

INCOME TAX ACT, 2025 applicable from 1st April 2026 Improved Clarity & Ease in Reading Towards Viksit Bharat Through Simplified Taxation Law

Appeal to the Prime Minister open the cases of "Nov 1984 Sikh Carnage": Babbar



The Sikh Times Simmi Kaur Babbar New Delhi 20 March: Sardar Gurcharan Singh Babbar, President of the All India Sikh

Conference Babbar, has issued a strong and emotional statement recalling the horrifying events of November 1984, describing them as one of the darkest and most painful chapters in the history of India.

the Aravali hills, where they were burned using petrol, diesel, and chemicals in an attempt to destroy evidence. He further alleged that dangerous prisoners from Tihar Jail were used to carry out these acts under police supervision.

Rahul Gandhi's citizenship dispute: Lucknow Bench of Allahabad HC asks petitioner to implead Centre

Opposition's 'rare view': Tharoor says Parliament should be used more for discussions than disruptions

Congress leader was speaking at the release of the book Guardians of the Republic, written by former law minister Ashwani Kumar, at a discussion moderated by political scientist Neera Chandhoke.



the Supreme Court. He said the implementability of the Supreme Court's decisions always depends on the Executive's will and the people's pressure on the Executive.

what they say but what they do with what they say. Human dignity is at the core of our democracy, the Constitution and also the freedom struggle, Kumar said, adding that a society was judged by the justice it was able to serve.

sustained just by institutions but by the values that animated them," Tharoor said regarding Kumar's argument in his book. He made no reference to the Congress or the BJP in his speech.

Rs 125 Crore A Day: Madhya Pradesh's Debt Belies 'Performer State' Title

Uttar Pradesh.(Agency) Even as NITI Aayog has labelled Madhya Pradesh a "Performer State" in its Fiscal Health Index 2026, the state's aggressive borrowing tells a conflicting story.



What makes the situation striking is the contrast with

the state's reported fiscal performance. According to the index, Madhya Pradesh has maintained a revenue surplus since 2021-22, with strong growth in GST, excise and trade tax collections.

In 4 years, AAP Govt recruits as many doctors as previous govts did in decades, fixing Punjab's long-neglected healthcare system: CM Mann

The Sikh Times CHANDIGARH, 20 March: Continuing his series 'Shandaar Char Saal Bhagwant Mann De Naal', Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Singh Mann on Friday presented the four-year report card of the health sector, after earlier detailing the AAP Government's work in agriculture and irrigation.



On Frequent Visits To Delhi, EPS' Reply After Meeting Amit Shah

Edappadi K Palaniswami categorically said there were no discussions with actor-turned-politician Vijay's Tamilaga Vettri Kazhagam (TVK), ruling out any possibility of an alliance.

Chennai. (Agency) Signalling a decisive push towards the 2026 Tamil Nadu Assembly elections, AIADMK general secretary Edappadi K Palaniswami on Friday said seat-sharing talks with the BJP would be finalised within four days after his meeting with Union Home Minister Amit Shah in Delhi.



numbers, sources indicate the AIADMK is keen to contest around 165 seats, leaving approximately 27 for the Bharatiya Janata Party, 17 for the Pattali Makkal Katchi, nine for TTV Dhinakaran's AMMK, and three for the Tamil Maanila Congress (TMC).

four and five seats. The revised formula indicates a recalibration of alliance strengths ahead of a high-stakes election. Palaniswami made it clear that no new parties are expected to join the AIADMK front, stating that political alignments in the state are largely settled between the AIADMK and the DMK-led blocs.

Front continued news

Appeal to the Prime Minister open the cases of "Nov1984 Sikh Carnage": Babbar

He further said that even the last rites were not performed according to Sikh religious traditions. No bodies were taken to cremation grounds, and no Granthi Sahib was called for final prayers. Babbar alleged that the violence continued for four days under the watch of the then Home Minister P. V. Narasimha Rao, and that nearly 5,000 innocent Sikhs were killed in Delhi alone.

He expressed deep anguish that even after four decades, the perpetrators — including political leaders and police officials — are still free. "Many of the accused officials are alive, living comfortably, and even receiving government pensions, yet no strict action has been taken against them," he said.

Highlighting the global anger within the Sikh community, Babbar said that Sikhs across India and the world are united in demanding justice for the victims of the 1984 massacre.

He urged the Government of India, under Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Home Minister Amit Shah, to reopen all cases related to November 1984, register fresh FIRs, and take strict legal action against all guilty individuals, including political leaders and police officials. Babbar concluded with a strong warning that until justice is delivered, the issue will never be settled.

"The Sikh community has waited for decades. The pain and anger still remain. If justice is not delivered now, this wound will continue to bleed, and the faith of people in the justice system will be deeply shaken," he said.

News box

FIR against 2 women for stealing gold ring in front of liquor shop

Gurgaon.(Agency)

An FIR has been filed after a man alleged his gold ring was stolen by two unidentified women who approached his car outside a liquor shop on Golf Course Road late on Tuesday night. According to police, the complainant, a resident of DLF Phase 3, Sector 24, claimed the incident took place around 9.50 pm in front of the G Town liquor shop where he has sitting in his car with a friend. He said they went there to buy wine. The complainant told police that two women, one wearing a pink top and the other a black one, came near his car and asked for a couple of cigarettes. He alleged that after handing a cigarette to the woman in the pink top, she opened the car door and made objectionable advances. She allegedly grabbed his hand and pinched his finger.

Feeling uncomfortable, the complainant asked his friend to drive away from the spot. After moving around 200 metres, he realised his gold ring was missing. Suspecting that the woman had stolen it during the interaction, he returned to the spot but the two women had left already. A police officer involved with the investigation said the accused had reached the area 15 minutes before the incident. They are yet to be identified, he added. "We have gathered CCTV footage from the area and are trying to trace them. They will be nabbed soon," the officer said. Police said the victim works at a private company in the city. Based on his complaint, the accused have been booked under Section 305(b) (theft in a means of transportation) of the BNS at the Sector 53 police station.

DU student raped at birthday party in Gurgaon, 29-year-old arrested

Gurgaon.(Agency)

A 19-year-old Delhi University (DU) student was allegedly raped by a 29-year-old man in a flat in Sector 33, where she had gone to attend a birthday party on Saturday. Police arrested the accused from the city on Sunday, soon after a case was lodged. The survivor, originally from West Bengal, did not know the accused before the incident, and they met at the party.

The accused was identified as Divyam, a resident of Delhi's Rohini, who works with a security company. According to police and sources, Divyam arrived late for the party as he was invited by his cousin who was among those attending it. He met the survivor there, and they began to drink together. "The accused got heavily drunk and started misbehaving with the woman. Later, the accused took her to an isolated part of the flat and raped her. The woman also confronted the accused for taking advantage of her inebriated condition," an investigator said. The survivor initially confided in her friend who hosted the party, following which arguments broke out between the attendees. The accused and his cousin soon left the party. She eventually lodged a complaint with police on Sunday morning, following which police registered a case under Section 64(1) (rape) of Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita at Sadar police station.

Projects not registered, Rera fines two Noida builders Rs 5 lakh each

Gurgaon.(Agency)

UP-Rera has imposed penalties on two Noida builders for failing to register their projects with the real estate regulator. The projects, Estate 105 and Sobha Rivana, have been fined Rs 5 lakh each. Officials said an inquiry found that both projects were being promoted through websites despite the lack of registration.

A Lucknow-based project, Avikalp Estate, was similarly fined for selling units without registration. According to an official from UP-Rera, notices were issued to the erring developers, who filed replies that were found to be unsatisfactory. "They were found to be in violation of Section 3 of the Real Estate (Regulation and Development) Act, 2016, according to which registration of any real estate project with UP Rera is mandatory. Accordingly, a fine of Rs 5 lakh each has been imposed on developers of three projects," the official said. As per the UP-Rera Act, it is mandatory for any real estate project located within a planning area, having a land area exceeding 500 square metres or comprising more than 8 apartments or flats, to be registered with the regulatory authority.

4L induction stoves sold in 10 days amid LPG shortage in Gurgaon

Gurgaon.(Agency)

Panic about LPG shortage has triggered an unprecedented spike in induction cooktop sales in Gurgaon, with more than four lakh units sold in just 10 days, traders said. According to traders, nearly 70% of electric induction cooktops sold in the last 10 days are not high-end brands but local makes. "There is a mismatch between demand and supply of branded electric induction," said a shopkeeper.

Retailers said discounts disappeared within days due to soaring demand, and most outlets are now accepting advance bookings with waiting periods of up to five days. LPG disruption, fuelled by supply constraints and delayed cylinder deliveries, has pushed households to shift rapidly to electric alternatives. This switch has also contributed to a noticeable rise in local electricity consumption. Retailers said the surge is the highest seen in recent years, reflecting growing public anxiety over the ongoing



gas crisis. "We have not seen such a spike in demand for these appliances in years," said Dinesh Sharma, a shop owner in Sadar Bazaar. Discounts that once ranged between 30-50% have vanished, with most cooktops now selling at full marked price due to overwhelming demand. Many stores are now offering advance bookings, accepting token money and promising delivery in three to five days as

soon as fresh stock arrives. Buyers are undeterred by higher prices, reflecting growing anxiety over traditional cooking fuel shortages. "People are ready to make advance payment and give a token amount to pre-book the supply," said Surender Yadav, who runs a store in Sector 14. Rachita Rokar, a resident of Sector 90, said that electric induction cooktops of major brands are out of stock

on e-platforms, while local brands are available at higher prices. "Earlier, discounts were available on products from all companies, and now they are being sold at the MRP," said Rokar.

Even those who have LPG have started using electric cookware. "The availability of LPG is uncertain. We have shifted some of the cooking to electric equipment and increased the use of ovens and microwaves," said Poja Bist, a resident of Sector 84. For many families, induction cooktops offer a cost-effective and safe alternative to LPG cylinders, particularly where gas bookings have become unpredictable. Small eateries and cloud kitchens, however, face difficulties adapting, as high-volume or specialty cooking often still depends on gas. Rising black-market LPG prices—reportedly reaching up to Rs 4,000 per cylinder in some areas—have amplified the shift towards electric options.

Only 30% Noida schools bag Nipun tag, 18% in Ghaziabad

Noida.(Agency)

The district has recorded a sharp fall in its NIPUN assessment performance in govt schools this year, with only 123 of 420 schools, or 29%, achieving NIPUN status, according to the annual report. The district now ranks 70th in the state. In neighbouring Ghaziabad, only 65 of 365 schools qualified, placing it among the lowest-performing districts. The drop is particularly stark for Noida, which saw a stronger performance last year with 330 of 378 schools meeting the NIPUN benchmark, which assesses the basic numeracy skills and reading skills of classes 1 to 4 students. "In Bissrakh, only 19 of 117 schools were found proficient. In Jewar, 93 schools were assessed, but only 15 were found proficient. These two blocks achieved a mere 16% success. Dadri and Dankaur blocks fared a little better. About 51% of schools in Dadri and 35% in Dankaur achieved Nipun status," said a DIET official. Across the state, Hardoi, Aligarh and Shahjahanpur



emerged as top performers in terms of the number of NIPUN schools, while Hapur, Ghaziabad and Baghpat have found themselves at the tail end.

The report also points to a widening gap between top-performing districts and tailenders. Aligarh (66%), Kasganj (64%)

and Maharajganj (61%) schools have recorded relatively high levels of foundational learning, in contrast to Noida's 29% and Ghaziabad's 17%. The disparity is notable as both districts are part of the National Capital Region and have comparatively better infrastructure than many largely rural districts.

Teachers claim that the decline is largely due to increasing non-academic responsibilities. "A significant portion of our time was spent on duties like SIR work and BLO assignments this year, which directly affects classroom teaching," said a govt school teacher in Noida. A teacher from Ghaziabad said that frequent administrative and election-related duties disrupt regular teaching, affecting focus on foundational literacy and numeracy.

"The results haven't met expectations. We will analyse the shortcomings. A meeting with teachers will soon be held to formulate a future strategy," said Rahul Panwar, BSA, Noida.

Mother's body in flat, man jumps 13 floors to his death in Gzb highrise

Ghaziabad.(Agency)

A 42-year-old man jumped to his death from the 13th-floor of a high-rise Kavi Nagar's Mahaganpuram society on Thursday afternoon. When police checked his ground-floor flat, they discovered the body of the man's mother lying in bed.

According to police, Rajveer Chawala lived in the flat with his mother Satnam Kaur (70). Chawala was married but had been separated from his wife for some time. He worked as an astrologer and a podcaster, but had allegedly stopped working for the last few months. Around 2pm on Thursday, witnesses dialled 112 to report that a resident had committed suicide in the society. A police team reached the spot and found that the man lived on a ground-floor flat of the Vinayak tower, and had gone up to the 13th floor of the tower, from where he jumped. "He fell onto the tin sheds built below. The loud noise



alerted the guard and nearby people, who rushed to the spot and found Chawla lying there, injured. The police, who arrived at

the spot, rushed him to the district hospital, where doctors declared him dead," said ACP (Kavi Nagar) Suryabali Maurya.

Cops later found Chawala's mother's body lying in bed inside their home and sent it for autopsy. It is estimated that Kaur had been dead for two days, and while a cause of death has not been determined, there were no injury marks found on the body, police said. "A forensic team was called to the spot, which has collected some samples from the flat. But we sent Kaur's body for autopsy, and reports are awaited along with Chawala's body. The reason for Kaur's death will be cleared by the autopsy report," the ACP added. Chawala's estranged wife told cops that he struggled with depression and had financial struggles as well.

A neighbour who wished to remain anonymous said that Chawala had not come out of his flat for the last few days.

Rapid Metro ridership up 14% in Gurgaon, but operating costs hit finances

GHAZIABAD.(Agency)

The city's Rapid Metro is seeing more commuters, but higher operating costs continue to strain its finances. A key concern has been the rise in expenditure. Passenger footfall has gone up steadily over the past year, with average daily ridership now hovering around 53,000 passengers, up from nearly 47,000 last year. Total ridership increased by 13.5% between April 2025 and Feb 2026, reaching 1.7 crore passengers, up from 1.5 crore in the corresponding period last year, according to data shared by Haryana Mass Rapid Transport Corporation Ltd (HMRTC) on Thursday. At a board meeting, chief secretary Anurag Rastogi, who presided, said the consistent rise in ridership and revenue reflects the success of integrated transport synergy. He emphasised the need for timely project execution and improved coordination among agencies. Officials said the increase reflects improved mobility demand, with several



months recording noticeable growth compared to last year.

According to data, July recorded the highest jump of 22.93%, with ridership of 17.8 lakh. This was followed by Sept with 17.5 lakh passengers and Aug saw 16.6 lakh ridership. However, the gains in ridership have not translated into a strong financial cushion. The HMRTC has managed to move out of losses and record a surplus this year, but he improvement was marginal. While total income increased to Rs 58.9 crore from Rs 42 crore last year,

expenditure also rose sharply to Rs 58.7 crore, leaving only a marginal surplus of Rs 0.22 crore. In comparison, the system saw a deficit of Rs 9.2 crore in the previous year. Officials attributed the pressure on finances primarily to a 14.46% increase in operational expenses, driven by higher power charges, overhaul of rolling stock and repair of viaduct infrastructure. Power and traction costs alone rose to Rs 11.26 crore, while overall operational costs climbed to nearly Rs 32 crore. This has

limited the impact of higher commuter numbers on overall financial health. While fare revenue registered a modest growth of 12.6%, a large part of the financial improvement came from non-fare sources, which surged by 108%. Revenue from advertisement rights through e-auctions alone more than doubled to Rs 21.5 crore.

Additional income from station space rentals and marketing activities also saw incremental increases, reflecting a growing reliance on commercial streams to offset operational costs.

HMRTC managing director Chander Shekhar Khare told TOI, "Despite rising operational costs, we have recorded a surplus this year. Service reliability has contributed to the increase in ridership. At the same time, we are pushing non-fare revenue through advertisement rights and will soon invite tenders for station naming rights, which will further boost revenue while also ensuring better maintenance of station premises." Khare said the

state is also making progress on multiple metro.

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Press Area, ITO, New Delhi  
Editor-in-Chief  
Gurcharan Singh Babbar  
Mob : 9654077232, 9971359517  
Website : www.thesikhimes.in  
Email : sikhimesindia@gmail.com

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# In 4 years, AAP Govt recruits as many doctors as previous govts did in decades, fixing Punjab's long-neglected healthcare system: CM Mann

**Contd.....Front page**  
 "The scheme has received a massive response, with people coming forward in large numbers to avail its benefits, giving major relief to families who otherwise have to spend huge amounts on treatment," he noted. Raising concern over misinformation, the Chief Minister said, "Some anti-Punjab forces who don't want people to benefit from such facilities are spreading canards about this scheme. These misnomers are aimed at discouraging people from availing its benefits, which is unwarranted and undesirable." He added that the Punjab Government has empanelled the majority of private hospitals under the scheme, with government-fixed rates for around 2600 ailments and treatments. Drawing a comparison with the Centre's Ayushman Yojna, CM Bhagwant Singh Mann said, "Mukh Mantri Sehat Yojna is a boon for people, whereas Ayushman is a

sham." He explained, "The Centre has allocated merely ₹9300 crore for a population of 140 crore, whereas Punjab has allocated ₹2000 crore for just 3 crore people. This means Punjab is spending nearly ten times more per capita, and unlike Ayushman, there are no restrictive conditions in our scheme." Highlighting the scale of implementation, he noted, "Around 900 government and private hospitals in Punjab and Chandigarh have been empanelled, 25 lakh beneficiaries have been registered, and over 1.6 lakh people have already received treatment." He added, "₹1200 crore was allocated for 2025-26, and ₹2000 crore has been earmarked for 2026-27. The scheme covers 2,356 medical and surgical procedures, including orthopaedics, general medicine, heart, lung, kidney diseases, cancer treatment, and more." Presenting the health department's four-year report card, the Chief

Minister said, "883 Aam Aadmi Clinics are operational across Punjab, and 100 more will be dedicated on March 28. Additionally, 400 clinics are under construction where 47 tests and 107 medicines are available free of cost, with a patient satisfaction rate of 94%." He added, "OPD footfall has crossed 5 crore, with 1.69 crore patients treated for specific conditions, and this model is now recognized across India." On strengthening human resources, CM Bhagwant Singh Mann said, "Punjab has witnessed the largest recruitment of doctors in its history since 2022, including 948 general doctors and 627 specialists, accounting for 35% of total government doctor recruitment in over 75 years." He further stated, "300 nursing staff and 250 pharmacists have been recruited, and recruitment of 672 nurses is underway." Focusing on maternal and child healthcare, he said, "Seven Mother and Child Health Centres

with 250-bed capacity each are under construction, and the Dhuri centre with 30 beds was inaugurated on March 17. Free medicines are now available in all hospitals." He added that infrastructure strengthening remains a priority, with hotline services operational in all district hospitals and 33 out of 42 sub-divisional hospitals. "The remaining hospitals will receive hotline services by April-May 2026, and more than 7400 crore has been spent on advanced medical equipment," he noted. The Chief Minister further stated, "22 Critical Care Blocks with 50 beds each are under construction, and diagnostic services are being significantly expanded. MRI services will be available in all district hospitals by October 2026, marking a 500% increase, while CT scan services have been expanded by 33%." He added, "PET scan facilities will be introduced in Amritsar, Faridkot, Mohali, and Patiala, and more than

200 empanelled private diagnostic centres are providing free X-ray and ultrasound services." Highlighting emergency response initiatives, CM Bhagwant Singh Mann said, "Farishte Scheme and Sadak Surakhya Force are ensuring immediate cashless treatment to accident victims. Helpers are rewarded with ₹2000 and a certificate, and more than 600 lives have been saved." On technological interventions, he said, "Dialysis services have been expanded and capacity doubled to 4800, reducing waiting time. For the first time in the country, AI-enabled cancer screening was conducted between September 2025 and March 2026, with 9,294 women screened for breast cancer." He added, "Vision screening was conducted for 1.07 lakh people, with 21,660 identified with vision issues." Detailing critical care initiatives, CM Bhagwant Singh Mann said, "Under Mission Amrit, the Punjab STEMI Project has been

implemented in 23 districts for heart attack care, enrolling 29,000 patients and identifying more than 1700 STEMI cases." He added, "The AI-enabled Punjab Stroke Project, in collaboration with CMC Ludhiana and Medtronic, has already benefited more than 100 patients." He further stated, "The first-of-its-kind Punjab Institute of Liver and Biliary Sciences is providing major relief to people." Highlighting preventive health initiatives, he said, "Under the CM Ki Yogshala campaign, 8000 yoga sessions are held daily, benefiting around 2 lakh people." On medical education, the Chief Minister said, "Seven new medical colleges are under construction, which will add 600 new MBBS seats, helping develop Punjab as a hub of medical education." He concluded, "The Punjab Government will leave no stone unturned to make Punjab healthy and progressive in the coming times."

# Plant to generate employment for 2,700 youth directly & 10,000 indirectly: CM Mann

**The Sikh Times**  
 LUDHIANA, 20th March: Punjab's industrial revival story under the AAP-led government received a major push as Chief Minister Bhagwant Singh Mann inaugurated Tata Steel's second-largest plant in India in Ludhiana, positioning it as proof of a decisive policy shift from the past. With thousands of jobs promised and green energy-driven steel production launched for the first time in the country, the CM drew a sharp contrast with previous governments, asserting that industries that once left Punjab due to flawed policies are now returning under a pro-industry regime. The plant, set up in Ludhiana at a cost of ₹3200 crore, marks a major step towards transforming Punjab's industrial landscape. Addressing the gathering after unveiling Tata Steel's second-

largest plant, Punjab CM Bhagwant Mann stated, "This is a momentous day as history has been created to give a major fillip to the economic development of the state. Today Punjab has become the first state in India to start steel production using green energy through this Electric Arc Furnace-based plant. It is a red-letter day for Punjab as Tata Steel has taken responsibility to illuminate the future of 2600 to 2700 families directly and 8000-10,000 indirectly. This world-class plant is equipped with cutting-edge green energy technology." Congratulating the Tata Steel team, he said, "When a company like Tata Steel invests in a state, it reflects trust, confidence and belief in its future. Tata Steel's presence sends a clear message that Punjab is ready for the next phase of

industrial growth. This investment is not just a project, but an opportunity for the youth of Punjab, our engineers, our skilled workforce and for Punjab's manufacturing sector to grow stronger." Emphasising the future vision, the Chief Minister continued, "Punjab has always been a land of entrepreneurs and cities like Ludhiana are globally recognised for their entrepreneurial spirit, hard work and manufacturing strength. With modern facilities like this Tata Steel plant, we are strengthening our legacy and preparing Punjab for the future of manufacturing. This is Tata Steel's first Electric Arc Furnace-based plant in India, which shows that Punjab is attracting not just investment, but modern and future-ready investment. Such production reflects the global shift towards efficiency, sustainability and better use of resources." Reiterating the government's industrial vision, he asserted, "We want Punjab to become one of the most preferred industrial destinations in India. We want companies to see Punjab not just as a market, but as a long-term

manufacturing partner. Tata Group is globally known for its social responsibility, and Ratan Tata had always led from the front in this regard." Reflecting on the project, he said, "Recalling a personal example, he shared that Ratan Tata had even started a dog shelter at Bombay House for stray dogs after seeing them struggle during the monsoon. Describing him as the 'Desh ka Beta', CM Bhagwant Singh Mann said that when he passed away, the entire nation mourned his contribution to nation-building and reputation. Punjab is proud to be the first state to start steel production using green energy. Recalling his visit to Japan, the Chief Minister added, "Countries like Japan are already moving towards large-scale use of green energy, and this project

also its reputation. The plant, spread over 115 acres, saw its investment rise from ₹2,600 crore to ₹3,200 crore and will use 100% steel scrap as raw material, making it environmentally sustainable. The Tata Group operates in over 100 countries across six continents and employs more than one million people. Punjabis believe in honest and dedicated work, which has always strengthened the bond between industry and workforce. The state government is actively attracting investment to boost industrial growth." Detailing achievements, CM Bhagwant Singh Mann emphasised, "Over the past four years, investments worth ₹1.58 lakh crore have been secured, creating employment opportunities for more than five lakh youth. Our approach is simple i.e. stable policies, fast decisions and strong industry partnerships. The state government should act as a facilitator, not an obstacle, and must make it easier for industries to invest and expand." Reaffirming commitment, he said, "Punjab is ready, it welcomes investment and supports industry that cre-

ates jobs and strengthens the economy. Every new factory and investment helps the state move closer to generating employment. When industries grow, Punjab grows, and when Punjab grows, the country grows. When industry creates jobs, youth find opportunities within the state, putting Punjab on a high growth trajectory. From traditional industry to advanced manufacturing, Punjab is moving towards global competitiveness and a strong industrial ecosystem." Appreciating collaboration, the Chief Minister added, "Industrial development is always a partnership. When government and industry work together with trust and clarity, projects move faster and outcomes become stronger." He expressed hope that this project will become a key pillar in Punjab's industrial

growth story. This project will encourage more companies to look towards Punjab as a serious manufacturing destination." CM Bhagwant Singh Mann assured full support to Tata Steel and the industry, stating that they are partners in Punjab's progress. "This project is an important milestone in the economic development of the state. It will help transform Punjab into an industrial hub and accelerate economic growth. The day is not far when Punjab will lead the country not only in agriculture but also in industry," he concluded. Earlier, Industries Minister Sanjeev Arora welcomed the dignitaries. On the occasion, Cabinet Minister Sanjeev Arora, Hardeep Singh Mundian, Chief Secretary KAP Sinha and others were present.

## Illegal LPG storage unit busted in south Delhi; 223 cylinders seized, 2 held

New Delhi: The Delhi Police has busted an illegal LPG cylinder storage unit in south Delhi's Rajpur Khurd, arresting two persons and seizing 223 cylinders from the premises, officials said on Wednesday. The accused, identified as Hitesh Rathi, 38, and Arvind Kumar, 40, were allegedly operating the facility without valid licence or authorisation, they added. Acting on specific intelligence, police raided a plot in Rajpur Khurd village on Tuesday. During the search, they recovered 223 Indane LPG cylinders, including 16 filled and 45 empty domestic cylinders, and 162 empty commercial cylinders, officials said. An electronic weighing machine and eight safety caps were also seized from the location, they added. Police said the premises were being used as an illegal storage facility, adding that stockpiling such large number of LPG cylinders without proper safety measures posed serious risk to nearby residents. The accused failed to produce any valid documents or satisfactory explanation for storing the cylinders, they said. Officials from the food and supplies department and Indane Gas representatives were called to verify and count the seized LPG cylinders, police said. A case has been registered in this connection at Maidan Garhi police station under relevant sections of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita and the Essential Commodities Act, and further investigation is underway, they added.

## Una youth arrested by Delhi Police for social media post against PM Modi

Una (HP): The Special Branch of the Delhi Police has arrested a youth from Gagret in Una district for writing a social media post against Prime Minister Narendra Modi. The arrest was made late Tuesday night at the Special Branch office. Una SP Sachin Hiremath said a team is investigating an FIR registered in Delhi against Anil Kumar Dadhwal, a resident of Gagret, regarding a social media post against the PM. The team had informed the Una police and was assisted by local police personnel. Hiremath said the accused was not at home, so the Delhi Police team returned on Monday to serve a notice to the family, asking them to produce Anil Kumar at their designated office in Delhi. On Tuesday, the accused went to Delhi with his lawyer, and the Delhi Police arrested him last night. The Una police have yet to receive further information from the Delhi Police. The accused's family members have informed the Una police about the arrest. Hiremath declined to comment on the contents of the social media post. Anil Kumar Dadhwal is reportedly active on social media and is believed to be a Congress supporter.

## Jamia Millia Islamia launches 30 new courses, March 25 deadline for admissions

New Delhi: Jamia Millia Islamia (JMI) has announced that the deadline for submitting online applications for the 2026-27 academic session is March 25, urging prospective students to complete the process well in advance. The university is offering admissions across undergraduate, postgraduate, diploma and certificate programmes. The document outlines eligibility criteria, entrance test details, fee structures and timelines, and is accessible through the official admission portal. A major highlight this year is the introduction of 30 new programmes spanning diverse disciplines such as Japanese and German studies, human resource management, biotechnology, renewable energy, robotics & artificial intelligence, and multiple language specialisations.

## National Green Tribunal seeks Delhi Jal Board's response on IIT-Delhi study funding

New Delhi: The National Green Tribunal (NGT), Principal Bench, New Delhi, on Wednesday sought Delhi Jal Board's (DJB) response on the funding for the Indian Institute of Technology-Delhi study to examine the feasibility and effectiveness of ultraviolet (UV) technology for disinfection in Sewage Treatment Plants (STPs). The Bench, comprising Justice Prakash Shrivastava and Expert Member Afroz Ahmad, was hearing an application which originates from a news report highlighting that a significant number of Delhi's STPs are not adequately equipped to address pollution in the Yamuna. During the proceedings, the Tribunal noted that in its earlier order dated August 22, 2025, it had directed the Indian Institute of Technology-Delhi to examine the feasibility and effectiveness of ultraviolet (UV) technology for disinfection in STPs. The proposed study aims to determine key technical parameters such as UV wavelength, intensity, exposure time, and distance required to effectively reduce fecal coliform levels in treated sewage. The Tribunal was informed that the IIT-Delhi, through a communication dated January 13, 2026, had estimated the cost of the study at Rs 60,70,500 for 14 STPs and had requested remittance of the amount to proceed further. The counsel appearing for the Delhi Jal Board sought time to obtain instructions regarding the payment, while the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) also sought an adjournment citing personal difficulty. Taking note of the submissions, the Tribunal directed the

## Public Notice

I, NARESH KUMAR S/O SHRI KRISHAN SHARMA, R/O 115-A, GRIH-10, SUNDER APARTMENTS, PASCHIMI VIHAR, DELHI - 110087, DELHI, INDIA have changed my name to NARESH KUMAR SHARMA for all future purposes.

**NAME CHANGE**  
 I, ANITA RANI W/O OM PRAKASH, R/O 369, 1st FLOOR 369 MUKHERJI NAGAR DELHI-110009, DELHI, INDIA have changed my name to ANITA MANCHANDA for all future purposes.

**NAME CHANGE**  
 I, NARESH KUMAR GOEL S/O SHISHAPAL, residing at H NO-F-63, GALI NO-11, JAGAT PURI, KRISHNA NAGAR, DELHI -110051, have changed my name to NARESH KUMAR for all future purposes.

**NAME CHANGE**  
 I, HEEMATA GOEL W/O NARESH KUMAR residing at H NO-F-63, GALI NO-11, JAGAT PURI, KRISHNA NAGAR, DELHI -110051, have changed my name to HEEMALATA for all future purposes.

**NAME CHANGE**  
 I, RITU AGGARWAL W/O PYSHU KUMAR residing at H NO-F-63, GALI NO-11, JAGAT PURI, KRISHNA NAGAR, DELHI -110051, have changed my name to RITU GOEL for all future purposes.

**NAME CHANGE**  
 I, HITHERO KNOWN AS SAFAIA BANO alias SAFAIA daughter of Shri IFTIKHAR AHMAD and wife of Shri ANWAR SHAKIB, residing at F-66/1 S/F, L5, Abul Fazal Enclave II, Shaheen Bagh Jamia Nagar, Abul Fazal Enclave-II, South Delhi, Delhi-110025, have changed my name and shall hereafter be known as SAFAIA.

**NAME CHANGE**  
 I, Dhananjay Koshal, son of Shri Krishan Avtar Koshal, resident of 41 Extension-1, Lokesh Cinema, Nanangli Delhi-110041, that is, in my 10th class mark sheet and migration certificate, my mother's name is written as Parveen, whereas her full name is Parveen Bala. She should be known as Parveen Bala in future. Roll Number: 27023532016 Year: October 2005

**NAME CHANGE**  
 I, GYANENDRA S/O SHAJENDRA SINGH R/O 37A/317 DURGA NAGAR NAGLA PADI DAYAL BAGH AGRA UTTAR PRADESH -282005 have changed my name to GYANENDRA SINGH Permanently for all future purpose

**Public Notice**  
 It is for general information that I, MANAKA RANI W/O PAWAN KUMAR, R/O 142/6, Gharoncha Neem Ka Bangar, Patparganj Village, Shamas Pur East Delhi, Delhi-110091, declare that name of mine has been wrongly written as MONIKA in my minor son namely ASAV/KUMAR, aged 12 years in his school record. The actual name of mine is MANAKA RANI, which may be amended accordingly.

**NAME CHANGE**  
 I, hithero known as TAJINDER KUMAR S/O BANARASI DAS SEHTHYA R/O House No-71, Block-B, Pocket-Q, Shalimar Bagh, North West Delhi, Delhi-110088 have changed my name and shall hereafter be known as TAJINDER KUMAR SEHTYA.

## Public Notice

General public is hereby informed that I, Mr. PARVIN KUMAR VIG, am filing an application in L&DO/NDMC for substitution / mutation of the property bearing Shop No. 62, Khanna Market, Lodhi Colony, New Delhi-110003, in the name of Late Shri Boddh Raj, on the grounds of inheritance. If there are any objections/claims from the general public in respect of this application, the same may be communicated to the office of L&DO/NDMC along with supporting document through registered post or by visiting L&DO/NDMC, or through an email at so.estate@ndmc.gov.in, within 30 days from the date of publication of this notice.

Mr. Parvin Kumar Vig  
 Address - K-49B first floor Kalkaji, New Delhi  
 Phone 9810519221

## NAME CHANGE

I, Shraban Kumar Satapathy S/o Panchanan Satapathy, House No-211-212, 1st Floor, Pocket-4, Sector-25 Rohini, Rohini, North West Delhi, Delhi, 110085 have changed my name to Shraban Satapathy for all future purposes.

## NAME CHANGE

I, Sahil Gupta S/O Davender Kumar R/O 490/36 Onkar Nagar-C Tri Nagar, Delhi-110035, have changed my minor daughter's name from Aaradhya Aggarwal to Aaradhya Gupta for all future purpose.

## NAME CHANGE

I, MRS. POOJA W/O of No-6502810P RANK-SEP Name-AJAY YADAV residing at VILL- BHEUSA URF BANKATA, PO-BARIGAON, TEH-KHAJANI, DISTT-GORAKHPUR, UTTAR PRADESH-273211, have changed my name from MRS. POOJA to POOJA for all future purposes vide Affidavit dated 20/03/2026 before Notary Public, Delhi.

## NAME CHANGE

I, POUJAPOOJAKAWATRAWIBANTI R/O HOUSE NO-1689NEAR TRIVENI PARK, SEC-2, ROHTAK, HARYANA-124001 HAVE CHANGED MY NAME TO POUJARAJORA FOR ALL FUTURE PURPOSES

## NAME CHANGE

I, RAMESH SINGH ARYA S/o SH VINOD SINGH ARYA, R/O GALI NO.16, PURANA WATER TANK, RANGPUR, MAHPAL PUR, NEW DELHI-110037 want to change my name from RAMESH SINGH ARYA to ARYAN SINGH. THAT RAMESH SINGH ARYA and ARYAN SINGH is one and same Person

## NAME CHANGE

It is for general information that I, MEENAKSHI W/O LATE SOHAN LAL R/O 3189, GALI NO. 234, CHANDAN NAGAR, TRI NAGAR, ONKAR NAGAR, P.O. DISTT NORTH WEST DELHI-110035 declare that name of mine has been wrongly written as MEENU in my husband service record. The actual name of mine is MEENAKSHI which may be amended accordingly. It is certified that I have complied with other legal requirements in this connection.

## PUBLIC NOTICE

NOTICE is hereby given to public at large that my client Mr. Rocky Jaiswal is purchasing the Plot No. 4, admeasuring 60 sq. yds., pertaining to the Kharsa No. 40/25, situated in the colony known as K-5 Extension, Part-1, Mohan Garden, Uttam Nagar, in the revenue estate of village Haastal, New Delhi from Mrs. Prem Devi who is the owner of the property vide G.P.A. Agreement to Sale & WILL dated 07-03-2023 and Intend to mortgage the said property with Aditya Birla Housing Finance Ltd. If any person(s) has/have any objection(s) or claim(s) with respect to the right, title or interest in the said property may please contact us within 07 days from the date of this notice on the number & address mentioned herein below, failing which my client(s) shall not be held responsible in any manner whatsoever.

Khatian & Khatian  
 Plot No. 100, 1st floor  
 Okhla Phase III, New Delhi  
 Ph. No: 011-49774545

## PUBLIC NOTICE

This is to inform you that Mr. Pravin Vishwas Ghadge, Mrs. Sneha Pravin Ghadge, Mr. Vishwas Bhagwan Ghadge and Mrs. Ranjana Vishwas Ghadge are intend to purchase Unit No. 5, Property bearing Municipal No. 73, comprising the entire Ground Floor, First Floor, Second Floor, and Third Floor, along with roof rights, admeasuring 112 sq. yards, forming part of Kharsa No. 604/427-69 and Kharsa No. 605/69, situated at Block AC, Gali No. 2, Joshi Road, Karol Bagh, New Delhi - 110005, from Mr. Subhash Rajeja. Mr. Subhash Rajeja is the owner of the said property by virtue of a Relinquishment Deed dated 28.01.2023. The original owner of the property was his mother, Mrs. Geeta Rajeja. However, Mr. Subhash Rajeja has informed us that Two of the original documents, namely the Conveyance Deed dated 16.03.2012 (registered as No. 4858) and Conveyance Deed dated 16.03.2012 (registered as No. 4847), relating to the said property, has been lost/misplaced. The said documents are not traceable and could not be found. An online FIR (LAR No. 176641/2026) dated 19.03.2026 has been registered regarding the loss of the aforesaid documents. Please also note that the said property is proposed to be financed by Samman Capital Ltd., UGF, BP-3, Pusa Road, Old Rajinder Nagar, New Delhi. Any person(s) objection & regarding subject property, then kindly may submit his/her objection within 07 days from the date of the Notice in writing. The said objection may be kindly sent to the undersigned by way of the Registered Post on the address given below and by E-mail, failing which, the claim as per aforesaid shall be treated as null and void in respect of the subject property.

(JASHWANI) Advocate  
 Chamber No. 122,  
 Tehsil Compound,  
 Ghaziabad, U.P.  
 kumar2021ashwani@gmail.com

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## PUBLIC NOTICE

NEWS BOX

## Lebanon president Joseph Aoun calls for Israel truce as French minister visits

BEIRUT. (Agency)

Lebanese President Joseph Aoun said a proposed framework to halt fighting between Israel and Iran-backed militant Hezbollah was "still on the table", as he hosted French Foreign Minister Jean-Noel Barrot on Thursday. Lebanon was pulled into the regional war on March 2, when Hezbollah fired rockets toward neighbouring Israel in response to the killing of its ally Iran's supreme leader in Israeli-US attacks. Israel responded with heavy airstrikes across Lebanon and ground incursions in the border area, which combined have left more than 1,000 people dead. On the Israeli side, two soldiers were killed in fighting in southern Lebanon, according to the military. Meeting Barrot on Thursday, Aoun stressed "the necessity of a ceasefire, and to provide the necessary guarantees for its success by the parties concerned", according to a presidency statement.

On March 9, Aoun proposed a four-point initiative that called for "a full truce" with Israel, increased support to the Lebanese army in order to "disarm Hezbollah" and "direct negotiations" with Israel. The president told Barrot that "the negotiating initiative... is still on the table, but the continued military escalation is hindering its launch", the statement said. "What is important is to stop the escalation" between Hezbollah and Israel, Aoun added. According to the French foreign ministry, Barrot's snap visit was a sign of "solidarity with the Lebanese people, who have been dragged into a war they did not choose".

The French minister met with other top officials and visited a school near Beirut that had been turned into a shelter for people displaced by the war. French President Emmanuel Macron, who spoke with Lebanese leaders last week, expressed his hope on Thursday that Israel would agree to direct talks with Beirut. "The matter of direct negotiations requires that the delegations be finalised and that consent be formally expressed by the Israeli side," he told reporters in Brussels after a European summit.

## 11 killed in anti-cartel operation in northwest Mexico



MEXICO CITY. (Agency)

Eleven presumed gunmen were killed in an anti-cartel military operation in northwestern Mexico, officials said on Thursday. The Public Security Secretariat said the operation was carried out by Mexican Marines in the conflict-ridden state of Sinaloa, where government forces raided homes tied to the Sinaloa cartel faction allied with Ismael "El Mayo" Zambada. Loyalists to Zambada, jailed in the United States since 2024, have been waging war against allies of the sons of Joaquin "El Chapo" Guzman, who has also been imprisoned in the US. Gunmen opened fire on the Marines when they arrived at one of the target properties, with a preliminary toll of 11 deaths in the ensuing firefight, according to the security secretariat's statement. No injuries were reported in the operation. Government forces detained the alleged daughter of a leader of the faction, known as the "Mayiza," though the unnamed woman was released after authorities determined she was unrelated to criminal activity. Authorities say they're maintaining operational presence in the region, where the raid ignited a wave of highway blockades and burning of businesses.

Mexico has increased arrests of drug traffickers and drug seizures as US President Donald Trump pressures Mexican authorities to crack down on cartels.

## Iran War Is Making Saudis Rich But They Are Not Happy About It. Here's Why

world. (Agency)

One country sits at the center of a war it never asked for, watching oil prices climb to levels that should make it rich but instead keep its officials up at night. Saudi Arabia, the Gulf's largest oil producer, is running worst-case models that show Brent crude surging past 180 dollars a barrel if the Iran conflict and its chokehold on energy supplies drag into late April, according to a Wall Street Journal report citing several Saudi oil officials. Rather than celebrate, Riyadh is alarmed. Prices that high could destroy long-term demand, trigger a global recession and brand the kingdom a wartime profiteer. "Saudi Arabia generally does not like too rapid increases in oil, because that then creates long term market instability," Umer Karim, analyst of Saudi foreign policy at the King Faisal Center for Research and Islamic Studies, was quoted as saying in the Journal report. The ideal, he added, is modest price gains with stable market share. Saudi Aramco, the national oil company that handles production, sales and pricing, has not commented on the report yet. The math is already brutal. Since fighting erupted on February 28, prices have jumped sharply, with Brent futures touching around 119 dollars a barrel this week after Iran struck Qatar's Ras Laffan energy hub, Saudi facilities at Yanbu and continued attacking ships in the Strait of Hormuz, the narrow passage carrying about 20 percent of the world's oil. Gulf benchmarks tied to Oman crude, which Middle East producers use to price physical tanker cargoes, have blown past 166 dollars in recent trade.

# Teenagers sue Musk's xAI claiming image-generator made sexually explicit images of them as minors

**They are seeking class-action status in order to represent what the lawsuit says are thousands of victims like themselves who either are minors or were minors when sexually explicit images of them were created.**

NASHVILLE. (Agency)

Three teenagers in Tennessee sued Elon Musk's xAI this week, claiming the company's image-generation tools were used to morph real photos of them into explicitly sexual images. The high school students, who are seeking to proceed under pseudonyms, filed the lawsuit in California, where xAI — Musk's artificial intelligence company — has its headquarters. They are seeking class-action status in order to represent what the lawsuit says are thousands of victims like themselves who either are minors or were minors when

sexually explicit images of them were created. According to the lawsuit, Jane Doe 1 was alerted anonymously in December that someone was distributing sexually explicit images of her on a social media website. "At least five of these files, one video and four images, depicted her actual face and body in settings with which she was familiar, but morphed into sexually explicit poses," the lawsuit states. It claims the person distributing the images knew Doe and used xAI's image generation tools to turn real photos of her into sexually abusive ones. One of the images was taken from a homecoming photo. Another was taken from a high school yearbook. The person distributing the images also created explicit images of at least 18 other girls, two of whom are co-plaintiffs in the lawsuit. In late December, local police arrested the perpetrator and confiscated his phone. They found that he had uploaded the images to several platforms where he traded them for sexually explicit images of other minors. Other AI companies have

prohibited their image-generators from producing any sexually explicit content, even of adults. Musk saw this as a business opportunity and promoted the ability of xAI's Grok chatbot to create "spicy"



content, the lawsuit claims. However, there is currently no way to prevent the generation of explicit images of adults while completely blocking the generation of images of children, the lawsuit claims. It also claims that xAI knew Grok would be

able to produce sexually explicit images of children but released it anyway.

The lawsuit claims the person who distributed images of the plaintiffs used an application that licensed the xAI technology or "otherwise purchased its access to Grok, and was used as a cut-out or middleman." xAI did not respond to an email from The Associated Press seeking comment. But a Jan. 14 post about the controversy on the social media platform X said: "We remain committed to making X a safe platform for everyone and continue to have zero tolerance for any forms of child sexual exploitation, non-consensual nudity, and unwanted sexual content." We take action to remove high-priority violative content, including Child Sexual Abuse Material (CSAM) and non-consensual nudity, taking appropriate action against accounts that violate our X Rules.

## Venezuelan president replaces senior military commanders

CARACAS. (Agency)

Venezuela's interim president said Thursday that she had replaced all her senior military commanders, the latest in a flurry of reforms since the United States ousted Nicolas Maduro.

Delcy Rodriguez announced the changes in a social media post a day after firing the long-serving defense minister, who had been close to Maduro, and replacing him with a former intelligence chief. "I announce the designation of the renewed Military High Command," said Rodriguez, who served as vice president under Maduro, the authoritarian leftist toppled in an American special forces raid on January 3. Under US pressure and even a threat of violence, Rodriguez is

tasked with leading a country with the world's largest proven oil reserves but an economy in shambles, with widespread shortages of food,



medicine and other basics. She has enacted a historic amnesty law to free political prisoners jailed under Maduro and reformed oil and mining regulations in line with US demands

for access to her country's vast natural wealth. President Donald Trump has said he effectively runs Venezuela now and is letting Rodriguez stay in power so long as she toes the US line. Rodriguez is in the delicate position of trying to satisfy both Trump and Venezuelans still loyal to Maduro, who was taken to New York along with his wife for trial on US-issued drug trafficking charges.

The Venezuelan military, which has sworn loyalty to Rodriguez, is a powerful entity. It oversees oil, mining and food distribution enterprises, as well as customs operations and key government ministries, amid allegations of abuse and corruption.

## Epstein's former attorney tells House panel he didn't know about the abuse

WASHINGTON. (Agency)

Jeffrey Epstein's longtime personal attorney testified to a House committee Thursday that he was unaware of the late financier's sexual abuse of underage girls at the time it was happening, becoming the latest person connected to Epstein to take that stance.

Darren Indyke, who worked as Epstein's attorney for roughly two decades, told the House Oversight Committee in his opening statement that he "had no knowledge whatsoever" of Epstein's abuse and would have quit working for him if he had known he was trafficking women and underage girls. Other associates of Epstein, including his former accountant Richard Kahn, one of his largest clients, Les Wexner, and former President Bill Clinton, have also told the committee in sworn depositions that they didn't know about Epstein's abuse. Democrats on the committee aired their frustration during a break from Indyke's deposition, saying that the lawyer had taken a "defensive" posture in the face of questioning. Indyke, along with Kahn, is an executor of Epstein's estate, and lawmakers had hoped they would provide details about Epstein's abuse that would bring accountability. So far, though, lawmakers have struggled to uncover substantive details about the associates of Epstein, who died in 2019 in a New York jail cell while he faced charges for sex trafficking. As with all the other witnesses, they all claim they never had any knowledge before it became public that Mr. Epstein was involved with women, doing anything inappropriately with young women," said Rep. James Comer, the chair of the House Oversight Committee. Comer, R-Ky., added that Indyke was asked why he had continued to work with Epstein following his 2008 guilty plea for soliciting prostitution from a minor. He said Indyke told lawmakers that Epstein convinced him it was a one-time mistake and he was remorseful. Still, Democrats accused Indyke and Kahn of covering up for Epstein. "I think what has become crystal clear over the course of these last few depositions is that these people are going to lie to us over and over and over," said Rep. Dave Min, a California Democrat. Both Indyke and Kahn have said repeatedly that they did not know about Epstein's abuse. As executors of his estate, they agreed earlier this year to settle a class-action lawsuit brought against them by survivors of Epstein's abuse for up to \$35 million that alleged they had aided "Epstein's illegal conduct" for financial gain. They did not admit any wrongdoing as part of the settlement. A push for more documents Democratic lawmakers are pushing for the release of further documents from Epstein's estate. They said Indyke indicated that he is awaiting further instructions from the Republican-controlled committee about providing a tranche of documents that relate to a lawsuit that a prominent Epstein abuse survivor, Virginia Giuffre filed against Epstein's former girlfriend and confidant, Ghislaine Maxwell, as well as other documentation on businesses connected to Epstein.

## Crude sinks after Netanyahu tries to reassure on Iran war

HONG KONG. (Agency)

Crude prices fell more than two percent Friday after Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said Iran was being "decimated" and that the war would end earlier than many feared.

Traders also welcomed US President Donald Trump's remarks that Israeli forces would not target any more of Tehran's energy infrastructure, after strikes on a key gas field Wednesday sparked warnings of retaliation against installations across the Gulf. But with the conflict heading into a fourth week, most equities fell as investors fret over energy markets, with oil still holding around \$100 and gas surging amid the effective closure of the crucial Strait of Hormuz. Netanyahu told a news conference Thursday that Israel and the United States were "winning and Iran is being decimated", adding that the Islamic republic no longer had the capacity to enrich uranium or manufacture ballistic missiles. "This war is ending a lot faster than people think," he said without providing a specific timeframe. Netanyahu also said he would help the United States try to secure Hormuz, through which a fifth of global oil and gas flows. His comments came after Washington said

there was no deadline to end the war launched against Iran on February 28. Both main oil contracts sank Friday, though Brent remains at about \$105 and West Texas Intermediate about \$93. Before Netanyahu's comments Thursday, the commodity had soared to as high as \$119 after Tehran struck a number of



energy sites around the Gulf in retaliation for Israel's attack on its South Pars field. European gas prices soared more than a third at one point.

Asked whether he had talked to the prime minister about attacking Iranian gas fields, Trump replied: "I did. I told him, don't do that, and he won't do that. "You know, we're independent. We get along great. It's coordinated, but on occasion, he'll do something, and if I don't like it...and so we're not doing that anymore." He had warned Iran earlier that US forces would

"massively blow up" the South Pars field if Tehran did not stop attacking Qatar, to which Iran said it would have "zero restraint" if its energy infrastructure was hit again. Meanwhile, French President Emmanuel Macron said his country planned to talk with permanent members of the UN Security Council about establishing a UN framework -- once the ongoing exchange of fire had ended -- to secure navigation in the Strait of Hormuz. While Wall Street enjoyed a late rally on the remarks, Asian stock markets fluctuated as nervous traders awaited positive developments in the crisis.

Hong Kong, Sydney, Singapore and Wellington all fell, though Shanghai, Seoul and Taipei rose. Tokyo was closed for a holiday. "Netanyahu's remarks have poured a layer of soothing balm over sentiment, with talk of securing the Strait and claims that Iran's nuclear and missile capabilities have been neutralised, feeding the idea that this conflict could burn out faster than feared," wrote Stephen Innes at SPI Asset Management. "That narrative matters because it shortens the perceived life of the supply shock."

# Israel hits Tehran with airstrikes on Persian New Year as war jolts energy markets

DUBAI. (Agency)

Israel pounded Tehran with airstrikes Friday as Iranians marked Nowruz, or the Persian New Year, in the midst of a war that has sent shock waves through the global economy and risked drawing Iran's Arab neighbors directly into the conflict. Activists reported hearing strikes around Iran's capital. The attacks came a day after Israel pledged to refrain from more strikes on a key Iranian gas field and Iran intensified attacks on oil and natural gas facilities around the Gulf.

Heavy explosions shook Dubai early Friday as air defenses intercepted incoming fire over the city, where people were observing Eid al-Fitr, the end of the holy Muslim fasting month of Ramadan, and mosques made the day's first call to prayers.

Iran kept up its wave of attacks launched at Israel that have sent millions of people to shelters, with sirens sounding across a wide swath of the north, from Haifa to the Galilee to the border with Lebanon. It came after an intense day that saw more than a dozen

missile launches on Thursday alone, according to Israel's military. Global fuel supplies have been under intense pressure because of Iran's stranglehold on the Strait of Hormuz, a strategic waterway through which a fifth of the world's oil is transported. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said late Thursday that, at the request of President Donald Trump, Israel will hold off any further attacks on Iran's offshore South Pars gas field. Iranian strikes in retaliation have led to already elevated global energy prices further surging and spurred Gulf allies to call for Trump to rein in Netanyahu.

Since the U.S. and Israel launched the war on Feb. 28, Iran's top leaders have been killed and the country's military capabilities have been severely degraded. Netanyahu said in a televised address that Iran no longer has the ability to enrich uranium or make ballistic missiles, although he did not provide evidence. Still, Iran — now led by the son of the supreme leader killed in the

war's opening salvo — remains capable of missile and drone attacks. Brent crude oil, the international standard, briefly surged above \$119 a barrel, up more than 60% since the war started. The European



benchmark for natural gas prices also rose sharply and has roughly doubled in the past month. U.N. Security Council meets over Iran's attacks on Gulf states. The United Nations Security Council held an urgent closed meeting Thursday during

which Gulf countries stressed the need for Iran to halt attacks on them, said Bahrain's U.N. Ambassador Jamal Alrowaiei, the Arab representative on the U.N.'s most powerful body. But Iran has showed no signs of backing down. Saudi Arabia said its SAMREF refinery in the Red Sea port city of Yanbu was hit. Saudi Arabia had begun pumping large volumes of oil west toward the Red Sea to avoid the Strait of Hormuz. Qatar, a key source of natural gas for world markets, said Iranian missiles that caused extensive damage to the Ras Laffan liquefied natural gas facility, reduced its exports by about 17 percent and will cost about \$20 billion in lost revenue a year. The damage will take up to five years to repair, even though production at the facility had already been halted after earlier attacks. Two oil refineries in Kuwait and gas operations in Abu Dhabi also were targeted by Iran, authorities said.

NEWS BOX

### '11-Year History Of Electrical Defects': US Aviation Group On Air India Plane In Ahmedabad Crash

Ahmedabad.(Agency)

The London-bound Air India Boeing 787-8 aircraft, which crashed in Ahmedabad last year killing 241 people onboard, had a history of fire-damaged power panels, bus tie bar damage, core network faults, electrical transients, and open circuits. The Foundation for Aviation Safety (FAS), a US-based aviation safety advocacy group, claimed to have accessed some "non-public" documents highlighting these defects in the Air India plane. The FAS, however, said it has not received any response after it shared these documents with the National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) and the Aviation Accidents Investigation Bureau (AAIB) in India. Ed Pierson, executive director at FAS, told News18 that the aircraft had numerous electrical issues. "This aircraft had a documented 11-year history of serious electrical and electronic problems. Bus power control unit faults, flight management computer faults — the list goes on. And when you see that many systems affected across all those domains, it really points to one thing, which is unstable electrical power. These weren't minor discrepancies. He said the pattern demands scrutiny. "We at the Foundation for Aviation Safety believe these defects played a major role in the accident and need to be thoroughly investigated," he added.

### Anant Singh gets bail by Patna High Court in Dularchand Yadav murder case

Patna. (Agency)

JDU MLA Anant Singh has been granted bail by the Patna High Court on Thursday, paving the way for his release after months in custody. Singh was lodged in Beur Jail in connection with the Dularchand Yadav murder case during last year's Bihar Assembly elections. As per the information, he is expected to be released from jail in the next 48 hours. The case dates back to October 2025, when Dularchand Yadav, a supporter of the Jan Suraj Party, was shot dead during election campaigning in Mokama. Singh was named the prime accused and subsequently arrested. His bail petitions were earlier rejected by lower courts.

### Dularchand Yadav murder case

On October 30, 2025, Dularchand Yadav was murdered in Basawan Chak under the limits of Ghoswari police station in Mokama. Yadav, a former RJD leader, was campaigning for the Jan Suraj Party candidate when he was attacked. Singh was accused of orchestrating the killing and was arrested by the police on the night of November 1. He was produced before the court the next day and then sent to Beur Jail in Patna. After nearly four and a half months in custody, he has now been granted bail by the high court.

### Diarrhoea outbreak in Goa: 149 cases detected within a week, water contamination suspected

Panaji.(Agency)

Over 149 diarrhoea cases have been detected within a week at a residential complex at Dabolim in South Goa district Goa and water contamination is suspected to be the main reason behind the outbreak. The outbreak was reported at the Prabhu Violetta residential complex which has nearly 200 apartments.

Residents lodge police complaint against builder Residents have lodged a police complaint against the builder, Prabhu Realtors, alleging illegal discharge of untreated sewage within the complex, thereby endangering public health.

The affected persons include children and elderly residents, many of whom complained of vomiting, dehydration and severe abdominal pain, with several requiring hospitalisation, officials said.

### 149 cases detected within a week

A house-to-house survey conducted by the Cortalim Primary Health Centre (PHC) since March 14 has identified 149 cases, including three cases detected on March 17.

Authorities have collected water samples from various points within the area, including a residential flat, the underground sump supplying tap water, a swimming pool and treated sewage lines used for gardening, amid suspicion that contaminated water may have caused the outbreak, officials said.

The Goa State Pollution Control Board (GSPCB) has also carried out an independent inspection and sampling exercise. As a precautionary step, Cortalim PHC medical officer in-charge Dr Tejan Lotlikar on Thursday directed the builder to immediately stop supplying borewell water to residents until test reports are available, citing it as a possible source of contamination.

## With jump of 29% over reserve price, Chandigarh's earns nearly Rs 500 cr in 1st round of liquor auction

Chandigarh.(Agency)

For the second consecutive year, the liquor vend at Palsora village on the Mohali border has emerged as the highest-grossing unit in Chandigarh's excise auction, drawing a winning bid of Rs 16.71 crore against a reserve price of Rs 11.41 crore. In the previous excise cycle, the same vend had also led the chart with a bid of Rs 14 crore over a base price of Rs 10.22 crore. The first round of e-auction under the Excise Policy 2025-2026 saw participation from several, with 195 bids submitted online for 84 vends out of a total of 97. However, one bidder was disqualified during technical scrutiny, leaving 83 vends effectively in contention. The combined reserve price for these stood at Rs 385.24 crore.

The Excise and Taxation Department reported a total collection of Rs 496.81 crore in licence fees from the first round, reflecting an increase of nearly 29 per cent over the reserve price. Additionally, Rs 3.90 crore was generated through participation fees. In comparison, last year's auction had yielded Rs 606.43 crore in licence fees and Rs 4.56 crore in participation charges for 96 vends. The second-highest bid of Rs 12.27 crore was recorded for a vend in

Dhanas against a reserve price of Rs 9.62 crore. A Sector-61 vend secured the third spot, fetching Rs 11.52 crore compared to its base price of Rs 8.21 crore.

The department has initiated the tendering process for the remaining 14 vends. Officials



expressed confidence that, given the strong response so far, the remaining units will also attract competitive bids, pushing overall revenues well beyond the baseline targets.

UT authorities attributed the encouraging outcome to reforms introduced in the new excise policy, which emphasises transparency and technology-driven processes. The entire

auction was conducted online, with bidders trained in the use of digital signatures and specialised software developed by the National Informatics Centre (NIC). No offline submissions were entertained. To discourage cartelisation and monopolistic control, the policy caps the allocation at a maximum of 10 licensing units per individual or entity. UT officials said this move is intended to ensure fair competition while boosting revenue. Other key provisions include the reintroduction of liquor sales through departmental stores, allowing bar licensees to procure stock from nearby vends, an increased security deposit for retail outlets, and mandatory GPS tracking for liquor transportation. Meanwhile, Darshan Singh Kler, president of the Wine Contractors Association, has raised objections regarding the bidding process. In a written complaint to the Excise and Taxation Commissioner, he alleged that certain bidders were allowed to submit documents after the stipulated deadline. He also claimed that some participants failed to disclose business associations with other bidders, as required under the policy guidelines.

## Over 20 international restaurants to come up in GIFT City in a year: Gujarat Deputy CM

The Deputy CM said that GIFT City is not just an infrastructure project, but a center for realising the dreams of millions of youth of the country by preserving their spirit and values.

Ahmedabad. (Agency)

Deputy Chief Minister Harsh Sanghavi on Thursday said that more than 20 "international-class" restaurants will come up in Gujarat International Finance Tec-City (GIFT City), Gandhinagar, in the next one year.

The state government, he said, is working "seriously on the 'Working and Living in GIFT City' model so that employees get the best facilities to stay there". Sanghavi was speaking at the inaugural session of 'IFSCA Talent Vista Summit-2026' on the theme 'Shaping Global Talent for India and the World' at GIFT City.

"To make GIFT City a new-age global financial centre, the focus will now be on creating 'world class talent'. For this, prestigious universities such as IIM-Ahmedabad, MICA, Nirma and Gujarat National Law University are preparing a new visionary youth force. Foreign universities established in GIFT City have also joined this work. The government is committed to

providing maximum opportunities to these youths through structured internship and placement framework," Sanghavi said.

Addressing industry leaders, vice chancellors of



various universities and youth from across the country, Sanghavi gave a detailed overview of the development and future vision of GIFT City.

The Deputy CM said that GIFT City is not just an infrastructure project, but a center for realising the dreams of millions of youth of the country by

preserving their spirit and values.

Urging entrepreneurs to invest in the state, the Deputy CM said that there may be some difference in incentives in Gujarat compared to other states, but "there is no other place like Gujarat in terms of political and policy stability". "The Gujarat government is always ready to listen to the questions of investors and find solutions to their issues," he said.

On the occasion, the Deputy CM inaugurated Wipro's new office at GIFT City. Welcoming big companies like Wipro to GIFT City, he said that "Gujarat is a land of opportunities and it is the best time to invest here". Principal Secretary to the Prime Minister, P.K. Mishra said that GIFT City is no longer just a fantasy or idea, but has become a global financial infrastructure. "Financial activities that were taking place abroad for decades are now coming to India. As a result, India's capital market has become strong and high-value employment is being created in India.

## The 544 names in an envelope: A village in UP uncovers a massive bid to purge its voters

Lucknow. (Agency)

The claims and objections round is over, the names have been sealed, and Uttar Pradesh is in the last stages of its Special Intensive Revision (SIR) exercise, with a final voter list due in mid-April, after yet another extension.

For 544 residents of village Louharipur in Shamli district, that means a month more of an anxious wait. On February 14, Form 7s with names of the 544 — all of them Muslims — were found stuffed in an envelope with the Booth Level Officer (BLO) at the village primary school. They made up nearly half the total number of existing voters in the village, which is around 1,100. In the SIR exercise, Form 7s are meant for deletion of an existing name in the electoral rolls. All the recovered 544 Form 7s in Louharipur had the same applicant: 'Ved Pal'.

A month later, residents of Muslim-

dominated Louharipur say none of their questions regarding the forms have been answered. The claim by poll officials that the documents were "fake" has done little to assuage their apprehensions, with members from nearly every family in the

other details of the 544 voters, with the reason cited for seeking their deletion from the electoral rolls being that they had shifted out of Louharipur — a claim refuted by the locals.

Not getting satisfactory answers from Mukesh, the villagers, who made a copy of the 544 forms, held a panchayat to discuss the issue the next day. "At the meeting, it was decided that we would lodge a complaint with the district administration," says Mohammad Kamil (72), 10 of whose family members figured among the 544 in whose names the forms were found.



village figuring in the list of 544. Villagers say that a local youth first spotted the BLO, Mukesh, with the forms, and confronted her about it. The forms were preprinted with EPIC (electors' photo identity card) numbers and

Fakruddin (80), a retired primary government school teacher, says all the 544 in whose names the forms were submitted for deletion of names lived in the village. "In fact, some of them are government officials living here."

## Arrest over Ganga iftar party: Owner says gave boat for hire, was taken by surprise over row

Lucknow (Agency).

Police have identified the owner of the motorboat on which an iftar party was held on March 15, leading to the arrest of 14, in Varanasi. Kashi Sahani, 65, who was let off after questioning, told police he had given the boat on hire to a local resident, Naju Yadav, and had no idea of the controversy.

The 14, who are accused of consuming chicken biryani during the boat ride on the Ganga and disposing of the leftover food in the river, were arrested on Tuesday on a complaint by Bharatiya Janata Yuva Morcha district president Rajat Jaiswal.

They have been booked for allegedly injuring or defiling a place of worship, acts causing outrage to religious feelings, promoting enmity between different groups, as well as for public nuisance and under provisions of the Water (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act.

Sahani told The Indian Express that Yadav, 40, approached him around 5 pm on March 15, a Sunday, seeking to hire his motorboat, which can seat around 30 people, to ferry people for a ride. A native of Shivalay area in Varanasi, Sahani owns two

motorboats as well as two hand-propelled boats, all of them stationed at Rana Mahal Ghat.

Yadav, who lives near Chausathi Ghat, takes customers for boat rides, and Sahani says he has given him his boats on hire before as well.

"Initially, we quoted Rs 100 per passenger, but a deal was finally struck for a lump sum of Rs 1,800 for the boat," says Sahani's daughter



Naina, 26, who says she was present when the discussion happened.

The boat had 20-odd people when it set off, says Naina. "They were carrying utensils with them, but it was not unusual, and we don't check what passengers bring along."

A bhandara was underway at the ghat that evening, drawing a large crowd, Sahani says, suggesting there was a lot of commotion.

## Moga court denies bail to two in case linked to Amritpal speech

Moga court denies bail in Amritpal speech case, citing serious allegations, flight risk, and potential witness influence in ongoing trial proceedings.

Chandigarh. (Agency)

A court in Moga has denied bail to two men accused in a 2023-case linked to a speech by Amritpal Singh, citing the serious nature of the allegations and the possibility of the accused influencing witnesses.

Additional Sessions Judge Ravi Inder Kaur Sandhu dismissed separate bail applications filed by Basant Singh, Daultapura Ucha village, and Kulwant Singh, Rauke Kalan village. An FIR was registered at Baghapurana police station under multiple IPC provisions, including Sections 121-A, 153-A, 153-B and 120-B.

The prosecution said the case stems from an incident on February 19, 2023, at Budh Singh Wala village



in Moga. Amritpal Singh, associated with Waris Punjab De,

allegedly delivered a provocative speech during an event marking the death anniversary of Deep Sidhu. Police alleged that both the accused, along with others, were present armed with weapons, and that the speech incited sentiments against the government and promoted the idea of a separate state.

However, the counsel for the accused argued that they were falsely implicated on the basis of a video clip and no weapons were recovered from them. The counsel also contended that the challan was filed after a delay of over two years and that both accused had been in custody since June 23, 2025. Opposing this, the prosecution maintained that the

allegations were grave and warranted denial of bail.

The court, in its orders dated March 17, held that the accusations were "clear and specific", and the matter was serious in nature. It observed that there was a likelihood of the accused fleeing justice and potentially influencing witnesses if released. It also noted that the trial was yet to commence and expressed concern that the accused could interfere with the judicial process.

"In light of the gravity and seriousness of the offence... this court does not find it a fit case for grant of bail," the judge said while dismissing both applications.

As per the India Meteorological Department (IMD), the shift in weather, amid heatwave conditions, were due to an upper air cyclonic circulation over west Rajasthan along with a western disturbance as an upper air cyclonic circulation over north Pakistan with a trough.

The weather department has issued a warning of light to moderate thunderstorm with rain and lightning, and surface winds of 50-60 kmph gusting up to 70 kmph, for the districts of Banaskantha, Sabarkantha and Patan, Rajkot, Jamnagar, Junagadh, Amreli, Morbi, Gir Somnath, and Kutch till Friday

Isolated hail activity is also likely at these locations. Similar warnings have also been issued for Mehsana, Gandhinagar, Aravalli, Kheda, Ahmedabad, Anand, Panchmahal, Dahod and Mahisagar, Vadodara, Chhota Udepur, Narmada, Bharuch, Surat, Dang, Tapi, Navsari, Valsad, Surendranagar, Porbandar, Bhavnagar, Dwarka and Botad.

## Rain & gusty winds catch Saurashtra, Kutch unawares

Ahmedabad.(Agency)

High velocity winds pulled a surprise in several corners of the state, even as 36 talukas—majorly in Saurashtra and Kutch—and Ahmedabad experienced rainfall activity on Thursday, the weather department said.

Rajkot and Bhesan in Junagadh recorded the highest rainfall at 35 mm each; Bagasara in Amreli and Dhoraji in Rajkot recorded 22 mm and 20 mm, respectively.

Ahmedabad, too, woke up to gusty winds. Towards the evening, light showers were reported, contributing to a sharp decline in temperatures. The strong winds led to several incidents of trees and electricity poles falling on four wheelers and three wheelers. At Manzoor Gam near Gitanandir, two people were injured after an electric pole collapsed on an auto rickshaw. Civic authorities ruled out any casualties due to these incidents. Nearly 20 complaints of uprooting and falling of tree branches were reported in the city, as stated by its municipal corporation's control room. Most such incidents were reported in the North-West zone.

## Chopping and changing to deliver

Like a pack of cards shuffled and reshuffled to randomise the stack before dealing out to the players, the Election Commission of India has announced major changes to the bureaucracy in West Bengal in less than 24 hours after announcing the schedule for state's assembly elections. Characteristically, Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee reacted sharply, calling it "midnight mayhem", complaining that it flouted protocol and suggesting it will hamper administrative work. For good measure, she claimed that all officers in West Bengal worked for the state. The ECI's challenge in West Bengal is extreme. It has opted for a two-phase election in a state where recent elections have been held in seven and eight phases. If chopping and changing the top officials is a first step, the aggressive-yet-predictable move reeks of the now-chronic distrust between state and central institutions. It must be considered as an exercise in ensuring a level playing field to kick off a free, fair and violence-free election. The Trinamool Congress is already tainted with a reputation of unleashing violence before and after elections. The BJP has played victim in the past. But its local leadership—from the noisy Leader of Opposition in the state assembly, Suvendu Adhikari, to past state party president Dilip Ghosh—have warned that there will be retaliation. Ghosh has gone so far as to declare there will be more injuries than heads bandaged and legs in casts—in an obvious, oblique reference to Banerjee's accident in 2021 after which she campaigned in a wheelchair.

For starters, Chief Secretary Nandini Chakravorty and Home Secretary Jagdish Prasad Meena have been moved out and are to be excluded from any position that has to do with the election process. It may not be a grudge order; the chief secretary was earlier summoned to Nirvachan Sadan in Delhi to explain why several ECI directives had not been implemented. Others on the chop-and-change list include Peeyush Pandey, who was temporarily replaced as Director General and Inspector General of Police by Siddh Nath Gupta, and Supratim Sarkar, replaced as Kolkata Police Commissioner by Ajay Kumar Nand. A statement from Nirvachan Sadan has promised more changes to follow. As a demonstration of its powers and promise, which is an obligation under the Constitution, the ECI's orders on the changes are a shock-and-awe exercise. Since the ECI is not required to explain its actions, the measures are open to speculation—including the most obvious one that the ECI is concerned about the bureaucracy following its orders promptly and fully. Whether these changes would satisfy the ECI is a different matter. In the 2024 Lok Sabha elections, the ECI had shunted out the home secretaries of Gujarat, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Jharkhand, Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand, as well as the DGP of West Bengal. The necessity to have a truly acquiescent bureaucracy in place for the West Bengal election is understandable. The ECI is under extreme pressure because its final voter list for the state is still incomplete, with over 60 lakh names under adjudication and direction from the Supreme Court that it must continue to dispose of pending cases up until the last minute before polling day. With 294 constituencies with voter lists under adjudication, the public mood is volatile, political tempers are unpredictable and managing the environment difficult. Chief Election Commissioner Gyanesh Kumar said on March 10 in Kolkata, "Political violence will not be tolerated, no elector will be placed under any kind of pressure, and anti-social elements will refrain from any acts of violence. If they try to indulge in such acts, then strong action will be taken." Given the changes, Kumar can hope to deliver on his promise. After the seven-phase 2024 elections, delivering a two-phase violence-free one that satisfies political participants and voters alike—some of the, still waiting for confirmation on their right to vote—is a daunting task.

## Beyond uneasy poll alliances in Tamil Nadu

Film superstar Vijay's quest for stardom in Dravidian political arena enlivens poll battle

FEW Assembly elections in Tamil Nadu have caused so much anticipation as the one that will take place on April 23. The entry of a significant new player in what used to be a predominantly two-way contest has created a flutter that has not been seen for decades. In Kerala, which goes to the polls on April 9, it's a battle between two established coalitions — the Congress-led United Democratic Front will attempt to dislodge the CPI(M)-led Left Democratic Front, with the BJP trying to make inroads. Celluloid superstar Vijay's quest for stardom in the Dravidian political arena has made this TN election largely about his prospects. Back-of-the-envelope calculations and feverish predictions are being made about how much of the vote share he will get, how that might translate into seats, and which of the two big Dravidian parties he will hurt. Vijay himself has made it clear that he has not made this entry seeking work experience in politics. It has to be the chief minister's post in the first shot. And he would prefer to go it alone, unless the alliance that wants him on its side promises that he gets the top job and gives him a mouth-watering number of seats to contest. The AIADMK, which tried to bring his Tamizhaga Vettri Kazhagam (TVK) into the NDA fold, stumbled over these demands. Over the last week, the grapevine in Chennai buzzed again with rumours of another approach, this time from the BJP. The party wants a better outing than in the 2024 Lok Sabha elections, but clearly has little confidence in its forced electoral alliance with the AIADMK, which even the BJP's followers in the state are not enthused about.

The TVK could give the alliance the edge that it lacks now. The rumours got wings after it emerged that in a recent meeting of the TVK, some members pointed out that the party's candidates would not be able to raise Rs 5 crore, a sum well over the Rs 40-lakh limit set by the Election Commission of India (ECI), to meet their election expenses. The meeting was divided about entering into an alliance with a bigger party. The reports were denied by both TVK and AIADMK. Vijay once described the BJP as his "ideological enemy" and an alliance with the Hindutva party might hurt his prospects among the Christian and Muslim minorities, who are now said to make up large numbers of his followers. The AIADMK would not mind the TVK joining the alliance as that would marshal the anti-incumbency votes, but fears being overshadowed by it.

For all the talk about Vijay joining an alliance, he is really a solo flier. He sees his role in politics as similar to the

roles he essays in films — vanquishing villains and being hailed as the Jana Nayagan (people's leader), also the title of his latest film. The movie was set for a Pongal release in January, but the Central Board of Film Certification (CBFC) did not clear it, referring it instead to a review panel. Recently, the producers of the film withdrew their petition against the CBFC from the Madras High Court, clearing the way for the review panel. Is the release of a film with a candidate acting in it a violation of the model code of conduct? That's a question for the ECI, but the answer, going by the selective track record of the past few years, may depend on which side of the Dravidian divide Vijay is seen to be hurting. The Naam Tamilar Katchi, a small Tamil

the Central agency.

It is not clear what plans Vijay has for the state he is so determined to lead. He has not given any media interviews. For his part, Stalin has decided to pitch the upcoming elections as a decisive battle for the preservation of the "Dravidian model" of development, describing it as a "contrast" to the BJP model, which he says is made up of "violence, hate speech and a regressive ideology". This is his refrain in all speeches. He points out correctly that despite facing pressures from the Centre, Tamil Nadu has posted a better performance than the so-called "double engine" states. But he is also taking nothing for granted. Unlike in some other states, anti-incumbency kicks in every five years in Tamil Nadu. Only the Jayalalithaa-led AIADMK was able to break the pattern in the past decade when it won in 2016.

Just as Vijay ignores the AIADMK, Stalin ignores him, leaving it to others in the party hierarchy to take him on. But the party is nervous about him, especially after the political headway he seems to have made despite the Karur stampede. Moreover, the DMK's relations with its main ally, the Congress, in the Secular Progressive Alliance are not as close as they were in previous elections, given their public spat over seat-sharing. Talks on seat-sharing with smaller parties, including the two Left parties, and the Dalit party VCK, are proceeding slowly. The AIADMK seems like a bit player in the elections. Apart from the BJP, its coalition now includes TTV Dinakaran, the nephew of the late AIADMK leader Jayalalithaa's friend



nationalist party led by filmmaker Seeman whose vote share was growing, could turn out to be the worst hit.

So far, Thalpathy (the Tamil word for General), which is how fans address Vijay, has reserved all his barbs for the ruling DMK and its leader, Chief Minister MK Stalin. He has addressed few public meetings since the September 2025 stampede at his Karur rally that killed 41 people. But whenever he has re-emerged, he has described the coming electoral battle as a "war" between him and Stalin. He positions himself as fighting the alleged corruption and misrule of the DMK and claims to be the true inheritor of Periyar, K Kamaraj, CN Annadurai and MGR. He ignores the AIADMK altogether. And he has never criticised his "ideological enemy", even though the CBI's roving enquiry into the Karur tragedy is not what he and the TVK expected when the Supreme Court granted their request that the investigation be shifted from the Tamil Nadu police to

Sasikala. But Sasikala has launched her own party, which could pose a problem for the AIADMK in some constituencies. The party has also lost an influential leader to the TVK, and another, former chief minister O Panneerselvam, to the DMK.

A tie-up with the BJP comes with its own perils, as party leader Edappadi Palaniswami knows from watching how the saffron party's regional allies have fared in Maharashtra and Bihar. The grouping's lack of chemistry is obvious. In the 2021 elections, the DMK bagged 133 seats in the 234-member Assembly, winning a majority on its own. At the very least, the NDA will hope to create a dent in the DMK-led front large enough for a hung Assembly, even if it cannot inflict outright defeat; and that Vijay, either with it or separately, will play his part in this endeavour. After all, it was Piyush Goyal, the BJP's TN election in-charge, who described him recently as a "vote-cutter rather than a king or a kingmaker".

## Punjab's enforcement gap: Stronger mining laws fail sans accountability

Construction activity continues to fuel illegal mining, often because legal supply is either inadequate or priced too high due to regulatory bottlenecks.

PUNJAB'S latest legislation to regulate mining reflects a familiar pattern in governance: a strong legal response to a problem that is, at its core, administrative. Illegal sand and gravel mining has long plagued the state, eroding riverbeds, damaging rural roads and causing substantial revenue losses. The new Bill signals intent, but that alone will not dismantle entrenched networks that thrive on weak enforcement and political patronage. For years, successive governments have introduced tighter rules, higher penalties and more elaborate licensing systems. Yet illegal extraction continues. The Tribune has highlighted persistent illegal sand mining in the Swan riverbed in Ropar, with heavy machinery operating at night despite NGT restrictions. It raises concerns over enforcement failure, environmental damage and possible official complicity. The reason for continued illegal mining is not the absence of laws, but the lack of consistent, on-ground accountability. Enforcement agencies remain



understaffed or compromised, monitoring is sporadic and coordination between departments is poor. In many cases, local communities bear the environmental and infrastructural costs while the state exchequer loses out. The challenge, therefore, is to shift focus from legislation to implementation. Technology can play a critical role — GPS tracking of mining vehicles, real-time monitoring of extraction sites and transparent e-auction systems can reduce discretion and curb leakages. Equally important is fixing responsibility: officials who fail to act against violations must face consequences. Without deterrence, even the best-crafted laws risk becoming symbolic. Punjab must also address the demand side. Construction activity continues to fuel illegal mining, often because legal supply is either inadequate or priced too high due to regulatory bottlenecks. Rationalising the legal mining process and ensuring steady supply could reduce the incentive for illegal operations. The credibility of the mining laws is judged by visible outcomes — cleaner riverbeds, safer infrastructure and higher revenues.

# Passive euthanasia verdict: A delicate balance between life and dignity

Judicial prudence ultimately rests on logic beyond emotion

IN its historic judgment on March 11, 2026, the Supreme Court of India allowed the first-ever case of passive euthanasia to end the life of Harish Rana, who has been in a vegetative state since 2013. It shows that judicial prudence ultimately rests on logic, practicability and reason beyond the temporary veil of emotion. With this decision, the apex court has partially reviewed its own verdict in the Aruna Shanbaug case of 2018, whereby, such a request was denied. It has given the green signal to passive euthanasia under the safeguards spelled out in the same judgment. Euthanasia refers to the practice of intentionally terminating human life to relieve the person from suffering and undignified existence. Proponents justify it as an extension of the autonomy to choose a respectful exit in order to get rid of unbearable pain and persistent trauma. For them, it is a compassionate alternative to prolonged agony.

On the other hand, opponents warn against its misuse, stating that vulnerable patients may feel pressured into choosing death. It would also erode societal and familial commitment to the care of sick persons. Disability rights groups caution that validating death for whatever reasons may signal that some lives are "less worth living." The law esteems the lives of men as not only valuable to their own possessors, but also valuable to the State which protects them and for the protection and amelioration of which the State exists. The State is politically duty-bound to prevent persons from taking their own lives, as much as it is obliged to prevent them from taking the lives of others. Euthanasia has two forms: passive and active. Passive euthanasia amounts to withdrawing a patient from the life-support system and clinically-assisted nutrition and hydration. Active euthanasia calls for a medical professional administering drugs with the consent of the family

members of the patient to cause death. Passive euthanasia has been accepted in many healthcare systems the world over, including India, where courts allow it under strict safeguards to relieve a terminally ill person from pains when there is no hope of recovery. Under societal norms and practices, passive euthanasia is a part and parcel of everyday social life, when near and dear ones reconcile to the fate that the ill or aged person has no chance of survival and they take a call to stop all human interventions, allowing death to arrive naturally and peacefully.

In Jainism, Santhara, also known as Sallekhana, is a religious practice involving the voluntary, gradual cessation of food and liquid intake until death. Practitioners view this act as spiritual discipline intended to thin human passions, purify the soul and detach from the material body to destroy karma and achieve a peaceful end to life. While passive euthanasia is mercy, active euthanasia is a crime. Active euthanasia is illegal in India and in major parts of the world. Only 10 countries, including the Netherlands, Belgium, Canada and Spain, have validated it under strict legal layers of eligibility checks, second opinion and cooling-off period. The instant judgment of the SC in the Harish Rana case is the culmination of prolonged judicial deliberations on the subject of right to self-destruction from time to time. In State of Maharashtra vs Maruti Sripati Dubal (1986), the Bombay High Court opined in favour of the 'right to die', saying that "right to live includes right not to live." It declared Section 309 of the Indian Penal Code, 1860 (IPC), criminalising attempt to commit suicide, unconstitutional. Contrary to that, the Andhra Pradesh High Court took the opposite view in Chenna

Jagadeeshwar's case (1988) and held that Section 309, IPC, is not unconstitutional and self-effacement is a serious crime. The controversy was settled by the apex court in P Rathinam vs Union of India (1994), upholding the views expressed by the Bombay High Court in the Maruti Sripati Dubal case. A couple of years later, the SC revised its viewpoint and established in Gian Kaur vs State of Punjab (1996) that the right to live under Article

who remained in a vegetative state for more than four decades, the SC issued guidelines in 2011 to allow the withdrawal of life support under specific circumstances and judicial supervision. In the Common Cause vs UOI (2018), the apex court formally recognised the "right to die with dignity" as a fundamental right under Article 21. It also legalised the use of advance medical directives, allowing competent adults to issue written instructions

(living wills), specifying their medical preferences should they become terminally ill or incapacitated.

Accordingly, keeping in view the popular public opinion, the lawmakers decriminalised attempt to commit suicide and omitted the offence from the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, 2023. It was, perhaps, a precursor to the validation of passive euthanasia by the SC in the instant case. In 2023, a Constitution Bench modified and further simplified the procedural requirements established in the Common Cause case of 2018, introducing specific timelines for medical boards and reducing the role of the judicial magistrate to improve accessibility.

The decision on passive euthanasia revolves around balancing respect for

personal choice and the protection of the vulnerable. The prudent approach should focus on safeguards in the form of transparent and clear medical diagnosis, repeated informed consent of the patient and his family members, robust palliative care and mental health assessment to ensure that euthanasia is not chosen simply because no other alternative of pain relief is available.



21 does not include the "right to die" or "right to be killed." Justice JS Verma observed, "Right to life is a natural right embodied in Article 21 but suicide is an unnatural termination or extinction of life and incompatible and inconsistent with the concept of right to life." While rejecting the petition of activist Pinki Virani seeking passive euthanasia for Aruna Shanbaug,

## Punjab: Youth dies of alleged drug overdose in Sangrur

Sangrur.(Agency)

A 21-year-old youth died after allegedly being injected with an overdose of a narcotic drug in Sangrur district of Punjab. According to information, the incident occurred on the evening of March 17, around 7 PM. The deceased has been identified as Sumit. Sumit's mother Sukho, who works as a sanitation worker, stated that when she returned home from duty, she found her son lying unconscious on the bed, with his legs hanging down. She also noticed a young guy, identified as Anmol Singh, sitting nearby holding a syringe. When questioned, the accused fled the scene, leaving the syringe behind. The family members immediately rushed Sumit to the Civil Hospital in Sangrur, where doctors declared him dead. During the preliminary medical examination, doctors suspected that the youth had been given a drug injection, which led to his deteriorating condition. The lack of timely medical treatment is believed to have contributed to his death. Police have registered a case based on the complaint and have arrested the accused, Anmol Singh, following a tip-off. A piece of paper was also recovered from the scene, which has been taken into possession for investigation. The police stated that a detailed investigation is underway, and all aspects of the case are being thoroughly examined.

## UP: Eid Moon not sighted in Lucknow; Eid to be celebrated on Saturday

Lucknow.(Agency)

As the crescent moon for Eid could not be sighted in the Lucknow today, the imam of city-based Tila Wali Masjid declared that the Eid will be celebrated on Saturday. Earlier, the crescent moon for Eid was sighted from the Tila Wali Masjid in the capital city of Lucknow, but today the



moon could not be seen. The royal imam of the mosque, Maulana Qari Syed Fazlul Mannan Rahmani, along with Imtiaz, were observing the sky through telescopes, but the moon remained unseen. Consequently, the royal imam announced that Eid will be celebrated on Saturday.

It is worth noting that, ahead of Eid-ul-Fitr, the central moon sighting committee from Farangi Mahal had called for people to observe the moon on Thursday evening at 5:30 PM. The committee mentioned that arrangements had been made for moon sighting at Eidgah, Ashbagh, and urged the public to participate. However, the crescent moon could not be sighted this time.

## Speeding SUV rams multiple vehicles in Dehradun, one dead, three injured

Dehradun.(Agency)

A man was killed and three others were injured after a speeding SUV ramed multiple vehicles in Dehradun on Wednesday evening, police said. The incident took place around 7:30 pm in the Dalanwala area. The vehicle involved was a Toyota Innova, driven by Guneet Singh, 43, a resident of Inder Road.

According to police, the driver was coming at high speed from the DL Cut and driving recklessly. He first hit a car on DL Road, damaging it. The SUV then sped ahead and crashed into a scooter and a motorcycle.

Three people were seriously injured in the collision. They were identified as Rahul, a resident of Ambedkar Nagar, and Rohit Phillips, 48, along with his 22-year-old son Anuj Phillips, residents of Old Survey Road.

Police rushed Rahul to Vaish Nursing Home. After initial treatment, he was referred to Max Hospital by ambulance. Rohit and Anuj were taken to Doon Hospital in a private vehicle. Rohit Phillips later died during treatment, police said.

The SUV also hit a parked motorcycle and a scooter on the roadside, damaging both. The vehicle then veered off towards Old Survey Road, crashed through the gate of a house, and entered the premises. Inside the house, another scooter and a car were damaged.

Police have seized the vehicle and taken the driver into custody. A case has been registered, and further investigation is underway.

# Nashik sexual abuse case: SIT probes godman Ashok Kharat, assets under lens

Maharashtra has formed an SIT led by IPS Tejaswini Satpute to probe sexual abuse allegations against Ashok Kharat, with an extortion link emerging and assets worth Rs 200 crore under scrutiny.

Nashik .(Agency)

The Maharashtra government has formed a Special Investigation Team (SIT) to probe a sexual abuse case linked to self-styled godman Ashok Kharat, also known as "Captain." The SIT is being led by IPS officer Tejaswini Satpute. Satpute on Thursday questioned Kharat for nearly two hours. She did not share details of the interrogation and said she would speak to the media once more information is available.

The case has taken a new turn with an extortion complaint filed in Shirdi. A woman told police she received an objectionable photograph from a phone number and was threatened that it would be made viral unless she paid money.

She said she was shocked to see explicit images and videos of herself. According to her complaint, the accused worked at Kharat's Nashik office. She also said she had visited the office a few years ago.

Police registered the case on February 18, 2026. The accused, identified as Neeraj Jadhav, has not

yet been arrested. Investigators are now trying to find out whether Jadhav was acting on his own or at Kharat's direction. Police say this will become



clearer after his arrest. Meanwhile, the Nashik Crime Branch searched Kharat's residence and seized a pistol, cartridges and Rs 6.5 lakh in cash. Officials say Kharat has built assets worth around Rs 200 crore over the past 15 years,

raising questions about his income sources. According to investigators, his properties include about 30 acres of land in Pathardi village in

Nashik, valued at around Rs 150 crore. He also owns 45 acres in Sinnar taluka, estimated at Rs 2 crore. Police said land purchase deeds worth over Rs 30 crore have been registered in the names of his wife Kalpana, daughter Srishti and another relative in Nashik's Pathardi and Gaulane areas.

Kharat also owns a farmhouse worth more than Rs 10 crore near the Ishaneshwar temple in Sinnar. The temple trust itself has an annual turnover of around Rs 2 crore.

Other assets include land worth Rs 5 crore near Ozar airport in Janori village, a bungalow in Karmayogi Nagar valued at Rs 5 crore, and an office near Canada Corner worth about Rs 1 crore. He also owns agricultural land in a prime location in Shirdi, valued in crores. The SIT is continuing its probe into the allegations, including the financial trail and the wider network linked to Kharat.

## Adi Kailash Yatra 2026: Bookings begin for sacred pilgrimage, first batch will leave on May 8 in Uttarakhand

Haldwani.(Agency)

Bookings have opened for the famous Adi Kailash Yatra in Uttarakhand. The pilgrimage will begin on May 8, with devotees showing great enthusiasm. Officials expect higher participation this year, as the journey offers both religious darshan and spiritual experiences across Kumaon's sacred sites.

Bookings have started for the world-famous Adi Kailash Yatra, also known as Chhota Kailash, in Uttarakhand. The sacred journey will begin on May 8, 2026, and preparations are in full swing. Devotees are showing great excitement, and officials expect more pilgrims this year compared to previous years.

Pilgrimage Details

The Adi Kailash Yatra is located in the Dharchula region of Pithoragarh district. The first phase of the journey will run from May 8 to June 15, with a total of 15 batches departing during this period. The Kumaon Mandal Vikas Nigam (KMVN) is organizing the pilgrimage and has intensified preparations to ensure smooth arrangements.

According to KMVN General Manager Vijay Nath Shukla, the first batch will leave from the PWD Guest House in Haldwani on May 8. The route will pass through Almora

and Pithoragarh before reaching Adi Kailash.

Enthusiasm Among Devotees

Pilgrims are highly enthusiastic about the yatra. Online bookings have already begun and are receiving strong responses. Seeing the rising demand, KMVN officials are focusing on improving facilities and making the journey more accessible. Plans are also being considered to transport pilgrims via Tanakpur and Dharchula routes.

Religious Importance

Adi Kailash, also known as Chhota Kailash, holds immense religious significance. It is considered a center of faith for devotees of Lord Shiva. The journey also includes a visit to Om Parvat, where the natural snow formation resembles the sacred 'Om' symbol, adding to the spiritual aura.

The pilgrimage is not just about darshan but also about experiencing spiritual peace in the Himalayas. Devotees believe that visiting Adi Kailash brings blessings, prosperity, and divine connection.



## Ahmedabad Crime Branch busts fake currency racket, 7 arrested

Ahmedabad.(Agency)

The Ahmedabad Crime Branch has busted a major fake currency racket, seizing counterfeit notes worth Rs 2.38 crore and arresting seven people, officials said. Of the total haul, fake notes worth Rs 2.10 crore were recovered from Ahmedabad, while Rs 28 lakh was seized during a follow-up raid in Surat.

According to police, the accused were caught while transporting the counterfeit currency from Surat to Ahmedabad in a white Toyota Fortuner. The vehicle was intercepted near Amraiwadi after a tip-off.

Deputy Commissioner of Police (Crime Branch) Ajit Rajiyan said teams had been deployed in advance after receiving intelligence inputs.

"Our teams were waiting for a white Fortuner car (GJ05 RS 5252). As soon as the vehicle reached between metro pillars 29 and 30, it was stopped. During the search, bundles of fake Rs 500 notes were found packed inside a white plastic box in a black bag," he said. Police detained all occupants of the car, including a woman. Officials said the serial numbers on the seized notes were different, indicating a large-scale operation.

Further investigation led the Crime Branch to a house in Surat's Sarthana area, where counterfeit notes were being printed. In a

joint raid with Surat Police, officers recovered fake currency worth Rs 28 lakh along with printing equipment, ink, and raw materials.

During questioning, police uncovered the alleged involvement of Pradeep Jotangia, a yoga instructor who runs the Satyam Foundation in Surat. Investigators said the



accused had been operating the racket for the past six months and were selling fake currency at a 25% commission. The main accused, Mukesh Thummar, allegedly set up the printing unit at his residence. Police said he sourced green security thread paper marked "RBI" and "Bharat" from Chinese suppliers through websites such as Alibaba and made payments via digital gateways.

Officials added that Thummar, who is skilled in Photoshop editing, used advanced techniques to design the counterfeit notes. The accused also allegedly used AI tools, including ChatGPT, to make the fake currency appear more realistic.

Those arrested have been identified as Pradeep Jotangia, Mukesh Thummar, Ashok Mawani, Ramesh Balar, Divyesh Rana, Bharat Kakadiya, and a woman, all residents of Surat. Police said the Fortuner used in the operation belonged to Jotangia and carried a board of the Ministry of AYUSH, raising further suspicion about the network's methods.

So far, officials have recovered 42,000 fake Rs 500 notes from Ahmedabad and 5,600 such notes from Surat. Other items seized include security thread paper rings, an electric press machine, a note-counting machine, printers, a laptop, paper-cutting machines, and ink. The Crime Branch is now searching for other members of the racket and the agents in Ahmedabad who were supposed to receive the Rs 2.10 crore consignment. Investigators are also probing whether similar modules are operating elsewhere, as the raw materials were imported from China under the guise of stationery items.

## Mohali MC plans mechanical sweeping for 'C' roads; key decisions likely in House meet on Mar 24

Chandigarh.(Agency)

In a move to strengthen the city's sanitation system, the Municipal Corporation (MC) Mohali is set to introduce mechanical sweeping on the city's prominent 'C' roads, with the proposal scheduled to be tabled in the House meeting on March 24.

According to the plan, around 303.44 kilometres of roads will be cleaned using machines. The initial proposal had suggested cleaning both sides, covering 606.88 kilometres, but after technical approval, it has been revised to single-side sweeping. Under this plan, nearly 50.57 kilometres of roads will be cleaned daily, ensuring that each stretch is covered twice within a week. The project will also include washing of roads and suction-based removal of leaves and waste, aiming to reduce dust and improve overall cleanliness. Notably, the estimated cost of the project has been reduced from Rs 8.21 crore to Rs 3.91 crore after technical clearance. Officials said, "The project is expected to significantly improve the city's cleanliness and reduce dust pollution on roads". The upcoming House meeting, to be chaired by Mayor Amarjit Singh Sidhu, will be the last meeting of the current council, making it politically significant as several key proposals are expected to be approved before the end of the term. Along with the mechanical sweeping project, the civic body will also discuss a proposal to spend nearly Rs 5 crore on hiring additional manpower and tractor-trolleys for sanitation work across Zone 1 to Zone 4.

# Intention to spread terror in Hindus: Court denies plea of Amravati murder accused

The case relates to the killing of Umesh Kolhe on June 21, 2022, allegedly in retaliation for social media posts supporting former BJP spokesperson Nupur Sharma following her controversial remarks. Initially registered as a murder case, the investigation was later transferred to the NIA.

Mumbai.(Agency)

A special NIA court in Mumbai has rejected the discharge plea of Irfan Khan, accused of masterminding the 2022 murder of Amravati chemist Umesh Kolhe. The court held that the killing was carried out with a clear intention to spread terror, particularly targeting Hindus, and classified the act as terrorism under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA) alongside the Indian Penal Code (IPC). Special Judge Chakor Baviskar noted that the evidence considered so far was only "a tip of an iceberg" and that further

material would emerge during the trial. The judge expressed doubt that Khan would be acquitted at the conclusion of the case. The case relates to the killing of Umesh Kolhe on June 21, 2022, allegedly in retaliation for social media posts supporting former BJP spokesperson Nupur Sharma following her controversial remarks. Initially registered as a murder case, the investigation was later transferred to the National Investigation Agency (NIA), which invoked UAPA provisions citing a larger conspiracy to instil terror. Rejecting the defence's claim that the



case was a simple murder without a terror angle, the court found that the material indicated a clear intent to "strike terror in a section of people." Witness statements reportedly indicated Khan using phrases like 'kafiro ki' and stating 'inko anjam dikhana padega'

during meetings. The NIA alleged that Khan was part of a group that held meetings, mobilised individuals, and conspired to kill Kolhe. Khan was accused of participating in providing logistical and financial support to the assailants as well as aiding them in evading arrest.

The court concluded that Khan's grudge was not against Kolhe alone but against the entire Hindu community. It stated that by killing Kolhe, Khan aimed to send a message to the wider Hindu community. The court also clarified that under Section 15 of the UAPA,

a terrorist act does not require the involvement of a banned organisation and can be committed by individuals with intent to create terror. The court added that the statements of witnesses were sufficient to establish the terrorist intention of the accused.

It also noted there was no personal rivalry between the accused, who reportedly ran an organisation named 'Rahebar Helpline' aimed at the betterment of Muslims, and Kolhe.

Yet, Khan participated in a criminal conspiracy to murder him, noted the court.

# Firefighters' preparedness under lens day after blaze in Delhi's Palam kills 9 of family

## lapses will be punished, says Delhi govt

**Fire officials said they did not receive the call about the incident on time. "This is not the first time that we have received a call late. After we reached the site, the building was engulfed in smoke," said an official.**

**New Delhi.(Agency)**  
The malfunctioning of a hydraulic crane during the firefighting operation at a residential building in Southwest Delhi's Palam on Wednesday has yet again raised questions over the preparedness of the Delhi Fire Services (DFS). Moments after successfully pulling a person to safety, the hydraulic fire tender developed a technical snag — reportedly triggered by low hanging electric wires in the locality — interfering with its sensors and bringing the operation to a sudden halt, raising fresh concerns over the upkeep of such life-saving

equipment. Nine of a family were killed in the blaze. The Delhi government has warned of strict action against erring DFS officers, officials said on Thursday. "CM Rekha Gupta has already ordered for a magisterial enquiry in the fire incident. The response time and measures are under probe and strict action will be taken against lapses," said a senior official in Delhi government. Meanwhile, Home Minister Ashish Sood also launched a city-wide fire safety mission on Thursday as he said



that "we are ending the era of blind spots in the city". Fire officials said they did not receive the call about the incident on time. "This is not the first time that we have received a call late.

After we reached the site, the building was engulfed in smoke," said an official. A senior fire official told The Indian Express, "Most deaths in blazes are being caused in cases where a shop is operating at the ground floor with houses above, as in the case of Palam blaze. Residential buildings have a single staircase and in most of the fires, we see that the fire usually starts from the ground floor and traps the only exit." Uncontrolled commercialisation is an added factor, the official said.

Limited availability of fire safety equipment remains a concern and a challenge. Of the roughly 11 rescue-specific hydraulic units in service, 9 are in commission, according to officials. There are only two high-reach Bronto fire tenders — a specialised fire truck equipped with a long, extendable hydraulic platform (like a crane with a basket at the end) — which are currently functional. Both operational units have a reach of 42 metres, while another Bronto with a 70 metre capacity remains out of service, alongside one more malfunctioning unit.

### Beaten, told not to hold program on Bhagat Singh, allege students and activists picked up by police in Delhi

**New Delhi.(Agency)**  
Several students and activists who were allegedly picked up by Delhi Police earlier this month have alleged that they were assaulted and harassed in custody. Senior Delhi Police officials declined to comment on the allegations. Nine of the 10 individuals who were allegedly detained without due process were released "barely 12 hours" before the Delhi High Court took up habeas corpus petitions filed on their behalf in an unusual sitting on Sunday. The court directed the police to preserve CCTV camera footage from the places where they were allegedly picked up on March 12 and 13.



The police maintained that these individuals were issued notices, after which they had joined an investigation voluntarily. Two individuals — DU student Ilakkiya and labour rights activist Shiv Kumar — were allegedly picked up on March 12 outside Dyal Singh College, where they had

gone to meet a professor to discuss a program that had been planned by the Forum Against Corporatisation and Militarisation (FACM), a platform of student groups, teachers' collectives, and labour unions, on March 31. This program would cap the observance of "Anti-Imperialism Week" marking the sacrifice of the revolutionaries Bhagat Singh, Sukhdev, and Rajguru. "When we stepped out [of the college]... three men and one woman, all in civil clothes, put Shiva inside [a vehicle]... and they pulled me also inside," Ilakkiya said. Abinash, 21, a third-year student of Mathematics at SGTB Khalsa College, said he had been picked up on March 13 from a room in Vijay Nagar, where worried friends of Ilakkiya and Shiv had assembled. "Around 8 o'clock, the Special Cell barged in. They broke the door... and took about seven of us," he said. Abinash, who is associated with the student organisation Bhagat Singh Chitra Ekta Manch (BSCEM), said he was harassed and beaten.

### Geotagging, unique customer IDs: Overhaul of DJB water-billing system on cards

**New Delhi.(Agency)**  
Geotagging of consumer properties and assigning a Unique Customer Premise Identification number will be among the key highlights with the Delhi Jal Board (DJB) planning an overhaul of the system for generating water bills amid complaints from consumers over inaccurate or missing bills, said officials. The DJB is also planning to hold a door-to-door drive and update the database of the 35 lakh water consumers in the Capital. The cost of overhaul is pegged at Rs 60 crore, Water Minister Parvesh Sahib Singh said on Thursday, adding that this effort is aimed at eliminating discrepancies that have eroded public trust over time. "People of Delhi want to pay their water bills and fulfill their responsibility. The



problem arises when someone suddenly receives an inflated bill, when a meter is not functioning, or when bills don't reach on time. These are not small issues... they affect daily life. Our effort is to fix these gaps at the ground level and build a system that is accurate, transparent, and trustworthy." Officials said under this initiative, DJB will also introduce installation of technology-enabled smart meter readings with features such as photo capture and GPS tagging. A proof of bill delivery (PoD) will have to be submitted in the database. At present, consumer records are maintained using installed meters. "The overhaul is expected to help weed out duplicate and incorrect entries," said an official. "Within six months, every registered consumer is expected to have a verified digital record, reducing disputes and improving service delivery," Singh said.

### Bengal man strangles six-month pregnant wife for refusing his demands for money

**A pregnant woman was allegedly strangled by her husband following a monetary dispute in West Bengal's North 24 Parganas district. Three family members have been arrested as police investigate the case.**

**New Delhi.(Agency)**  
A 24-year-old woman who was six months pregnant was allegedly murdered by her husband in West Bengal's North 24 Parganas district, police said. The victim, identified as Puja Mondal, was found dead on Wednesday evening at her home in Garulia's Lenin Nagar area. Her body had been wrapped in plastic and hidden beneath a bed, officials said.



Police have arrested three people in connection with the case, including her husband, Rishi Harichand, his mother and another family member. A murder case has been registered, and the body has been sent for post-mortem.

According to the complaint filed by the victim's family, Puja was allegedly killed after she refused to meet her husband's monetary demands. Per preliminary investigation, cops suspect Harichand strangled her with a piece of cloth and attempted to conceal the crime by hiding the body. Local sources said Mondal and Harichand had been married for about two years. Her family alleged she had faced repeated harassment over money from her husband and in-laws since the marriage, which they initially did not accept. Despite her pregnancy, the

alleged harassment continued, they said. On Wednesday morning, an argument reportedly broke out between the couple after she refused to give money, following which she was allegedly killed.

When Mondal's family could not reach her, they went to her in-laws' house later that afternoon. Unable to find her, they alerted police, who subsequently recovered the body from under the bed. Goutam Biswas, the victim's maternal uncle, told India Today, "Rishi would

demand money from my niece Puja. They married each other without our consent. None of our family had accepted them. Later we heard that she was pregnant. After that, we accepted the couple." He added, "Her husband does not do any work. Therefore he often demands money. After getting the phone call, we reached the spot and saw my niece was hidden under the bed. And we also heard that her husband, mother-in-law and others surrendered at the police station.

### Delhi LG Sandhu visits Kalindi Kunj barrage to take stock of pollution in Yamuna

**New Delhi.(Agency)**  
As the Yamuna has developed pink froth, indicating pollution, Lieutenant Governor Taranjit Singh Sandhu on Thursday visited the Kalindi Kunj barrage, accompanied by senior officials to assess the situation. He emphasised the need for practical and sustainable solutions to prevent the formation of froth on the river.

"Visited the Kalindi Kunj Ghat along the Yamuna River, along with senior officials of concerned departments, to take a first-hand assessment of the current situation," he posted on X.

The LG also said that he discussed the involvement of local and international experts from leading scientific institutions and organisations to help identify practical and sustainable measures going forward. This comes a day after Delhi Water Minister Parvesh Sahib Singh visited the spot. Singh was accompanied by a team comprising environmental experts from IIT-Delhi, officials from the district administration, Delhi Pollution Control Committee (DPC), Delhi Jal Board (DJB), and senior officers from the Irrigation and Flood Control (I&FC) departments of both Delhi and Uttar Pradesh.

During the visit, experts highlighted that the froth formation is localised and largely linked to the structural and flow conditions at the Okhla barrage. Due to the slope at the barrage, water falls with force, creating turbulence and this agitation causes existing impurities in the water to turn into visible foam, they said.

### 3 friends, returning from Ladakh trip, die after car plunges 30 feet off flyover

**New Delhi.(Agency)**  
Three friends, all in their 20s, died after their car hit a divider and plunged nearly 30 feet off a flyover on the Delhi-Mumbai Expressway on Wednesday. All three were part of a larger group who were returning to Pune, after a trip to Jammu and Leh-Ladakh.



The incident happened around 10.30 am. Senior police officer Manoj Sikarwar said that a group of 12 people had left Pune on February 26 in three cars for a trip to the mountains. One person returned earlier, while another went back home separately. The remaining 10 were en route to Pune in three vehicles. They had halted

overnight in Dausa in Rajasthan before resuming their journey on Wednesday morning. The incident happened when the car, a Toyota Fortuner, spiralled

out of control and hit a divider before diving 30 feet off a flyover. Preliminary investigation suggests that the incident happened as the driver

may have dozed off. The impact was so severe that the vehicle was completely mangled, and the occupants were critically injured. Locals rushed to the spot and began rescue efforts, pulling the injured out of the wreckage and taking them to a nearby hospital. However, doctors declared all three dead on arrival.

At the time of the accident, the remaining two cars, carrying seven of 12 friends, had stopped near a toll plaza. They were informed of the incident shortly after. The deceased have been identified as Siddhant (21), Kunal (25), and Mayuresh (23). Police have conducted

postmortem examinations and handed over the bodies to the families and friends. They are being transported to Pune by ambulance.

**The three friends were part of a group of 12 people, all from Pune, who were returning from a Jammu and Leh-Ladakh trip. The remaining friends were in two other cars and were at a toll plaza at the time of the incident.**

Police have registered a case and are investigating all aspects of the accident, with Sikarwar saying that evidence has been collected from the crash site to ascertain the exact cause.

### Lawyers in Karkardooma Court go on a flash strike, resolve to not allow police to enter the complex: Why are they angry?

**The advocates allege that police did not act on an FIR after one of their colleagues was beaten and robbed. This isn't the first time that Delhi's 1.65 lakh lawyers have clashed with police and stayed away from work in protest.**

**New Delhi.(Agency)**  
Work has stopped in Northeast Delhi's Karkardooma Courts complex after lawyers went on a strike on Friday (March 20) to protest the alleged police inaction on a complaint of assault and robbery filed by one of their colleagues.

The lawyers have also alleged that the Station House Officer (SHO) of Ghazipur police station, in whose jurisdiction the alleged crime took place, was trying to "shield the real culprits". At a meeting on Thursday, the Shahdara Bar Association (SBA), which represents all lawyers in the Karkardooma Courts complex, called for a total suspension of work on Friday and to stop the entry of police to the complex. "All the members of Shahdara Bar Association are hereby informed that an emergent meeting... was called today to discuss a serious incident wherein a member of the Bar was



brutally attacked and robbed within territorial jurisdiction of P.S. Ghazipur. Though an FIR... was registered... however, SHO Ghazipur failed to take any action against the accused person and to arrest them," the SBA said in a

circular signed by its president V K Singh and honorary secretary Narveer Dabas. The circular alleged that the SHO had "intentionally failed to take any action against accused persons and has been taking time on one pretext or

another just to shield the real culprits". The circular also mentioned earlier instances of alleged failure by police to act on complaints by lawyers.

"In a previous incident, where an attempt was made to kill a lawyer and he received a gunshot injury during the incident, police officials of P.S. Mayur Vihar failed to arrest all accused persons till date. It has further been observed that various police officials have been misbehaving with lawyers in police stations and they intentionally don't take any action on the complaints filed by advocates," it said.

Therefore, the circular said, the meeting of the SBA's Executive Committee had "unanimously resolved to observe complete suspension of work on 20.03.2026, and to ban the entry of Police officials inside the court premises on 20.03.2026 as a mark of protest".

NEWS BOX

**Best in the world? Premier League clubs handed a European reality check**

New Delhi. (Agency)

Arjun Tendulkar has made a strong early impression at Lucknow Super Giants ahead of IPL 2026, catching the eye of captain Rishabh Pant during 't go below 1200.'" Arjun said. The numbers left Pant visibly taken aback, ing comfortable with a heavier blade. While the Premier League continues to dominate headlines and spending charts, the Champions League tells a different story. Six English clubs made the Round of 16, the most ever from a single country. It felt like a proper statement. Depth, quality, and strength across the board. Two weeks later, that statement didn't hold up. Four of those six teams were out. Manchester City, Chelsea, Newcastle United and Tottenham Hotspur all went home, and not in the kind of last-minute heartbreak that gets talked about for years. These were exits that felt clear. Across those



ties, Premier League sides conceded 30 goals and scored 18. Entertaining games, yes, but also ones where the gap showed.

And the teams knocking them out were not surprises. Real Madrid, Barcelona and Atletico Madrid have been here before, many times. They didn't need anything special, just their usual level in this competition.

The scorelines said enough. Real Madrid beat Manchester City 5-1 on aggregate without ever looking stretched. Barcelona put eight past Newcastle United across two legs, playing with control even when the game opened up. Atletico Madrid edged Tottenham Hotspur 7-5 in a chaotic tie, but still looked like the side that knew where it was going. For all the talk about pace and intensity in England, these games had a different feel. Not slow, but more measured. Less about constant action, more about picking the right moments.

**Knockout football hits different**

There's always a shift when teams move from league football to Europe. Same players, same teams, but a different kind of game. Real Madrid showed that perfectly against Manchester City. They didn't try to outplay City in every phase. They stayed calm, let the game flow, and took their chances when they came. It never felt rushed, even when City had spells of control.

**KKR receive Matheesha Pathirana injury boost as pacer declared fit to play IPL 2026**

NEW DELHI. (Agency)

Kolkata Knight Riders received a timely boost ahead of the IPL 2026 season when Sri Lanka Cricket confirmed that pacer Matheesha Pathirana is fit and ready to join the team for the new campaign. The confirmation from the board eases concerns over KKR's pace bowling resources, which was hit severely by injury. Sri Lanka Cricket secretary Bandula Dissanayake told that Pathirana has completed his rehabilitation and has been granted the necessary clearance to participate in the IPL. However, KKR will assess his readiness before finalising his inclusion. Pathirana suffered a hamstring injury during Sri Lanka's T20 World Cup 2026 group game against Australia and went on to miss the remainder of the tournament as the co-hosts were eliminated in the Super 8 stage. "As far as I



know, he's fit and we have given him NOC to participate in the IPL, that's all I know at this point of time," Dissanayake told. He has completed rehab and he is fit. But the franchise will be tasked to assess his readiness. At the moment we don't know anything about that. As far as we know he is fit and ready to join IPL."

**WHEN WILL PATHIRANA JOIN KKR SQUAD?**

There is no confirmation yet on when Pathirana will join the KKR squad, which is scheduled to leave for Mumbai on 25 March for their opening match against Mumbai Indians four days later.

**India vs Ireland T20I series confirmed for June, Paul Stirling steps down as captain**

**Ireland are all set to welcome India to their shores in June this year for a short T20I series, Cricket Ireland announced on Thursday, March 19. India will take on the Irish side ahead of their white-ball tour of England.**

New Delhi. (Agency)

Ireland are all set to play India in a T20I series in June this year under new leadership as Paul Stirling decided to step down as the captain of the side in the shortest format on Thursday, March 19. A report from ESPNcricinfo in September last year revealed that talks were going on between the BCCI and Cricket Ireland about the Indian team playing a short T20I series in Ireland ahead of their white-ball tour of England in July this year. This has now been confirmed by Ireland's director of high performance, Graham West, in a press release while announcing Stirling's



departure from his role as T20I captain. "With qualification secured for the T20 World Cup in 2028, Paul's decision to stand down as T20 captain provides the opportunity for the new captain to begin implementing their style and methodology, starting with the India series in June," said West in the statement.

India will be playing against Afghanistan in a one-off Test and a three-match ODI series right after the IPL 2026 season comes to a

close. The final ODI match between the two sides is scheduled for June 20 and India will face England in the first T20I match as part of the tour on July 1.

With the dates yet to be announced, the short series against Ireland is expected to happen during this period.

**WHY DID STIRLING STEP DOWN AS IRELAND CAPTAIN?**

Stirling's decision to step down as the captain of Ireland's T20I side comes after a horrid

campaign during the T20 World Cup 2026. Ireland were knocked out in the group stage after just one win in their four matches. They lost to Sri Lanka and Australia while the game against Zimbabwe was washed out. Stirling will continue as Ireland's ODI captain, meaning that they will now have a dedicated skipper in each of the formats.

"While I will be stepping away from the T20 captaincy, I remain fully committed to the Ireland team and will continue in my role as ODI captain.

I still have a huge amount of ambition as a player and feel this decision will allow me to fully focus on being the best version of myself and making the strongest possible contribution on the field." "This feels like the right time for the team to move into a new chapter, and I wish whoever takes on the T20 captaincy every success.

They will have my full support, and I look forward to working alongside them as we continue to build and push for success on the international stage." "Representing Ireland remains the greatest privilege of my career and I am as motivated as ever to help the team continue to grow and achieve success in the years ahead," said Stirling in the statement.

**Sanju Samson, MS Dhoni's intense chat at CSK camp sets internet ablaze**

New Delhi. (Agency)

The moment that Chennai Super Kings have been waiting for has finally arrived as Sanju Samson was seen interacting with MS Dhoni during the training camp ahead of the new IPL 2026 season on Thursday, March 19. Samson joined CSK ahead of the IPL 2026 season, in a trade that saw Ravindra Jadeja and Sam Curran move in the opposite direction to be a part of RR for the new campaign. After his heroics in the T20 World Cup 2026, where he scored 321 runs from five matches and emerged as the Player Of The Tournament, Samson arrived in Chennai on Thursday to link up with the squad after a much-needed rest. In the video that has gone viral now, Samson can be seen engaging in a light-hearted chat with Dhoni as both men were seen smiling. You can see



the full video below: This interaction got the CSK fans buzzing, who are already excited to see the Thala-Chettan connection on the field during the IPL 2026 season.

**WHAT DID SAMSON SAY ABOUT PLAYING ALONGSIDE DHONI?**

Samson said that he is excited about spending an entire IPL season alongside Dhoni and

said that the legendary Indian captain has always had a positive influence on him.

"I've spoken to Mahi bhai a lot and have seen him on and off in the Indian team, but this will be the first time we'll spend two months together, so there's a lot of excitement," Samson told.

"Whenever he calls or speaks to me, there's always a positive influence. But being with him in the same team for two months will definitely have its benefits, and

just thinking about it makes me happy. Watching and learning from the way he approaches the game is something I see as a great opportunity," Samson added. CSK fans could see both men on the field together during CSK's opening match of IPL 2026 against RR on March 30 in Guwahati.

**Mitchell Starc joins Pat Cummins and Josh Hazlewood, set for delayed IPL 2026 start**

New Delhi. (Agency)

Mitchell Starc has joined Pat Cummins and Josh Hazlewood in having delayed starts to IPL 2026 as Cricket Australia look to manage the workload of the big three pacers ahead of a packed international schedule. The update, provided by cricket.com.au on Friday, March 20, comes after it was revealed that Nathan Ellis has been ruled out of the upcoming season following the recurrence of a hamstring injury that he had in the build-up to the T20 World Cup 2026.

Cummins has been away from international cricket for a considerable period, with his last appearance coming in December 2025 against England at the Adelaide Oval, where he claimed three wickets in both innings. The SRH skipper was also ruled out of the T20 World Cup 2026 due to injury and has since been focused on regaining full fitness.



Hazlewood has followed a similar trajectory, having been sidelined with injury over the past few months. The Australian quick last featured in competitive cricket in November 2025 for New South Wales and went on to miss both the Ashes and the T20 World Cup 2026. Starc played all five Ashes Tests and the latter portion of the Big Bash League with Sydney Sixers. He didn't play the T20 World Cup after having retired from the format. However, Starc is being managed by Cricket Australia after having bowled more balls in Test cricket than any other paceman over the course of the last 12 months, barring Mohammed Siraj.

**FIFA creates rule requiring female coaches at women's tournaments**



ZURICH. (Agency)

Female soccer coaches will get more chances to work at the Women's World Cup and other tournaments after FIFA passed a new rule Thursday. FIFA said it will require at its women's tournaments that "at least one female must be a head coach or assistant coach" of each team. Just 10 of 32 teams at

the 2023 Women's World Cup had a female head coach, including Sarina Wiegman of beaten finalist England. "We must do more to accelerate change by creating clearer pathways, expanding opportunities, and increasing the visibility for women on our sidelines," FIFA's Chief Football Officer Jill Ellis said in a statement. FIFA's policy will

**FIFA's policy will aim to spread globally what European soccer body UEFA has done where the women's game is more developed.**

aim to spread globally what European soccer body UEFA has done where the women's game is more developed. Though just seven of 16 teams at the Women's European Championship had a female head coach, all that appointed a man as head coach had to have a female assistant coach. Wiegman guided England to retain its European title, which was her own third in a row and an eighth straight for female head coaches in the competition dating back to 1997.

**Mondo Duplantis in India Bhubaneswar set to host World Indoor Champs' 2028**

**Indian athletics fans could get a chance to watch pole vault superstar Mondo Duplantis on home soil, with Bhubaneswar set to host the 2028 World Indoor Athletics Championships.**

NEW DELHI. (Agency)

There could be a rare opportunity for Indian athletics fans to witness world record holder Armand 'Mondo' Duplantis in action on home soil, with Bhubaneswar set to host the World Indoor Athletics Championships in 2028. India will stage the prestigious indoor event for the first time after World Athletics awarded the hosting rights to the country at its Council meeting in Torun, Poland, on

Thursday. The decision was taken a day before the start of the 2026 World Indoor Championships in the Polish city. "India has been awarded the World Indoor Athletics Championships for the year 2028," World Athletics vice-president Adille Sumariwalla confirmed. The event, held every two years, features some of the biggest names in global athletics, including pole vault superstar Duplantis, who has dominated the discipline in recent years. His presence in Bhubaneswar in 2028 would offer Indian fans a chance to watch one of the sport's modern greats up close. The Athletics Federation of India (AFI) had earlier announced its bid for the 2028 edition, with a World Athletics delegation visiting the indoor facility at the Kalinga Stadium complex in January.

AFI president Bahadur Singh Sagoo said the development reflects the growing stature of Indian athletics on the global stage.

"The World Athletics 2028 Indoor

Championships being awarded to India marks the growing stature of Indian athletics. Track and field in the country has been in sharp focus since Neeraj Chopra's success at the Olympics and World Championships," he



said. Bhubaneswar's Kalinga Stadium complex, which houses a state-of-the-art indoor facility, has emerged as a key venue in India's push to host major international events. India has also submitted bids for

several global competitions, including the 2028 World U20 Championships and the 2031 World Athletics Championships, as part of its larger ambition to host the 2036 Olympics.

**WHO IS MONDO DUPLANTIS?**

Armand 'Mondo' Duplantis is perhaps the greatest track and field athlete of all time. A pole vaulter, Duplantis has broken the world record 15 times in a remarkable display of dominance since 2020. The Swedish star cleared 6.31 metres at the Mondo Classic indoor meet in Uppsala, Sweden, to break the world record for the 15th time in his career, improving his own mark by one centimetre. Unlike most track and field disciplines, pole vault has a single world record covering both indoor and outdoor performances. And it was six years ago in an indoor meet in Poland, where Duplantis broke the pole vault record for the first time.

## Sensex, Nifty rally as crude oil cools, IT stocks shine

New Delhi,(Agency)

Benchmark stock market indices opened in green as crude oil prices eased over Israel PM's comments, raising hopes of de-escalation of the Middle East conflict. IT stocks rallied in early trade, pushing markets higher. The S&P BSE Sensex jumped 808.29 points to 75,015.53, while the NSE Nifty50 added 257.45 points to 23,259.60 as of 9:26 am.

Dr. VK Vijayakumar, Chief Investment Strategist, Geojit Investments Limited, said that market has been oscillating between some hope and fear during the last four days. "There is potential for the market to move up since hope of de-escalation is back. Israel PM's remarks yesterday indicate that there won't be further attacks on Iran's oil and gas infrastructure. This has cooled the Brent crude to \$106 from the peak of \$118 yesterday," he added.

"The gains which Nifty accumulated in the previous three days have been completely wiped out with the 775 point loss yesterday. This oscillation between hope and fear is likely to continue in the near-term. The HDFC issue impacted Nifty Bank significantly yesterday and it also contributed to the crash in Nifty. This is likely to be a storm in a tea cup. Even though the uncertainty continues, the market construct is ripe for a bounce back today. Beaten down financials and autos are set for a bounce back.

## E-comm moratorium, agri, fisheries high on India's agenda at 14th WTO Ministerial meet

New Delhi,(Agency)

Discussions around the future of the e-commerce moratorium and wider reforms of the World Trade Organization (WTO) are going to be the major points of discussions for India in the upcoming ministerial meeting at the 14th WTO Ministerial Conference, a senior government official said. Officials indicated that detailed discussions on the aspects of the long-standing e-commerce moratorium will be at the core of the discussion, with several countries seeking more structured engagement on its continuation. The current moratorium is set to expire at MC14 or on March 31, 2026, whichever is earlier, unless members agree to extend it. Agriculture and fisheries are also expected to be covered, and India is expecting some guidance on the same.

India is expected to play a constructive role across all areas of deliberations. "We expect India to play a constructive role... WTO needs to be strengthened and be more relevant and effective," the official said. India aims to engage constructively across issues, with officials underlining the need to strengthen the WTO and enhance its relevance in a rapidly evolving global trade landscape. Sources also indicated that there are chances of possible deliberations on whether a concrete roadmap for broader WTO reforms will be formally taken up at the next ministerial. Another issue likely to be discussed is the proposal to bring the Joint Statement Initiative under Annex 4 of the WTO framework that requires explicit consensus among members. Fundamental questions, including whether investment-related issues fall within the WTO's mandate, continue to divide the member nations.

"There is a proposal to see whether that can get into Annex 4. Till now there has been no addition to Annex 4. Only when WTO conclusions were finalised, there were two Annex 4 agreements — one on civil aviation and one on public procurement — which was something like grandfathering of what

already existing at that time," added the official. The 14th Ministerial Conference, or WTO Ministerial Conference MC14, will take place from March 26 to 29 in Yaoundé, Cameroon. An Indian delegation led by Commerce Minister Piyush Goyal along with other bureaucrats will be there at the Conference.

## Bank Holiday Eid 2026: Are banks closed today or tomorrow for Eid ul-Fitr Check

Mumbai,(Agency)

While there were some initial confusions regarding the exact date of Eid-ul-Fitr, it is now clear that India will celebrate Eid on Saturday (21 March 2026).

Meanwhile, banks in several cities are closed both today and tomorrow for Eid-ul-Fitr. Bank Holiday March 21

Banks will be closed Assam, Gujarat, Mizoram, Maharashtra, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, Odisha, Chandigarh, Tamil Nadu, Uttarakhand, Sikkim, Manipur, Kerala, Arunachal Pradesh, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, Jammu & Kashmir, Nagaland, West Bengal, Delhi, Goa, Bihar, Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, Meghalaya, Srinagar to celebrate Ramzan-Id (Id-ul-Fitr), Khutub-E-Ramzan, Sarhul.

However, banking activities on mobile and internet will remain uninterrupted, though several bank branches will remain closed on account of bank holidays. The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) bank holidays calendar list has given full details of states and days when bank branches will be closed in the month of March 2026. Furthermore, you must note that the banks will NOT be closed for all the days consecutively in all states or regions. This is the total number of days when banks in different parts of the country will remain closed for state-observed holidays. For instance banks will be closed for Thiruvalluvar Day in Kochi, but in other states it will NOT be closed for the same reason. Reserve Bank of India places its Holidays under three brackets -- Holiday under Negotiable Instruments Act; Holiday under Negotiable Instruments Act and Real Time Gross Settlement Holiday; and Banks' Closing of Accounts. However, it must be noted that the bank holidays vary in various states as well not observed by all the banking companies. Banking holidays also depend on the festivals being observed in specific states or notification of specific occasions in those states.

# Ports power India's growth: Why sea trade matters more than ever

New Delhi,(Agency)

Ports have historically played a defining role in shaping the economic fortunes of several cities and regions. In India, where nearly 95% of trade by volume moves through sea routes, maritime infrastructure is closely tied to industrial growth, employment, and regional development. Across the country, cities that have built strong linkages between ports and industry have often emerged as important economic hubs. Port-linked industrial facilities often generate multiplier effects, supporting small businesses, ancillary industries, and increasing employment opportunities while also expanding the cargo movement through ports. In many ways, the story of Thoothukudi reflects this broader relationship between ports and industrial ecosystems. Situated on the southeastern coast of Tamil Nadu, Thoothukudi has long served as an important maritime gateway for southern India. Historical records trace its trading links back to as early as 123 AD. Today, V.O. Chidmbaranar Port continues that legacy, with a cargo handling capacity of around 82 million

tonnes each year. Its location along major international shipping routes connecting Asia, Europe and the Middle East give the port a natural logistical advantage, particularly for industries that depend on importing raw materials and exporting finished goods.

### ROLE OF INDUSTRY IN PORT-LED DEVELOPMENT

India's own experience shows how port-led development can reshape regional economies. Jawaharlal Nehru Port in Mumbai helped build one of the country's largest logistics and export ecosystems. In Tamil Nadu, Chennai Port and Kamarajar Port have supported the growth of the state's automobile manufacturing corridor, turning Chennai into a major vehicle export hub. Similarly, Gujarat's Mundra Port has evolved into one of India's most commercially significant ports by attracting large-scale investments in manufacturing, energy and logistics infrastructure. Thoothukudi possesses many of the same structural advantages.

Industries that rely on bulk imports and exports naturally gravitate towards port cities where logistics costs are lower, and global supply chains are easier to access. Copper refining is one such industry. Copper concentrate is



typically imported from mining regions around the world, while refined copper is distributed to manufacturing sectors or exported to international markets.

As a result, copper smelters are often located near ports to streamline the movement of raw materials and finished products. Copper refining was a crucial part of the port-linked industry of

Thoothukudi before the closure of the Sterlite Copper Plant in 2018. The facility was among India's largest copper producers, accounting for nearly 36% of country's copper output. Industry estimates suggest that it contributed close to 3% of Tamil Nadu's GDP while supporting extensive downstream manufacturing activity. However, the plant's impact extended beyond production. Its operations were closely tied to the port's logistics network, allowing copper concentrate to be imported efficiently while refined copper was distributed to domestic industries and international markets while also providing additional employment to locals.

At its peak, the Sterlite facility also played a significant role in driving cargo movement through the port. The plant's operations drew approximately 10-12 vessels every month, contributing to the port's strong growth during that period. However, since the plant's closure, a visible decline has been observed in business related activity at the port.

## HDFC Bank share price extends fall, down 2% after sharp sell-off

Mumbai,(Agency)

Shares of HDFC Bank extended their decline on Friday, falling over 2% in early trade even as the broader market staged a strong rebound, underlining stock-specific concerns weighing on the lender. The stock slipped 2.19% to Rs 782.15 on the BSE at 10:35 am, adding to losses after it had plunged more than 5% in the previous session, marking one of its sharpest declines in recent months. The sharp sell-off was triggered by the resignation of part-time chairman Atanu Chakraborty, who cited "certain happenings and practices" within the bank that were "not in congruence with my personal values and ethics." The remarks have raised concerns around governance and internal processes, prompting investors to reassess their exposure to the stock. While the bank has not indicated any operational impact, the nature of the exit has created uncertainty, particularly given HDFC Bank's positioning as a high-quality,

well-governed institution.

Market participants said the lack of immediate clarity around the developments has led to a cautious stance, with investors preferring to wait for further disclosures before taking fresh positions.

The continued weakness in HDFC Bank stands out against the broader market trend, with benchmark indices rebounding sharply. The Sensex was up around 900 points in early trade, supported by value buying and recovery across several sectors. Despite the positive momentum, HDFC Bank remained under pressure, indicating that the selling is largely stock-specific rather than driven by macro factors. The divergence highlights the sensitivity of investors to governance-related concerns, especially in large-cap financial stocks. Other banking stocks such as ICICI Bank, Axis Bank and State Bank of India saw relatively stable or mildly positive movement,

further underscoring the underperformance in HDFC Bank.

Foreign institutional investors (FIIs), who hold a significant stake in HDFC Bank, are also seen as a key factor. Any uncertainty tends to trigger position trimming in such large, liquid names, amplifying price movements.

The recent volatility in global markets, coupled with elevated crude oil prices and ongoing tensions in West Asia, has kept overall sentiment fragile, even as markets attempt a recovery. Analysts expect near-term volatility in the stock to persist until there is greater clarity on the governance concerns and internal developments flagged by the outgoing chairman. While HDFC Bank's fundamentals remain strong, including its asset quality and growth outlook, the current episode has introduced an element of uncertainty that could weigh on the stock in the short term on clearer communication from the bank and a broader easing of concerns.

## Rupee hits all-time low, slips past Rs 93 mark against US dollar

New Delhi,(Agency)

The rupee plunged to a record low on Friday, breaching the Rs 93 mark for the first time as a surge in crude oil prices and escalating tensions in West Asia triggered fresh pressure on the currency. It weakened to Rs 93.15 against the US dollar in early trade, extending recent losses as investors reacted to the intensifying conflict across the Gulf, which has disrupted energy infrastructure and pushed oil prices sharply higher. Brent crude remains firmly above \$100 per barrel amid fears of prolonged supply disruptions, a key concern for India, which imports a large share of its oil needs. Higher oil prices increase the country's import bill, drive up demand for dollars, and put downward pressure on the rupee. At the same



time, rising geopolitical uncertainty has triggered a global risk-off mood, with investors moving towards safe-haven assets such as the US dollar. This has strengthened the dollar and weighed on emerging market currencies, including the rupee. Foreign institutional investors (FIIs) have also stepped up selling in Indian equities amid the uncertainty, further adding to pressure. When global funds pull money out, they convert rupees into dollars, accelerating the currency's decline. With limited room for rate cuts and inflation risks still in focus, the dollar has remained strong, keeping global liquidity tight and reducing the appeal of emerging markets.

For India, the implications go beyond the currency market. A weaker rupee, combined with elevated crude prices, could push up imported inflation, particularly in fuel and commodities, and increase costs for businesses and consumers. Market participants will now closely track developments in the West Asia conflict, movements in crude oil prices, and any signals of intervention from the Reserve Bank of India to stabilise the rupee.

## Missile attack on Ras Laffan cuts Qatar LNG capacity by 17%, \$20 billion loss estimated

New Delhi,(Agency)

Missile attacks on Ras Laffan Industrial City, one of the world's largest natural gas processing hubs operated by QatarEnergy, have reduced Qatar's LNG export capacity by 17% and caused an estimated loss of \$20 billion. Iran carried out the attack on Wednesday in response to Israel's strike on its energy infrastructure.

QatarEnergy said the attacks, which occurred on Wednesday, March 18, 2026, and in the early hours of Thursday, March 19, 2026, could take up to five years to repair, impacting energy supplies to markets in Europe and Asia. "I am relieved to confirm that no one was injured in these unjustified and senseless attacks, which were not just an attack on the State of Qatar but on global energy security and stability. This was an attack on all of us who stand for development and human

progress sustained by fair, reliable, and secure access to energy," said Saad Sherida Al-Kaabi, Minister of State for Energy Affairs and President and CEO



of QatarEnergy. According to the company, the attacks damaged two LNG production units—Trains 4 and 6—together accounting for 12.8 million tonnes per annum (MTPA) of capacity, or approximately 17% of Qatar's LNG exports. Train 4 is a joint

venture between QatarEnergy (66%) and ExxonMobil (34%), while Train 6 is owned by QatarEnergy (70%) and ExxonMobil (30%). "The damage sustained by the LNG facilities will take between three to five years to repair. The impact will be felt in China, South Korea, Italy, and Belgium. This means that we will be compelled to declare force majeure for up to five years on some long-term LNG contracts," said Minister Al-Kaabi. QatarEnergy also confirmed that the attacks targeted the Pearl GTL (gas-to-liquids) facility, operated by Shell under a production-sharing agreement. The plant converts natural gas into cleaner-burning fuels, base oils, paraffins, and waxes.

"The damage caused to one of the two trains at Pearl GTL is being assessed and is expected to remain offline for a minimum of one year," he added.

## Is Dubai's luxury housing boom starting to crack as Gulf conflict escalates

New Delhi,(Agency)

Dubai's booming property market is facing a critical stress test as escalating strikes across the Gulf begin to dent investor confidence and challenge the emirate's safe-haven appeal. A series of attacks on energy and logistics infrastructure has heightened geopolitical risks, triggering volatility across regional markets and raising concerns among global investors who have been key drivers of Dubai's real estate rally. For years, Dubai has positioned itself as a stable hub for global capital, attracting high-net-worth individuals, expatriates and institutional investors. But recent developments are forcing a rethink. Beyond its financial appeal, Dubai has also been seen as one of the safest urban centres in the region, a key factor behind its ability to attract global talent. That perception is now being tested, with airspace disruptions and security concerns prompting some residents and investors to reassess their exposure. Bloomberg recently reported that the emirate's safe-haven status is coming under pressure, as rising geopolitical risks begin to influence investor behaviour. Wealth managers say there is no panic exit yet, but decision-making cycles are slowing, with buyers

increasingly adopting a wait-and-watch approach.

### EARLY SIGNS OF STRESS

The shift in sentiment is already visible in financial markets. According to Reuters, UAE equities have declined sharply since the conflict escalated, with property-linked stocks such as Emaar Properties coming under pressure as risk appetite weakens. Debt markets, a key funding channel for developers, have also turned cautious, with new bond issuances slowing amid rising risk premiums, Reuters reported. While this does not yet signal a fall in property prices, it points to a clear change in investor mood.

### RELIANCE ON EXTERNAL CAPITAL

Dubai's property market has been on a strong upward trajectory in recent years, driven by foreign inflows, tax advantages and post-pandemic migration trends.

Reuters estimates that property prices surged nearly 60 percent between 2022 and early 2025, making it one of the world's hottest real estate markets.

However, that rally has also increased the market's vulnerability to external shocks. "Real estate investment depends heavily on

stability and investor confidence," market participants told Reuters, warning that prolonged geopolitical uncertainty could weaken both.

### LUXURY VILLA DEALS FACE PRICING PRESSURE

Beyond geopolitics, structural factors are adding to the pressure. A large share of

sentiment. Early signs of pricing pressure are also emerging at the top end of the market. Some luxury villa transactions are being renegotiated, with buyers seeking discounts and sellers showing greater flexibility amid uncertainty.

However, there is no evidence of a broad-based correction yet.

Developers continue to report steady activity, particularly in the luxury segment, and projects remain on track. Some industry executives told Reuters the market is showing "resilience" despite the geopolitical backdrop, supported by underlying demand.

Analysts, however, caution that the full impact may take time to play out.

"The real effect will depend on how long the conflict persists and how it affects demand," a market participant told Reuters said, indicating that current stability may not hold if tensions escalate further. The outlook now hinges largely on how the geopolitical situation evolves. If tensions ease, the market could stabilise quickly, supported by strong fundamentals and continued inflows. But a prolonged period of uncertainty, especially alongside high oil prices and tighter global liquidity, could slow demand and put pressure on prices.





# Rasha Thadani

Gets The 'Best Birthday Surprise' From Director Ajay Bhupathi

Rasha Thadani rang in her 21st birthday on March 16. But her celebrations are far from over. The young actress, who is currently busy shooting for her upcoming Tollywood film Srinivasa Mangapuram, recently received the 'best' surprise from the film's director, Ajay Bhupathi, on set. Taking to Instagram Stories, Rasha shared a cheerful snapshot from the celebration. The image captured the actor beaming with joy as she stood alongside the film's cast and crew. The setup featured a beautifully decorated cake, along with chocolates and gifts arranged for the birthday girl. Sharing the moment, she thanked the filmmaker, writing, "@dirajaybhupathi Thank you for the best surprise."

**Rasha Thadani Seek Blessings At Tirupati Balaji Temple**  
After her birthday celebrations, the star visited the sacred Tirupati Balaji Temple with her mother and veteran actress Raveena Tandon. Located on the seventh peak of the Seshachalam Hills, the pilgrimage site is dedicated to Lord Venkateswara. The duo sought blessings at the revered shrine and Raveena shared glimpses of their spiritual visit on social media. Dressed in stunning traditional attire,



the mother and daughter duo looked graceful as they posed against the temple's majestic backdrop. Further in the post, Raveena also dropped glimpses from Rasha's birthday celebration with family. In the caption, she penned, "Eeshwar, Family and Friends, the babies @rashathadani's birthday month starting with blessings at Tirupati. Then a weekend with The Sun and Son. Friends and fun and an amazing Indian win."

**What We Know About Srinivasa Mangapuram?**  
Rasha is set to make her Tollywood debut with the film Srinivasa Mangapuram, directed by Ajay Bhupathi. The upcoming film also stars Mahesh Babu's nephew Jaya Krishna Ghattamaneni and veteran actor Mohan Babu. Rasha will reportedly be seen playing a character named Manga in the project.

**What's Next For Rasha Thadani?**  
Rasha marked her debut in the lights-camera-action world with the 2025 Bollywood film Azaad, directed by Abhishek Kapoor. She starred opposite Aaman Devgan, nephew of actor Ajay Devgn. Up next, she will be seen sharing the screen space with Munjya fame Abhay Verma in Laikeya Laikaa.

## '6 Pounds Is Unrealistic': Kajol Keeps It Real About Weight Loss



Kajol has often been vocal about her struggles, choices and personal life. Recently, she talked about her weight loss journey and made a shocking revelation, leaving her fans thrilled. While many complimented her cheerful nature, actor Karanvir Sharma pointed towards her "evergreen charm". On Instagram, Kajol dropped a series of pictures from her latest photoshoot in a gorgeous dark green saree featuring intricate gold embellishments and mirror work all over it. She teamed it with a gold sleeveless blouse with a deep neckline and some minimal jewellery.

**Kajol Wraps Her Elegant Look With A Stunning Insight From Her Weight Loss Journey**

Her hair was styled in a sophisticated updo with a side-swept fringe, while she complemented her fashion moment with elegant makeup. It included defined eyebrows, a kohl-rimmed smoky eyeshadow, a dollop of blush and highlighter on her cheeks alongside glossy lipstick. Finally, her charming smile added an oomph factor to her overall look.

Alongside the pictures, she opened up about her weight loss journey. In a hilarious way, she revealed that she was weighing just 6 pounds more than her original weight. Kajol wrote, "I've decided I will never come down to my original weight.. after all 6 pounds is a little unrealistic! #weighteddiaries."

**Kajol's Fans Are In Love With Her Ageless Beauty**

The pictures along with her quirky caption, soon caught the attention of her fans and friends from the industry. The diva's The Trial Season 2 co-star Karanvir Sharma commented on the post, "If evergreen was a color," talking about Kajol's unfiltered charm even at 51.

Reacting to the post, a user said, "The photo at the end, your signature smile (heart-eyed emoji)." Another added, "You are incredibly beautiful, my queen." A fan called her "Breathtaking." Someone mentioned, "Shine bright like a Diamond," while one more person stated, "Prettiest Queen." "Perfection doesn't have a weight limit. You're proof of that. I Love U Always," read a comment seemingly from one of her ardent fans. Echoing the same emotion, yet another social media user stated, "You are perfect just the way you are @kajol. The most important thing is that you feel good."

**Kajol's Recent And Upcoming Works**

Last year, Kajol appeared in two back-to-back movies alongside a show, Two Much with Kajol and Twinkle. She was seen as Ambika Dasgupta in Maa, a mythological horror film directed by Vishal Furia, alongside Ronit Roy, Indraneil Sengupta, and Kherin Sharma, as well as Meher Menon in Sarzameen, an action thriller film written and directed by Kayoze Irani, in his directorial debut.

## Nora Fatehi Celebrates Morocco's AFCON Win Amid 'Sarke Chunar' Row, Calls It 'Plot Twist Of The Century'



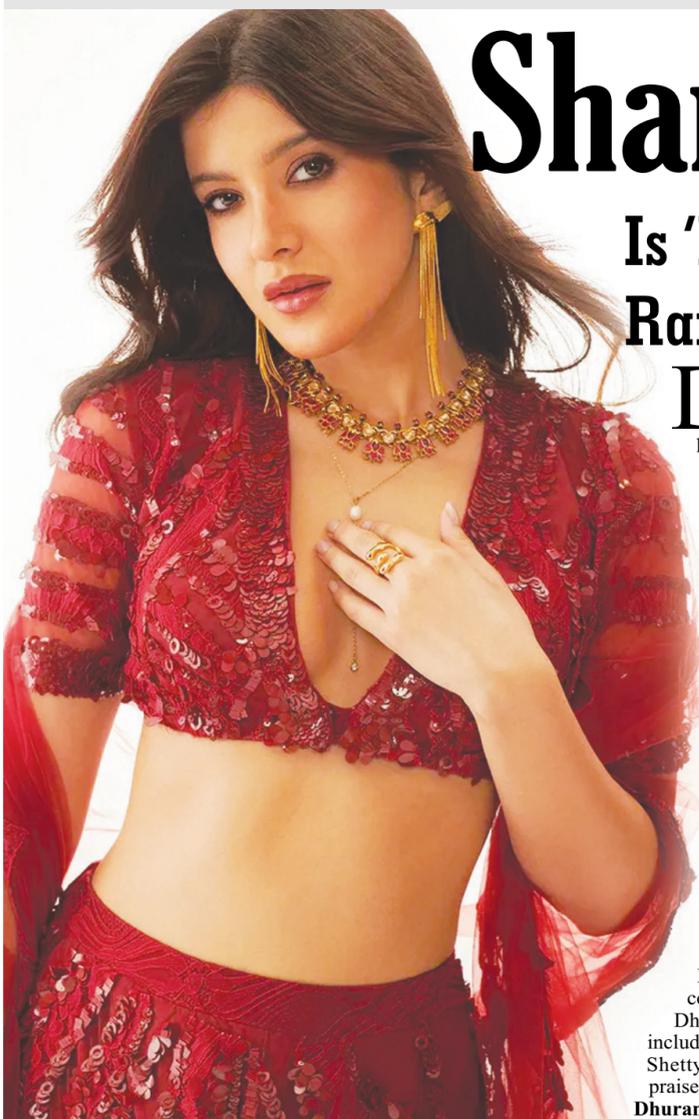
Nora Fatehi is in the spotlight once again, but this time for two very different reasons. While her latest song Sarke Chunar continues to face criticism online, the actor-dancer is celebrating a major sporting victory close to her heart. Morocco have been awarded the African Cup of Nations (AFCON) title following a dramatic decision by the Confederation of African Football (CAF), and Nora could not be more thrilled. Taking to Instagram, Nora shared her excitement in a video, calling the moment a "plot twist of the century."

**'Plot Twist Of The Century': Nora Reacts To Historic Decision**

Morocco's victory came after CAF stripped Senegal of the title following controversy surrounding the final. The match had seen Senegal walk off the pitch mid-game before returning to secure a win, a development that later drew scrutiny. Reacting to the decision, Nora said, "Morocco officially will be going to the World Cup as an African champion. So bravo. Congratulations to Morocco. Plot twist of the century." She added, "So now after this decision, many are saying that justice has finally been served. Morocco is celebrating as we speak. I mean, what can I say? I've never heard of this before in football history, but there's a first for everything and well deserved."

**From Stadium Buzz To 'Lucky Charm' Status**

Nora Fatehi was present at the tournament and became a familiar face in the stands, cheering passionately for Morocco. Her presence did not go unnoticed. Fans quickly dubbed her the team's "lucky charm," with many gathering around her for selfies and pictures during matches. Her appearance also sparked fresh dating rumours with Moroccan footballer Achraf Hakimi, especially after fans noticed his engagement with her social media activity during the games. While neither has addressed the speculation, it added to the online buzz surrounding her.



# Shanaya Kapoor

Is 'Mind Blown' After Watching Ranveer Singh's Dhurandhar 2

Dhurandhar fever has once again taken over people with the release of Ranveer Singh's highly anticipated film, Dhurandhar 2. Directed by Aditya Dhar, the sequel to the 2025 release, titled Dhurandhar: The Revenge, hit theatres on Thursday, March 19, with paid previews a day earlier. Following its release, the spy thriller has not only captured fans' attention but also won admiration from many celebrities.

Among them is Shanaya Kapoor. Taking to her Instagram Stories on Thursday, she shared a still from the movie, which introduced Ranveer as Jaskirat Singh Ranghi, aka Hamza Ali Mazari. In the picture, he was seen dressed in a striped T-shirt and with an intense look on his face.

The actress had nothing but praise for Ranveer. She wrote, "MIND BLOWN" on the post while complimenting him for his work in Dhurandhar 2. Other industry bigwigs, including Allu Arjun, Preity Zinta, Shilpa Shetty, and Madhur Bhandarkar, have praised Dhurandhar 2.

Dhurandhar 2: Plot And Cast

Helmed by Aditya Dhar, who has also taken on writing and producing duties, the movie boasts an ensemble cast featuring Ranveer Singh, Sara Arjun, Sanjay Dutt, R. Madhavan, Rakesh Bedi, Danish Pandor, Gaurav Gera, and Arjun Rampal, among others. The film has been generating significant buzz and is widely anticipated to outperform the box office success of its predecessor.



Dhurandhar 2 picks up directly from the first film's cliffhanger ending. The sequel will further explore Jaskirat's dual identity and the wider intelligence operation unfolding across borders. The narrative is also likely to focus on the shifting power dynamics within Karachi's underworld following the death of Rehman Dakait. It is backed by Jio Studios and B62 Studios. According to Sacnilk, the film has already crossed the Rs 50 crore mark after preview shows. Some trade experts speculate that it might cross the Rs 100 crore mark on the opening day itself.

Cool de-stress mantras for city moms this

# Exam season

The board exam season is on. While the spirit to excel in this competitive world is keeping students awake throughout the night, their stressed parents are also having sleepless nights. What is interesting to note here is, that there are some moms and dads who are coping with stress rather smartly. We spoke with few city moms of board examinees to know their mantra of coping up with the stressful period.

**Increased workout**  
Exercising could be a great panacea for all worries. Realising this, homemaker Viji Murali whose daughter Ishita is appearing for her tenth board CBSE has increased her workout regime more than usual to keep all the stress at bay. "I've started sweating out in the gym even more now. Earlier, I would work out just once a day, but as the board examination approached, I'd begun to hit the gym twice a day. Also, I watch movies which alter my mood and divert my mind for a few hours."

**Kicking off the stress**  
A lecturer at LAD College, Charuta Gajbhiye, kicks off her stress, literally. She plays football with her son in the evening. She elaborates, "My de-stress mantra is simple, what makes my son happy, de-stresses me too. So, I have developed an interest in sports as my son is an ardent sports lover. We play football every day. He and I indulge



together before he sits for his revision." **Musical solace** activity for 15-20 minutes, in the evening in this recreational

What better way to bust the stress than indulging in the activity you are passionate about. A classical singer Sharmista Jha whose son Rajshekhar is appearing for his 12 boards, endorses this fact and adds, "I begin my day with riyaz of Rabindra Sangeet early morning, which is nothing less than a meditation for me. It keeps me calm and positive throughout the day. Also, whenever I feel restless, I head towards my kitchen and cook something special; mostly what my son wants to eat. My mind is completely free of all the worries. In a nutshell I find solace in music and cooking these days."

## Fitness facts that you know all wrong

Many fitness tips can acquire the form of believable myths. In this extract from her new book, a popular city-based trainer digs for the truth. In the world of fitness, there are plenty of myths and half truths. Some myths are just harmless half-truths, but others can actually be harmful. They can cause frustration in working out, and sometimes even lead to injury. There's a lot of fitness information out there - some reliable, some not.

The important thing is to ask questions. If you don't understand something, ask a qualified fitness professional for advice. One reason myths get started is that we all react to exercise a little differently. So what's true for one person may not be true for another. That's why you have to find your own things that are true for you. But there are still some fitness myths that just need busting.

**MYTH YOU ONLY NEED TO EXERCISE IF YOU HAVE WEIGHT TO LOSE**

**FACT:** Ever heard the term skinny fat? According to researchers at Mayo Clinic, US, over half of so called normal weight adults fall into this category. It has been defined as having more than 30 per cent body fat for women or 20 per cent for men. Too much body fat puts you at the same disease risk as an obese person - you're just more likely to suffer from undetected diabetes.



**MYTH SIZE ZERO**

**FACT:** Size zero is a dress measurement, not your figure. And this so-called size zero can be attained if you stop eating and exercise to within an inch of your life. Size zero means you are bordering on anorexia, and that is neither healthy nor beautiful.

**MYTH LIFTING HEAVY WEIGHTS BULKS YOU UP**

**FACT:** Weight training actually helps women slim down instead of bulk up, since women have much lower testosterone than men. In a study at Central Michigan University, US, researchers had women train one arm doing a just a few reps of a heavy weight and the other doing more reps with a lighter weight (both lifting an equivalent number of pounds).

**Surprise:** The heavy lifters got stronger, but gained no more size than the arm lifting the lower weights. Ladies, weight training is very good for you. It will lead to increased metabolism and strength, lower risk of osteoporosis, and a smaller waistline!

**MYTH AB EXERCISES WILL GIVE YOU A FLAT STOMACH**

**FACT:** The only way to get a flat stomach is to strip away the fat around the midsection. This is accomplished by doing cardio aerobic exercise to burn calorie, weight training to increase metabolism and following a proper diet. Abdominal exercises will help to build muscle in your midsection, but you will never see the muscle definition unless the fat in this area is stripped away.

**MYTH NO PAIN, NO GAIN**

**FACT:** Exercise should not be painful. At the height of your workout, you should be sweating and breathing hard. It's important to distinguish between muscle fatigue - what people at my gym call "the burn" - and muscle pain, which is sharp and uncomfortable when you move. Pain is your body's way of telling you that you're doing something wrong. Listen to your body. If it's painful, stop.

## Has China decoded Zika virus?

China has claimed that its scientists have successfully decoded the gene sequence of imported Zika virus. As per the Chinese health ministry website, scientists have successfully decoded genes that make up for the Zika virus. In unearthing the gene code of the virus that currently hovers as a big threat over the Rio games as well as the rest of the world, scientists have used the genome from the first imported case of Zika in the country. Reportedly, China had confirmed its first imported Zika case around ninth of February this year when a Chinese national had returned after

visiting South America. China has reported ten cases of Zika so far. If the Chinese scientists are to be believed, the Zika gene decoding might prove as a milestone in the war against the virus. Several cases of Microcephaly and Guillain Barre syndrome have been reported around the world and there are many studies that have hinted at the correlation between the two and Zika virus. The decoding will further help scientists develop vaccination, bacteria and other measures helpful in eradicating Zika.



## 3 exercises to fix Back pain

**A** recent study has concluded that the best way to treat back pain is by regularly exercising. Stretching, muscle exercises and stamina training are far more successful at tackling lower-back pain than other treatments, the research says. Those who performed a range of exercises had a 35 per cent reduced risk of lower back complaints over a year's time. These exercises had benefits that stayed longer. Besides, making lifestyle changes like sitting in the correct posture, bending correctly and avoiding lifting heavy items or rather, lifting them appropriately further reduced the risk. These three exercises will help you further:

**Decompression breathing**

- Keep your heels slightly apart and your toes

- touching.
- Unlock knees, shift weight onto your heels, and gently pull them toward each other.
- Stand tall, reach your arms overhead, and press your fingertips together.
- While inhaling, lift the ribcage away from the hips. On exhale, tighten the core to support your spine.
- Modified founder**
- Stick out your hips, inhale and reach your arms out in front of your heart.
- Keeping your hips back, press your fingertips together.
- Slowly, lift your arms and keep the core pulled in and



maintain a neutral spine. Hold for 15 to 20 seconds.

**Woodpecker**

Named after the bird's movement, this not only strengthens your back but also your butt muscles.

- From a lunge position, press your front heel and stand tall.
- Lift the back heel up off the ground and reach the arms out in front of your heart.
- Drive your butt as far back as you can, without moving your knee, until you feel a stretch in your hamstrings.
- Tighten your core, maintain a neutral spine and slowly reach the arms overhead.
- Hold for 20 to 30 seconds, before repeating on the other side.