity Raises Questions Inside Delhi BJP

- Massive Publicity for Rekha Gupta Raises Questions? Is Delhi BJP Becoming a One-Face Leadership? Delhi BJP Leaders Missing from Government Advertisements Is Delhi government Ignoring Its Senior BJP Leaders?

The Sikh Times Gurcharan Singh Babbar

New Delhi, 9 March: The Bharatiya Janata Party in Delhi was strengthened through years of hard work and sacrifice by the Sangh Parivar and countless dedicated party workers. Senior leaders of the Delhi Pradesh BJP devoted their entire lives to building the party, and lakhs of workers worked day and night, shedding their blood and sweat to bring the BJP government to power in Delhi.



efforts, organizational work and political commitment helped the party reach its current position. However, during the past one year, since the Bharatiya Janata Party government came to power in Delhi, a completely different picture has begun to emerge in the capital.

national-level leader within the BJP. Across Delhi, large hoardings carrying the photographs of Rekha Gupta have been installed. Bus stands throughout the city display her photographs prominently.

agencies close to the system. While these advertisements prominently highlight Rekha Gupta, many senior leaders of the Delhi BJP appear to be missing from the publicity material. This has created the impression among political observers that the stature of many senior party leaders has been deliberately reduced.

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Jaishankar to brief Lok Sabha on Middle East war, Opposition seeks full debate

New Delhi. (Agency) External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar will brief the Lok Sabha on Monday on the rapidly evolving situation in the Middle East as Parliament reconvenes for the second half of the Budget session.

The development has also triggered political sparring ahead of the session, with the opposition pressing for a full-fledged debate on the conflict and its implications for India.



Parliament on the situation in West Asia. The problems with such Ministerial statements are that (i) they convey little of value over and above that is already known; and more importantly (ii) MPs are not

given an opportunity to seek clarifications or ask questions," Ramesh said in a post on X. He pointed to the debate held in the Lok Sabha on the US invasion of Iraq in 2003 under former prime minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee, saying Parliament had then adopted a resolution condemning the invasion.

Nadda slams Opposition's walkout during Jaishankar's statement

New Delhi.(Agency)

Union Minister J P Nadda on Monday said the Opposition only wants "anarchy" as the Congress and other Opposition parties created ruckus and staged a walkout in the Rajya Sabha during a statement by External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar on the situation in West Asia.

Progressive And People-Centric Budget To Enhance Public Service Delivery: Mundian

Chandigarh, March 9: Hailing the Budget presented by Finance Minister Advocate Harpal Singh Cheema as progressive, visionary and people-centric, Punjab Revenue, Rehabilitation and Disaster Management and Water Supply and Sanitation Minister Hardeep Singh Mundian today said that the financial roadmap will significantly strengthen drinking water infrastructure and transparent governance across the state.

11 major surface water projects, which will ensure the supply of clean drinking water to 1230 quality-affected and water-stressed villages. These projects will play a key role in addressing long-standing water quality challenges and ensuring reliable drinking water supply in rural areas, he added.



individual in every Gram Panchayat will support the operation and maintenance of rural water supply systems, thereby strengthening community-level participation and improving service delivery. Welcoming the budgetary proposals related to the Revenue and Rehabilitation department, the Cabinet Minister said that the government's decision to establish a new administrative complex at Sri Anandpur Sahib to commemorate the 350th Martyrdom Anniversary of Sahib Sri Guru Tegh Bahadur Ji, would be a revered initiative of the state government.

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Journalist Reena Awarded Certificate of Appreciation by Judicial Council on International Women's Day

The Sikh Times

New Delhi (News Varta) March 8: On the occasion of International Women's Day, journalist Reena Slatia from Jammu was awarded a Certificate of Appreciation by the Judicial Council in recognition of her outstanding contribution towards the upliftment of women, and her continued service to society.

matters affecting women and the



community. The Judicial Council acknowledged that journalists play a vital role in shaping public awareness and promoting social respon-

sibility. Reena's work has been appreciated for raising the voices of women and addressing issues that are often overlooked in society. By covering matters related to women's rights, equality, and social justice, she has helped spread awareness and inspire positive change.

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AAP Govt fulfils every election guarantee within 4 years, treats manifesto as sacred document: CM Mann

The Sikh Times

CHANDIGARH, 9th March: Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Singh Mann on Monday said the frustration shown by opposition parties over the announcement of ₹1,000 per month for women clearly reflects their fear of the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) returning to power in Punjab in 2027.

path of development and the pace of progress will only accelerate in the coming years. Concluding the debate on the motion of thanks to the Governor's address moved by Talwandi Sabo MLA Professor Baljinder Kaur in the Punjab Legislative Assembly, CM Bhagwant Singh Mann said there was a time when no one even read election manifestos because traditional parties released them merely as a formality a few days before elections.



made a historic initiative by including quality health and education for the common people in the manifesto, after which other parties were forced to include these core sectors in their manifestos as well," said CM Bhagwant Singh Mann. Referring to the four-year tenure of the government, CM Bhagwant Singh Mann said he was grateful to God for giving him enormous strength to serve Punjab and its people. Highlighting the

Punjab Government's achievements in health, education, the Mukh Mantri Mavaan Dhian Yojna, Meri Rasoi scheme, Mukh Mantri Teerth Yatra scheme, canal water, industry, agriculture and other sectors, he said that the initiatives taken by the Punjab Government have transformed the lives of people. Speaking about the Mukh Mantri Mavaan Dhian Yojna, he said that after the announcement of the scheme a wave of happiness has spread across Punjab, especially among women.

smile on women's faces due to this scheme gives me great satisfaction," stated CM Bhagwant Singh Mann. CM Bhagwant Singh Mann further said that registration for the scheme will begin on April 13 and all eligible beneficiaries can enrol under it. Referring to the Meri Rasoi scheme aimed at ensuring nutritious food for every family, he said that many families are deprived of essential nutrients due to lack of proper food, which adversely affects their health.

Front continued news

" Rekha Gupta's Solo Publicity Raises Questions Inside Delhi BJP "

Political observers say that it increasingly appears as if Delhi has only one BJP leader — Rekha Gupta — while many other senior leaders have been pushed into the background. In government advertisements issued by various ministries of the Delhi Government, even photographs of ministers are often missing, which has raised questions among party workers and supporters. The Bharatiya Janata Party has traditionally been known as a cadre-based party where the organization functions collectively and leaders work together. Historically, BJP governments have given significant respect and recognition to all ministers and senior leaders within the system. However, critics say that the current functioning appears different. According to them, Rekha Gupta is focusing heavily on promoting her own political image, spending crores of rupees of government funds on publicity in order to establish herself as a national-level leader within the party. Many political observers feel that this approach resembles the functioning style of a highly centralized leadership. As a result, there are concerns that the political graph of the BJP in Delhi could begin to decline if internal dissatisfaction continues to grow. Sources indicate that Rekha Gupta is currently working closely with a small group of trusted bureaucrats within the Delhi Government. Meanwhile, many BJP leaders who earlier played important roles in the organization appear to be sidelined. If one travels across Delhi today, it is difficult to miss the large hoardings and publicity material displaying Rekha Gupta's photographs. However, according to several local political observers, there is also growing anger and dissatisfaction among sections of the public regarding this excessive self-promotion. The primary reason being cited is that Rekha Gupta is allegedly not working in coordination with many senior party leaders and ministers within her own government. Instead, critics say she is focusing primarily on building her own political profile through massive publicity campaigns. Such developments, observers believe, may not be a positive sign for the Bharatiya Janata Party, especially with the Lok Sabha elections approaching in the near future. The party leadership is reportedly cautious about any situation that could create dissatisfaction among Delhi's voters. According to informed sources, the central leadership of the Bharatiya Janata Party is closely monitoring the functioning and working style of Rekha Gupta. Reports from grassroots workers and organizational units at the Mandal level are regularly reaching the party's top leadership. The BJP leadership has traditionally maintained strong contact with its ground-level cadre and local organizational networks. Therefore, it is believed that the leadership is fully aware of the developments taking place in Delhi. Political observers say that Smt. Rekha Gupta should keep in mind that the senior leadership of the Bharatiya Janata Party never works with closed eyes. The party leadership constantly evaluates the political situation and the functioning of its leaders, particularly when major elections are approaching. With the next Lok Sabha elections drawing closer, the BJP leadership is unlikely to ignore the sentiments of its workers and supporters in Delhi. The coming months may therefore prove crucial for the internal dynamics of the party in the national capital.

Land levelled, trees felled, road to new buildings laid at Damdama basin in Aravalis

Gurgaon.(Agency) Land has been altered, trees have been felled, and an electricity line has been extended to support new buildings that have come up within the Damdama Lake catchment, which is part of the protected Aravalis. To facilitate access, a 3km kuccha road was carved through the catchment, a zone protected under Sections 4 and 5 of the Punjab Land Preservation Act (PLPA), which prohibit non-forest activity. The road starts behind the Haryana tourism department's Damdama Tourist Complex and runs along the lake's basin to connect newly raised concrete structures. The road, which was 1.5km long in 2021 and 2023, now doubled in length; on both earlier occasions, the forest department dug trenches to block its use. Damdama, the only surviving Aravali foothill lake, is critical to Gurgaon's groundwater recharge and depends on a 5,000-acre catchment. A TOI site visit on Tuesday found around 10 acres of scrub forest



levelled and fenced with green chain-link and metal sheets. A semi-permanent red-roof structure, an electricity pole and an overhead power line were visible inside the enclosed parcel, indicating that a power connection was extended. Expansion of a farmhouse on elevated

terrain was also observed, suggesting continuing alteration of the natural landscape. Forest officials said they will inspect the site to verify fencing, construction and electrical extension. Divisional forest officer Raj Kumar said, "Non-forest activities are not permitted without approval. Action will be taken as per law if violations are found." Environmental groups have sought a joint inspection by forest and revenue departments and removal of unauthorised structures, cautioning that ongoing encroachment threatens both Damdama Lake and the broader Aravali recharge system vital to Gurgaon's groundwater security. The catchment, which feeds monsoon run-off from surrounding Aravali hills into the 62-acre lake, is notified under Sections 4 and 5 of the PLPA, requiring prior approval for activities such as land clearing, construction or change in land use. Environmentalists warn that levelling and fencing disrupt natural drainage patterns

and compact soil layers crucial for percolation. Environmentalist Vivek Kamboj said, "Once land is cleared and enclosed, the hydrology changes. Blocking or diverting run-off, even in parts, weakens the recharge cycle." The recent activity mirrors earlier construction inside the catchment, when a 1.5km road carved along the basin allegedly blocked two feeder drains. Activists say the pattern — improving access, then levelling land, followed by fencing and utilities — gradually converts protected catchment into private use. Groundwater data for Sohna block shows levels declining from 23.6 metres in 2018 to 26 metres in 2019 and 2020 reinforcing concerns in a region declared a "dark zone" by the Central Groundwater Authority in 2011. Groundwater levels in Sohna hovered in the mid-20m range over the past four years recorded at 25.59metres in 2021, 25.38metres in 2022, 26.67metres in 2023 and 25.71metres in 2024.

Man accompanying patient to Gurgaon Civil Hospital throws acid on her in casualty ward, flees

Noida.(Agency) A woman suffered more than 25% burn injuries after a man allegedly threw acid on her inside the casualty ward of Civil Hospital in Sector 10 on Sunday evening. She suffered burns on her face, neck and hand, doctors said. The accused fled after the incident that took place around 8.30pm when Samoli Das (32) reached the hospital along with him. According to hospital officials, the woman entered the casualty ward and was about to consult doctors, when the man suddenly attacked her. Emergency head Dr Om Parkash said, "Before she could even mention what she wanted to get checked, the man threw acid on her and fled. No one could immediately understand what happened." Hospital staffers rushed to help the woman, who was given initial



treatment. "An examination was carried out and since she suffered more than 25% burns, she was referred to PGI Rohtak," Dr Parkash added. Cops from Sector 10 police station reached the hospital and began an investigation. Police said the woman, who is from Nuh, had come to visit her

relative's house in Subhash Nagar in Gurgaon. She had come to the hospital for treatment following an assault. "Since the statement of the victim has not been recorded, a case is yet to be registered," a police officer said. No other person was injured in the incident, doctors said. Gurgaon chief medical officer Lokveer Singh said the hospital administration informed police and is assisting the investigation. "We will hand over CCTV footage to the police," Singh told TOI. The incident has also raised questions over security at the hospital. While guards are deployed at the entrance, visitors and attendants are generally not checked and people are able to enter the premises without screening of bags or belongings. Gurgaon has only one major public hospital, the Civil Hospital, which sees, on an average, 2,000 patients in its OPD

Told to slow down, men in cars assault 2 in Gurgaon, no arrest yet

Ghaziabad.(Agency) Told to slow down their car in a residential lane, a group of unidentified men allegedly assaulted a caretaker and his relative with helmets and sticks in Sector 42. The incident took place around 4.30pm on March 4. Pramod Kumar (32), a native of Uttarakhand who works as a caretaker in Gurgaon, lodged a complaint at Sushant Lok 1 police station a day later, following which a case was registered on March 6. Kumar said the accused came in two cars — a white Scorpio and a blue-grey car. He produced video footage of the incident, an officer said. Kumar, who lives on the ground floor of a house, was at work when several men arrived in the cars carrying sticks. His relative Nabil Lal, who lives in a house close by in Sushant Lok 1, asked the occupants of the vehicles to drive slowly in the lane. "Following this, the men turned their car around, got out of the vehicles and began assaulting Lal with helmets," the complainant alleged. When Kumar tried to intervene and stop the attackers, they started beating him too. The accused pushed his wife, sister and young children and entered the house during the incident. The group threatened to "harm" the entire family and misbehaved with a woman residing on the second floor of the building. Police said Lal was taken to a govt hospital in Sector 10, where doctors conducted a medical examination and issued a medico-legal report. "We are checking the CCTV footage and the video," the officer said, adding the case was filed under sections 191(2) (rioting), 190 (unlawful assembly), 115(2) (voluntary causing hurt), 351(2) (criminal intimidation) and 333 (house trespass after preparation for hurt, assault or wrongful restraint) of the BNS.

News box

7 supervisors removed for negligence, 3 students caught cheating in Haryana boards

Noida.(Agency) Board of School Education Haryana (BSEH) has removed seven examination supervisors from duty for negligence and has caught three students using unfair means during the Class XII board examinations. The surprise inspections by the board's flying squad were conducted on the instructions of the board chairman during the history and biology papers across Gurgaon, Bhiwani, Charkhi Dadri and Jhajjar districts on Friday. Two of the students were found using unfair means in Bhiwani district, while another student was caught in Charkhi Dadri. The inspection teams also found serious lapses in supervision by the staffers posted at different centres, following which the board removed the supervisors. In Gurgaon's Nathupur, trained graduate teacher (TGT) Ajay Kumar was relieved from duty, while at the Panchgaon examination centre in Pataudi, TGTs Varun Yadav and Ranjit Singh were removed. At the Farmana-03 examination centre, physical training instructor (PTI) Anil Kumar and primary teacher (PRT) Sombir Singh Malik were removed from duty. PTI Jaswinder Singh was removed from duty at Barwala-01 centre and TGT Naresh Kumar was removed.

Asked his name, then attacked': Muzaffarnagar cleric on way to mosque assaulted with sticks, bat; 5 named in FIR

Noida.(Agency) A 28-year-old cleric was allegedly assaulted by a group of men in the Sarwat area under the Civil Lines police station limits on Sunday, police said to news agency. The victim, Mufti Abdul Wahab, was on his way to a mosque for prayers when he was attacked. According to Circle Officer Siddharth Mishra, a case has been registered against five men — Lavi, Basant, Harish, Aditya and Rishabh — in connection with the incident. One of the accused, Lavi, has been arrested, while efforts are underway to trace the others. In a complaint filed by Wahab's family, it was alleged that the cleric was travelling on his motorcycle to the mosque when the men stopped him, passed objectionable remarks and asked his name before assaulting him with sticks and a bat. Wahab was initially taken to the district hospital and later referred to a higher medical facility after his condition turned critical, police said. Jamiat Ulema-e-Hind condemned the attack and demanded strict action against those involved. The organisation's media in-charge, Maulana Sabir, termed the incident provocative and called for stringent action against the accused.

Parking, garbage among old grudges: How 50-year feud exploded on Holi in Delhi's Uttam Nagar, left 26-year-old dead

NEW DELHI.(Agency) What began as a minor Holi mishap in southwest Delhi's Uttam Nagar spiralled into a deadly clash between two neighbouring families whose disputes date back nearly five decades — a feud fuelled by everyday frictions over parking, garbage disposal and neighbourhood tensions. The violence on March 4 left 26-year-old Tarun dead and triggered protests, arson and heavy police deployment in the area. Police said eight people, including a minor, have been apprehended so far in connection with the incident. On Sunday, officers arrested the eighth accused, 38-year-old Imran alias Bunty. Investigators found that the two families had been neighbours for nearly 50 years and had long-standing disputes over issues such as parking

and garbage disposal. During the clash, eight people sustained injuries — three from one family and five from the other. Most were discharged from hospital the same day, but Tarun was admitted with serious injuries. An FIR was initially registered under provisions related to attempt to commit culpable homicide under the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita. After Tarun died during treatment on March 5, the charge of murder was added. Police said the situation in the locality remains tense but under control. Residents have been urged not to believe rumours, and authorities warned that action would be taken against anyone attempting to give the incident a communal colour or disturb law and order. Tensions escalated further on Friday when a car and a motorcycle were set on fire and protests broke out in the

area. Members of Bajrang Dal and Vishwa Hindu Parishad staged a demonstration near Delhi Metro's Uttam Nagar East station, blocking the main road and demanding strict action against those responsible for the killing. According to police, the quarrel erupted around 11.09pm on March 4 in the JJ Colony area of Uttam Nagar after a girl from one family accidentally splashed coloured water on a woman from the neighbouring household while playing Holi. The incident quickly escalated as members of both families gathered on the street and began exchanging blows. Police said mild force had to be used to disperse the protesters after repeated appeals failed. Additional police and paramilitary personnel have since been deployed in the area as a precautionary measure.

'Give me love in my next birth': 'UK07 Rider' Anurag Dobhal's message to mother before Fortuner crash on Delhi—Meerut Expressway

Noida.(Agency) When I return in the next birth, please give me love," Anurag Dobhal (28), YouTuber and former Bigg Boss 17 contestant known as "UK07 Rider", told his mother during an Instagram livestream moments before his Toyota Fortuner crashed into a divider on the Delhi—Meerut Expressway near Dasna on Saturday night. More than 80,000 people were watching the stream as Dobhal appeared visibly distressed and spoke about feeling alone and overwhelmed. Moments before the crash, Dobhal turned the camera towards the windscreen and speedometer as the SUV accelerated. The vehicle then suddenly swerved towards the median and slammed into the divider with massive force. According to Surendra Nath Tiwari, DCP (Rural), police received information about the crash around 10.20pm. Dobhal was travelling towards Delhi from Meerut when the accident occurred near a restaurant in the



Dasna area. "The SUV hit the divider, crossed into the opposite lane and flipped several times," the officer said. The impact was so severe that the vehicle was badly mangled and its wheels were torn off. Police suspect the car was travelling at nearly 150-160 kmph at the time of the crash. Investigators are examining whether the crash was an attempted suicide. "We suspect he may have deliberately turned the vehicle

towards the divider to cause self-harm," Tiwari said. By the time police reached the spot, Dobhal's friends had already taken him to hospital after alerting the emergency helpline 112. One of Dobhal's followers, Ashish Chaudhary from Ghaziabad, said he rushed to the site after witnessing the crash during the livestream. "I was watching his live when the accident happened. I immediately went there with my friends. Some passersby were already trying to rescue him. We pulled him out of the mangled vehicle and took him to Subharti Hospital in Meerut, which was the nearest," he said. On Sunday morning, Dobhal was referred to a private hospital in Delhi after his condition worsened. Police said a team has been formed to investigate the sequence of events and examine his recent social media posts. His family has not lodged any complaint so far, and officers plan to question him once his condition stabilises. Dobhal, who hails from Uttarakhand, rose to prominence through travel, biking and lifestyle content on YouTube and built a large online following known as "Brosena". His YouTube channel has nearly 8 million subscribers, while his Instagram account has about 7.6 million followers. In recent

days, some of his posts had raised concern among followers.

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Ayodhya once saw bullets for devotees, now it showers them with flowers: CM Adityanath

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 "Around 900 government and private hospitals have been empanelled under this scheme. Even in developed countries like Canada people have to pay insurance premiums for healthcare, but in Punjab treatment is being provided free of cost," he said. CM Bhagwant Singh Mann also announced that medical colleges will be set up in LehraGaga, Sangrur, Malerkotla, Hoshiarpur and Kapurthala to impart quality health services to people. He said that since 2022 as many as 934 doctors have been recruited for government hospitals. He also mentioned the success of the Chief Minister

Yogshala initiative aimed at carving out a healthy and prosperous Punjab. Speaking about education reforms, CM Bhagwant Singh Mann said that 118 Schools of Eminence are being established across Punjab to provide quality education. "Principals and teachers are being sent to Finland, Singapore and IIM Ahmedabad for training. Since 2022, a total of 13,765 teachers have been recruited, and it is a matter of immense pride for Punjabis that Punjab secured the top position in the National Achievement Survey 2024," said CM Bhagwant Singh Mann. The Chief Minister further said that the future belongs

to Artificial Intelligence and teachers are being trained globally to educate students about AI. He said that farmers are now receiving electricity during the daytime for irrigation for the first time, which has transformed their lives. "Punjab farmers are getting the highest sugarcane price in the country at the rate of ₹416 per quintal," said CM Bhagwant Singh Mann. Highlighting irrigation and infrastructure initiatives, CM Bhagwant Singh Mann said that the Ferozepur Feeder Canal, considered to be the life-line of Malwa, has been renovated and a new Malwa Canal is being built for the first time since inde-

pendence. He said that village libraries are being established to encourage reading among youth and 3200 sports grounds are being developed in villages to channelise the energy of youth in a positive direction and steer them away from the menace of drugs. Highlighting the transparent employment drive of the Punjab Government, CM Bhagwant Singh Mann said that 63,943 government jobs have been given to youth so far without any recommendation or bribery. "Earlier, ordinary youth struggled to get government jobs because wealthy people secured them through bribery," he said. CM Bhagwant Singh Mann further announced that on March 20 a Tata Steel manufacturing plant worth ₹3200 crore will be inaugurated in Ludhiana, generating employment for 4000 youth. He said that to attract industrial investment the Punjab Progressive Investment

Summit will be held in Mohali from March 13 to March 15. Referring to his visits abroad, Bhagwant Singh Mann said that his visits to Japan, South Korea and other countries acted as a catalyst to attract investment, including a ₹1300 crore investment by Japan's GIC company. Speaking about the power sector, he said that 90% of households are receiving free electricity and recently electricity tariffs were reduced by 70 paise to ₹1.50 per unit. "For the first time the government has purchased a private thermal plant of GVK company and named it after Sri Guru Amar Das Ji," he said. Highlighting infrastructure initiatives, CM Bhagwant Singh Mann said that under the Roshan Punjab initiative ₹5000 crore is being spent to strengthen infrastructure including underground electricity cables. He said that the formation of the ultra modern Sadak Surakhya Force has

reduced road accident deaths in Punjab by 48%. Reiterating the zero tolerance policy against corruption, he said that an anti corruption helpline (95012-00200) was launched and more than 1000 arrests have been made so far. Referring to the damage caused by last year's floods, CM Bhagwant Singh Mann said that compensation was provided for crop losses, damaged houses and livestock. He said that under the Jis Da Khet, Us Di Ret scheme farmers have benefited significantly and flood affected farmers were also provided 84,889 quintals of wheat seed free of cost worth ₹33.96 crore. Speaking about religious pilgrimage initiatives, Bhagwant Singh Mann said that under the Mukh Mantri Teerth Yatra Scheme many elderly citizens got the opportunity to visit religious places for the first time. "Devotees will now also be taken for

darshan to Takht Sri Patna Sahib in Bihar and Takht Sri Hazur Sahib in Maharashtra," said the Chief Minister. CM Bhagwant Singh Mann further said that the Easy Registry and Easy Jamabandi system has been implemented to permanently end difficulties faced during property registration. He said that a total of 44,920 kilometres of roads are being renovated at a cost of ₹16,209 crore, including ₹14,328 crore for renovation and ₹1,880 crore for five years of maintenance. Targeting the Shiromani Akali Dal, CM Bhagwant Singh Mann said that people gave five opportunities to former Chief Minister Parkash Singh Badal, the father of Akali leader Sukhbir Singh Badal, but instead of developing Punjab the family only developed itself. "People are well aware of their dubious character and will never

forgive them for the sins against Punjab and its people," he said. CM Bhagwant Singh Mann further said that 19 toll plazas have been closed in Punjab, saving ₹64 lakh daily for the public and tax on vehicles carrying Holy Scriptures has also been waived. Criticising Congress MLAs for walking out of the Assembly, Bhagwant Singh Mann said that Congress will face a crushing defeat in 2027 and the situation will be such that the people of Punjab may not even elect a single MLA to sit on the opposition benches. "The Punjab Government will continue to serve the people with dedication, commitment and honesty to build the Punjab of the dreams of the martyrs. It is the bounden duty of the Punjab Government and no stone will be left unturned for this noble cause," said CM Bhagwant Singh Mann.

Journalist Reena Awarded Certificate of Appreciation by Judicial Council on International Women's Day.

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 Rajiv Agnihotri said "Journalists serve as an important bridge between the public and institutions of governance. Their role in bringing truth and facts to the forefront strengthens democratic values and ensures transparency in society. He emphasized that responsible journalism helps society move toward justice, equality, and awareness. He further stated that Reena's commitment to covering issues related to women's upliftment reflects her deep concern for social welfare and justice. According to him, her work has helped bring attention to the challenges faced by women and has encouraged discussions on improving their rights, safety, and opportunities." The Chairman also highlighted that the Judicial Council believes in recognizing and encouraging individuals who contribute positively to society. By honoring journalists, social workers, and other individuals who dedicate their work to public welfare, the Council aims to promote a culture of responsibility, awareness, and service. Rajiv Agnihotri expressed confidence that Reena will continue to serve society with the same sincerity and dedication in the

future. He stated that her work in journalism will continue to inspire many others, particularly young journalists who aspire to use media as a tool for social change. After receiving the Certificate of Appreciation, Reena expressed her heartfelt gratitude to the Judicial Council and its Chairman Rajiv Agnihotri for recognizing her efforts. She said "Receiving this honor on the occasion of International Women's Day makes it even more special and meaningful." Reena stated that journalism is not only a profession but also a responsibility toward society. She said that journalists have the duty to highlight the concerns of the people, bring forward the voices of the underrepresented, and promote awareness on issues that require public attention. She also mentioned that many women continue to face social challenges, including inequality, discrimination, and limited opportunities. According to her, raising awareness about such issues is an important step toward achieving equality and empowerment for women. Reena said that receiving

the Certificate of Appreciation for her contribution to the upliftment of women encourages her to continue working with greater dedication. She added that empowering women and promoting social awareness are essential for building a more progressive and balanced society. She also appreciated the efforts of the Judicial Council in supporting initiatives that promote justice, transparency, and social welfare. According to her, institutions that recognize individuals working for social development play a vital role in encouraging positive contributions within society. Judicial Council Secretary Shri Sanjay Arora extended its best wishes to Reena for her continued success and expressed hope that she will keep inspiring others through her work while continuing to promote the empowerment of women and the betterment of society.

Progressive And People-Centric Budget To Enhance Public Service Delivery: Mundian

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 The Cabinet Minister further informed that the government would design this administrative complex in heritage architectural style, which will bring key government offices under one roof, streamline administrative functioning and enhance public service delivery while preserving the historical and spiritual identity of the holy city. Highlighting further initiatives of revenue department, Hardeep Singh Mundian said the government has taken several transformative steps to make land and property

services transparent, technology-driven and citizen-centric. He said Punjab has become the first state in the country to introduce the "Easy Jamabandi" initiative, which allows citizens to access land records, apply for mutations, request Rapat entries and obtain Fard Badar services through an online portal or even via WhatsApp with doorstep assistance from Sewa Sahayaks. The Minister further said the "Easy Registry" project has simplified property registration procedures by introducing simplified deed formats and enabling district-wide registration choice with real-time updates for citizens. As many as 6.17 lakh documents have already been registered under this initiative, reflecting its wide

acceptance and its role in curbing corruption at Sub-Registrar offices. Referring to disaster management efforts, the Minister said the government demonstrated swift and systematic response during the devastating floods witnessed last year. During FY 2025-26, the government released Rs.1,010 crore for comprehensive disaster relief and mitigation, which included compensation for crop loss, damage to houses and livestock besides critical interventions under the State Mitigation Fund. He said Punjab has also introduced India's first fully digital Flood Relief System, enabling geo-tagged surveys and real-

time monitoring to ensure direct online transfer of relief funds to beneficiaries without intermediaries. The initiative has significantly reduced delays, enabling flood-affected families to receive financial assistance within a few months whereas earlier such relief often took six months to a year.

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PUBLIC NOTICE
 It is for general information that I Chandan Kumar Mahto S/O Shalender Mahto, R/O A-47, Sharma Enclave, Village-Mubarak Pur Dabas, North West Delhi, Delhi-110081, declare that name of mine and my father has been wrongly written as Chandan Kumar Mahto and Shalender Mahto in my 10th Class educational documents. The actual name of mine and my father are Chandan Kumar Mahto and Shalender Mahto respectively which may be amended accordingly.

NAME CHANGE
 I, ModMohd Kasif S/O Khalil Khan R/O H No. C-84A, STREET NO. 7, JYOTI COLONY, SHAHDARA, SHAHDARA DELHI-110032. Changed my name to Mohammad Kasif.

PUBLIC NOTICE
 Information is given to general public at large that our client Mrs. Vimlesh W/O Mr. Kunwar Pal is the owner of Freehold Residential Property Bearing Plot No.2, Land area measuring 50 Sq. Yds. Out of Kharsa No.2/21 & 22 Situated in the revenue estate of Village Mirzapur, Delhi estate Delhi Area Abadi Known as Colony Mahabir Enclave, Part-II, New Delhi. by virtue of Notarized GPA, ATS and WILL dated 15.09.2010, in now our client is declaring that that any other person does not have any right over the said property, and same property Sold to Mrs. Jainab Khatoun and same has been financed by SMFG India Home Finance Company Limited Branch: Moti Nagar New Delhi. If any person(s) have any objection(s) or claim(s) with respect to the right, title or interest in the Said Property then contact us within 07 days from the date of Publication of this notice and or the same to the undersigned if found by anyone. Thereafter no claim shall be entertained.

NAME CHANGE
 I, S. VATSALA Mother of No-15713107M, Rank-HAV, Name-RAJESH S. residing at VILL. KALASAMUDRAM, TEHSIL-POLLUR, DISTT. TIRUVANNAMALAI, TAMIL NADU-623211 have changed my name from S VATSALA TO VATSALASUBRAMANIAM for all future purposes vide Affidavit Dated 09/03/2026 before Notary Public, Delhi.

NAME CHANGE
 I, Subramanian Father of No-15713107M, Rank-HAV, Name-RAJESH S. residing at VILL. KALASAMUDRAM, TEHSIL-POLLUR, DISTT. TIRUVANNAMALAI, TAMIL NADU-623211 have changed my name from SUBRAMANIAN for all future purposes vide Affidavit Dated 09/03/2026 before Notary Public, Delhi.

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NAME CHANGE
 I, Sunil S/O Prahlad Pal R/O Z-282, GALI NO.5, PREM NAGAR-2, KIRARI SULEMAN NAGAR, ROHI-NI, DELHI-110086 have changed my name to SUNIL PAL.

NAME CHANGE
 I, Vikas Kumar S/O Shashi Kant R/O H.No 24 RAM CHANDER ENCLAVE MAHARANI ENCLAVE HASTSAL VILLAGE UTTAM NAGAR DELHI-110059 have changed my name to VIKAS Permanently for all future purposes.

NAME CHANGE
 I, Rakesh Choudhary S/O HARE KRISHAN CHOUDHARY R/O WZ-550, FIF FLAT NO-201, THAKUR GOBIND APARTMENT, NANGAL RAYA, DELHI-110046 have changed my name from RAKESH CHOUDHARY to RAKESH KUMAR for all future purposes.

NAME CHANGE
 I, Subramanian Father of No-15713107M, Rank-HAV, Name-RAJESH S. residing at VILL. KALASAMUDRAM, TEHSIL-POLLUR, DISTT. TIRUVANNAMALAI, TAMIL NADU-623211 have changed my name from SUBRAMANIAN for all future purposes vide Affidavit Dated 09/03/2026 before Notary Public, Delhi.

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NAME CHANGE
 I, Sajjan Devi W/O PUKHRAJ JAIN Residing at H No H NO-T78 GALI NO-08 GAUTAMPURI, SEELAMPUR, NORTH EAST DELHI 110053 have changed my name to RIKHAB JAIN for all future purposes.

NAME CHANGE
 I, Shafiquddin R/O B-213 GALI NO-03 MANDAWALI FAZALPUR DELHI-110092 have changed my name to SHARFUDDIN ANSARI Permanently for all future purposes.

NAME CHANGE
 I, Bri Mohan S/O H No B-3 CHANDER ENCLAVE, SHALIMAR GARDEN, SAHIBABAD, GHAZIABAD, UTTAR PRADESH-201005, have changed my name to BRIJ MOHAN DABLA for all future purposes.

NAME CHANGE
 I, Subramanian Father of No-15713107M, Rank-HAV, Name-RAJESH S. residing at VILL. KALASAMUDRAM, TEHSIL-POLLUR, DISTT. TIRUVANNAMALAI, TAMIL NADU-623211 have changed my name from SUBRAMANIAN for all future purposes vide Affidavit Dated 09/03/2026 before Notary Public, Delhi.

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NAME CHANGE
 I, Gopal Kashyap S/O Sukh Ram R/O 13/224, 3rd Floor, Geeta Colony, Delhi-110031 have changed my name to Gopal.

NAME CHANGE
 I, Sarvinder S/O Mangra, R/O Bhamela, Muzaffarnagar, Uttar Pradesh, 251301, have changed the name of my minor son Vansh aged 17 years and he shall hereafter be known as VIVEK

NAME CHANGE
 I, Sachin S/O Thomas R/O Plot No.35 First Floor Village Amberhal Sector-19 Dwarika Delhi 110075 Changed my name to Sachin Thomas.

NAME CHANGE
 I, Subramanian Father of No-15713107M, Rank-HAV, Name-RAJESH S. residing at VILL. KALASAMUDRAM, TEHSIL-POLLUR, DISTT. TIRUVANNAMALAI, TAMIL NADU-623211 have changed my name from SUBRAMANIAN for all future purposes vide Affidavit Dated 09/03/2026 before Notary Public, Delhi.

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NAME CHANGE
 I, Jagbir Singh Tarwar S/O Lal Singh R/O WZ-578/C, Naraina Village, Delhi-110028 have changed my name to Jagbir Singh.

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<p>NAME CHANGE I, VINOD PALIWAL S/O MOOL CHAND R/O HOUSE NO A-88/1, DEVLV EXTENSION, SOUTH DELHI, NEW DELHI 110080 have changed my name from VINOD PALIWAL to LALIT, and henceforth I shall be known as LALIT for all future purposes. That VINOD PALIWAL and LALIT both names belong to the same and one person.</p>	<p>PUBLIC NOTICE It is for general information that I Tushar Bhatnagar S/O Deni Bhatnagar, R/O 47/14 sector 4, shastri nagar, Meerut, PO. L. L. R. M. Med.college, DIST: Meerut, Uttar Pradesh - 250004, declare that name of my father has been wrongly written as Amit Bhatnagar in my 10th Class educational documents. The actual name of my father is Deni Bhatnagar, respectively which may be amended accordingly.</p>	<p>NAME CHANGE I, Rachna D/o Madan Pal Singh, R/O Lane No. 6, Ram Niwas, Ankit Vihar, Muzaffarnagar, Uttar Pradesh, have changed my name from Rachna to Rachna Bansal. Henceforth, I shall be known as Rachna Bansal for all purposes.</p>
<p>NAME CHANGE I, Anita Devi W/O Rajinder Singh R/O RZ-C 28 Najafgarh park dicheon road Najafgarh delhi 110043, Changed my name to Anita.</p>	<p>NAME CHANGE I, hitherto known as ANITA BANIWAL D/O DARYAV SINGH W/O SAURAV MANN R/O H.No-525, Village Hamid Pur, PO. Khampur, North West Delhi, Delhi-110036 have changed my name and shall hereafter be known as ANITA MANN.</p>	<p>NAME CHANGE I, hitherto known as MEERA W/O JAG PRASAD R/O E 26, 2, Shastri Park Garhi Mendu, Bhajan Pura, North East Delhi-110053 has changed my name and shall hereafter be known as MARIJA.</p>
<p>NAME CHANGE I, hitherto known as SOHARTA DEVI W/O RAM SEWAK R/O 47, Def Enc-1, Defence Enclave Mohan Garden, New Delhi-110059, have changed my name and shall hereafter be known as SOHARTI DEVI</p>	<p>NAME CHANGE I, hitherto known as GAURA W/O DEEPAK RAO R/O L-2, West Patel Nagar, Patel Nagar, Central Delhi, Delhi-110008 have changed my name and shall hereafter be known as GAURI RAO.</p>	<p>NAME CHANGE I, Chandrawati Devi mother of 771923-S Ex Sgt Ranjay Kumar Singh resident of RZ345 A2 Rajnagar part-2 palam New Delhi 110077 have changed my Name from Chandrawati Devi to Chandrabati Singh vide Affidavit IN-DL8873502526013Y dated 08-03-2026 at New Delhi.</p>
<p>NAME CHANGE I, hitherto known as RAKESH KUMAR S/O KASHI PRASAD R/O F-1-336A, TF, Gali No-3, Mahavir Enclave-1, Pallam Village, South West Delhi, Delhi-110045 have changed my name and shall hereafter be known as RAKESH KUMAR VERMA.</p>	<p>NAME CHANGE I, hitherto known as HIMANSHI D/O ASHOK KUMAR R/O E-38, Kusumpur Pahari, Vasanti Vihar, Vasant Kunj, South West Delhi, Delhi-110070 declare that name of my father and my mother has been wrongly written as ASHOK and LALI in my all educational documents. The actual name of my father and my mother are ASHOK KUMAR and SUMAN respectively which may be amended accordingly</p>	<p>Public Notice It is for general information that I, Sameer Ray S/O Surjeet Ray R/O B-2/671, Block-B2, JJ Cluster, Madanpur Khadar, Sarita Vihar, South Delhi, Delhi-110076 declare that name of my minor daughter Roy in my minor daughter Diya Ray aged 17 years in her 10th Class Educational Documents, The actual name of my minor daughter is Diya Ray.</p>
<p>NAME CHANGE I, Leena Agarwal W/O Rohit Aggarwal R/O P No-76, Second Floor, Block B-3, Jwala Heri, Paschim Vihar, PO: Paschim Vihar, Dist: West Delhi, Delhi -110063 have changed my name to Leena Aggarwal for all future purposes.</p>	<p>NAME CHANGE I, Rohit S/O NAND Kishor, R/O P No-76, Second Floor, Block B-3, Jwala Heri, Paschim Vihar, PO: Paschim Vihar, Dist: West Delhi, Delhi -110063 have changed my name to Rohit Aggarwal for all future purposes.</p>	<p>NAME CHANGE I, PATIL BALKRISHNA KERABA is a real mother of No-2810662K Rank SEP Name PATIL MADHUR BALKRISHNA KERABA presently residing VILL KURNI POST-MALAGE TEH-KAGAL DIST-KOLHAPUR (MAHARASHTRA)-416219, have changed my name from PATIL BALKRISHNA KERABA to PATIL MADHUR BALKRISHNA KERABA and date of birth from 16/05/1958 to 01/01/1951 for all future purposes. Vide affidavit dated 02.03.2026 before Public Notary Delhi.</p>
<p>NAME CHANGE I, Sameer Ray S/O Surjeet Ray R/O B-2/671, Block-B2, JJ Cluster, Madanpur Khadar, Sarita Vihar, South Delhi, Delhi-110076 declare that name of my minor daughter is Diya Ray aged 17 years in her 10th Class Educational Documents, The actual name of my minor daughter is Diya Ray.</p>	<p>NAME CHANGE I, Sameer Ray S/O Surjeet Ray R/O B-2/671, Block-B2, JJ Cluster, Madanpur Khadar, Sarita Vihar, South Delhi, Delhi-110076 declare that name of my minor daughter is Diya Ray aged 17 years in her 10th Class Educational Documents, The actual name of my minor daughter is Diya Ray.</p>	<p>NAME CHANGE I, PATIL BALKRISHNA KERABA is a real mother of No-2810662K Rank SEP Name PATIL MADHUR BALKRISHNA KERABA presently residing VILL KURNI POST-MALAGE TEH-KAGAL DIST-KOLHAPUR (MAHARASHTRA)-416219, have changed my name from PATIL BALKRISHNA KERABA to PATIL MADHUR BALKRISHNA KERABA and date of birth from 16/05/1958 to 01/01/1951 for all future purposes. Vide affidavit dated 02.03.2026 before Public Notary Delhi.</p>
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<p>NAME CHANGE I, Sameer Ray S/O Surjeet Ray R/O B-2/671, Block-B2, JJ Cluster, Madanpur Khadar, Sarita Vihar, South Delhi, Delhi-110076 declare that name of my minor daughter is Diya Ray aged 17 years in her 10th Class Educational Documents, The actual name of my minor daughter is Diya Ray.</p>	<p>NAME CHANGE I, Sameer Ray S/O Surjeet Ray R/O B-2/671, Block-B2, JJ Cluster, Madanpur Khadar, Sarita Vihar, South Delhi, Delhi-110076 declare that name of my minor daughter is Diya Ray aged 17 years in her 10th Class Educational Documents, The actual name of my minor daughter is Diya Ray.</p>	<p>NAME CHANGE I, PATIL BALKRISHNA KERABA is a real mother of No-2810662K Rank SEP Name PATIL MADHUR BALKRISHNA KERABA presently residing VILL KURNI POST-MALAGE TEH-KAGAL DIST-KOLHAPUR (MAHARASHTRA)-416219, have changed my name from PATIL BALKRISHNA KERABA to PATIL MADHUR BALKRISHNA KERABA and date of birth from 16/05/1958 to 01/01/1951 for all future purposes. Vide affidavit dated 02.03.2026 before Public Notary Delhi.</p>
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NEWS BOX

Dozens wounded in Bahrain as Gulf suffers missile, drone attacks

MANAMA. (Agency)

Bahrain said Monday that an Iranian drone attack on the island of Sitra injured 32 people overnight, as Gulf nations reported new attacks with Tehran pressing its retaliatory strikes across the region.

All of the wounded were Bahraini citizens and there were four "serious cases", including children, the health ministry said in a statement carried by the state news agency. The wounded included a 17-year-old girl who suffered severe head and eye injuries, and a two-month-old baby, according to the ministry.

Several explosions were also heard Monday in the Qatari capital Doha, AFP journalists said, as Qatar, Saudi Arabia and Kuwait all reported new attacks.

Doha has been targeted by waves of Iranian drones and missiles since Iran launched a sprawling retaliation campaign across the Gulf in the wake of US and Israeli attacks against the Islamic republic.

Qatar's defence ministry said on Monday that its forces had intercepted a missile attack. Elsewhere in the Gulf, Saudi Arabia's defence ministry said the kingdom intercepted and destroyed two drones heading towards the Shaybah oil field in the southeast of the country. Kuwait's defence ministry said the country's air defences were working to intercept a missile and drone attack on Monday. On Sunday, the Gulf nation was targeted by seven missiles and five drones, according to figures released by authorities.

The United States said Sunday that it was ordering embassy staff to leave Saudi Arabia as Iran strikes the kingdom. The State Department said in a travel advisory it had "ordered non-emergency US government employees and US government employee family members to leave Saudi Arabia due to safety risks". Drones hit the US embassy in the Saudi capital Riyadh last week, and drones have also caused damage at the US embassies in Kuwait and the United Arab Emirates. Gulf countries have borne much of Tehran's response after the United States and Israel launched a massive air campaign against Iran on February 28. Iran's President Masoud Pezeshkian has warned that the Islamic republic "will be forced to respond" against its neighbours if their territory is used to attack it.

Nepal polls: Rastriya Swatantra Party wins 124 seats followed by Nepali Congress with 17

KATHMANDU. (Agency)

The Rastriya Swatantra Party (RSP) is heading towards a two-thirds majority in Nepal's parliamentary polls, securing 124 seats under direct voting and nearly 40 lakh votes under the proportionate-voting system as of 7 am on Monday.

The RSP has won 124 seats and is leading in one seat, whereas the Nepali Congress (NC) has won 17 seats and is leading in one seat. The CPN-UML has won eight seats and is leading in one seat and the NCP has won seven seats. The Shram Sanskriti Party has won three seats, the RPP and Independent candidates have won one seat each. So far, the results for 161 of the 165 seats have been declared under direct voting.

The outcome on the remaining four seats is expected to be declared in the afternoon. Under proportionate voting, the RSP has secured 37,89,803 votes, the NC 12,75,594, the CPN-UML 10,79,726, the NCP 5,55,300, the Shram Sanskriti Party 2,65,398, the Janata Samajwadi Party 1,16,463 and the Rastriya Parivartan Party has bagged 1,08,084 votes.

Nepal is set to witness its first Madhesi prime minister - Balendra Shah -- who will also be the youngest elected executive head in the history of the Himalayan country.

US military kills six in strike on alleged drug boat in the Eastern Pacific

WASHINGTON. (Agency)

The U.S. military said it killed six men Sunday in a strike on an alleged drug-smuggling vessel in the eastern Pacific Ocean as part of the Trump administration's campaign against alleged traffickers. Sunday's attack brought the death toll to at least 157 people since the Trump administration began targeting those it calls "narcoterrorists" in small vessels in early September.

As with most of the military's statements on the more than 40 known strikes in the Eastern Pacific Ocean and Caribbean Sea, U.S. Southern Command said it targeted alleged drug traffickers along known smuggling routes. The military did not provide evidence that the vessel was ferrying drugs. It posted a video on X that showed a small boat being blown up as it floated on the water. President Donald Trump has said the U.S. is in "armed conflict" with cartels in Latin America and has justified the attacks as a necessary escalation to stem the flow of drugs into the United States. But his administration has offered little evidence to support its claims of killing "narcoterrorists." In a meeting with Latin American leaders on Saturday, Trump encouraged them to join the U.S. in taking military action against drug-trafficking cartels and transnational gangs, which he said pose an "unacceptable threat" to the region's national security. To that end, Ecuador and the United States conducted military operations this past week against organized crime groups in the South American country. With Saturday's gathering, Trump aimed to demonstrate that he remains committed to focusing U.S. foreign policy on the Western Hemisphere, even while waging a war on Iran that has had repercussions across the Middle East.

Critics have questioned the overall legality of the boat strikes as well as their effectiveness, in part because the fentanyl behind many fatal overdoses is typically trafficked to the U.S. over land from Mexico, where it is produced with chemicals imported from China and India.

Human Rights Watch says Israel used white phosphorus bombs in Lebanon attack

HRW said that it "verified and geolocated seven images showing airburst white phosphorus munitions being deployed over a residential part" of the southern Lebanese town of Yohmor.

Dubai. (Agency)

Human Rights Watch on Monday said it has found that Israel had "unlawfully" used white phosphorus over residential parts of a southern Lebanese town last week.

"The Israeli military unlawfully used artillery-fired white phosphorus munitions over homes on March 3, 2026, in the southern Lebanese town of Yohmor," the

New York-based rights group said in a report. HRW added that it "verified and geolocated seven images showing airburst white phosphorus munitions being deployed over a residential part of the town and civil defense workers responding to fires in at least two homes and one car in that area."

White phosphorus, a substance that ignites on contact with oxygen, can be used to create smokescreens and to illuminate battlefields. But the munition can also be used as an incendiary weapon and can cause fires, horrific burns, respiratory damage, organ failure and death. At least 394 people have been killed in Israeli attacks, Lebanese authorities said, registering more than half a million people as displaced. Israel -- which kept up strikes targeting Hezbollah despite a 2024 ceasefire -- launched multiple waves of

strikes across Lebanon since last week and sent ground troops into border areas after the Iran-backed group attacked it. The Israeli army has since repeatedly called on people living south of the Litani River,

consequences for civilians," Ramzi Kaiss, Lebanon researcher at HRW, was quoted saying in the report. "Israel should immediately halt this practice and states providing Israel with weapons, including white phosphorus munitions, should immediately suspend military assistance and arms sales and push Israel to stop firing such munitions in residential areas," he added. Lebanese authorities and HRW have previously flagged Israel's use of controversial white phosphorus rounds, in attacks that harmed civilians and the environment. Lebanon's state-run National News Agency on Sunday said Israeli forces targeted the towns of Khiam and Tal Nahas, near the border with Israel, "with artillery and phosphorus shelling."

Last month, Lebanon accused Israel of spraying the herbicide glyphosate on the Lebanese side of their shared border, with President Joseph Aoun decrying it as a "crime against the environment."



around 30 kilometres (20 miles) north of the Israeli border, to leave. "The Israeli military's unlawful use of white phosphorus over residential areas is extremely alarming and will have dire

West Asia conflict sends shockwaves through African fuel market and economies

NAIROBI. (Agency)

Surging oil prices triggered by the war with Iran are rippling across African economies, threatening higher fuel costs, rising inflation and renewed pressure on currencies across the continent. Africa imports most of the petroleum products it consumes, leaving many economies highly vulnerable to supply disruptions tied to tensions in the Middle East, a region central to global oil flows. "Africa is a net importer of oil products, meaning it is heavily exposed to shocks like these," said Nick Hedley, an energy transition research analyst at Zero Carbon Analytics. When global oil supplies tighten, Hedley said, prices rise while African currencies often weaken as investors move funds into safe-haven assets such as the U.S. dollar. That combination amplifies the impact of price spikes in import-dependent markets such as Kenya and Ghana. A similar dynamic unfolded after Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022, when rising crude prices and a

weakening currency pushed transport fuel prices in South Africa up by more than 25% within six months, Hedley said. "The near-term risks come from mainly the rising oil prices and weakening exchange rates as investors move to safe-haven assets," said



Oxford Economics senior economist Brendon Verster. Oil markets remain particularly sensitive to the conflict because of the strategic importance of the Strait of Hormuz, a narrow shipping corridor through which about a fifth of the world's crude passes. The impact of higher oil prices across Africa will be uneven. Countries like Kenya and Uganda say their supply

remain stable even as they work on ensuring continuity. Nigeria and Ghana produce crude oil but import most of their refined petroleum products, limiting the benefits to them of higher global prices.

"It's difficult to say at this point whether they will see net gains," Hedley said. "Oil producers could benefit from higher crude prices, but ordinary citizens will likely face higher transport and fuel costs, and potentially higher interest rates."

Still, sustained high prices could bring a windfall for Africa's major oil exporters. Verster noted that Nigeria exports roughly 1.5 million barrels of oil per day and has based its medium-term fiscal framework on oil prices between \$64 and \$66 per barrel through 2028. The war pushed prices above \$100 per barrel Monday, a level that if sustained, would significantly boost revenues for exporters including Angola, Algeria and Libya.

For most African households, however, the immediate effect is likely to be higher living costs.

US begins large military drill with South Korea while waging war in West Asia

SEOUL. (Agency)

The United States began a large military exercise with South Korea involving thousands of troops Monday while also waging an escalating war in West Asia. South Korea's Joint Chiefs of Staff has said about 18,000 Korean troops will take part in Freedom Shield, which runs through March 19. U.S. Forces Korea hasn't confirmed the number of American troops participating in the training in South Korea. The allies' combined exercise comes amid South Korean media speculation that Washington is relocating some assets from South Korea to support fighting against Iran.

U.S. Forces Korea said last week it would not comment on specific movements of military assets for security reasons. South Korean officials also declined to comment on the reports that some U.S. Patriot anti-

missile systems and other equipment were being moved to the Middle East, but they said there would be no meaningful impact on the allies' combined defense posture.



Freedom Shield may trigger an irritated response from North Korea, which has long described the allies' joint exercises as invasion rehearsals and used them as a pretext to ramp up its own military demonstrations and weapons tests. The allies say the drills are defensive in nature. North Korea

has suspended all meaningful dialogue with Washington and Seoul following the 2019 collapse of a summit between leader Kim Jong Un and U.S. President Donald Trump during his first term.

Tensions rose in recent years as Kim used Russia's invasion of Ukraine as a window to accelerate the development of his nuclear arsenal and increase his leverage by aligning militarily with Moscow, which has received thousands of North Korean troops and large weapons shipments to help fuel its warfighting.

The allies' drills follow a major political conference in Pyongyang last month, where Kim confirmed his hard-line view of "enemy" Seoul but left the door open to talks with Washington, calling on the United States to drop its demand for North Korea's denuclearization as a precondition for dialogue.

\$100 million worth gold arrived from Venezuela: US Interior Secretary after new mining licence

World. (Agency)

US Interior Secretary Doug Burgum confirmed that Washington received more than \$100 million worth of gold from Venezuela on Friday after the US issued a licence authorising dealings with Minerven, Venezuela's state-owned gold mining company.

Speaking to Fox News about how the US plans to explore Venezuela's rare earth minerals, Burgum said that since US President Donald Trump had promised a "golden age of abundance," the first critical mineral coming from Venezuela would be solid gold bars.

"On Friday, \$100 million worth of gold came from Venezuela to the US, both for industrial purposes and other commercial uses. Venezuela has around \$500 billion worth of gold resources, but it also has other critical minerals such as bauxite and aluminium, which we need for defence and consumer goods. It also has coal resources that can help generate power. These resources can help us win the AI arms race with China," Burgum said. Stating that the people of Venezuela would thank Trump, Burgum said, "When



we were there last week with oil and gas executives and top mining executives, they were excited to get back to Venezuela and explore the great opportunities available there. "The people of Venezuela are going to dedicate a statue to Trump because he is going to reopen their economy after more than two decades. The enthusiasm in Venezuela about their future is high." On Friday, Burgum met with acting Venezuelan President Delcy Rodríguez as well as representatives from more than two dozen US mining and minerals companies, many of which previously operated in the country. After the meeting, Burgum said Venezuela's government had given security assurances to mining companies interested in investing in the country, where mineral-rich areas have long been controlled by guerrilla groups, gangs and other illegal actors.

Under the licence, individuals and companies from Russia, Iran, North Korea and Cuba are not authorised to enter into contracts with Minerven. The Trump administration is seeking to counter China's dominance in critical minerals, some of which are abundant in Venezuela.

Mojtaba Khamenei: son and successor to Iran's supreme

World. (Agency)

Mojtaba Khamenei, the son of late Iranian supreme leader Ali Khamenei who has been appointed as the new head of the Islamic republic, is a discreet figure who offers continuity of his father's hardline leadership. The 56-year-old had no official post during his father's rule, but was speculated to be acting behind the scenes to pull strings at the heart of power in Iran.

He is regarded as close to conservatives, notably because of his ties with the powerful Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, which swiftly pledged allegiance to the new leader. The Islamic republic's third supreme leader also received endorsements from President Masoud Pezeshkian, the armed forces and the judiciary within hours of his appointment. Because of his discretion at official ceremonies and in the media, Khamenei's true influence has been the subject of intense speculation for years among the Iranian population as well as in diplomatic circles. He was named supreme

leader by Iran's top clerical body, the Assembly of Experts, in a statement published shortly after midnight on Monday (2030 GMT Sunday). Even though the Islamic revolution had put an end to a multi-century royal dynasty headed by the shah, the council opted for the kind of hereditary transition that Ali Khamenei had rejected on principle in 2024. Born on September 8, 1969 in the holy city of Mashhad in eastern Iran, Mojtaba Khamenei is the only one of the late supreme leader's six children to hold a public position.

Ayatollah Ali Khamenei was killed aged 86 during the first wave of US-Israeli air strikes on Tehran that triggered the war in the Middle East on February 28. Security force links Mojtaba Khamenei, a cleric who has a salt-and-pepper beard and the black turban of the "seyyed" -- descendants of the Prophet Mohammed -- is a veteran of the Iran-Iraq war in the 1980s. The United States imposed sanctions on him in 2019

during President Donald Trump's first term, saying Khamenei represented his father "despite never being elected or appointed to a government position aside from work in the office of his father".



Ali Khamenei had "delegated a part of his leadership responsibilities" to his son, "who worked closely" with Iranian security forces "to advance his father's destabilising regional ambitions and oppressive domestic objectives", the US Treasury said at the time. Opponents have accused the younger

Khamenei of playing a role in the violent crackdown that followed the re-election of ultra-conservative president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad in 2009, which triggered a vast protest movement. According to an investigation by the Bloomberg news organisation, which cited anonymous sources and Western intelligence agency reports, Mojtaba Khamenei has amassed wealth estimated at more than \$100 million. Money from oil sales had been channelled into investments in luxury British real estate, hotels in Europe and property in Dubai through shell companies in tax havens, according to the investigation. On the religious front, Mojtaba Khamenei studied theology in the holy city of Qom, south of Tehran, where he also taught. He had attained the rank of Hujjat al-Islam, but was presented as ayatollah -- a higher rank held by his father and by revolutionary leader Ruhollah Khomeini -- upon his appointment as supreme leader.

NEWS BOX

B Mallapuram residents to boycott polls over lack of roads

DHARMAPURI .(Agency)
Ward 15 residents of B Mallapuram panchayat in Pappireddipatti constituency put a banner outside their village, urging politicians not to enter their village and seek votes. Further, they also stated that they would be boycotting the upcoming election, as elected representatives have failed to provide roads to their village.

Residents of Majid Street in Ward 15 have a total of 1,200 people living in the area. For years, residents had sought the administration to improve roads in their area. However, as no efforts were taken, they put up a banner urging politicians not to come to their ward seeking votes. Further, they also said they would not participate in the election.

Speaking to , B Gnanasekar said, "Our roads are damaged, water supply is hit, and we have no drainage. We have been requesting all amenities to be brought to our village, especially proper roads. However, so far, none of our requests has been fulfilled. Therefore, we are boycotting the election." Another resident, J Sivakumar, said, "Most roads in our panchayat are damaged as the roads were laid here nearly a decade ago. There have been no efforts to undertake renovations. Roads are crucial for healthcare, education and even livelihood. When we are denied basic amenities, why should we vote?"

However, when reached out to officials in the revenue department, they said, There is a legal dispute against constructing roads, which has caused the delay. Until the matter is resolved, there is little we can do."

Mumbai: Labourer who killed man using iron hammer in 2020, sentenced to life

Mumbai. (Agency)
A sessions court convicted and sentenced a 45-year-old labourer to life imprisonment for the brutal 2020 murder of a man and the attempted murder of an eyewitness using an iron hammer. The court found the accused Subal Choudhary, also known as Bangali, guilty of killing Javed Siddiqui Shaikh and grievously injuring Ayaz Khan following a late-night altercation in a Kurla chawl.

The court also imposed a fine of Rs 10,000 on the accused, noting that the assault was carried out with clear lethal intent. The incident occurred in the early hours of Aug 19, 2020, at Indira Nagar. According to the prosecution, Khan heard a loud quarrel and discovered Choudhary and Shaikh engaged in a physical fight. When Khan attempted to intervene, Choudhary retrieved an iron hammer from beneath a kitchen platform and struck Shaikh repeatedly on the head. Khan was also attacked with the same weapon when he tried to stop the assault. While Khan managed to flee and seek help, Shaikh was later found unresponsive and succumbed to his injuries at Sion Hospital.

During the trial, the defence argued that Choudhary had acted to save himself, claiming that Shaikh and Khan had entered his home to commit theft and initiated the assault. However, the judge rejected this plea, noting the disproportionate nature of the violence. The court observed that the medical evidence, which detailed multiple fractures and crushed brain matter, was inconsistent with a claim of self-protection.

RRTS on track: Ahmedabad set for high-speed links to satellite towns

Gandhinagar. (Agency)
In a major push to upgrade urban transport infrastructure, the Gujarat govt has begun planning a Regional Rapid Transit System (RRTS) to link Ahmedabad with its fast-growing outgrowth areas. Similar RRTS networks are being conceptualized for Surat, Rajkot and Vadodara as the state prepares for the next phase of urban expansion.

Officials said Ahmedabad is likely to be connected to Sanand, Kalol, Mehsana and Dehgam under the proposed network. For Surat, the likely links include Navsari, Bardoli and Valsad, while Vadodara is expected to be connected with Anand, Nadiad and Dabhoi. Rajkot's network is expected to include Wankaner and Gondal.

The govt has allocated Rs 10 crore in the 2026-27 budget for technical studies and planning of the RRTS corridors. Ahmedabad will be treated as a high-priority urban region for feasibility assessments. Cept University is currently preparing an alternative analysis report to identify the most viable alignment and technology options. To guide the project, the state has roped in the National Capital Region Transport Corporation (NCRTC), which is implementing three RRTS corridors around Delhi — linking the national capital with Meerut, Sonipat and Alwar. NCRTC has been asked to prepare the master plan for Gujarat's RRTS network. Sources said that once the master plan is ready, the state govt will initiate the next round of approvals and preparatory work. "The aim is to begin physical work on connecting Ahmedabad's surrounding towns through the RRTS before the 2030 Commonwealth Games," a top govt source said.

Andhra rolls out digital permit system to check cattle transport abuse

Current transport certificates are time-bound but prone to manipulation, with instances of forgery and tampering in the number of animals and the purpose of transportation.

Vijayawada.(Agency)
In a major step to curb illegal cattle transportation and prevent cruelty to animals, the Animal Husbandry Department of Andhra Pradesh has introduced a Digital Transport Certificate Generation System, aimed at ensuring transparency and stricter monitoring of cattle movement across the State.

Animal transport has long been marred by violations, with cattle often crammed into lorries in large numbers, subjected to rough handling, and sometimes suffering injuries such as broken legs. As per the Transport of Animals Rules, 2001, a maximum of 12 cattle can be transported in a lorry, while the number may range from six to ten depending on the size of the vehicle. However, these norms are frequently ignored.

The rules also lay down several safeguards for animal welfare. Animals being transported must be healthy and free from infectious diseases, and those that are injured, diseased, blind, fatigued or newborn should not be



transported. Pregnant animals close to delivery and animals that have given birth within the preceding 72 hours are also barred from transport. The rules further specify that young animals should not be mixed with adult cattle and different classes of animals should not be transported together. Vehicles carrying animals must prominently display an 'Animal Carrier' board and ensure adequate space, fodder and water during the journey. Currently, transport permits are issued manually under Rule 96 of the Transport of Animals Rules by Assistant

Directors of the Animal Husbandry Department. These certificates are time-bound but prone to manipulation, with instances of forgery and tampering in the number of animals and the purpose of transportation. To address these issues, the department has launched a digital certification system that will issue transport permits online. Each certificate will carry a QR code, making it tamper-proof and eliminating the possibility of forgery. Transport of cattle will be allowed only after verification by concerned officials. The new digital certificate will include details such as the purpose of transportation whether for farming, draught work, milking, breeding or slaughter along with the vehicle registration number, origin and destination points, duration of transport, and the name and address of the driver. The certificate will also mention the consignor and consignee details, enabling authorities to verify the movement of cattle more effectively.

Wayanad township row: Mammooty called to clarify, says CPM district secretary Rafeek

According to Rafeek, his intervention at the site was purely out of concern that the crowd and commotion there could cause inconvenience to the actor.

KALPETTA . (Agency)
Responding to the controversy that arose during Mammooty's visit to the township built for survivors of the Mundakkai-Chooralmala landslide, CPM Wayanad district secretary K Rafeek said the actor called him personally to clarify the situation and stressed that there was no misunderstanding between them.

In a Facebook post, Rafeek explained that he happened to be present at the site in connection with another programme when Mammooty visited the township set up for victims of the devastating 2024 landslides. According to him, his intervention at the site was purely out of concern that the crowd and commotion there could cause inconvenience to the actor. "As a public representative, it is natural for us to receive guests visiting the township if we are present there," Rafeek said. He noted that Mammooty had expressed a concern that Rafeek's presence at the event could be



interpreted politically. Rafeek said he understood the actor's point that such interactions might be misread in a different context. Rafeek further revealed that Mammooty later called him directly over the phone and clarified the matter, reiterating that there was no issue between them. The CPM leader also alleged that certain media

outlets and cyber groups attempted to weaponise a private conversation to create controversy. According to him, this amplified the issue unnecessarily and gave it a political dimension.

The CPM leader said such controversies should not overshadow the significance of the township project, which was established as part of the government's rehabilitation efforts for victims of the devastating landslides. Rafeek wrote that Mammooty's visit to the township was a moment of happiness for everyone.

Minister Riyas defends CPM dist secy amid row over Mammooty's visit
Kozhikode: Kerala Tourism and PWD Minister P A Mohamed Riyas on Sunday defended the actions of CPM Wayanad district secretary K Rafeek amid the controversy surrounding actor Mammooty's recent visit to the township project built for survivors of the Mundakkai-Chooralmala landslide.

Stray dog crisis: Five mobile ABC units to be launched across Kerala

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM. (Agency)
Following the successful deployment of the state's first portable Animal Birth Control (ABC) unit at Nedumangad, the state government is set to expand the initiative across the state to control the stray dog population.

The animal husbandry department plans to roll out five additional portable ABC units within the next three months. An amount of Rs 2 crore has been earmarked for the project, with each unit estimated to cost around Rs 40 lakh. The Kerala State Nirmithi Kendra will be roped in for designing and implementing the project.

A senior official from the department said the proposal will be submitted for government approval on Wednesday. "Nirmithi Kendra has extensive experience in constructing

container-based modules, which are widely used by departments such as excise and animal husbandry at checkposts," the official said.

The first portable ABC unit, developed by Indian



Immunologicals Ltd (IIL) in collaboration with NGO CAWA, became operational in October last year. The unit is equipped with facilities for two simultaneous surgeries, a fully air-conditioned operation theatre, generator, refrigerator, and a Wi-Fi-enabled camera monitoring

system. At Nedumangad municipality, around 400 sterilisation surgeries have already been completed. Officials said several improvements have been proposed to enhance the design of future units. "This is the first initiative of its kind in the country, piloted in Kerala. Based on field experience, we have suggested modifications such as sliding doors, increased kennel height, and other refinements to make the units more efficient and animal-friendly," the official added.

As per the operational plan, each portable unit will be stationed in a local body for 45 days based on demand. Each dog will receive five days of post-operative care in accordance with the Animal Welfare Board of India (AWBI) norms. The sterilisation cost, estimated at Rs 2,100 per dog, will be covered by local bodies.

Mumbai: Engineering student arrested for cab driver's murder, claims "self-defence"

Thane .(Agency)
Thane Rural Crime Branch team have arrested a 21-year-old engineering student for the alleged murder of a cab driver whose body was found in a remote area of Ahilyanagar district after he had gone missing for four days. The accused, identified as Adarsh Chandrakant Bhalerao, was apprehended from Titwala following an investigation by the Thane Rural Crime Branch.

The deceased, Nasir Ahmed, a resident of Navi Mumbai, had been reported missing earlier this week. A complaint regarding his disappearance had been registered at Rabale Police Station.

According to police, Ahmed's body was discovered on Saturday in the jurisdiction of Otur Police Station near Malshej Ghat. His car was later found abandoned in a forested area at Govili village along the Kalyan-Murbad road under the limits of Kalyan Taluka Police Station. Police said the vehicle had several blood stains inside, indicating a violent assault.

Investigators said the accused,

originally from Ghansoli and currently residing in Titwala, is a second-year electrical engineering student.

On March 5, he had allegedly booked a cab through a ride-hailing app to travel to Junnar in Ahilyanagar district, from where he planned to



take a bus to Pune to meet a friend. Assistant police inspector Bhausaheb Gaikwad said that during questioning, the accused claimed that when the car reached near Otur, the driver allegedly threatened him with a knife and attempted to rob him. The accused told police that he attacked Ahmed in self-defence during the scuffle, and by mistake it led to the driver's death.

Rising to eco-challenge: Gir elevated rail, road links to steer clear of lions

Ahmedabad. (Agency)
The lions of Gujarat are shaping the state govt's policy to expand rail and road networks through ecologically sensitive areas. The steady rise of Asiatic lion deaths on railway tracks and the repeated sightings of the lions on highways have galvanized the Gujarat govt to propose elevated transportation corridors in and around Gir.

The proposal covers Greater Gir and other wildlife sanctuaries.

The state forest department is drafting its own Gujarat Forest Policy, which is being read as a significant shift in how the state expands transportation links through delicate, fauna-rich landscapes. The forest department



is pushing for infrastructure that allows animal movement beneath viaducts. Currently, the animals often move across open tracks and carriageways, officials said.

A P Singh, the head of the forest department and the principal chief conservator of forests, said, "There is a National Forest Policy, but the state, based on its own needs, is drafting its own policy."

Official sources said the Gujarat forest department is focusing on

wildlife conservation and management and is recommending strict limits on new linear infrastructure in key habitats.

The draft is likely to propose a fresh look at expanding road networks, converting rail gauges, and enhancing railway capacity. Some of these proposals are modelled on the mitigation measures adopted around Assam's Kaziranga National Park, where elevated stretches and wildlife-friendly design features were used to reduce animal-vehicle conflict. Senior Gujarat forest department officials said that the proposal is expected to cover eco-sensitive zones notified or earmarked around protected areas, not just the core sanctuary limits. The officials said the intent is to

ensure that new state highways, national highways, and railway lines do not create additional barriers to wildlife movement in corridors that connect Gir with surrounding forest patches and revenue lands used by lions.

The department previously took the position that railway expansion inside sanctuary limits should not be permitted unless the alignment is elevated.

With lion populations dispersing beyond Gir into the wider Saurashtra landscape, officials said the risk increased on existing transport corridors that cut across or skirt habitats and movement routes.

Data cited within the department points to recurring fatalities. In 2023 and 2024, officials recorded two lion deaths in road accidents and five deaths in train hits. Over

nearly a decade, the Gir region registered around 20 lion deaths linked to train and road accidents, according to figures referenced by officials familiar with the draft policy discussions.

The concern extends beyond lions: in the Velavadar region, blackbuck deaths linked to an existing highway were reported to be 15 in a year, highlighting the broader impact of high-speed traffic on wildlife. To strengthen its case, the forest department has cited examples from major protected areas including Jim Corbett, Sundarbans, Kaziranga and Kanha, arguing that new projects around wildlife habitats should incorporate elevation, underpasses, controlled access, speed management and other design interventions as standard conditions.

No substitute for AI power

When something scarce and consequential is at stake, watch who invokes the language of sharing. It is rarely the party that controls the asset. The one with the weak hand asks to "open the cards". The one holding leverage speaks instead of prudence, sequencing and risk. That simple asymmetry is the right way to read today's fashionable demand to 'democratise' access to artificial intelligence and its 'diffusion'. The claim is morally attractive, especially when framed for the Global South. But it is analytically incomplete. Asking for democratisation is not an alternative to building strategic capability. It is, at best, a complement to it. At worst, it is a substitute for hard choices that must be made at home.

AI is not a monolithic technology that can be diffused like a textbook. It is a layered production system with tight complementarities and real bottlenecks. At the frontier, it rests on advanced semiconductors, dense compute clusters, high-bandwidth interconnects, reliable energy, cooling systems, engineering depth, evaluation tooling, data pipelines and deployment infrastructure. High fixed costs, steep learning curves and scale effects create natural concentration. Marginal access to one layer without the others yields sharply diminishing returns.

This is why 'open-access' rhetoric sits uneasily with industrial reality. You may be offered model weights, developer tools or research collaborations. But the binding constraints remain compute, energy and the tacit know-how that converts prototypes into reliable systems. One is reminded of Michael Polanyi's words that we know more than we can say. Capability is embedded in routines, tooling and organisational learning. It cannot be transferred wholesale by declaration. Once AI becomes dual-use and general-purpose—embedded in defence analytics, cyber operations, surveillance, logistics optimisation and financial risk management—it moves from commerce to strategy. In such domains, export controls and technology-denial regimes are standard instruments of statecraft. The ability to deny access is itself a bargaining chip.

The best example would be nuclear technology. The nuclear age began with the language of peaceful diffusion. It consolidated into safeguards, export controls and a hierarchy of legitimacy. The universalist vocabulary was compatible with restrictive architecture because the technology altered the distribution of coercive capacity. AI is not nuclear in risk profile. But it is strategic in consequence. So who asks for democratisation? Typically those outside the frontier. Their argument draws on fairness and global public goods language. The claim is not frivolous. But justice claims do not change the incentive compatibility of the supply side. When the supplier internalises the benefits of control and can externalise many costs of exclusion, the equilibrium is conditional diffusion.

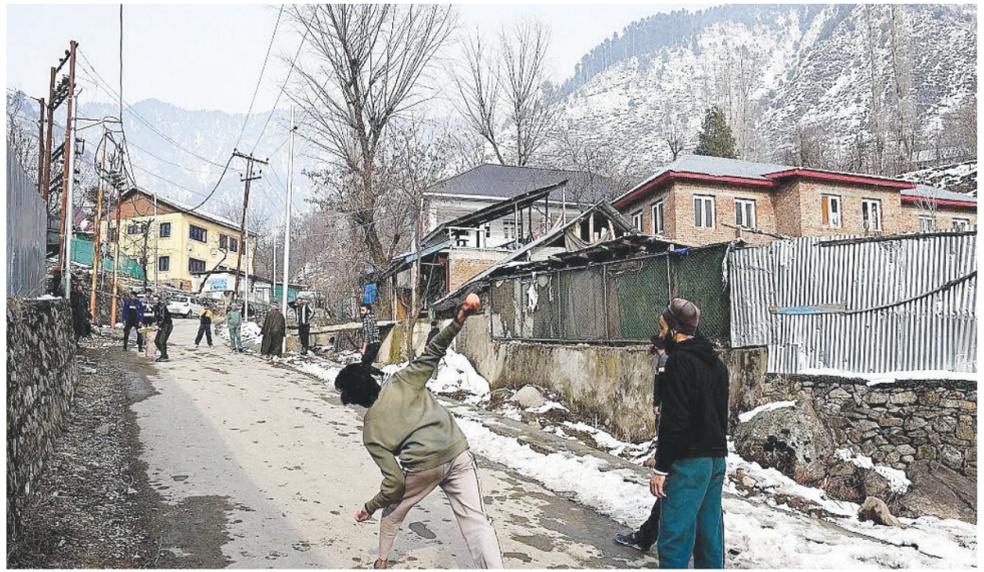
India is well aware of this. The latest Economic Survey's chapter on moving from import substitution to strategic resilience and then to strategic indispensability captures the hierarchy correctly. Growth must build durable, productive capability and reduce external vulnerability. Resilience is necessary. Translate that frame to AI and the implications are immediate. If the 21st century runs on 'compute' and the minerals and energy that feed it, then AI capability is inseparable from energy policy, grid stability, logistics and regulatory credibility. Data centres are energy-intensive physical infrastructure, not abstract digital assets. Frontier model development requires capital depth, risk tolerance and outcome-oriented institutions. Without a domestically built stack, democratisation remains rhetorical. The Survey's tiered approach to indigenisation offers a disciplined template. First, identify non-negotiable vulnerabilities where denial would impose asymmetric national costs. In AI terms, that means assured compute capacity for critical missions, secure cloud and edge infrastructure for core sectors.

Cricket crosses its boundaries

The T20 World Cup and Ranji tournament show that cricket is no longer the preserve of global or regional elites. Spirited performances by the likes of Nepal and Afghanistan on one playing field, and by Jammu & Kashmir on the other underlined the transformation of the sport

What a journey it has been for cricket, I told myself last week as two headlines hit the screens: the men's T20 World Cup tournament getting into gear and Jammu & Kashmir winning the Ranji Trophy for the first time. Though the two fields were far apart, they both amplified a new face of the game—one playing across the world and the other at home. Reverse Swing, this column's title, derives its name from a particular form of pace bowling unheard of until the 1970s, when Pakistani fast bowlers perfected the technique to move an old cricket ball towards the rougher side more than the usual shinier one. It's a metaphor for many things including the journey of cricket itself. As surprises and near-upsets at the World Cup showed, with Australia not even entering the semi-finals, cricket retains its old descriptor as a game of glorious uncertainties. But much else has changed. The game once famous for five-day Tests in which patient bowling and safe batting were de rigueur has now given way to three-hour T20 games that abound in risky hits out of the park. In the 1960s and 70s, a few elderly Indians tut-tutted over five-day matches as a waste of time, pointing to Japan, the era's emerging economy that did not indulge in such leisure. The rise of one-day games in the 1970s—initially of 60 overs for each side—with the arrival of the World Cup changed that. The eventual adoption of the T20 format put cricketing bouts closer to football matches in duration. There was a time when batters, in the best spirit of the gentleman's game, would 'walk' without waiting for the umpire's decision because they knew in their conscience that they were out. Or they simply obeyed a decision even if that appeared wrong because 'the umpire is always right'. Look how technology has changed that! In the India vs South Africa game at the T20 World Cup, the ground umpire asked for the third umpire's technology-aided review to rule a batsman out even though the fielding team had not appealed. Technology has changed much—from enabling day-night matches, to shorter formats suited for TV audiences, to software apps that analyse and display strokes and deliveries in every conceivable manner. White flannels were replaced by colourful uniforms once disparaged as 'pajama' outfits. Perhaps the most tectonic shift has been the game's pivot from England-Australia prominence to the subcontinent, especially India, as money followed eyeballs and South Asian nations started beating the rest of the world and entrepreneurial zeal took the sport to new corners of the subcontinent.

Administrators Jagmohan Dalmiya and Inderjit Singh Bindra dramatically changed the sport's fortunes and focus. Bindra built the Mohali stadium in Chandigarh, while Dalmiya, who honed his sports administration



skills at the Eden Gardens, grew the International Cricket Council's coffers by about 14 times during his three-year tenure as the first Asian and first non-cricketer to head the sport's global governing body in the late 1990s. Under Asian stewardship, cricket reached new shores far beyond its English routes, justifying sociologist Ashis Nandy's quip: "Cricket is an Indian game accidentally discovered by the British."

The ongoing World Cup shows that cricket is no longer just a sport of former British colonies. Italy, Nepal, Oman, the Netherlands and the United Arab Emirates were among the 20 teams in the fray. More importantly, the Dutch, Afghan and American cricketers displayed talent and spirit that placed them in the sport's mainstream. I recall a lazy morning at Mumbai's Brabourne Stadium talking to commentary veteran AFS 'Bobby' Talyarkhan, who remarked that cricket was supposed to be a game of the maiden, to be enjoyed in a leisurely manner. Well, there is nothing really laid-back about it now with its mix of cheerleaders, in-stadium music, booking announcements and frenetic camerawork. In a way, T20 is nothing but a remix of baseball that owes its origin to cricket, though crafted circa 2003 in England. It may be less known that cricket was once popular in the US—for about a century since

its independence, a preference that changed only after the Civil War of the 1860s. Baseball, codified in 1845, was derived from an early form of cricket called rounders.

In India, British colonial rulers applied their divide-and-rule policy to cricket as well. The Bombay Pentangular tournament played from 1892 to 1946 featured teams called Europeans, Parsees, Hindus, Muslims and 'The Rest'. However, in independent India, cricket has emerged as a unifier in which every region aspires to win domestic tournaments and players of modest backgrounds rise to prominence through excellence in the sport. Writer Anil Saari described cricket as India's 'fifth estate' and cinema as 'the sixth' in a reflection of how they wielded influence on the country's social ladder. The Ranji victory of Jammu & Kashmir, long wracked by separatism and social alienation, is thus a cultural milestone too. J&K won the trophy 44 years after winning its first match and 67 years after it entered the championship. The last international match was played in Kashmir in 1986, after which political turmoil blocked fixtures. Hopefully, the Ranji triumph will change the region's fortunes.

It could be said that both cricket and the railways have strengthened India's economy and social fabric, though not in ways the British would have intended.

Rising temperatures: The new normal calls for better preparedness

The Tribune Editorial: High temperatures in the first week of March are a warning sign of what lies ahead

WARMER, shorter winters followed by an abrupt spike in temperatures mark a distinct shift in weather patterns. The disappearing spring and onset of an early summer are being attributed to regional atmospheric changes and long-term climate change. The impact of such climate variability on life and livelihood is a subject of intense discussion. The economic consequences are being viewed with much concern in the farming sector across North India. In Himachal Pradesh's apple orchards, declining chilling hours are disrupting the delicate biological cycle of fruit crops. Substantial yield losses are expected along with a decline in quality. Adaptive measures include a shift to climate-resilient horticulture practices, and even moving the apple belt to higher elevations in the long run. Drought-tolerant crops, water-use efficiency and alternative crops can no longer be seen as



options. A clear strategy is required. High temperatures in the first week of March are a warning sign of what lies

ahead. Studies say the number of heatwave days in India has more than doubled since 1980. An escalating heat stress — fuelled as much by rapid urbanisation, dense construction and the loss of green spaces — calls for urgent plans to cater to the impending water and energy crises. The new normal of an accelerated transformation from winter to summer requires a fresh citizens' charter of responsibilities and duties. Equally critical is a blueprint on the preparedness of governments. Only a participatory approach on mitigation strategies for climate change can work.

Extreme weather can be overwhelming and there is a high probability of contingency plans falling short. That should propel better strategies — narrowing the gap between the projected electricity demand and supply, timely health advisories, tips to lessen the effect, and most important, a crackdown on power and water wastage.

Iran puts up brave front against US-Israel strikes

Geography, economics and human connections bind India to West Asia

With the US-Israel-Iran conflict continuing relentlessly into the second week, The Tribune Edit—Op-Ed articles vividly deconstruct the ifs and buts, why and who of the war. Former diplomats and ambassadors who have worked closely in West Asia and veteran journalists bring out a clear picture of what the war entails and discuss India's response threadbare amidst the simmering tensions. Caught off guard by Op Midnight Hammer last year, Tehran is on a stronger footing this time to face Op Epic fury, writes former Ambassador to Iran Gaddam Dharmendra in his Edit piece Iran is prepared for the long haul. Iran's resilience and counter-strike capabilities are dragging the US into one of its most consequential conflicts in decades. It's possible that things may not have deteriorated this rapidly had airstrikes not targeted 86-year-old Khamenei. The adverse downstream consequences of the US-Israeli actions are stacking up multidimensionally, he adds. Meanwhile, in Trump's topsy-turvy Washington DC, there is a dense fog over the objectives of the attacks on Iran, writes former Ambassador to Egypt and UAE Navdeep Suri in his Edit piece Op Epic Fury: The inmates are running the asylum. The real problem for Trump was the regime itself, but regime change has consequences, he asserts. For the Iranians, hating the theocratic regime doesn't mean embracing the US and Israel. Iran's own response to the bombings appears to have caught the US by surprise. Tehran clearly hopes that its attacks will force the rulers of Qatar, UAE and Saudi Arabia to use their special relationship with Trump and bring the war to an early halt. The US assumption, based on Israeli arguments, that the assassination of Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei would make the Iranian regime collapse is probably mistaken, writes ex-Ambassador to UAE and Iran KC Singh in his Edit article Iran regime change may

elude Trump. A prompt ceasefire is unlikely; unless the Iranian regime gets replaced by a pro-West government, stability may not return to the Gulf anytime soon, he writes. Iran would want to be seen extracting revenge from Israel and the US, he opines. Plus, Prime Minister Narendra Modi's unwillingness to criticise Israel during his recent visit, just 48 hours before US-led air strikes on Iran, has robbed India of its neutrality.

The Israeli foreign minister told the media a few days back that Modi was not aware when the Israelis-US were going to bomb Iran. That leaves us with two kinds of reactions to the Israeli admission. First, what kind of friend are the Israelis not to tell their best friend, India, about their best-laid plans? Two, one should thank God the Israelis didn't tell the PM about their bombing of Iran when he was in Tel Aviv — Modi must finally understand how best friends hold their cards close to their chest and not tell. PM Modi must know that India is not part of the Israel-US sanctum sanctorum, writes Editor-in-Chief Jyoti Malhotra in the article A peculiar silence in the heart of Delhi in her weekly column The Great Game. India should not be in faux alignment with powers that bomb girls' schools in Iran, she adds. Atmanirbharta means choosing wisely, to act in the national interest by both doing or not doing, she opines, and this atmanirbharta, non-alignment, can be India's only compass to lead us in the right direction. Meanwhile, the Opposition is characterising Modi government's muted response to the air strikes as unprincipled. On the contrary, India's silence should be seen as a sign of maturity, not abdication or cowardice as Sonia Gandhi has chosen to

view it, writes senior journalist R Jagannathan in his Op-Ed piece Modi's muted response to Iran strikes is not unprincipled.

The task before India is to shield its core interests of energy,



security, trade flows and the welfare of the diaspora, while contributing, wherever possible, to stability and dialogue, writes ex-Ambassador to Oman Anil Wadhwa in his article India needs to shield its core interests.

The conflict has become a testing ground — for new weapons, for recycled designs and for the doctrines that will shape future battlefields, writes our London Correspondent Shyam Bhatia in his Op-Ed article Iran

testing ground for new weapons. One of the clearest examples is the first confirmed combat use of a US one-way attack drone LUCAS, whose architecture mirrors Iran's Shahed 136. Earlier, after Iran captured a US RQ-170 Sentinel surveillance drone in 2011, Tehran claimed it had reverse-engineered aspects of the aircraft to inform its own unmanned systems. The circle appears to have turned again, with Washington deploying a drone modelled on Iranian architecture against Iranian targets, he writes. For India, this conflict is not a distant theatre. It is a live case study. The broader lesson is industrial as much as tactical. What distinguishes this conflict is the speed of adaptation. The balance between cost, scale and survivability is being recalibrated in real time. Geography, economics and human connections bind India to the Gulf and West Asia in ways that cannot be wished away, writes Bhatia. Back home, speaking at the first Dr Manmohan Singh Memorial Lecture, former German Chancellor Angela Merkel said what impressed me about Dr Singh (when they first met in April 2006) was his alert and curious gaze, which radiated experience and openness in equal measure. To me, he radiated a natural authority that did not, however, act intimidatingly but rather gave me courage — the courage to ask questions and courage to conduct open conversations. We can no longer simply view democratic orders as unshakably given. If we want to continue living in democracies, we must actively stand up for them. The excerpts of her speech appeared in our Op-Ed column Manmohan Singh gave me the courage to ask questions.

Rs 94 lakh awarded to advocate left fully disabled in 2019 road crash in Maharashtra

Thane.(Agency)

The Motor Accident Claims Tribunal (MACT) in Thane awarded compensation of Rs 94.2 lakh to a 44-year-old woman advocate who suffered 100% functional disability following a road accident beneath Cadbury Junction bridge in 2019.

The tribunal held the driver of the offending car solely responsible for the crash and directed the vehicle owner and insurer to pay the compensation jointly and severally, along with 9% annual interest from the date of filing of the petition until realisation. According to the order, the accident occurred on July 26, 2019, around 4.30 pm, when the claimant was riding her scooter on the Nashik-Mumbai Highway. A car allegedly approached from behind at high speed and rammed into her vehicle, dragging her several feet before she hit the cement barrier of the bridge. She sustained multiple grievous injuries, including spinal fractures, resulting in traumatic paraplegia.

Medical records and disability certificates placed before the tribunal confirmed 100% permanent disability related to bowel and bladder functions. The court observed that the claimant is bedridden and requires attendants for daily activities.

CA Inter results out: 7 from Ahmedabad among India Top 50

Ahmedabad.(Agency)

Seven candidates from Ahmedabad have made it to the Top 50 rank of the chartered accountant (CA) Intermediate course exams, results of which were announced on Sunday. The exams were conducted in Jan. Office-bearers of the Institute of Chartered Accountants of India's (ICAI) Ahmedabad chapter on Sunday said that the centre's overall result was 13.19%, with 189 out of 1,433 candidates from both groups passing the



exam. The success ratio was 16.54% for Group 1 and 20.83% for Group 2. Among the toppers from Ahmedabad, Barun Agrawal got all-India rank (AIR) 17, followed by Gaurav Prajapati (AIR 29), Karan Harwani (AIR 34), Neha Gupta (AIR 42), Kanishka Shah and Rishabh Mehta (both with AIR 46), and Vaibhav Sakhavala (AIR 50).

In an interaction with the media, the toppers said that they devotedly put the planned hours into their preparation. They have now set their sights on the Finals. Nationwide, the overall passing percentage for both groups was 9.39%, whereas the percentages for Group 1 and Group 2 were 13.96% and 15.54% respectively.

The tigress the wild failed to reclaim—Mangala's six-year journey in captivity

Idukki.(Agency)

In the wild, a cub tiger that cannot keep pace rarely survives. When Mangala was found abandoned as a two-month-old inside Periyar Tiger Reserve (PTR) in 2020, her poor vision and paralysed hind leg had already placed her at a disadvantage. What followed was a rare case of prolonged human intervention: years of treatment, rehabilitation and attempts to prepare her for a life the forest could not offer. The cub was first spotted on the premises of Mangala Devi temple—which lent her its name—by forest watcher Viswan. Initially, forest staff hoped her mother would return. It did not happen. Within two days, the cub had grown weak. "It was shifted to the rescue centre in the reserve and given immediate care," said Anuraj, former assistant forest veterinary officer at PTR.

There, Mangala was administered medication and rehabilitation for her injured leg. "With regular treatment, the leg improved over time," he said. Her eyesight, however, remained a concern. Doctors diagnosed cataract along with corneal opacity. Instead of opting for immediate surgery, a panel of experts decided to attempt treatment first. It started showing results. At the same time, officials attempted to prepare the cub for a possible return to the wild by minimising human interaction and encouraging natural hunting behaviour.

"The cub was provided bait such as rabbits. It was interesting to watch her instinctively knock down the prey and go for the throat—typical hunting behaviour in tigers," Anuraj recalled. Despite the improvements, later medical examinations concluded that Mangala's vision could never be fully restored. Releasing her into the forest could make her vulnerable to attacks. Surgery was found impractical due to the challenges of transporting the animal for treatment, post-operative care issues and the limitations artificial lenses could pose for a predator that relies on sharp vision to hunt.

BMC approves empanelment of geotechnical experts to scrutinise foundations of high-rise buildings in Mumbai

Mumbai. (Agency)

In a first for an urban local body in Asia, the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) in January approved through its high-rise committee (HRC) for empanelment of geotechnical/foundation experts to scrutinise as independent signatory for the foundations of high-rise buildings and ensure that excavation and construction practices meet stringent safety standards. The new norm states that buildings taller than 180m will have to obtain a mandatory clearance from HRC before key stages of construction can proceed.

The move comes as Mumbai's skyline grows increasingly vertical, with a rising number of super-tall towers being planned on tightly packed urban plots that require deep excavations and complex foundation systems. Palais Royale in Worli is Mumbai's tallest under-construction building at 320m. Lokhandwala Minerva, Piramal Aranya Arav, Lodha World One, and others shape Mumbai's skyline, with many other proposals in queue. "This is a big step in ensuring the safety of building foundations. Our high-rise committee examines whether the foundation design is appropriate for the soil/rock

conditions, whether excavation is being carried out safely, and whether adequate safeguards are in place to prevent damage to nearby buildings and underground utilities," said IIT-Bombay's civil engineering department Deepankar Choudhury, who is a member of BMC's HRC and

Until now, these aspects were largely reviewed and signed by structural engineers appointed by developers as part of the building approval process. However, a series of structural failures of foundations or shorings in recent years that pointed to lapses in foundation quality prompted the BMC to consider specialised oversight from geotechnical consultants as independent signatory taking responsibility of foundation/geotechnical design.

Choudhury said the committee to empanel geotechnical consultants will include independent senior geotechnical engineers from academia and industry with aligned technical specialisation who will provide the much-needed an additional layer of scrutiny before work proceeds on projects involving deep foundations. "With dense construction often taking place only metres away from existing buildings, excavation can pose significant risks if not carefully monitored," he added. By bringing in independent expert geotechnical/foundation review at the municipal level, the BMC hopes to reduce such risks and ensure that foundation construction for super-tall buildings follows the highest engineering standards.



a geotechnical/foundation expert. "This includes reviewing soil/rock investigation reports, shoring systems, and other measures deployed during deep digging for basements and foundations."

West Asia war triggers slump in Kadapa banana prices

KADAPA.(Agency)

Banana prices have started declining again in the wake of conflict in West Asia, leaving farmers in the district worried about further losses. Banana prices are fluctuating widely in recent years due to factors such as excessive rainfall, drought and the influence of middlemen. After witnessing a sharp fall a few months ago, prices began to rise from January and February this year, bringing some relief to farmers.

However, prices have started falling once again, reportedly due to concerns over the ongoing tensions in West Asia. According to e-crop data, banana cultivation in the district covers about 13,820 hectares.

The largest area is in Lingala with

5,350 hectares, followed by Pulivendula with 1,660 hectares, Vemula with 1,287 hectares, Simhadripuram with 1,256 hectares and Kasinayana with 1,237 hectares.

Other areas include Mydukur with 849 hectares, Kondapuram with 718 hectares, Vontimitta with 171 hectares, Tondur and CK Dinne with 169 hectares each, Pendlimarri with 153 hectares, B Mattam with 140 hectares, VN Palle with 114 hectares and Muddanur with 83 hectares.

Banana cultivation is also carried out on smaller areas in Khajipet, Siddavatam, Duvvur, Porumamilla, Kalasapadu, Yerraguntla, Atlur, Gopavaram, Chapadu and Vallur. Farmers spend nearly Rs 1.5 lakh to cultivate banana crop on one



acre on an average. If the crop rises well, yields range between 15 and 20 tonnes per acre. Banana cultivation continues throughout the year, though many farmers plan harvesting during February, March and April when prices are usually higher. Bananas grown in Pulivendula region are supplied to markets in Kolkata, Delhi, Srinagar, Haryana, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh, besides being

exported to the Gulf nations. Depending on the harvest and labour availability for cutting the crop, about 10 to 16 truckloads of bananas are transported daily. Each truck carries around 20-25 tonnes. The produce is first sent by truck to Tadipatri railway station in neighbouring Anantapur district, from where it is transported to Mumbai and then shipped to the Gulf countries. Supplies are also sent to other States. Farmers say bananas grown in Pulivendula differ from those cultivated elsewhere. Bananas from the region stay fresh for 12 to 14 days, unlike other places, where they stay fresh for 8 to 10 days only. However, farmers allege that traders are using the West Asia war fears to artificially,

Season's first heatwave is here; Yellow Alert issued for Ahmedabad

Ahmedabad.(Agency)

If you have been feeling that the past few days have been a bit too hot for early March, the sun plans to crank up its heat even more in what the weather office is calling the season's first yellow alert. The India Meteorological Department



(IMD) has forecast 'sporadic heatwave impact' in Ahmedabad and several other districts for Monday and Tuesday. A yellow alert was issued for Kutch and Rajkot on Sunday.

This alert for Monday and Tuesday covers Kutch, Banaskantha, Gandhinagar, Ahmedabad,

Surendranagar, Rajkot, Amerli, Bhavnagar, Botad, Vadodara, and Surat. These districts may experience temperatures above normal, with hot and humid conditions forecast for coastal areas. Temperatures are likely to stabilize from March 11 onwards, according to IMD.

On Sunday, Ahmedabad recorded a maximum temperature of 39.4 degrees celsius, which was 5.2 degrees above normal. At 19.1 degrees celsius, the minimum temperature was 1.2 degrees higher than normal. The forecast indicated a gradual rise in maximum and minimum temperatures by two to three degrees during the next three days. Thereafter, there will be no large change.

In Rajkot and Surendranagar, the mercury touched 40 degrees celsius on Sunday for the first time this summer. Following closely was Mahua (39.8 degrees) and Deesa (39.6). IMD's long-range forecast for March indicates chances of above-normal temperatures for the majority of regions of Gujarat state.

Kerala eyes Maharashtra firm tie-up for own antivenom

Thiruvananthapuram.(Agency)

Moving ahead with its plan to tackle cases of snakebites, which claimed 18 lives in 2025-26 and remain a major public health issue, the state government is exploring a partnership with Bharat Serums and Vaccines Ltd (BSV), a Mumbai-based biopharmaceutical firm, to develop polyvalent anti-snake venom (ASV) tailored to species found in Kerala. Under it, BSV would help establish a venom collection centre at the Thrissur Zoological Park in Puthur and provide technical expertise in venom extraction, storage and transportation.

The initiative is part of the government's push to create indigenous ASV, which experts believe will be more effective against snakes found in Kerala. At present, the antivenom supplied from Tamil Nadu and Karnataka is not fully

effective here due to geographical and climatic variations.

"In our preliminary discussions, BSV expressed interest in using venom collected here to prepare antivenom specifically for Kerala," said assistant conservator of forest Y Muhammad



Anwar.

Kerala reports up to 45,000 cases of snakebites a year, with about 30% of them involving venomous snakes. Of these, roughly 335 cases are attributed to hump-nosed pit viper bites, which are difficult to treat as existing antivenom remains ineffective even at high doses.

Tamil Nadu plans standardised framework to measure climate benefits of urban forestry

Chennai. (Agency)

Tamil Nadu's expanding urban forestry initiatives may soon have a standardised system to measure their climate benefits, with a new roadmap proposing a methodology to quantify how tree planting helps mitigate climate change and strengthen urban resilience. The roadmap, prepared under the Indo-German Support Project for Climate Action in India, outlines a framework to assess the "climate co-benefits" of urban forestry programmes in the state. These include carbon sequestration, urban cooling, groundwater recharge, flood mitigation and biodiversity enhancement.

Urban forestry initiatives are primarily aimed at improving green cover and biodiversity, but they also deliver significant climate mitigation and adaptation benefits. However, these impacts have rarely

been measured systematically, limiting their use in policy planning and climate reporting, the document notes.

In Anwardeen, principal chief conservator of forests and chief mission director of Green Tamil Nadu Mission, told that 14.16 crore seedlings were planted across the state between 2022-23 and 2025-26, covering a potential area of 1.28 lakh hectares. "Rough estimates show that 2-3 lakh tonnes of carbon dioxide are sequestered every year. We do not yet have specific data on the extent of urban plantations, but efforts are under way to segregate the data. Conservative estimates suggest around 25 lakh seedlings have been planted in urban areas so far, and another seven lakh are



proposed this year. The primary challenge is the availability of land and subsequent maintenance," he said.

The proposed methodology focuses on estimating both mitigation and adaptation benefits of urban forestry. For mitigation, it calculates carbon dioxide removal through biomass accumulation in trees, using field measurements such as diameter at breast height or default sequestration factors

depending on data availability. For adaptation, four key indicators have been identified: reduction in the urban heat island effect, improvement in groundwater recharge, enhanced flood and stormwater management, and increased biodiversity. Trees can reduce urban temperatures through shading and evapotranspiration, while vegetation also improves infiltration and reduces runoff during heavy rainfall.

The roadmap also identifies several challenges in implementing such monitoring systems. These include limited awareness of climate co-benefits among field staff, lack of baseline data, inadequate training in monitoring methods, and limited use of tools such as remote sensing and environmental sensors. More than 25 organisations were

consulted during the development of the methodology.

The roadmap proposes phased implementation through policy advisories, pilot projects, capacity-building programmes, and integration of climate co-benefit monitoring into existing urban forestry schemes.

Additional chief secretary Supriya Sahu said such assessments could eventually support climate reporting under India's Nationally Determined Contributions and help attract funding through government schemes, CSR initiatives and carbon markets. "By institutionalising the methodology across programmes and agencies, the framework aims to ensure that the climate benefits of urban tree planting are systematically measured, reported and incorporated into planning and investment decisions," she said.

Does India have low-cost killer kamikaze drones like Iran's Shahed?

New Delhi.(Agency)

In Iran's war with the US and Israel, low-cost drones have given Tehran unprecedented leverage. Iran's Shahed-136 drone has been the inspiration for indigenous models, costing between \$20,000 and \$50,000 per unit. In fact, the US's Low-cost Uncrewed Combat Attack System, aka LUCAS drone, is based on the same design as Shahed. India, too, is ramping up its firepower capability with indigenous long-range strike drones. Before proving its mettle in the current war, Iran's Shahed-136 drone made its mark in the Russia-Ukraine conflict, forcing Kyiv to spend millions in intercepting them. That Iran, a country without an effective air force, could hit deep inside countries, reveals the power of its drones and missiles. The US's low-cost LUCAS drones look very similar to Iran's Shahed-136. Before the Ukraine-Russia war, it was the conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan over Nagorno-

Karabakh that showed how drones and loitering munitions could tilt the balance of military power. Azerbaijan won the war and its extensive use of drones, especially those from Israel and Turkey, is credited for its victory. The newer dimension to this is low-cost drones that push the enemy into a financial and material attrition. For example, the Shahed-136 kamikaze drones cost anywhere between \$20,000 to \$50,000 each. But the US and Israel are spending millions on intercepting them. Each Patriot missile costs \$4 million, while some interceptors could cost up to \$12 million. Therefore, low-cost drones and interceptors have become vital in modern warfare. India has two low-cost long-range striking drone projects. While the Sheshnag-150 is being developed by Bengaluru-based startup NewSpace Research and Technologies (NRT), the second is Project KAL, by

Noida-based IG Defence. The two would give the Indian armed forces a cost-effective edge to carry out precision attacks. India has several indigenous drones already in operation or inducted with its armed forces. While major high-end platforms like Medium Altitude Long Endurance (MALE), and High Altitude Long Endurance (HALE) UAVs are in trials or development, smaller tactical, surveillance, swarm, and combat drones from Indian private firms and DRDO have been delivered, inducted, and used operationally, including in exercises and real scenarios. **WHAT ARE INDIA'S SESHNAG AND PROJECT KAL STRIKE DRONES?** India's armed forces have inducted several indigenous attack drones, primarily loitering munitions, for precision strikes. One such indigenous drone is the Nagastra-1 from



Solar Industries, inducted since 2024 with batches delivered. These one-way systems enable infantry-level precision attacks with minimal collateral damage. The SkyStriker 'suicide drones', developed by Bengaluru-based Alpha Design (ADTL) in collaboration with Israel's Elbit Systems, also made their operational debut during Operation Sindoor in the forward areas of Jammu and Kashmir. However, low-cost Shahed-type drones are

now being developed in India. Project KAL, is reportedly in its early stages, and is designed as a deep-penetration strike drone with a range of up to 1,000 km and an endurance of three to five hours. It can fly into enemy territory, spot targets, adjust its path, and deliver a high-explosive payload. Meanwhile, the Sheshnag-150, named after the mythological multi-headed serpent king, is a long-range swarming attack drone, with autonomous systems capable of deep strikes and saturation attacks. Weighing about 150 kg, Sheshnag also boasts a 1,000-1,200 km range, and can 25-40 kg payload, and over five hours of flight time. What sets it apart is its AI-powered swarm tech — multiple drones can team up autonomously to evade defences and hit targets together. Sheshnag-150 first flew in February 2025, and the project gained urgency after Operation Sindoor last year.

Akasa Air passenger smokes beedi inside washroom on Delhi-Goa flight

New Delhi.(Agency)

A passenger on board a Delhi-Goa Akasa Air flight was handed over to authorities after he was caught allegedly smoking a beedi (hand-rolled cigarette) inside the plane washroom, officials said on Sunday. According to a police official, the incident took place on Saturday on flight QP1625 travelling from Delhi to Goa. The accused, identified as Ashish, a resident of Delhi, allegedly smoked



inside the aircraft's washroom during the journey, the official said. The airline, in its complaint, said that the passenger was found carrying a lighter, which could pose a potential safety risk to the aircraft and those on board. Police said the act endangered the safety of fellow passengers and crew members during the flight. Akasa Air said its crew followed the required safety protocols after the passenger was found smoking during the flight and handed him over to authorities upon arrival in Goa. A case was registered against the accused at the Mopa airport police station under relevant provisions of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita and the Suppression of Unlawful Acts against Safety of Civil Aviation Act. Akasa Air said it was extending full cooperation to the authorities in the matter. Further investigation into the matter is underway.

Domestic laws insufficient in cross-border matrimonial disputes: Delhi HC Chief Justice Devendra Upadhyaya

New Delhi.(Agency)

Delhi HC Chief Justice Devendra Kumar Upadhyaya on Sunday said domestic laws in India are often insufficient to deal with cross-border matrimonial disputes, particularly those involving child custody, and emphasised that justice in such matters cannot always be delivered by strictly adhering to statutory provisions. Justice Upadhyaya made the remarks while delivering the keynote address on the second day of India International Disputes Week 2026 in Chandigarh. He underlined that the search for justice does not always end within the four corners of law and that courts often have to adopt a broader and more sensitive approach in resolving complex family disputes. Commenting on cross-border matrimonial disputes, especially cases involving the custody of children, the Chief Justice pointed out that India is still not a signatory to certain international treaties that could help resolve such conflicts.

"Despite a recommendation made by the Law Commission of India, we are yet not signatories of certain international treaties. There is a growing urge and demand from all parties for India to be signatory of the international conventions," he said. Justice Upadhyaya added that in the absence of such a system, domestic courts face considerable difficulty in dealing with cases involving parents residing in different countries. "In case of a parent seeking custody of a child, where will he bring the lawsuit? Where will he initiate the legal action, and whether or not any legal verdict given by a court here in India or abroad will be respected by the other countries. These are some of the difficult problems which we are facing now," he said. He noted that constitutional courts in India, including the Supreme Court and the High Courts, have evolved certain case laws to deal with such issues in the absence of international treaties. Justice Upadhyaya further stressed that lawyers representing the parties as well as judges must adopt a sensitive approach in matrimonial and child custody disputes. "It's more of a social problem than a legal one," he said, adding that both lawyers and judges sometimes have to think "out of the box" to ensure justice is done in such sensitive cases.

Shakun Group MD Dies As BMW Crashes On Delhi-Mumbai Expressway

New Delhi.(Agency)

Vallabh Maheshwari, the Managing Director (MD) of Shakun Group, died after his BMW car lost control and overturned on the Delhi-Mumbai expressway near Rajasthan's Alwar on Sunday.

Maheshwari was travelling from Jaipur to Mathura when the incident took place. According to the police, Maheshwari's driver was behind the wheel. He lost control of the car, broke through roadside barricades, and crashed into the median before hitting the wall of a culvert.

The collision of the crash was so strong that it left the luxury car completely mangled. The 62-year-old Jaipur-based businessman and his driver were rushed to a nearby hospital, where



doctors declared Maheshwari dead. His driver, however, escaped unhurt. Maheshwari's body has been sent for post-mortem to Jaipur. Initial investigation suggests that the

car's speed or a technical fault may have caused the accident. Maheshwari has served as a director in several branches of the Shakun Group. The group, founded in early 2000, works for setting up the relevant industry, and then the processing of the resource. They also transport and deliver the final product to end-users.

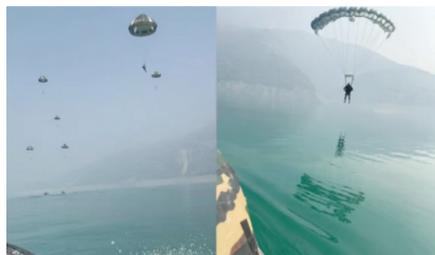
Former Rajasthan Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot expressed grief over the businessman's death. "The news of the demise of industrialist Vallabh Maheshwari in a tragic road accident that occurred on the expressway in the Reni police station area of Alwar is extremely heartbreaking. I pray to God to grant peace to the departed soul and strength to the bereaved family to bear this sorrow. Om Shanti," he wrote in a post on X.

Air Force, Army's Joint Para-Drop Exercises Over Uttarakhand Lake

New Delhi.(Agency)

The Indian Air Force carried out joint exercises with the Indian Army on March 8, showcasing its operational capabilities at Tehri Lake in Uttarakhand. Photos and videos from the exercise were shared by the Indian Air Force's official handle on X, showing the troops conducting paratroop exercises above the pristine lake.

The post also included a clip of the soldiers jumping off a plane mid-air, deploying their parachutes moments later. "On 08 Mar 26, IAF aircraft carried out Combat Free-Fall and Static Line paratroops over Tehri Lake, in a joint exercise with Indian Army.



The exercise showcased seamless inter-service synergy and operational capability," the post read. This was not the first time the Indian Army and Indian Air Force conducted such joint exercises. In 2024, they successfully paratrooped a homegrown portable hospital, the Aarogya Maitri Health Cube, from 15,000 feet. Known as "the world's

first portable hospital", these units were developed under the Bharat Health Initiative for Sahyog Hita and Maitri (Project BHISHM) to set up trauma care facilities in the field, saving lives even in the most remote regions. The Ministry of Defence stated that the operation was conducted in line with Prime Minister Narendra Modi's vision of providing critical supplies to affected areas as part of disaster relief and humanitarian aid. The Indian Army's Para Brigade played a key role in the exercise. The IAF used the C-130J Super Hercules, its US-origin advanced tactical transport aircraft, to airlift and drop the "cube" accurately at a designated location.

Govt worked in mission mode over one year: Delhi CM Rekha Gupta

The Chief Minister said the expansion of the metro network will make daily travel safer and easier for women, as Prime Minister Narendra Modi inaugurated two new metro corridors.

New Delhi.(Agency)

CM Rekha Gupta on Sunday said the Delhi government worked in "mission mode" over the past year and launched several welfare initiatives aimed at supporting the poor and workers in the national capital. She also said the expansion of the metro network will make daily travel safer and easier for women, as Prime Minister Narendra Modi inaugurated two new metro corridors.

Gupta said the Delhi government has completed one year in office and during this period it has worked with dedication and honesty,

guided by the principles of hard work and integrity in public service. She said schemes such as Ayushman Bharat, the

the issue of landfill mountains have remained among the key priorities of the government, with work being carried out in mission mode on these fronts.

The Chief Minister added that inspired by the Prime Minister's principle of "Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikas," the government has launched 70 Atal Canteens in the city, providing affordable meals to the poor, dependents and labourers at nominal prices. Around 70,000 people are receiving meals daily at these canteens.

The Chief Minister also said that concrete steps are being taken, with the support of the Central

Government, to tackle issues of pollution and waterlogging in the city. After nearly 50 years, a new drainage master plan has been prepared for Delhi, which is expected to help address these problems.

Gupta said that inspired by the PM's vision of "Meri Punji, Mera Adhikar," the Delhi government has disbursed nearly 200 crore to around 70,000 girls under the Ladli Scheme, clearing long-pending payments that had remained unclaimed in accounts and had not reached beneficiaries earlier.

Referring to the PM's emphasis on technology and transparency, she said the government has promoted digitalisation across departments. Initiatives include the e-file system, digital hospital records, online OPD booking, digital asset management, and CM Jan Sunwai App.



NEWS BOX

Not just God's plan: Gautam Gambhir credits Indian fans for T20 World Cup triumph

New Delhi. (Agency)

India's head coach Gautam Gambhir turned to social media to dedicate the country's historic third T20 World Cup title to the millions of fans whose unwavering support fuelled the team's journey to glory.

[IND vs NZ final: Highlights | Scorecard | Taking to X (formerly Twitter), Gambhir wrote, "This wasn't just God's plan, it was the plan of 1.4 Billion Indians! Each player a WORLD CHAMPION!" — a passionate tribute that captured the euphoria of an entire nation united behind its cricket team.

India etched their name in the history books by becoming the first team to successfully defend the T20 World Cup title, and the first side to win the tournament on home soil. In a dominant final at the Narendra Modi Stadium, India crushed New Zealand by 96 runs to lift their third T20 World Cup trophy, sending fans across the country into a frenzy of celebration. Speaking at the post-match press conference, Gambhir took a moment to acknowledge the architects behind India's continued success — the men who built the system long before the trophies arrived.

He reserved special praise for former head coach Rahul Dravid, crediting him for maintaining the team's structure and stability during his tenure — a foundation



that Gambhir has built upon to deliver championship results. Gambhir also shone a light on VVS Laxman, who heads the BCCI's Centre of Excellence, recognising his often unseen but vital contributions in identifying and nurturing the next generation of Indian cricket talent through the national pipeline. Chief selector Ajit Agarkar also received a heartfelt mention. Gambhir acknowledged the criticism Agarkar frequently faces and commended his honesty and steadfast commitment to the role. Perhaps the most personal tribute, however, was reserved for ICC Chairman Jay Shah. Gambhir revealed that Shah was the one voice of support during the darkest periods of his coaching tenure, following back-to-back series losses to New Zealand and South Africa.

Why didn't Glenn Phillips bowl more in T20 World Cup final? Santner explains

LONDON. (Agency)

There are certain moments in a high-pressure final that can decide the course of the game. For New Zealand, holding back Glenn Phillips in the T20 World Cup 2026 final against India seemed to be one of those defining moments. Phillips was the only right-arm spinner that the Blackcaps had in their lineup for the game with Cole McConchie being dropped for Jacob Duffy. Yet, the all-rounder bowled just one over and gave away five runs in it, and never got the ball again. This allowed the Indian batters to break free and put on a mammoth 255 in the final, ultimately ending up with a win and



the title. Speaking at the post-match press conference, Santner explained the reason behind the call. The New Zealand skipper said that the way Abhishek Sharma and Sanju Samson played Phillips brilliantly, which made him go to the pacers in the hope of getting something off the track. Santner further stated that if Samson was dismissed early, then Phillips would have come on to bowl against Abhishek and Kishan.

"I think the way they played the over, Abhishek I thought played that very smart. I know at times he comes a little bit hard at the off spinner, but he gave it over to Sanju. And then I think the first kind of three overs is when the ball is doing its most. And then I think you can really capitalise on the last three of the power play like they did. So it was always going to be hard. I think if Sanju got out, definitely would have been another option for GP to bowl to the two left-handers. But when you're not taking wickets, it's always a challenge," said Samson.

WHY DID NEW ZEALAND DROP MCCONCHIE?

Given India's struggles against off-spin bowlers during the tournament, it seemed like a logical call to include McConchie for the game.

India have ruined cricket: Salty Shoaib Akhtar reacts to one-sided T20 World Cup win

PARIS. (Agency)

India's dominant triumph in the 2026 T20 World Cup final has triggered strong reactions across the cricketing world, particularly from across the border. Former Pakistan fast bowler Shoaib Akhtar delivered one of the most controversial responses, claiming that India's rise has "ruined cricket." India outclassed New Zealand in the final at the Narendra Modi Stadium, sealing a massive 96-run win to lift their third T20 World Cup title. While most cricket experts praised the clinical performance, Akhtar launched a sharp attack during the Tapmad show Game On Hai, comparing India to a "rich kid" dominating a neighbourhood game. "It's like when there's one rich kid in a neighbourhood who calls all the poor kids and says, 'Come, let's play cricket.' That's exactly what India is doing with us. Out of eight teams, they keep four, and out of those four they call three again and move forward, and then they say, 'See, I've won.' They have ruined cricket entirely," Akhtar said. The former Pakistan pacer's comments quickly

sparked debate among fans online, with many calling the remarks bitter following India's emphatic victory. Interestingly, Akhtar had struck a slightly different tone before the final. While acknowledging India as favourites, he had suggested that he



wanted New Zealand to win the title "for cricket's sake." "I feel New Zealand might be bogged down in front of India, but India also have the pressure of 1.5 billion people. They have already lost a match in the World Cup

final to Australia in Ahmedabad. I see India as the winner out of all this, but for cricket's sake, it's high time New Zealand won this World Cup," he had said earlier. Despite his criticism, Akhtar did acknowledge one factor behind India's success. The former pacer praised head coach Gautam Gambhir for backing players through difficult phases, suggesting that such faith can sometimes make the difference in major tournaments.

PAKISTAN STARS ANGRY WITH INDIA'S DOMINANCE

Akhtar was not the only former Pakistan cricketer to make controversial remarks after India's victory. Mohammad Amir also shared a surprising take during the Pakistan cricket talk show Harna Mana Hai. According to Amir, a large portion of the credit for India's win should go to New Zealand's bowlers. The former left-arm pacer suggested that the Kiwi attack failed to apply enough pressure, which allowed India's batters to dictate the pace of the game. Such reactions from across the border have added

another layer to the discussions surrounding India's commanding title win, with several fans and experts pointing out that the victory was the result of consistent performances throughout the tournament.

HOW INDIA WON THE 2026 T20 WORLD CUP India delivered one of their most complete performances of the tournament in the final against New Zealand.

After being asked to bat first, India's top order produced a fearless display. Sanju Samson led the charge with a superb 89 off 46 balls, while Abhishek Sharma smashed a rapid 52 from 21 deliveries. Ishan Kishan continued his excellent tournament with a quickfire 54 off 25 balls, before Shivam Dube added late fireworks with an unbeaten 26 from just eight balls to power India to 255/5.

Chasing the massive target, New Zealand managed a brief fightback through Tim Seifert's 52 off 26 balls, but India's bowling attack soon tightened its grip. Jasprit Bumrah delivered a sensational spell of 4/15, while Axar Patel picked up 3/27 to dismantle the Kiwi batting lineup. India eventually sealed a 96-run victory, creating history by becoming the first team to successfully defend the T20 World Cup and the first host nation to lift the trophy.

In photos: Inside India's T20 World Cup victory celebration at Narendra Modi Stadium

Ahmedabad. (Agency)

India showcased their most dominant side in the T20 World Cup 2026 final against New Zealand in Ahmedabad on March 8, creating history by becoming the first team to successfully defend a T20 World Cup title. Playing in front of a packed home crowd at the Narendra Modi Stadium, India delivered a complete performance that left little room for doubt about the outcome. The foundation was laid with the bat as Abhishek Sharma finally rediscovered his touch after a quiet tournament, while Sanju Samson capped off a sensational campaign with another commanding knock that sealed his Player of the Tournament award. Ishan Kishan continued his rich vein of form and Shivam Dube's late fireworks pushed India to a formidable total of 254, already placing New Zealand under enormous pressure. If the target looked daunting, the presence of Jasprit Bumrah made the task even tougher. Bumrah struck early and decisively, while Axar Patel's spin further tightened India's grip on the match as New Zealand struggled



to keep up. The eventual 96-run victory sealed India's third T20 World Cup title, sparking wild celebrations as players, support staff and families joined the festivities on the field.

INDIA CELEBRATES T20 WORLD CUP TRIUMPH: In pics

Hardik Pandya, Tilak Varma and Ishan Kishan rushed to Suryakumar Yadav as soon as India's T20 World Cup title defence was sealed. The celebrations began at the Narendra Modi stadium in Ahmedabad. In front of a fully packed Narendra Modi stadium, Suryakumar Yadav-led India became the first ever team to lift a T20 World Cup title in front of their home crowd. A first-ever title defence for the first-ever home World Cup champions.

Emotional Ishan Kishan dedicates T20 World Cup triumph to late cousin sister

T20 World Cup: Ishan Kishan revealed he lost his cousin sister in a car accident a day before the T20 World Cup final. The emotional wicketkeeper-batter dedicated India's historic triumph to her memory after the win.

Ahmedabad. (Agency)

India's T20 World Cup 2026 victory in Ahmedabad will be remembered for the records and celebrations. For Ishan Kishan, however, the night carried a far more emotional layer. The wicketkeeper-batter revealed that he had lost his cousin sister in a car accident just a day before the final and dedicated India's title triumph to her.

The 27-year-old shared the heartbreaking news after India's commanding win over New Zealand in the final on Sunday, March 8. Speaking during the post-match press conference in Ahmedabad, Kishan said he decided to step onto the field and play the

match in her memory. "To be honest, before the game, I lost my cousin sister yesterday in a car accident. I played well for her. I spoke to Hardik bhai, he said to put the team ahead. I dedicate this win to her, and today is Women's Day, so it makes it all the more special," Kishan said. The left-handed batter added that a conversation with teammate Hardik Pandya helped him steady his mind before the biggest match of



the tournament despite the personal loss. Kishan also reflected on the shift in his mindset over the past year, explaining that he has tried to stop overthinking situations that are beyond his control and focus purely on performing. "I have stopped thinking too

much. Just do your work and not think about the things which are not under your control, and that's what Virat bhai always did," Kishan said, referencing Virat Kohli. The wicketkeeper-batter also recalled a light-hearted exchange with India captain Suryakumar Yadav from before the World Cup squad was finalised.

"When Surya bhai called, I took a screenshot and thought it was for the World Cup. He called and asked WC jeetwayega kya. I asked, 'Aap bharosa karoge kya?' and I said, 'Karoonga.' He said chal kiya," Kishan recalled. HOW WAS ISHAN KISHAN 2026 T20 WC?

Kishan's emotional night in the final was also the perfect ending to what had been a superb tournament for the Jharkhand batter.

The left-hander finished as the fourth-highest run-getter in the T20 World Cup, piling up 317 runs in nine matches at a ridiculous strike rate of 193.29. Three half-centuries later, Kishan had firmly established himself as one of India's most dangerous batters in the tournament.

Three-time world champions, are India the greatest T20I side ever

New Delhi. (Agency)

T20 cricket has rarely allowed dynasties to flourish. Teams change quickly, conditions vary from one tournament to the next, and the margins between victory and defeat are often painfully thin. Even sides that dominate for a short spell usually find themselves dragged back into the pack within a year or two. They were not just the defending champions. They arrived carrying the weight of expectation that inevitably follows success; the burden of being the team every opponent desperately wanted to beat, and the challenge of attempting something no men's side had managed before, defending a T20 World Cup title in the most unpredictable format in international cricket, and doing it at home.

The scale of that achievement was evident from the very beginning. This was not simply another strong team entering a

World Cup. Playing at home, in front of expectant crowds and constant scrutiny, India were perhaps the most heavily backed



favourites any side has carried into a tournament of this kind. By the end of it, they had surpassed those expectations and achieved everything they had set out to do. The spotlight rarely moved away. Yet the journey to the title was anything but

straightforward. Even before the tournament began, India made a bold call by moving away from Shubman Gill and backing Sanju Samson alongside the explosive Abhishek Sharma at the top of the order. It reflected the team's intent to play fearless, attacking cricket from the very first over. But the story soon became more complicated.

Ishan Kishan's form demanded attention, Samson once again found himself pushed aside, and the balance of the side shifted. As the tournament unfolded, India continued to adjust their combinations, responding to form, conditions and the rhythm of a long competition. By the middle of the campaign, the team had to pivot again.

Samson returned, the trio of left-handers at the top was broken up, and the batting order was reshaped. Such mid-tournament changes often unsettle teams.

Gavaskar keeps T20 World Cup promise, dances with Suryakumar

T20 World Cup final: Sunil Gavaskar kept his promise to Suryakumar Yadav and danced with the Indian captain after India retained their T20 World Cup crown in Ahmedabad. Gavaskar heaped praise on Suryakumar after the win.

New Delhi. (Agency)

Before the start of the T20 World Cup 2026, Sunil Gavaskar made a promise to the Indian team and Suryakumar Yadav. The Indian legend, who is known for his celebrations after India win a big game, promised Suryakumar that he would dance with joy if



the team managed to defend their crown. "When you lift the trophy and receive it, I will start dancing," Gavaskar said. "Dancing is my cardio. Everyone else does intense cardio, but I can't do that at my age. So I do a little bit of cardio, and that's

dancing. There's so much joy in seeing your captain and your country's flag going up. Sometimes emotions just come out." On Sunday, March 8, Gavaskar delivered on the promise. At first, just ahead of the presentation, the Indian legend was seen

dancing, which was captured by the broadcasters. As India defeated New Zealand to lift the T20 World Cup for the third time, the legendary batter couldn't contain his excitement and joined the Indian team in their victory celebrations. Gavaskar decided to shake a leg with Suryakumar, and the Indian skipper obliged. The portion of Gavaskar and Suryakumar's dance can be seen in the following video: WHAT DID GAVASKAR SAY ABOUT SURYAKUMAR? Gavaskar delivered high praise for Suryakumar after the T20 World Cup win. Speaking to India Today, Gavaskar said that Suryakumar was in the mold of Rohit Sharma and is leader in the dressing room that everyone looks up to. "He's such a calm, cool, collected captain, pretty much in the mold of Rohit Sharma. Always smiling, always positive in his attitude and his approach. He started off by saving India from an awkward situation against the USA, scoring 84. He's clearly the leader and everyone looks up to him," said Suryakumar.

Silver dips 1.30%, gold eases marginally over stronger dollar

New Delhi.(Agency)

Gold and silver prices eased on Monday amid a firmer US dollar and higher inflation expectations, trimming hopes of US Fed rate cuts in the near term. MCX gold April futures lost 0.16 per cent to Rs 1,61,380 per 10 grams around 11.10 am on an intraday basis. Meanwhile, MCX silver May futures declined 1.30 per cent to Rs 2,64,799 per kg. Earlier in the day, gold futures had dipped 1.1 per cent, while silver futures had declined 1.4 per cent, before a strong rebound by precious metals. The US dollar strengthened to cross its three-month high touching 99.34 up 0.36 per cent on an intraday basis, making dollar-priced bullion costlier for holders of other currencies. Analysts said that US Treasury yields surging with the 10-year papers hitting a one-month high, increased the opportunity cost of holding non-yielding metals. Meanwhile crude oil surged around 27 per cent to \$116 per barrel marking the first time since 2022 when both benchmarks crossed the \$100 mark. The spike followed escalating hostilities in the Middle East amid supply disruptions at the Strait of Hormuz. This raised inflation fears, leading to traders widely expecting the US Federal Reserve to hold interest rates steady at the conclusion of its two-day policy meeting on March 18.

The probability that the central bank will keep rates unchanged in June rose to over 51 per cent, up from below 43 per cent last week.

Gold has support at Rs 1,48,000 while resistance at Rs 1,53,000, an analyst said. In COMEX Gold, strong buying interest is visible in the \$5,000 support band, while a sustained breakout above \$5,400-\$5,600 could open the path toward fresh record highs, he added. The medium to long-term outlook of silver also remains constructive amid favourable global cues from geopolitical developments, even with ongoing volatility, a market participant said.

Market meltdown as crude prices soar 25% on West Asia conflict; Sensex crashes 2,500 points

Mumbai.(Agency)

Global equity markets, including India, are in freefall as crude prices spiked up to 25% overnight amid escalating West Asia tensions, stoking fears of inflation, especially among nations that rely on imported oil to meet energy demand.

Brent crude has surged to \$118 per barrel following the continued closure of the Strait of Hormuz, limited storage facilities in producer countries, and attacks on oil and gas infrastructure and vessels.

The Indian market's benchmark index, the BSE Sensex, crashed nearly 2,500 points on Monday morning to hit a low of 77,057, while the NSE Nifty50 fell more than 750 points to below the 23,700 level. Barring Coal India, 49 stocks in the Nifty50 pack were in the red, with IndiGo, Tata Motors, SBI, Tata Steel and Shriram Finance falling the most. The market downturn echoed global trends, as a bloodbath across Asian indices was seen on Monday morning, with all major indices trading with losses of 5%-8%. South Korea's Kospi has hit a lower circuit for the second time in four trading sessions. Dow futures are showing a 1,100-point decline, following the sell-off witnessed on Wall Street on Friday. According to SBI Securities, higher energy prices (crude oil, natural gas and coal) are likely to translate into higher inflation in the coming months, along with an impact on economic activity across major oil consumers such as India, Japan, China, Korea and Southeast Asia. Given that India is a key importer of oil, higher crude prices pose a significant macroeconomic headwind for the country. This may exert pressure on inflation, currency stability and corporate margins, thereby impacting overall equity market sentiment. The brokerage added that the monthly US non-farm payroll data for February was a negative surprise, unexpectedly falling by 92,000, marking a significant labour market reversal against expected gains of 50,000-58,000. The unemployment rate ticked up to 4.4%.

FMCG and pharma emerge as new strongholds for women CEOs

New Delhi.(Agency)

There was a time when some of India's leading banking and financial services firms had women at the helm, making these sectors a visible symbol of gender diversity. Today, that centre of gravity has shifted. Consumer-facing industries and pharmaceuticals have emerged as the new strongholds for women CEOs, reflecting where long-standing leadership pipelines are now bearing fruit.

A survey by global search firm Executive Access, commissioned by TOI, shows the FMCG sector has the highest number of women CEOs, with a 19% share. Pharma, too, has built a strong management bench that is increasingly feeding into top leadership roles, and follows with a 17% share.

"Women are often known for strong intuitive decision-making - a quality that can be a major advantage in today's uncertain and unpredictable business environment. Equally important is the fact that consumer buying decisions are heavily influenced by them. As organisations recognise this, forward-looking sectors are likely to see the share of women in leadership roles rise by at least 25% by 2030," said Executive Access India MD, Ronesh Puri.

Top women CEOs in the consumer space include Priya Nair (Hindustan Unilever), Prabha Narasimhan (Colgate-Palmolive India), and Geetika Mehta (Nivea India). In pharma, leaders such as Shweta Rai (Bayer), Meenakshi Nevatia (Pfizer), and Annapurna Das (Takeda) are among those at the helm of the Indian entities.

Rupee falls to record low amid crude oil shock: What it means for India

The rupee dropped 0.6% to 92.3350 against the US dollar, breaking its previous record low of 92.3025 that was touched last week. Rupee has remained under pressure since the United States and Israel launched military action against Iran last week.

New Delhi.(Agency)

The rupee fell to a fresh record low on Monday as a sharp rise in global oil prices and geopolitical tensions pushed investors towards safer assets such as the US dollar. The fall in the currency highlights the growing economic pressure on countries that rely heavily on energy imports, including India. The rupee dropped 0.6% to 92.3350 against the US dollar, breaking its previous record low of 92.3025 that was touched last week. Rupee has remained under

pressure since the United States and Israel launched military action against Iran last week. The conflict has shaken global markets and driven crude oil prices sharply higher. Brent crude had surged as much as 26.4% to \$117.16 per barrel and was trading around \$116.4 per barrel earlier in Asian trading. The spike in oil prices has raised fresh concerns for economies that depend heavily on imported energy. WHY OIL PRICES MATTER FOR INDIA

India is the world's third largest importer of crude oil, making the economy highly sensitive to changes in global energy prices. When oil prices rise, India's import bill increases sharply. Since oil is priced in US dollars, a weaker rupee means the country has to pay even more in local currency to buy the same amount of crude. Higher oil imports can widen India's trade deficit and put additional pressure on the rupee. This is one of the main reasons why currency markets react

quickly when crude prices jump.

IMPACT ON INFLATION

The combination of rising oil prices and a weaker rupee can push inflation higher.

Fuel plays an important role in the cost of



transportation, logistics and manufacturing. When crude prices increase, it often leads to higher petrol and diesel prices. This can raise the cost of moving goods across the country. Businesses may pass these higher costs on to consumers, which can

lead to an increase in the prices of everyday goods and services. If inflation rises sharply, it can affect household spending and economic growth.

PRESSURE ON GOVERNMENT FINANCES

Higher oil prices can also affect government finances.

India spends large amounts on energy imports each year. When crude becomes more expensive, the overall import bill rises and the current account deficit can widen. At the same time, a weaker rupee increases the cost of importing other commodities such as fertilisers, chemicals and electronic components. These pressures can make fiscal management more challenging if high oil prices persist for a longer period.

IMPACT ON INVESTORS AND MARKETS

Currency weakness can also affect investor sentiment.

Domestic oil companies' stocks tumble up to 9% as crude crosses \$100 a barrel

Mumbai.(Agency)

Shares of major state-owned oil marketing companies (OMCs) traded under pressure on Monday, declining up to nearly 9 per cent in early trade as the conflict involving Iran disrupted energy flows through the Strait of Hormuz and rattled global markets. With this development, OMC stocks such as Indian Oil Corporation (IOCL), Bharat Petroleum Corporation (BPCL), and Hindustan Petroleum Corporation (HPCL) slumped up to 8.67 per cent in early trade. By 11.20 am, IOCL shares declined 7.29 per cent to an intraday low of Rs 156.30 from the previous close of Rs 168.60 on the BSE.

Meanwhile, BPCL shares fell 8.43 per cent to an intraday low of Rs 322.95 from Rs 352.70 on the same exchange.



While HPCL saw the steepest decline, dropping 8.67 per cent to an intraday low of Rs 370.10 from its previous close of Rs 405.25, according to BSE data. These PSU stocks faced selling pressure as crude oil prices nearly touched \$110 per barrel after major producers in the Middle East reduced output, while the Strait of Hormuz remained effectively closed amid the Iran conflict.

Meanwhile, US President Donald Trump defended the spike in oil prices, saying higher crude costs were a temporary consequence of confronting Iran's nuclear threat.

"Short-term oil prices, which will drop rapidly when the destruction of the Iran nuclear threat is over, is a very small price to pay for USA and world safety and peace," Trump wrote on the social media platform Truth Social.

The jump marks one of the biggest weekly gains in oil futures trading since the early 1980s.

The headline indices were also under pressure, with Sensex and Nifty 50 trading in the red, down 3.16 per cent at 76,424.55 and 3.07 per cent at 23,697.80, respectively.

Tech Mahindra denies social media rumours of mass layoffs

New Delhi.(Agency)

IT major Tech Mahindra on Monday denied social media rumours that it plans a large-scale job cut, saying no such proposal is under consideration.

"The company has received calls and has noted certain social media posts regarding a market rumour of a potential significant reduction in headcount," the company said in an exchange filing. "In view of the above speculation, the company on its own accord considers it necessary to clarify to the Stock Exchanges that no such proposal is under consideration and categorically denies any such market rumours," it said in the filing complying with the disclosure norms. Certain posts were circulating on platforms such as X, which alleged cuts affecting as many as 30,000

employees. Tech Mahindra, which employs around 1,50,000 people worldwide, recently announced a collaboration with Microsoft to launch



an ontology-driven Agentic AI platform aimed at accelerating telecom and enterprise data modernisation.

The company had in the previous quarter announced that mass layoffs are not under consideration, but it is focusing

on productivity measures that include moving staff out of fixed-price projects and redeploying them into new projects.

Morgan Stanley in a recent report had suggested that long-term impact of AI on jobs may be less severe than many expect. According to the report, while some roles will be automated, most workers are unlikely to be permanently left behind. Instead, many are expected to shift into new types of jobs, including roles that do not yet exist. The bank said artificial intelligence will change the nature of work rather than eliminate it entirely. Several tech industry leaders have said that most white-collar roles that rely on computers could be automated within the next 12 to 18 months. US tech giant Oracle plans to cut 20,000 to 30,000 jobs to expand its AI data-centre capacity, while Amazon recently announced lay off 16,000 employees as part of its AI restructure plan.

Resigned from your job, present company giving you counteroffer Career coach explains whether or not you should accept it

New Delhi.(Agency)

A counteroffer from your present company to keep you on the job after you have quit may seem like an incentive. However, career coach Simon Ingari has cautioned that counteroffers don't provide long-term security to employees. They are strategies of companies to buy time until they find someone cheaper. Simon has urged professionals to never accept a counteroffer even if it is a 100 percent hike. Taking to X, Simon shared the story of an employee who was offered a counteroffer by a company from which he had resigned. However, the employee was laid off after four months by the company. The employee is now jobless and looking for new openings. Simon said that a candidate he was hiring was earning 100,000 when he got a new offer of 170,000. However, within 15 minutes of the offer letter reaching him, the candidate backed out. His current company offered him a 190,000 counteroffer and he accepted the offer immediately. Simon said that after four months, the candidate messaged him asking if there were any job openings. The candidate said that his company had laid him off and replaced him with a cheaper resource.

Highlighting the story of the candidate, Simon has urged professionals not to accept counteroffers as they may seem like a gain initially but do not reflect job security in the long run. He has advised professionals to never accept a counteroffer even if it is a 100 percent hike. He said that a counteroffer is not a reward but it is a tactic used by businesses to buy time until they find someone cheaper. He said that loyalty does not increase with money. If you were valued by the company then they would pay you fairly without waiting for your resignation.

The post has sparked widespread discussion on counteroffers with many users claiming that these offers are never a security for employees rather they are tactics of companies to buy time for looking for cheaper resources.

One user said, "Harsh truth If a company suddenly finds money only after your resignation, the problem was never the budget. It was priority. Counteroffers often buy time for the company not security for you. If you had to threaten to leave to be valued, the relationship is already broken." Another user said, "Many companies only react when they see you leaving, not because they suddenly value you more but because they need time to replace you. Sometimes it's better to move forward with the new opportunity you have than stay where you were only appreciated at the last minute."

Stock market crash: IndiGo, SBI, Maruti among worst hit amid ongoing sell-off

Among the worst-hit stocks on the index were InterGlobe Aviation (IndiGo) and State Bank of India (SBI), reflecting the broad-based nature of the market decline.

New Delhi.(Agency)

The sell-off on Dalal Street intensified on Monday morning, with several blue-chip stocks on the Nifty50 witnessing sharp declines as investor sentiment weakened amid the ongoing Gulf conflict and rising crude oil prices. At around 9:50 am, the Nifty50 was trading at 23,760.70, down 689.75 points or 2.82%, as heavy selling pressure spread across sectors including banking, automobiles, metals and infrastructure. Among the worst-hit stocks on the index were InterGlobe Aviation (IndiGo) and State Bank of India (SBI), reflecting the broad-based nature of the

market decline.

INDIGO, OTHER AVIATION STOCKS LOSE BIG

Shares of IndiGo fell sharply by around 7.7% to about Rs 4,065.50, making it one of the biggest losers on the Nifty50. SpiceJet shares were also down over 5%. Aviation stocks are particularly sensitive to movements in crude oil prices because fuel accounts for a large share of airline operating costs. With global oil prices surging amid geopolitical tensions, investors appear to be factoring in higher cost pressures for airlines.

BANKING STOCKS UNDER PRESSURE

Banking stocks also came under significant selling pressure. State Bank of India dropped nearly 5.9%, emerging as one of the top laggards on the index. Financial stocks often amplify market moves because they carry significant weight in benchmark indices. Other financial stocks also declined sharply. Shriram Finance fell about 5.6%, while Axis Bank slipped around 3.7% and ICICI Bank declined roughly 3.6%.



AUTO AND INFRA STOCKS DECLINE

Automobile and infrastructure stocks were also among the major losers.

Maruti Suzuki dropped about 4.6%, while Mahindra & Mahindra fell roughly 3.6%.

Infrastructure giant Larsen & Toubro declined around 4.4% as investors trimmed exposure to cyclical sectors.

METAL AND INDUSTRIAL STOCKS SLIDE

Metal stocks also witnessed sharp declines amid global growth concerns.

Tata Steel fell around 4.6%, while JSW Steel dropped close to 3.9% during the

session.

Other stocks such as Asian Paints, Adani Enterprises, and Jio Financial Services also traded significantly lower, highlighting the broad-based nature of the market sell-off.

FEW STOCKS SHOW RELATIVE RESILIENCE

Despite the sharp decline across most sectors, a few stocks showed relative resilience. Coal India was among the few gainers on the index, rising over 1%,

while pharmaceutical stocks such as Sun Pharma and Dr Reddy's Laboratories saw comparatively smaller declines than the broader market.

BROAD MARKET UNDER PRESSURE

The sharp fall in the Nifty50 reflects a broad risk-off sentiment among investors as geopolitical tensions escalate and oil prices surge. Analysts say investors are closely watching global developments, crude oil prices and foreign investment flows, which are likely to influence market sentiment in the near term.

Aneet Padda

Celebrates Big Milestone With Star Of The Year Win At Showsha Reel Awards 2026

Aneet Padda is celebrating a major milestone in her career after winning the Star Of The Year (Movie) award at the News18 Showsha Reel Awards 2026. She shared the glimpse of her win, calling it her magic wand. Aneet and Ahaan Panday's Saiyaara was one of the major hits of 2025.

Taking to her Instagram stories, Aneet Padda flaunted the trophy and mentioned 'Got my wand'. The actress delivered a heartfelt, emotional speech while accepting the award, while her Saiyaara co-star Ahaan Panday and director Mohit Suri cheered the loudest. A video of her speech has now gone viral on social media, and fans can't stop gushing over her inspiring words.

In her acceptance speech, Aneet Padda spoke about her love for cinema, and how it has taught her pain, empathy and love. "I have been giving a lot of speeches recently. And the only thing that I wish to say is this. I feel a lot of people believe that life is the biggest teacher of all. But anything that comes a close second, for me, it has been cinema. Because when I was younger, and hadn't lived enough life to understand the world, it was the thing that taught me pain, empathy and love and life. It was a thing that gave me an insight into how big the world is, outside. And for that I couldn't be more grateful to it. So I just really hope that I can give back, I really hope that I can pour the love back."



Suri. I love you so much. Ahaan Panday, there's nobody like you. The entire team of Saiyaara, there's nobody like you. You've changed my life. You absolutely changed my life," she said.

About the film
Saiyaara follows the love story of Krish Kapur (played by Ahaan Panday), a short-tempered musician, and Vaani (played by Aneet Padda), a shy, aspiring journalist-cum-poet. They meet, fall in love, and together build a successful career for Krish. Soon, he learns that Vaani has Alzheimer's disease after some troublesome moments involving her ex-boyfriend. Despite the struggles and ups and downs, the two eventually find their way back to each other and get married, marking the end of the emotional story.

Suri. I love you so much. Ahaan Panday, there's nobody like you. The entire team of Saiyaara, there's nobody like you. You've changed my life. You absolutely changed my life," she said.



Aly Goni, Munawar Faruqui Slam Trolls After Anurag Dobhal's Car Crash Video During Live Goes Viral



Anurag Dobhal's car crash during an Instagram livestream has left social media in shock. As the YouTuber receives treatment in hospital, actor Aly Goni and stand-up comedian Munawar Faruqui have slammed trolls for laughing at Anurag after he dropped an almost two-hour-long video sharing about his mental health and personal problems.

Aly Goni slammed netizens for trolling Anurag when he opened up about his personal life and, while expressing his support for the YouTuber, shared, "Uss ladke ne apni video daali aur zaahir kiya apne aap ko logon ke saamne ki uski life mein jo bhi chal raha hai. Aur logon ne usko kya diya return mein? Hasi, mazak, troll. Abhi sunne mein aaya hai ki usne chalti hui gaadi mein suicide karne ki koshish ki hai highway pe. I hope woh theek ho but sad reality. Shame on you guys for making fun of him. Aap sabko upar waala dekh raha hai. I hope he's fine (That boy posted his video and openly shared with people what he was going through in his life. And what did people give him in return? Laughter, mockery, and trolling. Now I've heard that he tried to commit suicide in a moving car on the highway. I hope he's okay, but this is the sad reality. Shame on you all for making fun of him. God is watching everyone. I just hope he's fine)."

Munawar Faruqui also shared a video and said, "I will talk about mental health. We always say someone's mental health is a very real and serious thing. We always tell others to talk about their problems, but koi insaan agar baat karne aata hai toh hum mazak udaate hain uska. Yeh internet ko kya bana diya tumne? Koi share karne aayega toh tum usko bologe views ke liye kar raha hai (If someone talks about their problems, then we make a joke about it. What have you made the internet? If someone shares something, you say he's doing it for views)."

Munawar further revealed that he tried to reach out to Anurag following his first video. "I hope he is fine, but this is not right. Aap perashaan ho, but suicide is not the answer. Don't do this. No matter what happens, never take this step. Don't waste your life," Munawar added in his video.

What was in Anurag's Insta Live

The video, which has gone viral on social media, shows Dobhal recording himself while behind the wheel and appearing visibly distressed. In the clip, he speaks about emotional struggles and a lack of love in his life. Toward the end of the clip, he appears to say something along the lines of, "Let's go for the final ride." Moments later, the car reportedly crashes into a road divider, after which the livestream abruptly ends and the screen turns black.

Twinkle Khanna Says Roles Have 'Flipped' With Dimple Kapadia: 'Now I Want To Show Her The World'



Former actor and author Twinkle Khanna recently travelled to Jodhpur with her mother, veteran actor Dimple Kapadia, and a group of close friends. During the trip, the mother-daughter duo attended a Sufi festival, immersing themselves in the soulful music and vibrant cultural atmosphere. Writing about the experience in her column for The Times of India, Twinkle revealed that while she herself may not be particularly inclined toward music, her mother has always had a deep interest in it. In fact, Dimple Kapadia is currently learning classical singing, a pursuit that reflects her longstanding passion for music.

Twinkle Khanna Reflects On Role Reversal With Her Mother

Twinkle also shared a nostalgic memory from her childhood while talking about her mother's love for music. "My mother, by contrast, has a keen interest in music and is currently learning classical singing. I have an old black-and-white photograph of her playing the sitar and me sitting beside her, all of three or four, with rounded cheeks and a mop of curls, solemnly patting a tabla," she wrote.

The author further reflected on how their roles have gradually reversed over the years. While Dimple once introduced her to new experiences and adventures when she was a child, Twinkle now feels the urge to do the same for her mother.

"We have flipped roles. Now, I want to be the one to give her experiences. To show her the world the way she once held my hand and showed me the Great Migration in Tanzania from a hot-air balloon; the underground tunnel from a hotel in Kashmir that opened into an apple orchard; and how to tumble down the hills of Ooty without fear," she wrote.

Twinkle added that she now hopes to witness the same sense of joy in her mother that Dimple once saw in her.

"I want to see her joy when she takes in the festival, the way she must have watched me when she bought me a Richie Rich comic or a box of lychees," she shared. Dimple Kapadia began her acting career with the iconic 1973 film Bobby, which made her an overnight sensation. Shortly before the film's release, she married legendary actor Rajesh Khanna and stepped away from acting for several years.

Samantha Ruth Prabhu Gives Tribute To Her Real Life Incredible Women, Shares Unseen Photos



Samantha Ruth Prabhu celebrates Happy Women Day with a heartfelt post. She thanked all the incredible women in her life. The actress also shared photos that included her recent marriage to Raj Nidimoru. The couple got married in an intimate ceremony in 2025.

Talking to her Instagram handle, Samantha Ruth Prabhu shared a series of women photos with whom she has worked. And also her family members. In the caption she gave tribute to them and wrote, "To the most incredible women I have the privilege of knowing. Women who are shaping the future we're building together, and who I learn from and grow with every single day." Fans also reacted.

Maa Inti Bangaaram To Release On May 15

Samantha Ruth Prabhu is all set to grace the screen with another powerful role in her forthcoming drama "Maa Inti Bangaaram". Now adding to the hype, the makers have announced the release date for her Telugu drama. The much-talked-about Tollywood flick will reach the audience on May 15 this year. Samantha updated the netizens about the release date of her next project with a social media post.

The announcement poster showed Samantha peeping through the door, with a curious expression on her face. "See you in theatres this summer, Bangaraalu...#MaaIntiBangaaram Grand Release worldwide on 15th

May, 2026 #MiBonMay15th #MiB (sic)," she captioned the post. In January, the makers unveiled the gripping first look poster from BV Nandini Reddy's directorial on social media.

Talking about her next, Samantha shared that the world of "Maa Inti Bangaaram" is rooted and emotional with a narrative dedicated to being family first.

"Maa Inti Bangaaram tells the story of a woman whose strength comes as much from her vulnerability as from her courage. Playing this



character and nurturing this film as a producer has been an incredibly fulfilling journey for me," she said. Samantha added, "The world of this film is rooted and emotional with a narrative style dedicated to being family first and slice of life whilst maintaining its quirky, edgy energy. I'm truly excited for audiences to experience this story and connect with its spirit when it reaches them." "Maa Inti Bangaaram" has been backed by Samantha, under her home banner Tralala Moving Pictures, along with husband Raj Nidimoru and Himank Duvvuru.

Chiang Mai's top attractions

Known as the 'Rose of the North', Chiang Mai is a little city that's big on culture, art, food, spirituality, nature and simply enjoying life. With a history spanning more than 700 years, when Chiang Mai was first established as the capital of the Lanna (Northern Thai) Kingdom, the city has long served as a welcome alternative to Bangkok's craziness. Don't let its relatively small size fool you though, Chiang Mai is firmly positioned as a favourite along the Southeast Asia tourist trail and offers visitors a wide range of sights and activities to fill their days. Here, activities and attractions blend together into complete experiences and always offer an inside look into the people and culture of Northern Thailand.

Get a massage...or five

With a massage shop on nearly every corner, you couldn't visit Chiang Mai without testing out the traditional Thai massage or relaxing with an aromatic oil massage. What's better, is there's a massage shop to fit any budgets with hour-long Thai massages starting around \$6 USD. If you're looking for something fancier, the city is also home to a number of high-end spas that will make sure you're fully pampered from head to toe. Influenced by Chinese, Indian and other Southeast Asian medicinal practices, Thai massage is known for its rhythmic pressure and yoga-like poses. If a traditional Thai massage isn't what you're looking for, most shops offer a variety of massage styles along with body scrubs, facials, peels, pedicures and more. Most places you can just walk into without an appointment, but if you're looking forward to a treatment after dinner in the high season you'll want to call ahead and make a booking. Many places also offer package deals, transportation to and from your guesthouse, and specials for couples.

Visit the elephants

Many tourists who go to Thailand can't wait to visit an elephant camp and interact with the gentle beasts, and who can blame them? Elephants are the largest land animal and, for such a gigantic beast, can be surprisingly gentle. Asian elephants, while being revered and celebrated throughout Asian and Southeast Asian cultures, have also been heavily exploited and wild herds have increasingly little living space. Being able to see and interact with the special creatures in the flesh is often a once in a lifetime experience. Not all elephant camps are created equal though and the level of quality care the elephants receive can greatly vary. A consistently good option is visiting Elephant Nature Park just outside of the city. An elephant rescue and rehabilitation centre, Elephant Nature Park gives visitors and volunteers the chance to personally interact with the elephants feeding and bathing them while enjoying the beautiful greenery of the northern Thai hills. Guests can choose to visit the park for a day or stay a week (or even longer) as a volunteer and help care for the elephants, many of which have been rescued from logging camps.

Thai Cooking Course

While there are cooking courses held throughout the country, Chiang Mai is one of the best places to learn how to make your own tom yum, green curry and mango with sticky rice. The city is filled with different schools offering half-day and full-day courses and whichever you choose, you're sure to leave satisfied and with some new skills under your belt. All classes will take you to visit a local fresh market where they explain the produce and traditional ingredients commonly found in Thai dishes then it's back to the kitchen where you'll be able to choose which dishes you want to try your hand at.



Of course phad Thai, fried rice and spring rolls are popular options, but many schools will allow you try making curry paste from scratch or the sweet and spicy somtam (green papaya salad). Vegetarian and vegan options are available everywhere as well. While you can't go wrong with the school you choose, you can make the mistake of eating too much before your class.

You'll be eating plenty of food during the course of your class so make sure to go hungry and with an empty belly!

Wat Chedi Luang

Another important temple, Wat Chedi Luang was one of the first temples built in Chiang Mai and is home to the city pillar, which is thought to house Chiang Mai's guardian spirits and help protect the city. First built around 1400 when Chiang Mai was being settled, the temple has gone through many changes, but all have centred around the impressively large brick and stucco chedi. Though today the chedi stands at 42 m tall, it had a maximum height of 96 m back in 1481. Like Wat Phra Singh, Wat Chedi Luang also holds many local and Buddhist festivals throughout the year including the Inthakin Festival venerating the city pillar. Here you'll also find a daily "Monk Chat" where foreign visitors can go meet with monks staying at the temple and chat with them about...well just about anything. This is your chance to ask any questions you may have about Thailand, Thai culture, Buddhism, or anything else you have on your mind. When you're done exploring Wat Chedi Luang, pop by Wat Pan Tao that's just next door. The temple is one of the last wooden temples in Chiang Mai, and one of the most beautiful.

Wat Phra Singh

A classic example of Lanna (Northern Thai) architecture and art, you may have noticed Wat Phra Singh as you made it to the end of the Sunday Walking Street on Ratchadamnoen Road, make sure you go back during the day for another look! Since 1344, religious structures have been built on the site of the modern day temple complex and today it is one of the most prominent temples in Chiang Mai, even considered a Royal Temple of the first grade. Often used as a central location for local festivals and holidays, there always seems to be something happening on the temple grounds, which is well-respected throughout the region and home to an important Buddha statue. Look inside the viharn (main temple building) which is decorated lavishly elaborate glass mosaics and murals of Thai legends, but don't forget to wander the grounds and peek into the smaller buildings and shrines. There is also a leafy meditation garden behind the main temple building with Buddhist sayings hiding in the trees that's perfect for taking a break during a hot afternoon or practicing vipassana.

Muay Thai

As the country's national sport, your trip to

Thailand wouldn't be complete without witnessing a traditional Muay Thai boxing match. The fighting style is known as the "art of eight limbs" because it uses a combination of physical techniques involving the fists, elbows, knees and shins to kick, punch, elbow and strike. Traditionally, Muay Thai was a form of combat used in actual warfare, but today, with its emphasis on physical and mental strength, unique warm up rituals and music Muay Thai matches are popular throughout the country. Stadiums in Chiang Mai will pass out fliers throughout town the day of a match listing who will be fighting and when. Tickets can be purchased at the stadiums, through tourist information shops and, often, even at your guesthouse or hotel. Most fights start later in the evening and offer welcome drinks upon entry. The youngest and most inexperienced fighters have the first matches with the night culminating with the largest match - you usually see a couple female or foreign fighters in the mix as well.

Monks in the morning

There are innumerable things to keep one entertained during visit to Australia, the co-host of ICC Cricket World Cup 2015. Here are some of the best free activities and attractions in Sydney, Australia's most spectacular harbour city.

Glorious coastal walk

Walk the beautiful Coogee to Bondi walk, taking in the spectacular coastal views of the coast and stop off for swim at beaches and coves along the way.



Wander the Botanic Gardens

The Royal Botanic Gardens are the largest of three major botanical gardens open to the public in Sydney. This beautifully maintained park includes one of Sydney best vantage points, Mrs Macquarie's Chair, on the edge of the gardens.

Cross the bridge on foot

It may cost to climb it, but crossing the Sydney Harbour Bridge by foot is completely free—and provides spectacular photo opportunities.

Rock pool dip

Snorkel in Sydney's rock pools abound with sea life. Try Gordon's Bay for gorgers and Cabbage Tree Bay in Manly for colourful fish species. Needless to say, it's also free to use the city's world famous surf beaches, including Bondi.

Thailand is 95% Buddhist and the philosophy fully permeates all aspects of life and society in the kingdom. While this is apparent from the sheer number of elaborately decorated temples that dot the landscape, one of the most obvious examples of how Buddhism and daily life intertwine is early in the morning when monks walk the streets in their saffron robes collecting their daily alms. Since monks fully depend on support and donations from the community, they only eat what they are given and every morning, usually between 6:00 am and 7:00

town as many of the city's high-rise hotels and is where you can also find some unique entertainment options like Muay Thai fights or ladyboy cabaret shows. Of course, like just about everywhere in Thailand, there's also plenty of food and restaurant choices from fruit shake stands and stalls serving simple Thai stir-fries to sit-down Western-style restaurants and even a few fast food joints including Subway and McDonald's. While the Night Bazaar has a more commercial, touristy feel to it, compared to the Sunday Walking Street or other markets in town, you can't beat the convenience and selection it provides.

Sunday Walking Street

Even if you have already been to several Southeast Asian markets, you haven't experienced any like Chiang Mai's famous Sunday Walking Street. Starting in the early evening and going late into the night, the sprawling street market is filled with food, handicrafts, clothes, art, souvenirs, musicians, massages and more and is quite a hit with locals as well as Thai and foreign tourists. Try starting at Tha Pae Gate on the east side of town, where stands selling cheap travellers' clothes, souvenirs and snacks begin setting up as early as 10:00 am, then wander west down Ratchadamnoen Road. The market seems to grow every month and currently runs the length of Ratchadamnoen Road to Wat Phra Singh (about 1.5 km) with side streets and temple grounds also being taken up by street stalls and food courts. With so much to see, and so many people, plan to spend several hours here taking in the sights and sounds of the bustling market, haggling for great deals on handmade goods, snacking on tasty treats, and relaxing with a foot massage while enjoying a little people watching. You're sure to get back to your guesthouse with a full stomach and plenty of goodies to take home.

Wat Phra That Doi Suthep

You'll find Wat Phra That Doi Suthep highly recommended in most Chiang Mai guides and for good reason—the temple, set atop Doi Suthep Mountain on the west side of town, is one of the most well-known in Thailand. With its impressive golden chedi (stupa) and panoramic views of the city, it is no surprise the temple can quickly become crowded with locals and visitors alike. According to legend, in 1371 an elephant carried an important relic of the Buddha up the mountain and collapsed on the spot where the chedi is now. Today, Wat Phra That Doi Suthep is by far one of the most important and respected temples in Northern Thailand and is best visited early in the morning when the heat and crowds of the day aren't too strong. Wander around the temple complex, get blessed by a monk, look out at the city below and grab a snack at one of the many food stalls outside the temple grounds before heading further up the mountain to visit the royal Phuping Palace or back down into town—the mountain drive is beautiful! (Note that there is a long staircase leading up to the temple, but a lift is available for those with wheelchairs or walking disabilities).

10 of the best free things to do in Sydney

Hike on the North Shore

Hike from Spit Bridge to Manly, through tiny secluded coves, before seeing the view open out towards Manly. Just as good in the other direction (and refuelling options are available at either end).

Take a free art tour

The Museum of Contemporary Art Australia (MCA), recently refurbished following a multi-million dollar development, offers free daily tours, as well as the ARTBAR, an evening put together by artists held on the last Friday of each month.

Picnic in Centennial Park

The Centennial Park, one of the largest open parks in the city, is the perfect setting for a

summer's day outdoors. Watch the continuous stream of runners, rollerbladers, cyclists and horse riders go past while you relax on the grass with a picnic.

Sydney Festival

The Sydney Festival opens next week with the Festival First Night—with free music, dance and visual spectacle on the streets and in the parks of central Sydney. More than 200,000 people are likely to go. From January 9 to 26.

Get up close to the Opera House

Walk around the Sydney Opera House, which recently celebrated its 40th anniversary. Designed by the enigmatic Danish architect Jorn Utzon, this is one of the most recognisable buildings in the world, and looks just as remarkable up close as it does in the photos.

Visit the Royal National Park

Sydney's Royal National Park is one of the oldest national parks in the world and is free to walk around (although you will have to pay for vehicle entry). There are dozens of miles of rainforest gullies, hidden beaches and dramatic cliffs. The coast walk in particular is known for its spectacular scenery.

