



# HYDERABAD HEADLINES

RNI NO.APENG/2010/33328 VOL NO. 16 ISSUE NO.: 301 HYDERABAD WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 25, 2026 PAGES: 12 RS. 1/-

WWW.HYDERABADHEADLINES.COM



## MAHARASHTRA'S 35,000-TONNE STRAWBERRY BOOM

On winter mornings in western Maharashtra, strawberry fields glow under a soft veil of mist. Neat rows of low green plants stretch across red soil, dotted with bright berries that seem to hold tiny drops of sunshine.

FOCUS-POINT 10



## Meta Signs 6GW GPU Deal With AMD

MONEY MATTERS 09

## KRITI SANON COMMANDS THE SPOTLIGHT AT LONDON



BOX-OFFICE 12

### SHORT TAKES



## Brook Ton Powers England into Semis

Harry Brook promoted himself to No. 3 and smashed his maiden T20I century in Pallekele, steering England past Pakistan and into the T20 World Cup 2026 semi-finals with a game to spare.

STADIUM 11



## Imran Taken to Hospital for Eye Care

Former Pakistan PM Imran Khan was taken to Islamabad's PIMS hospital for eye treatment & later returned to Adiala Jail. His party, Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf, demanded transparency about his health.

BEYOND BORDERS 08



## The Unsettling Iranian 'War Logic'...

Post-World War II, the US has repeatedly failed to translate its military superiority into lasting political victories in the "nation-building" wars it has so far waged.

OPINION 06

# Staff, Pensioners Praise CM's Welfare Move



HYDERABAD, FEB 24

Leaders of employee and pensioners' associations met Telangana Chief Minister Revanth Reddy to express their gratitude for introducing a comprehensive health scheme and accident insurance facility, fulfilling what they described as a decades-long demand of government staff and retirees.

The associations thanked the Chief Minister after the State Cabinet approved the implementation of an accident insurance cover of ₹1.20 crore for

employees and pensioners, along with a health scheme backed by a corpus fund of ₹1,056 crore. They called on the Chief Minister to convey their appreciation for the landmark decisions.

According to the association leaders, the schemes would remain historic initiatives, significantly enhancing the social security framework for employees and pensioners. They particularly welcomed the provision of cashless treatment for as many as 1,998 diseases, describing it as a major relief and a "boon" for beneficiaries across the State.

They noted that the Cabinet, under the leadership of Mr. Revanth Reddy, had given top priority to the welfare of employees and pensioners, and said the decisions would serve as a model for other States.

Among those who met the Chief Minister were representatives of the Telangana Employees, Teachers and Pensioners Joint Action Committee and various employee unions, including Maram Jagadeeshwar, Eluri Srinivasa Rao, P. Damodar Reddy (PRTU).

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2 >

## Four top CPI (Maoist) leaders surrender in Telangana



HYDERABAD, FEB. 24

Four senior members of the CPI (Maoist), specifically Tipirri Thirupathi, also known as Devji, Malla Raji Reddy, referred to as Sangram, Bade Chokka Rao, known as Damodar, and Nune Narsimha Reddy, identified as Ganganana, voluntarily surrendered to the police in Telangana on Tuesday.

The Director General

of Police for Telangana, B. Shivadhar Reddy, stated that this development represents a significant blow to the CPI (Maoist), as the last remaining apex organisational structure has effectively disbanded.

Additionally, the DGP noted that the Telangana State Committee has become defunct following the reintegration of Secretary Damodar and State Committee member Ganganna. Since the begin-

ning of 2024, a total of 591 individuals affiliated with the Maoist group at various ranks have surrendered to the Telangana police.

Currently, there are only 11 underground CPI (Maoist) operatives originating from Telangana, with merely two remaining active in the Telangana State Committee; the others are engaged in operations across various states, including Chhattisgarh.

## Free HPV Vaccine for Adolescent Girls in India

New Delhi, Feb 24: In a major step towards eliminating preventable cancers among women, the Union government will soon launch a nationwide human papillomavirus (HPV) vaccination programme targeting girls aged 14 years, official sources said on Tuesday. According to sources, the programme

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2 >



## Skills Key to Telangana's Growth: Vivek

HYDERABAD, FEB. 24:

Labour and Mines Minister Dr. G. Vivek Venkatswamy on Tuesday asserted that skill development in Telangana has evolved beyond a department into a comprehensive development strategy aimed at empowering youth and strengthening industry readiness. Speaking at the valedictory ceremony of the India Skills Competition 2025-26 (South Region) held at Kanha Shanti Vanam, the Minister said the State has undertaken concerted efforts to modernize Industrial Training Institutes (ITIs) and upgrade training infrastructure. Through Pub-



lic-Private Partnership (PPP) initiatives, the government ITIs are being transformed into Advanced Technology Centres (ATCs) equipped with modern machinery, digital tools, and industry-aligned curricula. "Today is not just about certificates.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2 >

## Kerala Renamed Keralam by Cabinet

New Delhi, Feb 24 (PTI)

The Union Cabinet on Tuesday approved a proposal of the Kerala government to change the name of the state to Keralam, Union minister Ashwini Vaishnaw said. The decision, which comes ahead of the assembly elections in the state, was taken at a meeting of the Cabinet chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi at its first meeting held at Seva Teerth, the new PMO complex. The Union Cabinet approved the proposal for altering the name of Kerala to Keralam.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2 >

## BJP Blames Telangana Govt for Temple Attacks

HYDERABAD, FEB. 24:

Telangana BJP state president N. Ramchander Rao on Tuesday condemned the alleged attack on the Sri Dwimukhi Hanuman Temple in Barkas area of Chandrayangutta, terming it a 'heinous act'. Talking to newsmen, Rao said the vandalism of the idol of Lord Hanuman was part of a disturbing pattern of attacks on Hindu temples under the Congress regime. He alleged that repeated incidents targeting temples and religious sentiments indicated as 'ongoing anti-Hindu rule' in Telangana.

Criticizing the state government's response, the BJP leader accused it of failing to take strict action against those responsible and demanded immediate identification and arrest of the culprits. He also called for enhanced security at temples across Telangana.

Warning of intensified protests if action is not taken, Rao said the BJP would continue its fight to safeguard Hindu religious institutions and Sanatana Dharma in the state.



## KTR Slams Congress Over Police Misuse

ADILABAD, FEB. 24:

BRS working president KT Rama Rao has accused the Congress government of undermining the mandate of the people during the municipal body elections and cautioned against the misuse of police force to target opposition leaders. He alleged that the Congress resorted to threats, inducements, and physical intimidation both during and after the recent municipal elections.

Following a visit to former MLA Balka Suman and other BRS leaders who are currently incarcerated at Adilabad Central Jail, Rama Rao noted that in the Kyathanpally municipality of Mancherial district, the BRS secured 10 seats, while its ally, the CPI, obtained four, resulting in a combined majority of 14 in the 22-member council. KT Rama Rao remarked, "Despite securing only seven seats, the Congress sought to seize power through coercion and inducements," placing the

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2 >

### THE DAILY MANTRA

EVOLVE FORWARD



- Stagnation leads to emptiness.
  - Growth leads to fulfillment.
  - Resistance to change creates suffering.
  - Acceptance of change creates wisdom.
- When we embrace change, we align with the natural rhythm of life. That alignment gives us direction — and direction feels like purpose.

Collected by Venna Srinivasa Reddy

**CEMENTING DREAMS WITH SUPERIOR STRENGTH.**

**Bharathi CEMENT**  
SUPERIOR QUALITY, GUARANTEED.

**ULTRAFAST**  
FAST SETTING CEMENT

GERMAN TECHNOLOGY  
ROBOTIC QUALITY CONTROL  
TAMPER PROOF PACKING

**3 TIMES BETTER**



## Rathotsavam held with grandeur at Jubilee Hills Sri Venkateswara Temple

**HYDERABAD:** The annual Brahmotsavams at the Sri Venkateswara Swamy Temple in Jubilee Hills witnessed a magnificent Rathotsavam on Tuesday morning, drawing a large gathering of devotees. Sri Kalyana Venkateswara Swamy, accompanied by Sridevi and Bhudevi, ascended the beautifully adorned chariot and blessed the devotees with His divine darshan. Amid chants and devotion, devotees offered camphor aartis as the majestic ratham moved through the temple streets. The procession was marked by vibrant kolatas, wood bhajans, and devotional Sankeertanas, leaving devotees spiritually enthralled. Temple tradition holds that the darshan of the Lord on the chariot relieves one from the sorrows of birth and grants salvation. In the evening, the Lord is scheduled to bless devotees on the Aswa Vahanam at 7 p.m. Local LAC President A.V. Reddy, Temple AEO Ramesh, priests, officials, and hundreds of devotees participated in the sacred celebrations.

## KTR urges students to stay stress-free during exams

**HYDERABAD:** In the wake of the Intermediate annual exams starting from Wednesday, BRS Party Working President K. Taraka Rama Rao (KTR) conveyed his heartfelt wishes to the students today. He wished that the students should appear for the exams with confidence at this crucial stage. KTR advised the students not to be under any mental pressure during the exams. "I wish you to write the exams with a calm mind and achieve good success. You will definitely get the result that is commensurate with your hard work," he assured the students. He especially wished that all the students should write the exams with discipline and concentration and pass with the best marks. KTR appealed to parents and teachers to ensure that students do not face any difficulties at the examination centers and to provide them with the necessary peaceful environment.

# Uttam's dream housing colony in Huzurnagar set for March launch

HYDERABAD

A major housing initiative spearheaded by Minister N. Uttam Kumar Reddy is set for inauguration in the first week of March, marking a significant stride in affordable housing and inclusive development in Huzurnagar. The ambitious project, spanning 110 acres at Ramaswamy Gutta in Huzurnagar, is designed to provide 2,160 modern single-bedroom flats to economically weaker families. Chief Minister A. Revanth Reddy has been invited to formally inaugurate the colony.

Originally launched by Uttam Kumar Reddy during his tenure as Housing Minister in undivided Andhra Pradesh state between 2011 and 2014, the project was later stalled. Following the Congress party's return to power in 2023, it was revived and fast-tracked.

Reviewing the works at the site along with V.P. Gowtham, Managing Director of Telangana Housing Corporation, and Suryapet District Collector Tejas Nandalal Pawar, the Minister directed the officials to accelerate completion and ensure coordination among all agencies. "There would be no further going back on the schedule. Engage adequate manpower and ensure seamless coordination in water supply,



electrification, plantation, beautification and CC roads", he instructed. Constructed at a cost of Rs 125 crore (excluding land acquisition costs), the land was legally purchased from the Endowments Department at full market value with all statutory compliances, the Minister noted.

The colony will feature essential amenities including a primary health centre, a school with modern infrastructure, green spaces, water supply, and electrification facilities. Targeted at economically weaker sections, including rice mill work-

ers and rural poor from surrounding areas, the project will follow a transparent beneficiary selection process overseen by the Revenue Divisional Officer. "Not even a single undeserving family should be included," the Minister stressed, adding that 1,000 beneficiaries will be finalized in the first phase. The inauguration will include a public meeting addressed by the Chief Minister and a "Sahapankti Bhojanam" community lunch for beneficiary families, symbolizing shared progress and social inclusion.

## 'Shamshabad to get new ESI hospital as CM approves land allocation'

HYDERABAD

Minister for Labour & Employment Dr. G Vivek Venkatswamy announced that Chief Minister A. Revanth Reddy has favourably acknowledged the proposal for land allocation intended for the establishment of a new ESI hospital in Shamshabad, a development that will significantly benefit numerous workers.

The Minister said the State government is committed to strengthening medical services for workers and is functioning with sincerity in this regard.

During his keynote address at the Employees' State Insurance Corporation (ESIC) Foundation Day event held at the Sanathanagar ESI Hospital on Tuesday, the Minister remarked on the progress observed in the districts. Specifically, he noted that the ESI hospital in Chennai, which commenced operations with 50 beds, is now functioning at its full capacity.

Additionally, he revealed that, upon becoming aware of the proposed closure of 18 ESIC dispensaries, the issue was addressed within



the Cabinet, leading to a resolution to move forward with their construction. In highlighting a major achievement, the Minister referred to the implementation of organ transplantation surgeries at the ESI Hospital as a noteworthy milestone and expressed gratitude to all organ donors.

Dr. Venkatswamy assured that the government would extend comprehensive support aimed at further developing and strengthening ESI services for the benefit of workers throughout the State. Principal Secretary Dana Kishore and Regional Director of ESIC Rajeev Lal were among the senior officials present on the occasion. (NSS)

## BJP demands probe into infant's death at Kummera Mallanna Jathara

HYDERABAD

The Telangana unit of the BJP on Tuesday demanded a thorough inquiry into the death of a two-month-old infant following an alleged brutal attack on a family from a weaker section during the Mallanna Jathara at Kummera village in Nagarkurnool district.

BJP State President N. Ramchander Rao visited Nagarkurnool and consoled the bereaved family. Addressing the media, he described the incident as "inhuman and heart-wrenching", stating that the attack on a marginalized family and the subsequent death of the infant had shocked the conscience of society.

Rao demanded that the State government order an immediate and im-

partial inquiry, ensure justice to the victim's family, and announce ex-gratia compensation. He questioned how justice could be expected when cases were allegedly filed against the victim's family and their complaint ignored. "This reflects total failure and negligence on the part of the police, amounting to a violation of the law", he alleged, adding that there were suspicions that authorities were shielding the perpetrators instead of taking action. Referring to recent incidents, Rao cited the reported lock-up death of Dalit youth Karla Rajesh in Kodad and claimed that attacks on poor and marginalized communities were on the rise.

The BJP leader targeted Chief Minister A Revanth Reddy, alleging that the



administration had lost control over law and order. "The police system appears to be functioning under the influence of ruling party MLAs and leaders. It seems

the system is no longer listening even to the Chief Minister", he charged.

Raising concerns over alleged money collections at temples during the Kum-

mera Mallanna Jathara, Rao questioned who had authorized such collections. "Temples should not be turned into collection centres", he said, urging the Endowments Department to monitor and curb illegal collections. He further alleged that under the Congress government, sacred temples were being turned into hubs for extorting money from devotees.

BJP SC Morcha State President Kanthi Kiran, ST Morcha State President Ravi Nayak, OBC Morcha State President Anand Goud, BJYM State President Ganesh Kunde, Nagarkurnool District President Narendar, State Secretary Bharat Prasad, and Senior leaders Achary, Dileepachari, Thaduri Srinivas, Katta Sudhakar, and KVLN Reddy were present at the press meet.

CONTINUATION FROM PAGE 1

# Kerala Renamed Keralam by Cabinet

FROM PAGE 1

Vaishnav said. Prime Minister Modi hailed the Cabinet decision, saying it reflects the will of the people of the state. "It is in line with our efforts to strengthen the connect with our glorious culture," he said in a post on X. The Kerala assembly elections are due in April this year, with the tenure of the 140-member current assembly ending on May 23. After the Union Cabinet's approval, the president of India will refer a Bill, namely the Kerala (Alteration of Name) Bill, 2026, to the Kerala Assembly for expressing its views under the proviso to Article 3 of the Constitution of India. After receipt of the views of the Kerala Assembly, the government of India will obtain the recommendation of the president for the introduction of the Kerala (Alteration of Name) Bill, 2026 to alter the name of Kerala to Keralam in Parliament, an official release said. Asked

why a decision like this was coming just ahead of the assembly elections in Kerala, Vaishnav said decisions are taken by the Union Cabinet under Prime Minister Modi without keeping elections in view. "Decisions of setting up new rail corridors and starting of Vande Bharat trains in Kerala were taken up when elections were not there. Elections will be held, but all decisions which are in the interest of the country will be taken," he said. The Kerala Assembly passed a resolution on June 24, 2024 to alter the name of Kerala to Keralam.

"The name of our State is 'Keralam' in Malayalam Language. States were formed on the basis of language on the 1st day of November, 1956. The Kerala Piravi Day is also on the 1st day of November. "Since the time of National Independence Struggle, there has been a strong demand for the formation of United Kerala for the people speaking Malayalam language. But in the First

Schedule to the Constitution the name of our State is recorded as 'Kerala'. This Assembly unanimously appeals to the Central Government to take urgent steps as per Article 3 of the Constitution for modifying the name to 'Keralam'," the Kerala Assembly resolution read. Thereafter, the Kerala government requested the central government to take necessary steps to amend the First Schedule to the Constitution by altering the name of 'Kerala' as 'Keralam' according to Article 3 of the Constitution.

The Article 3 of the Constitution provides for the alteration of names of existing states. According to Article 3, Parliament may by law alter the name of any state. Further proviso to Article 3 states that no Bill for the purpose shall be introduced in either House of Parliament except on the recommendation of the president and unless where the proposal contained in the Bill affects the

area, boundaries or name of any of the states, the Bill has been referred by the president to the legislature of that state for expressing its views thereon within such period as may be specified in the reference or within such further period as the president may allow and the period so specified or allowed has expired.

The matter regarding the alteration of the name Kerala to Keralam was considered in the Ministry of Home Affairs, government of India and with the approval of Union Home Minister Amit Shah, the draft note for the Cabinet for changing Kerala to Keralam was circulated to the Department of Legal Affairs and Legislative Department, and the Ministry of Law and Justice for their comments.

The Department of Legal Affairs and Legislative Department, Ministry of Law and Justice have concurred with the proposal for the alteration of Kerala as Keralam.

# Free HPV Vaccine for Adolescent Girls in India

FROM PAGE 1

will use a single-shot Gardasil, a quadrivalent HPV vaccine, that provides protection against HPV types 16 and 18, which cause cervical cancer, as well as types 6 and 11. The drive would be a special vaccination campaign and not under the government's Universal Immunisation Programme. It is in line with the World Health Organisation recommendations, which identify HPV vaccination as a central pillar of the Global Strategy to Eliminate Cervical Cancer. "Strong global and Indian scientific evidence confirms that a single dose provides robust and durable protection when administered to girls in the recommended age group," an official source said. The nationwide programme will target girls aged 14 years, an age at which the HPV vaccine offers maximum preventive benefit, well before potential exposure to the virus. In the open market, quadrivalent Gardasil-4 is a two-dose vaccine -- each costing Rs 3,927 -- for girls below 15 years.

For those above 15 years, three doses of the vaccine are required. Gardasil-4 vaccine is manufactured by MSD India. "Vaccination under the national programme will be voluntary and free of cost, ensuring equitable access across socio-economic groups. By prioritising prevention at the right age, the programme is expected to provide lifelong protection and significantly reduce the future burden of cervical cancer in the country," the source said. The vaccine has an excellent safety record, supported by more than 500 million doses administered globally since its introduction in 2006. Widespread vaccination has led to substantial reductions in HPV infection, precancerous lesions, and cervical cancer incidence in several countries. Once the vaccination programme is launched, India will join 160 countries that have introduced HPV vaccination in their national immunisation schedules. According to the source, over 90 countries are implementing single-dose HPV vaccination schedules, the source said. HPV vaccines are among the most extensively studied vaccines worldwide, with evidence demonstrating 93 to 100 per cent effectiveness in preventing cervical cancer caused by vaccine-covered HPV types.

"The upcoming nationwide rollout (of the vaccination programme) is a significant milestone towards achieving the vision of 'Swastha Nari', ensuring that prevention, protection, and equity form the foundation of women's healthcare in the country," an official source said. According to data, cervical cancer remains the second most common

cancer among women in India, with nearly 80,000 new cases and over 42,000 deaths reported annually. Scientific evidence establishes that almost all cases of cervical cancer are caused by persistent infection with high-risk types of Human Papillomavirus (HPV), particularly HPV types 16 and 18, which together account for more than 80 per cent of cervical cancer cases in India.

Despite being largely preventable through vaccination and early screening, cervical cancer continues to impose a heavy burden on women and families. According to sources, the forthcoming vaccination programme directly addresses this challenge by preventing HPV infection before it can progress to cancer. The drive will be conducted at designated government health facilities, including Ayushman Arogya Mandirs (Primary Health Centres).

All vaccination sites will be linked to 24/7 government health facilities, ensuring immediate medical support and reinforcing safety and parental confidence.

To ensure uninterrupted availability and uncompromised quality, the government has secured HPV vaccine supplies through a transparent, globally supported procurement mechanism, another official source said. Under India's partnership with Gavi - The Vaccine Alliance, high-quality Gardasil vaccines -- approved by India's drug regulator and widely used internationally -- have been made available for the national programme. "Parents and guardians across the country should come forward and ensure that their 14-year-old daughters are vaccinated against HPV once the programme is rolled out," the source said. The Strategic Advisory Group of Experts on Immunisation (SAGE) evaluated in 2022 the evidence that has been emerging over the past years that single-dose schedules provide comparable efficacy to the two or three-dose regimens and concluded that a single-dose vaccine provides adequate protection against HPV, which is comparable to two-dose schedules. Also, a WHO Position Paper on HPV Vaccine in December 2022 concluded that, as an off-label option, a single-dose schedule can be used in girls and boys aged 9 to 20 years. Current evidence suggests that a single dose schedule has comparable efficacy and duration of protection as a two-dose schedule and may offer programme advantages, be more efficient and affordable, and contribute to improved coverage, it stated. It also concluded that a minimum of two doses and, when feasible, three doses are necessary for those known to be immunocompromised and/or HIV-infected.

# Skills Key to Telangana's Growth: Vivek

FROM PAGE 1

It is a day to honour hard work, discipline, dedication, and talent", he noted, expressing confidence in the nation's future after witnessing the skills of participating youth. Director of Employment and Training Ms. Kanthi Wesley was also present.

Dr. Vivek highlighted the role of Telangana Academy for Skill and Knowledge (TASK) in bridging the gap between academia and industry, noting that communication skills, problem-solving abilities, and digital literacy are now

integrated into training modules. Hyderabad has emerged as a global hub in IT, pharmaceuticals, aerospace, and life sciences, with special emphasis now being placed on emerging sectors such as Artificial Intelligence, Robotics, Mechatronics, Data Analytics, and Green Technologies, he added.

"Skill development is not only about employment; it is about empowerment. Skilled individuals do not wait for opportunities -- they create them", he emphasized. As many as 350 participants competed across 63 skill cat-

egories in the South India regional event, including 123 young women.

Notably, 20 women participated in traditionally male-dominated trades such as Cabinet Making, Carpentry, Electrical Installations, Plumbing, and Heating, reflecting a positive social shift. The Minister presented Gold, Silver and Bronze medals in categories including 3D Digital Game Art, Additive Manufacturing,

Autonomous Mobile Robotics, Beauty Therapy, Bricklaying, Cabinet Making and Carpentry.

# KTR Slams Congress Over Police Misuse

FROM PAGE 1

blame on Minister G Vivek Venkatswamy and the Congress leadership for this maneuver. He disclosed that attempts were made to entice BRS councillors to defect with offers of up to Rs 3 crore each, which they declined. In light of this, he asserted that the Congress employed a range of tactics, including assaults on women councillors in Kyathanapally by Congress members within the council hall and the arrest of senior BRS leaders outside of it.

The BRS working president further highlighted an incident in the Jangaon municipality where a Dalit woman councillor was attacked by a police officer. "The government has ridiculed the people's decision and trivialized the democratic process," he stated.

Challenging the arrests of Balak Suman and other BRS leaders, KTR accused the police of partiality. He pointed out, "No repercussions were faced by former Congress MLA T Jagga Reddy or BJP MP Dharmapuri Arvind for their provocative and abusive behavior towards law enforcement, whereas prompt legal actions were initiated against BRS leaders who raised concerns over irregularities in the municipal elections." He also mentioned that tribal MLA Kova Lakshmi was falsely charged in an effort to quell dissent.

Rama Rao called upon the State Election Commission to intervene and facilitate new elections in Kyathanapally, Ibrahimpatnam, and Khanapur, ensuring a transparent process under CCTV surveillance and the oversight of senior officials. He urged the Commission to uphold the principles of free and fair operation of local government. He affirmed that the BRS would persist in its efforts to combat the deterioration of democratic standards within the State.

Srinivas Reddy (Secretariat), Khader (Fourth Class Employees), T. Laxman (Excise), V. Lachireddy (Telangana Employees JAC Chairman), K. Ramakrishna (Deputy Collectors' Association), S. Ramulu, Ramesh Paka, C.H. Srinivas (Telangana Tahsil-

dars Association), Banala Ram Reddy, V. Bhiksham (Telangana Revenue Services Association), Dr. Nirmala, L. Dasharath (TG-CPSU), Garike Upender Rao (GPO), Sugandhini (HMWSSB & SW), Bhoomesh, Sunil and others.

## Interactive Session on Emerging Trends in Electronics Packaging at GITAM

HYDERABAD

The Department of Electrical, Electronics and Communication Engineering (EECE), GITAM School of Core Engineering, Hyderabad, organized an interactive session on "Emerging Trends in Electronics Packaging" on 24 February 2026. The session was delivered by J. Srinivasa Rao, Former CEO of Vajra Automation, who engaged budding engineers with a thought-provoking and insightful address.

Srinivasa Rao began the session by emphasizing that the "human brain is conditioned" to make assumptions, often limiting creative thinking. Through illustrative video clips and real-world examples, he encouraged students to question conventional patterns, think independently, and articulate the ideas behind what they observe. He stressed the importance of reading extensively and highlighted that the brain functions more effectively in collaborative environments.



Cautioning students about the rapid pace of technological change, he remarked that those who fail to adapt risk becoming obsolete. He underscored that human survival and progress are increasingly dependent on electronics, asserting that the future is inseparable from technological innovation.

Explaining the concept of the "Or-

ange Economy," he described it as an ecosystem where creativity and ideas generate economic value. He noted that innovation does not depend on age or experience but on the ability to transform ideas into deliverable outcomes. He emphasized that investors today are willing to fund promising ideas and encouraged students to leverage tools effectively and interact

meaningfully to refine their concepts.

Srinivasa Rao observed that more than 50 percent of start-ups emerge from academic campuses and advised students to treat ideas as intellectual capital. He recommended forming clubs, collaborating with peers, and embracing teamwork, reiterating that no individual can master every domain alone. He urged students to act promptly in the fast-evolving technological landscape, reminding them that even a decade is a long time in today's world. He also encouraged them to utilize platforms such as NP-TEL to update and strengthen their knowledge base. The session was organized under the leadership of Prof.T. Madhavi, Head of the Department of EECE. Prof. Ch. Sumanth Kumar and Dr. N. Shyam Sunder Sagar served as conveners. The event witnessed enthusiastic participation from EECE students, who actively interacted with the speaker and sought clarification on various emerging technological trends.

## TGSRTC makes booking tickets easy with Meeseva MeTicket mobile app

HYDERABAD

The Telangana State Road Transport Corporation (TGSRTC), on Tuesday, February 22, launched bus ticketing services on the 'Meeseva MeTicket' mobile application. This app will provide access to the Online Passenger Reservation System (OPRS) services, enabling citizens to digitally book tickets for long-distance and inter-city services.

The app has a total of 1,710 OPRS services, including 450 AC bus and 1,260 non-AC bus services. Daily, 13,000 seats can be booked. Major destinations covered are Bengaluru, Tirupati, Visakhapatnam, Vijayawada, Manacheri, Khammam, Adilabad, Asifabad and Warangal.

### DIGITAL CITY BUS PASS

Residents in the Greater Hyderabad zone can also avail of the service. The app provides the facility to renew five types of monthly bus passes.

## TGSPDCL asst engg caught red-handed for taking bribe

HYDERABAD

In a significant anti-corruption crackdown, the Telangana State Southern Power Distribution Company Limited (TGSPDCL) Assistant Engineer (Operations), Mami-diseti Srinivasa Rao, posted at Masab Tank Section, was caught red-handed by the

Anti-Corruption Bureau (ACB), City Range-II Unit, while allegedly accepting a bribe of Rs.16,000.

According to ACB officials, the accused officer demanded and accepted the bribe from a complainant in his office to avoid taking coercive action against the complainant's seized electricity meter.

### ELECTRICAL WORK

E-Tender Notice No.: Sr. DEE/LMG/45 of 2025-26 Dated: 20-02-2026. E-Tenders are invited by the undersigned for the following works: **Tender No. EL/LM/25-26/42. Name of work:** At New Guwahati: Electrical work in connection with augmentation of existing facilities for conversion into inspection bays for Electric Locomotives at New Guwahati Loco Shed. **Tender Value:** ₹2,00,42,533.63. **Earnest Money:** ₹2,50,200. **Date & time of closing of tender:** 11:30 hrs on 20-03-2026 & opening on 11:30 hrs on 20-03-2026. The complete information with the tender document of above e-tender will be available up to 11:00 hrs. on 20-03-2026 on website [www.ireps.gov.in](http://www.ireps.gov.in) Sr. DEE/G&Chg/Lumding

NORTHEAST FRONTIER RAILWAY  
Serving Customers With A Smile

### CHANGE OF NAME

I. ELANGBAM SHARATCHANDRA, NO. 13004569Y OF ASSAM REGT.165 INF BN(TA), S/O ELANGBAM BROJO, RESIDENT OF HIYANGLAM MAKHA LEIKAI, THOUBAL DISTRICT, MANIPUR -795103, HAVE CHANGE MY SON'S NAME AND DOB FROM ELANGBAM SACHIN, DOB: 14/03/2015 TO ELANGBAM SACHIN DOB:05/10/2016 VIDE AFFIDAVIT DATED 06/02/2026 BEFORE THE OATH COMMISSIONER, KAKCHING, MANIPUR.

## Bandi Sanjay with Geetha Murthy Visited Bhagya Lakshmi Amma Vaari Temple



HYDERABAD

Today, Union Minister of State for Home Affairs Bandi Sanjay Kumar visited the Bhagya Lakshmi Temple in Hyderabad along with the BJP corporators who won in Karimnagar. On that occasion, the Union Minister, along with temple trustee Shashi and the priests, presented the temple shawl of the Goddess to BJP National Council member Geetha Murthy. Speaking on the occasion, Bandi Sanjay Kumar stated that the BJP will form the government in Telangana in 2028, and at that time, the temple will be transformed into a Golden Temple.

## QR code-based door-to-door waste collection to be strengthened: Karnan

HYDERABAD

Greater Hyderabad Municipal Corporation (GHMC) Commissioner R.V. Karnan has said that the QR code-based door-to-door waste collection system would enhance accountability and ensure daily collection of garbage from every household.

On Tuesday morning, the Commissioner inspected the implementation of the pilot project on QR code-based door-to-door garbage collection at Nalanda Nagar in Hyderguda, under Attapur Circle of Rajendranagar Zone.

He was accompanied by Zonal Commissioner Anurag Jayanti, Additional Commissioner (Sanitation) Ravi Kiran and Deputy Commissioner Sammaiah.

During the visit, zc anuraag



Jayanti explained the functioning of the QR code-based system to the Commissioner. Commissioner Karnan later conducted a surprise field inspection to assess the performance of Swachh Autos engaged in door-to-door garbage collection.

The Commissioner observed that Swachh Auto workers play

a crucial role in transforming Greater Hyderabad into a clean city. He directed Deputy Commissioners, and officials of the Solid Waste Management wing, including DEEs and AEs, to ensure that door-to-door garbage collection is carried out without fail every day across GHMC limits.

Officials were instructed to identify households that fail to hand over waste to Swachh Auto workers and motivate residents to participate in the system. Mr. Karnan warned that negligence in attendance, performance of sanitation workers, and supervisory lapses would not be tolerated. He also directed officials to respond promptly to complaints related to sanitation issues. Stressing the importance of public participation, the Commissioner called for awareness and outreach programmes to strengthen community involvement in cleanliness initiatives.

Officials stated that if the pilot project yields positive results, plans would be drawn up to implement the QR code-based waste collection system across GHMC limits.

## Konda Surekha invited to Dharmapuri Narasimha Swamy Brahmotsavam

HYDERABAD

The authorities and priests of Dharmapuri Temple on Tuesday visited Minister for Forest, Environment, and Endowments, Konda Surekha, at her residence in Hyderabad to extend an invitation for the annual Brahmotsavam celebration at the Dharmapuri Sri Lakshmi Narasimha Swamy Temple.

During this meeting, discussions centered around the spiritual significance of the Brahmotsavam, the organisation of various Vedic ceremonies, and the particulars regarding the

chariot and wedding festivals. Minister Konda Surekha emphasised the necessity of ensuring adequate facilities and security measures for the devotees in attendance. She graciously accepted the invitation and expressed her willingness to participate in the Brahmotsavam. The Minister conveyed her hope that these festivities would provide spiritual fulfillment to the devotees. Furthermore, Konda Surekha reaffirmed the government's commitment to the temple's development and the improvement of amenities for those who visit.

## Confidence is the beginning of success: State Welfare Minister Adhuri Laxman Kumar



HYDERABAD

In the wake of the intermediate exams starting from Wednesday (today) across the state, state Welfare Minister Adhuri Laxman Kumar wished the students the best of luck. "Examination is not the end of the future. It is the beginning of a new beginning. If you keep away fear and cultivate self-confidence, success will follow you," he clarified.

Stating that these exams are an important milestone in the life journey of students, he advised them to appear for the exams with a calm mind and punctuality. "Examination is only a stage that assesses your talent but not the final verdict that decides your future. Self-confidence is your biggest weapon," the minister said. He advised them to give priority only to revision without stressing about studying till the

last minute. "Look at the opportunity and not the pressure. Every question is not a challenge, but an opportunity to show your knowledge," he said while encouraging the students.

Addressing the parents, he appealed, "There should be love in your words, but no comparisons. The encouragement you give is their biggest strength. Remember that their mental health is more important than results." He extended special greetings to the students of SC Gurukuls, ST Gurukuls, and colleges run by SCDD.

The Minister wished that every student should achieve the best results and become a source of pride for their families, Gurukuls and the state. "The government is with you. Your success will not only be a source of pride for your family, but also for the state. Move forward boldly... achieve success," the Minister called.

## Speed up H-CITI, SRDP works to ease traffic: GHMC Commissioner Karnan


HYDERABAD

Greater Hyderabad Municipal Corporation (GHMC) Commissioner R.V. Karnan has directed the officials to accelerate ongoing infrastructure works under the H-CITI, Strategic Road Development Programme (SRDP) and Strategic Nala Development Programme (SNDP) to address traffic congestion in the city.

Chairing a high-level review meeting at the GHMC Head Office here on Tuesday, the Commissioner assessed the progress of projects across all GHMC zones. Zonal Commissioners, project engineers, and officials from planning, irrigation and land acquisition departments participated. Officials made detailed presentations outlining project status, field-level challenges, bottlenecks and reasons for delays.

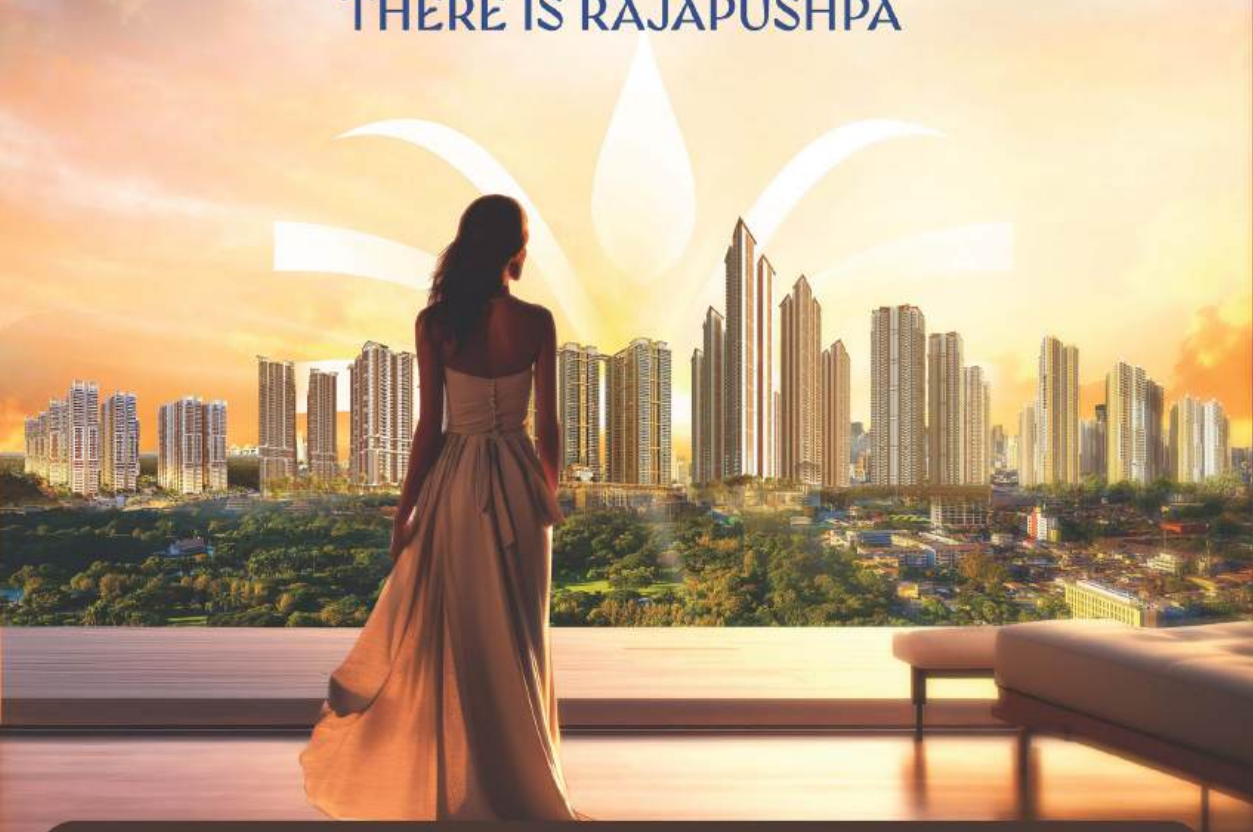
Karnan emphasised that there was no shortage of funds and instructed officials to fast-track utility shifting and pending land acquisition. He directed that unresolved government-related issues be escalated immediately for intervention.

The Commissioner specifically ordered that the Musarambagh High-Level Bridge and Nalgonda X Roads flyover works be completed in mission mode by June 2. He also called for expediting works related to the KBR Park project and stressed coordination with traffic police to minimise inconvenience to commuters. Senior officials, including Zonal Commissioners Anuraag Jayanti and G. Mukunda Reddy, Chief Engineer Sahadev Ratnakar, LA Special Deputy Collector Ramadevi, and other engineering officials attended the meeting.



**RAJAPUSHPA**  
PROPERTIES PVT. LTD  
Shaping Innovations

WHEREVER THERE IS A DREAM,  
THERE IS RAJAPUSHPA



18  
YEARS OF  
XCCELLENCE

48.67 +  
MILLION SQ.FT.  
PORTFOLIO

11.2  
MILLION SQ.FT  
COMPLETED PROJECTS

37.47  
MILLION SQ.FT  
UNDER CONSTRUCTION PROJECTS

18000+  
HAPPY RESIDENTS

20+  
PROJECTS

ONGOING PROJECTS

RAJAPUSHPA  
PROVINCIA  
NARSINGI

RAJAPUSHPA  
IMPERIA  
TELLAPUR

RAJAPUSHPA  
PRESENTIA  
KOKAPET

RAJAPUSHPA  
Aurelia  
TELLAPUR

RAJAPUSHPA  
CASA LUXURA  
NEOPOLIS

RAJAPUSHPA  
INFINA  
MANCHIREVULA

RAJAPUSHPA  
skYra  
NEOPOLIS

766 000 55 00

[www.rajapushpa.in](http://www.rajapushpa.in)

## SHORT TAKES

### Stones pelted at Constable Fasee Ahmed, two others in Nizamabad, case filed

**HYDERABAD:** A 42-year-old Muslim police constable was injured by a right-wing mob while performing duty in Nizamabad on Sunday evening, February 22. Md Fasee Ahmed, working in the Circle Inspector Cell, Bodhan Division, came to Rudrur town after receiving a distress call of a communal skirmish between two communities. He was accompanied by Head Constable of Special Branch S Buddha Srinivas and Constable B Kasinath. As part of his duty, Constable Fasee Ahmed took the mob's photograph as part of circumstantial evidence from his mobile phone. Mob leader Parvathi Murali noticed him and ordered a group of around 40 people to attack the policeman with stones.

### Aidw slams Gujarat move to mandate parental consent for marriage

**HYDERABAD:** The All India Democratic Women's Association (AIDWA) has strongly condemned the proposal by the Government of Gujarat to make parental consent mandatory in marriages through amendments to the Gujarat Registration of Marriages Act, 2006. AIDWA termed the move a "blatant attempt" to curb the autonomy and personal freedom of adults, especially women. The organization alleged that the proposal aims to control choice in matters of marriage, interfaith and inter-caste relationships, under the guise of preventing "love jihad". The association argued that the proposal violates constitutional guarantees and Supreme Court rulings, including the landmark Justice.

### KTR flags 'deteriorating' conditions in Telangana govt schools

**HYDERABAD:** BRS working president and former minister KT Rama Rao (KTR) on Monday, February 23, launched a sharp attack on chief minister A Revanth Reddy, alleging deteriorating conditions in government schools across Telangana and accusing the government of neglecting student welfare. In a post on X, Rama Rao claimed that "all sections of Telangana are on the streets" against what he described as the Chief Minister's "misrule," and alleged that even schoolchildren were being compelled to protest for basic necessities such as food. The remarks came in the wake of a protest by students of a Tribal Welfare School in Gudur village of Jangaon district. Students staged a sit-in on the Palakurthy-Station Ghanpur main road on Sunday, demanding hygienic food at their institution.

## CMD Musharraf Faruqi commends staff for record-breaking power recovery

**HYDERABAD**  
Musharraf Faruqi, the Chairman and Managing Director of the Southern Power Distribution Company of Telangana Limited, on Tuesday commended the officials and employees of his department for their unwavering commitment to restoring power supply in an exceptional timeframe, even undertaking their efforts during nighttime hours and in the absence of light, a feat that has not been accomplished previously. Due to the unexpected rain and strong winds that lashed Greater Hyderabad last night, tree branches fell on some 11 kV feeders. After nearly six months of dry weather, sudden rainwater entered the gaps of insulators, causing weak or damaged insulators to fail in certain places on Monday evening. As a result, power supply was disrupted in areas served by

# CPI HOLDS ROUND TABLE, SEEKS HALT TO "OPERATION KAGAAR"



### HYDERABAD

The Communist Party of India (CPI) on Tuesday convened a round table meeting at its state office, Maqdoom Bhavan, urging the Centre to immediately stop the ongoing "Operation Kagaar-2" against the Maoists and create conditions for them to join mainstream public life with dignity. Leaders of Left parties, political outfits and civil society groups participated in the meeting chaired by CPI State Secretary Kunamneni Sambasiva Rao. Among those present were MLC M. Kodandaram, CPI leaders E.T. Narasimha and V.S. Bose, CPI(M) leader Bandari Rajkumar, representatives of CPI (New Democracy), CPI (ML Massline), CPI (ML - Liberation), RSP, and members of civil rights organisations. The speakers appealed to the Union government to abandon "war-like approach" and instead encourage Maoists to give up armed struggle and enter democratic politics. They demanded withdrawal of cases filed under the 'Urban Naxalite' tag against the activists, including poet-activist Varavara Rao.

Addressing the gathering, Sambasiva Rao said while Marxism remains the ideological goal of communists, the methods of struggle must change with evolving circumstances. He argued that armed struggle is no longer viable and cited Nepal as an example where change was achieved through democratic movements. He urged the Maoists to join mainstream politics and called on the Centre to ensure dignified rehabilitation without "scapegoating". He questioned the government's approach, stating that any wrongdoing must be addressed under the law rather than through alleged extra-judicial measures. MLC Prof. Kodandaram said ideological differences should not translate into treating Maoists as enemies of the people. He stressed that the government must act strictly within constitutional and legal limits, noting that courts have previously ordered probes into encounter killings. CPI(M) leader Bandari Rajkumar accused the Centre of undermining constitutional values and said Left parties must focus on core public issues rather than divisive agendas. He called for unity among progressive forces.

### FOUR SENIOR MAOIST LEADERS SURRENDER

Meanwhile, in a significant development, four senior leaders of the banned Communist Party of India (Maoist) surrendered before Telangana Police here on Tuesday. Those who laid down arms include Politburo member Devji alias Tippiri Tirupati, Central Committee member Malla Rajireddy alias Sangram, Telangana State Secretary Bade Chokka Rao alias Damodar alias Jagan, and State Committee member Noone Narasimha Reddy alias Ganganna. Speaking to the media, Devji said health reasons prompted his decision. "I want to move from underground life to open public life. I will continue to work for the people and plan to enter politics soon", he said, adding that he would respond to detailed questions at an appropriate time. Malla Rajireddy said they had surrendered to continue their fight within the framework of law. "We will work among the people and discuss certain issues with the government. We will answer all questions soon", he added. The surrenders come amid intensified security operations.

## Three of family die by suicide over financial distress



### HYDERABAD

In a tragic incident, three members of a family allegedly died by suicide in the early hours of Tuesday, reportedly due to mounting financial stress. The deceased were identified as Ram Raj (55), his wife Madhavi (50), and their son Shashank. According to police, the couple was found hanging at their residence, while Shashank had allegedly slit his wrists before hanging himself. Police said a suicide note recovered from the house cited severe financial difficulties as the reason for

the extreme step. Ram Raj was running a local hotel business in Amberpet and a biryani centre in Mallepalli. Investigators suspect heavy business losses and financial transactions pushed the family into distress. At around 3:15 am, Ram Raj reportedly sent a WhatsApp message to his friend Ravi. When Ravi reached the house, he found the couple hanging and alerted the police by dialling 100. The Clues Team rushed to the spot. The bodies were shifted to the Osmania Mortuary for postmortem examination. Officials are also probing whether any harassment or threats from lenders contributed to the incident. "We are investigating from all angles", said Secunderabad Additional DCP Narsaiah. Police have registered a case and further investigation is underway.

## 500 families get evicted in Khammam on land govt allocated to temple



### HYDERABAD

For eight years, they cleared the vegetation, built their homes and settled into the land in Khammam that no one seemed interested in. On Tuesday, February 24, the authorities arrived with bulldozers to take it back. Special forces drawn from four districts moved in on the 31-acre plot in the morning to evict about 500 families living on what is allegedly Bhodan land, or land allotted by the government to landless citizens. Authorities had issued eviction notices earlier, stating that the land was government property. As the notice period expired, the demolition began. Protesters gathered at the Velugumatla Collectorate complex, with some sitting atop bulldozers to obstruct their movement. When the residents had reportedly requested more time to vacate their huts, the authorities continued their operation since the given period of notice had ended, leading to a scuffle between the authorities and locals. Nine families who had sought legal relief had their huts spared. However, every other hut was demolished.

### Residents allege foul play

"We cleared the ground and built the huts. We braved the snakes and mosquitoes to live here," one resident told reporters, adding that slum dwellers would consume poison if the evictions continued. Another alleged that authorities were acting against court orders, evicting residents without adequate notice. A third resident said she and her neighbours had voted for the Congress, "as we were convinced that Revanth Anna (Chief Minister Revanth Reddy) and Senanna (Minister of Revenue, Housing, Information and Public Relations Ponguleti Srinivasa Reddy) would support us."

## Bis Hyd cracks down on fake ISI mark: PVC wire unit raided, goods seized

### HYDERABAD

The Bureau of Indian Standards (BIS), Hyderabad Branch Office, conducted a search and seizure operation at a cable manufacturing unit in Cheralapally Industrial Area for violating provisions of the BIS Act, 2016. The operation was carried out under the direction of P.V. Srikanth, Director & Head, and led by Rakesh Tanneeru, Director. Officials seized 200 plus boxes of PVC insulated electrical wires and cables bearing fake ISI marks and fraudulent license numbers. The seized goods are estimated to be worth over Rs.5 lakh.

## Sudden rains in Telangana destroy crops, leave farmers in despair

### HYDERABAD

Untimely rains in Telangana caused a heavy blow to red chilli farmers, who woke up on Tuesday, February 24, to a devastating sight of their crops completely soaked and ruined. Of the many visuals that have surfaced is a heart-rending video of an elderly farmer couple - Banoth Anki and Laxma Naik - from Mahabubabad district, trying hard to dry their soaked crops with their bare hands. "What should we do now? We toiled hard, waking early, going hungry for days, only to be ruined by the rains. How will we survive now? What should we do, Oh Lord! Please

## Students travelling in RTC buses can get off anywhere if they have hall ticket: Ponnam

### HYDERABAD

State Transport Minister Ponnam Prabhakar has instructed RTC top officials to take all necessary steps to ensure that students writing intermediate and 10th grade exams do not face any difficulties. In the backdrop of the approaching exams, Prabhakar held a review meeting with top officials at the Secretariat on the RTC bus operations. With the intermediate exams starting from Wednesday (today) and the 10th grade exams starting from March 14, the RTC officials said that steps had been taken to keep additional buses during the morning and afternoon hours of the exams. The minister said that as per the instructions of the Chief Minister, he reviewed the issue along with state Special Chief Secretary Vikas Raj, RTC MD Nagireddy and other RTC officials. He instructed the officials to take precautions to ensure that the buses go to the



examination centers from rural areas without any hassles. He said that the operation of the buses had been taken to the lowest level. He also said that steps had been taken to drop the students at the examination center based on the hall ticket so that the buses stop at the examination center regardless of whether there is a bus stop or not. He

instructed that this should be communicated to the RTC conductors and drivers through each depot manager. He wished the students to use this facility and write the exams well and pass with good marks without such mental anxiety. Minister Ponnam Prabhakar suggested that the students should use the hall ticket to get down at the desired stop.

## Operation Octopus: Hyd Police bust pan-India cyber fraud web, 104 arrested across 16 states

### HYDERABAD

In one of the largest coordinated crackdowns on cybercrime, the Hyderabad City Police dismantled a sprawling pan-India cyber fraud syndicate under the codename "Operation Octopus". The 10-day multi-state operation led to the arrest of 104 accused across 16 states, exposing a massive laundering network linked to 1,055 cyber-crime cases involving fraud worth approximately Rs.127 crore. The arrested persons included 86 mule account hold-

ers, 17 account suppliers / aggregators and one bank official. The operation was spearheaded by DCP (Cybercrimes) V. Aravind Babu under the supervision of Commissioner of Police V.C. Sajjanar and Joint CP S.M. Vijay Kumar. Investigations by the Cyber Crime Police Station (CCPS) identified 151 bank accounts used to siphon and layer fraud proceeds from investment scams, trading frauds, and 'digital arrest' scams. With regard to seizures, 204 mobile phones, 141 SIM cards, 152 bank passbooks, 234 debit /

credit cards, 26 laptops, 56 corporate stamps and Rs.36 lakh cash was seized. A total of 32 special teams, led by Inspector-rank officers, conducted simultaneous raids across Maharashtra, Delhi, Rajasthan, West Bengal, Karnataka, Uttar Pradesh, Gujarat, Haryana, Punjab, Andhra Pradesh, Assam, Madhya Pradesh, Bihar, Uttarakhand, and Odisha. Police reiterated a strict 'Zero Tolerance' policy, stating that investigations are ongoing to track and arrest higher-level masterminds.

## SCR GM inspects Kacheguda, reviews key rail sections & Yadadri redevelopment

### HYDERABAD

Sanjay Kumar Srivastava, General Manager of South Central Railway, conducted a detailed inspection of Kacheguda Railway Station and undertook rear window inspections across key sections in the city on Tuesday. At Kacheguda, he was accompanied by Santosh Kumar Verma, Divisional Railway Manager (Hyderabad Division), along with senior railway officials. The General Manager reviewed passenger amenities on Platform No.1, inspected the foot over bridge, and examined yard and pit line operations. He interacted with staff and emphasized strict adherence to systemic procedures to ensure safety in train operations. He also inspected the station premises on the Golnaka side and reviewed ongoing upgradation plans. Subsequently, the GM carried out a rear window

inspection of the Sitalfalmamdi-Lallaguda-Yadadri section, accompanied by Gopalakrishnan R, Divisional Railway Manager, Secunderabad Division. He assessed the progress of works on the Sitalfalmamdi-Lallaguda chord line, a crucial stretch that enables direct train movement from Kazipet towards Kacheguda / Bengaluru and vice versa, bypassing Malkajgiri and Secunderabad stations. He also inspected the Charlapalli-Yadadri section, examining signalling systems, tracks, curves, gradients, and bridges, with a focus on comprehensive safety measures. At Yadadri Railway Station, the General Manager reviewed ongoing redevelopment works being executed at a cost of Rs.24.45 crore. He discussed upcoming plans with officials and directed them to expedite the works to ensure timely completion of the project.



347 of the 11 kV feeders across Greater Hyderabad. In light of the weather department's warnings, CMD Musharraf Faruqi held a teleconference with the organisation's Chief Engineers and superintending engineers to alert officials and ensure preparedness. Due to the staff remaining vigilant, nearly 86% of the affected 347 feeders were restored within half an hour, while 20 feeders were restored within an hour. However, in

areas such as Chanchalguda, Saleem Nagar, Noor Khan Bazaar, Malakpet, Chandulal Baradari, Saibaba Nagar, and Hyderguda, where fallen branches and debris caused greater damage, restoration of power supply to 27 feeders took between one and a half to two hours. In the worst-affected areas, director of the operations, Dr. N. Narasimulu, along with Chief Engineers, personally supervised restoration work.



tell us," a helpless Anki says as she attempts to dry their soaked crop. The couple had

taken five acre of agricultural land on lease and invested around Rs 5 lakh. They were

# No milk in ghee used for Tirupati laddus: Pawan Kalyan targets Jagan Reddy govt

Speaking in the Assembly, the Deputy Chief Minister said the investigation determined that the ghee supplied to the Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams was manufactured using palm oil and chemicals rather than milk.

The SIT has conclusively found that no milk was used in the manufacture of the ghee supplied for Tirumala laddu preparation," he said, adding that while adulterants were identified, the team could not conclusively determine the exact chemical composition or origin of the substances used.

CBI-led Special Investigation Team (SIT) has conclusively found that no milk was used in the manufacture of ghee supplied for the preparation of Tirumala prasadam laddus, Andhra Pradesh Deputy Chief Minister Pawan Kalyan told the state Legislative Assembly, triggering sharp political exchanges and renewed scrutiny over one of the country's most revered temple prasadam. Speaking in the House, Pawan Kalyan said the investigation determined that the ghee supplied to the Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams (TTD) was manufactured using palm oil and

chemicals rather than milk. According to him, the inquiry identified 36 accused and pointed to a deliberate conspiracy to defile the prasadam offered to Lord Venkateswara at Tirumala. He alleged that tender conditions for ghee supply contracts were altered to favour specific companies. Eligibility norms were allegedly relaxed, allowing firms with lower turnover, limited dairy experience and reduced production capacity to qualify. The companies that won contracts between 2020 and 2023, including Bhole Baba and its associates, reportedly did not supply ghee made from milk. Citing offi-



cial records in the Assembly, Pawan Kalyan said that out of 480 million laddu prasadam sold between 2019 and 2024, around 200 million were allegedly prepared using adulterated ghee.

**IT'S A MAHAPAPAM: CHANDRABABU NAIDU** Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu, meanwhile, termed the episode a "Mahapapam, not just about one laddu; an organised conspiracy," and launched a scathing attack on the previous government led by Jagan Mohan Reddy. "The people of the

state have already expressed their concern. We must also remember the conspiratorial actions involved. Even during British rule, Lord Venkateswara Swamy was not subjected to such things. If we fail to act with concern now, we will be neglecting our responsibility," Naidu said.

"That is why there is a conspiracy angle here. A syndicate has been formed, and this has been proven to a large extent through forensic evidence".

Describing the alleged scale of the adulteration, he said,

"Adulteration of 59.71 lakh kg of ghee has taken place, and Rs 234.51 crore has been spent on adulterated ghee. Between 2019 and 2024, as many as 20.01 crore laddus were prepared using adulterated ghee. This happened with the cooperation of officials, experts, and a syndicate. The laddu prasadam was defiled through organised crime, which would not have been possible without laboratories turning a blind eye during tenders." Naidu informed lawmakers that the CBI had reached the stage of filing a chargesheet on January 23, 2026, which was submitted to the Supreme Court of India the following day.

## THE TIRUPATI LADDU CONTROVERSY

The controversy began in September 2024 when Naidu accused the previous government of allowing animal fat in temple prasadam, sparking political and religious backlash. The YSR Congress

Party rejected the allegations, describing the probe's outcome as a "decisive blow to the politically manufactured falsehood" that animal fat was used. Jagan Mohan Reddy accused Naidu of "playing politics in the name of God" and said he would write to the Prime Minister and the Chief Justice seeking action. The Supreme Court, while hearing the matter, had cautioned against politicising religious issues, with Justice BR Gavai observing that "Gods should be kept away from politics." TTD Executive Officer Shyamala Rao termed the findings "shocking" and attributed the lapse to the absence of in-house testing.

Union Health Minister JP Nadda also sought a report for review by food safety authorities, as temple authorities moved to tighten quality checks. The case continues to draw intense political and public attention across Andhra Pradesh and beyond.

## TN polls: BJP wants 30-35 seats, gives AIADMK 72-seat list

CHENNAI, FEB 24



The Tamil Nadu unit of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) on Tuesday formally submitted a list of 72 Assembly constituencies to the AIADMK as part of seat-sharing discussions for the upcoming Tamil Nadu Assembly elections. According to sources, the BJP has expressed interest in directly contesting between 30 and 35 of these seats under the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) arrangement.

The list was handed over to AIADMK general secretary Edappadi K. Palaniswami by BJP State president Nainar Nagenthran and Union Minister and the party's election in-charge for Tamil Nadu, Piyush Goyal, during a meeting held in Chennai. The AIADMK is a key constituent of the BJP-led National Democratic Alliance in Tamil Nadu, with the alliance having been reaffirmed ahead of the 2026 Assembly elections. With the polls drawing closer, both major fronts in the State have intensified seat-sharing negotiations. While discussions within the DMK-led alliance are said to be progressing steadily, the NDA has now formally initiated its internal allocation process. Sources indicated that the BJP's wish list includes

prominent urban constituencies in Chennai such as Thousand Lights, T. Nagar, and Velachery. In neighbouring districts, the party has sought seats, including Tiruttani and Avadi in Tiruvallur district, and Kancheepuram and Thalli. The list reportedly also features constituencies such as Alangulam and Tenkasi in the southern belt. Also, the BJP is believed to have shown interest in contesting seats such as Tiruvannamalai, Singanailur, Aravakurichi, Palani, Vilavancode, and Nagercoil, where it expects to secure significant vote shares based on its recent electoral performance and organisational presence. Party insiders suggest that the BJP's demand for 30-35 seats reflects its ambition to expand its footprint in Tamil Nadu, particularly in regions where it has made incremental gains in recent elections. The final allocation, however, will depend on negotiations with the AIADMK leadership and the overall alliance strategy.

## Army Chief Visits Kishtwar After JeM Killings

JAMMU: (FEB 24)

Northern Army Commander Lieutenant General Pratik Sharma visited Jammu and Kashmir following the elimination of three terrorists of the Pakistan-based Jaish-e-Mohammad (JeM) and commended troops for their swift and precise action.

Three JeM operatives were killed in an encounter with security forces in the Chatroo area of Kishtwar district on Sunday.

"Lt Gen Pratik Sharma, Army Commander, visited Kishtwar following the successful conduct of Ops TRASHI-I, which resulted in the elimination of three Pakistan-sponsored terrorists," the Northern Command said in a post on X.

## K'taka govt has not filled 2.94 lakh vacant posts, claims Kumaraswamy

NEW DELHI, FEB 24



Union Minister H.D. Kumaraswamy on Tuesday expressed concern over the state government's failure to fill vacant government posts and warned the government not to take the protests by unemployed youth lightly.

He said the state government should not ignore the fact that a large number of job aspirants have taken to the streets in Dharwad. He said the youth have been forced to protest due to the government's negligence in filling vacant posts on time.

He also extended support to the protesting youth, urging them to ensure their protest remains peaceful and assuring them that he stands with them. Kumaraswamy said that 2.94 lakh government posts are currently vacant in the state, while only cabinet-rank posts are being filled at "super-fast" speed. This re-

flects the priorities of the Congress government, he said.

According to the report of the Karnataka Administrative Reforms Commission headed by R.V. Deshpande, there are 7 lakh unemployed people in the state. All of them are waiting for government jobs, and the vacancies should have been filled in a phased manner. Instead, the government has wasted three valuable years in internal power struggles and has no time to focus on the youth, he criticised.

Kumaraswamy warned that unemployment is not a simple issue, but a constant-

ly erupting volcano, and the government must not forget this. He said the authorities should have acted by now by allocating separate funds in the budget and initiating the recruitment process.

He pointed out that the highest number of vacancies exists in the education, health, and police departments.

He alleged that there are no inspectors at 18 key police stations in Bengaluru city and blamed the situation on the government's preoccupation with transfer-related matters.

He said these factors are directly affecting governance and urged the government to take immediate steps to fill vacant posts.

He also called on the government to come down from the third floor of Vidhana Soudha and listen to the voices of the youth, warning that otherwise the Congress government will have to pay a price for their anger.

## Siddaramaiah Cautions Over Student Murder Row

BENGALURU, FEB 24



Karnataka Chief Minister Siddaramaiah condemned the murder of a Class 10 student by a group of minors, and urged the public to maintain peace while advising parents to closely monitor their children's activities.

He also cautioned against any attempts to exploit the situation or disrupt public order.

Shivamogga experienced tension on Tuesday after a Class 10 student died while attempting to save his friend from an attack by minors from the same area. The deceased student's family has stated they will take drastic action if the perpetrators are not punished. Sanket, 15, was killed while trying to protect his friend Girish from a group assault on the outskirts of Shivamogga on Monday night, which led to heightened tensions in the area. Police have taken seven boys into custody in connection

with the incident. The case has reportedly taken a communal turn, as the accused belong to a different community. Siddaramaiah stated, "I strongly condemn the brutal assault and murder of a school student at Uragadur near Shivamogga city. I appeal to the public to maintain peace and restraint and not fall prey to any provocation. Strict action will also be taken against anyone who attempts to misuse the situation and disturb public peace." In addition to supporting the bereaved family, we will ensure that all those involved are punished according to the law and will make every effort to deliver justice.

## Jagan Flags Srikakulam Diarrhea Cases

AMARAVATI, FEB 25



Former Chief Minister and YSR Congress Party president YS Jagan Mohan Reddy on Tuesday expressed serious concern over the outbreak of diarrhea in Srikakulam.

He criticised the government for negligence and said public health was being compromised due to administrative failure.

The YSRC chief stated that poor road repair work and a lack of proper precautions in the drinking water supply had led to the present situation, and added that failure to protect public health exposed weaknesses in governance.

He said in a statement that the government has a responsibility to ensure safe drinking water and proper sanitation management. YS Jagan emphasised that the victims currently receiving treatment must

be provided with the best possible medical care. He demanded that special medical teams monitor patients who are on ventilator support and that senior specialists be appointed if required.

He said no effort should be spared in saving lives. He also called for a thorough inquiry into the incident and strict action against those responsible.

The former Chief Minister urged the authorities

to take immediate steps to ensure water purification, chlorination, and proper drainage management to prevent further spread. He warned that if the government fails to protect people's health, the public will respond accordingly.

He also demanded immediate financial assistance for the families of the deceased and affected victims. Meanwhile, YS Jagan Mohan Reddy interacted with party workers, supporters, and members of the public during his visit to his constituency, Pulivendula, in YSR Kadapa district.

At the Bhakarapuram camp office, he met people who had gathered in large numbers to see him and present their concerns.

According to a party statement, he enquired about the well-being of party workers and listened patiently to their problems.

He assured them that

difficult times would not last forever and that better days were ahead. He told them not to lose courage and promised to stand by anyone facing trouble.

Several leaders and cadres complained about harassment and attacks by TDP leaders under the coalition government. In response, he advised them to remain strong and continue their struggle democratically.

He also spoke to Kadapa MP YS Avinash Reddy regarding certain issues and suggested steps to resolve them. YS Jagan expressed concern about what he called the deteriorating governance and the misuse of institutions.

He said that any government should work for public welfare and not for vendetta. He recalled that during the YSRC tenure, benefits were delivered to all eligible persons without discrimination.

## Army, Railways Boost Jobs for Retiring Agniveers

NEW DELHI, FEB 24



The Indian Army and Indian Railways have launched a "Framework of Cooperation" to enhance post-retirement employment opportunities for Agniveers and other Army personnel, marking a significant milestone in inter-ministerial collaboration. Guided by senior leadership from both the Indian Army and the Ministry of Railways, the initiative aims to create smoother pathways for retiring service members to transition into civilian careers within the vast railway network. It focuses on raising awareness about available job roles in Indian Railways, streamlining recruitment processes for eligible veterans, and establishing dedicated support mechanisms to assist personnel nearing the end of their military tenure. The framework underscores a joint commitment to empowering former soldiers and Agniveers with meaningful second careers that leverage their discipline, skills, and training

while contributing to national development. Agniveers recruited under the Agnipath scheme for a four-year term often face challenges in securing stable employment after their service, as only a limited percentage are retained in the armed forces. This cooperation seeks to address that gap by prioritizing their integration into one of India's largest employers. Indian Railways, with its extensive operations across the country, offers diverse roles in areas such as security (through the Railway Protection Force), operations, maintenance, logistics, and administrative functions—positions well-suited to the leadership, technical abilities, and resilience developed in military service.

## Andhra milk adulteration: Seven people still in critical condition

AMARAVATI, FEB 24

The condition of seven persons undergoing treatment at various hospitals in Andhra Pradesh's Rajahmundry after consuming adulterated milk is critical, a top official said on Tuesday. State Health and Family Welfare Department Commissioner Veerapandian said that 15 people are undergoing treatment in various hospitals, of whom three are on ventilators, two on dialysis and three more on ventilator-dialysis. Among those undergoing treatment, there are two children, including a five-month-old baby. He said four people have died so far. No new cases were registered on Tuesday. Veerapandian told the media that necessary steps are being taken to provide better treatment to all those hospitalised. On the suggestion of senior nephrologist Raviraj, medicines required to quickly improve kidney function but not available here are being brought from Chennai and Mumbai. Officials said that milk was

supplied to the homes on February 16. As some may show symptoms later, doctors have been made available round the clock in the affected areas for 24 hours. These measures will continue for another month, the officials said. They said three people have been admitted to hospitals based on the results of their blood samples. Two of them were found to have high creatinine levels. Blood samples were collected from 315 people belonging to 110 families, who all had received milk from the same vendor. Two of them had high creatinine levels, while the third had suspicious symptoms. Their condition is stated to be stable. Veerapandian said that he has not come across traces of urea in milk so far. He said that if urea is found in milk, health problems like kidney failure and liver damage will not immediately arise. He quoted medical experts to say that problems like kidney or liver failure, and urinary incontinence can arise only if milk mixed with urea is consumed for a long time.

## When Mohanlal Took on CM Vijayan

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, FEB 24

In a political season dominated by optics and messaging, it is not often that Kerala's biggest screen icon starts asking the questions instead of facing them.

That is precisely what happened when Dadasaheb Phalke award winner and Malayalam cinema's enduring superstar Mohanlal sat down to interview Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan at Cliff House, the official residence of the Chief Minister.

The teaser of the interview is set to be released on Tuesday evening across social media and television platforms, with the full version to follow on leading channels. For decades, it has been Mohanlal who has been at the receiving end of probing questions about cinema, craft, fame and public life. This time, the roles were reversed. The actor reportedly spent two days in Thiruvananthapuram for the project. The first day was devoted to discussions on the themes to be covered, and the interview took place the



next day. The conversation is said to span the Chief Minister's personal journey, political evolution, and the gov-

ernment's record in office. The optics are compelling. A Dadasaheb Phalke laureate interviewing a sitting

Chief Minister on the eve of an election inevitably invites political readings. The Opposition has already accused the government of ramping up public relations efforts as the state heads to the polls.

The presence of one of Kerala's most popular cultural figures is bound to amplify that debate.

This is not entirely unprecedented.

Mohanlal had earlier conducted a similar interview with former Chief Minister Oommen Chandy.

Photographs of Mohanlal

and Pinarayi Vijayan together at Cliff House have already gone viral, fuelling anticipation.

Whether the interview reshapes political narratives or remains a high-profile media moment, one thing is certain: when the superstar asks the questions, Kerala watches.

Incidentally the same time last year, Mohanlal was interviewed by state Culture and Films Minister Saji Cherian, when the superstar was the chief guest at a cultural event organised at Cherian's constituency in Chengannur.

EDITORIAL

**THE TROPICAL ALLIANCE:  
INDIA AND BRAZIL FORGE  
A NEW GLOBAL SOUTH**

Brazilian President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva's India visit last week sent important messages for both India-Brazil ties, and for solidarity in the developing world, as two Global South powers focused on global governance and leadership. After his talks with Prime Minister Narendra Modi, India and Brazil agreed to try and double trade to \$30 billion by 2030, and signed agreements on critical minerals, steel mining, and digital cooperation to diversify beyond China-led supply chains. Mr. Lula, along with French President Emmanuel Macron, was among about 20 leaders at India's AI Impact Summit and was later accorded a state visit. The 80-year-old Brazilian President's presence was important, as he faces elections later this year, which may make it difficult for him to attend India's BRICS summit if it coincides with his campaigning for a fourth term. It also came amidst fresh turmoil over U.S.-imposed trade tariffs, after the American Supreme Court struck down U.S. President Donald Trump's rationale for the reciprocal tariffs. India and Brazil were both the highest taxed countries by the U.S. — 50% tariffs each — and both faced further possible tariffs over BRICS ties, Iran trade, and Russian oil imports. India and Brazil are also key members of the BRICS grouping of developing nations, the India-Brazil-South Africa (IBSA), G-4 with Germany and South Africa on UNSC reform, and co-founders of the biofuel alliance for alternative energy; each of these has faced challenges from Mr. Trump's policies on trade, territorial sovereignty, multilateralism and the UN, and fossil fuels. Amid such uncertainty, Mr. Modi and Mr. Lula reaffirmed their commitment to protecting the multilateral order.

Before leaving India, Mr. Lula, who is set to visit Washington next month, did not mince words while speaking to journalists about the challenges posed by the U.S. government. As a former trade union leader, he said he believed that the only way of tackling geopolitical uncertainty unleashed by the U.S. was for countries to "unionise", rather than cutting deals individually with Washington, which leave smaller nations at a disadvantage. The words are particularly important for both Delhi and Brasilia, as both have negotiated with the Trump administration on tariffs, but have not so far signed trade deals with the U.S. The U.S. court ruling offers an opportunity to reset the terms of the agreements, and it is significant that New Delhi has postponed a meeting of trade negotiators this week to give the U.S. and India time to assess the ruling. India and Brazil, and their developing world partners, should coordinate the next steps and stay engaged with Washington. Mr. Lula's warning is clear: it is easy to break a single stick, but far more difficult to do so if the sticks are bundled tightly together.

**The Unsettling Iranian 'War Logic'  
Trump May Be Ignoring**

**The Constitutional foundation and the 'imagined purpose' of Iran is predicated on Wilayat al-Faqih, meaning the "Guardianship of the Islamic Jurist". Under the 'Twelver Shi'ism' framework, which adheres to the belief in twelve divinely ordained leaders known as Imams, the Supreme Leader of Iran, currently Ali Khamenei, becomes the 'Wali al-Faqih', affording him an outsized relevance across the world.**

Post-World War II, the US has repeatedly failed to translate its military superiority into lasting political victories in the "nation-building" wars it has so far waged. Relatively smaller operations like Kosovo or, more recently, Venezuela aside, most of its other 'interventions' have failed. The Korean War was a stalemate, and Vietnam a humiliating retreat. The prevailing situation in the Gulf reminds one of the premature claims of victory after the First Gulf War. Saddam Hussein may have been ousted from power, but the current dispensation in Baghdad is equally sectarian (read pro-Iran). Libya post-Gaddafi is hardly a nation-state, much like the chaos in Yemen or Somalia. The ouster of Syrian dictator Bashar al-Assad has led to a former al-Qaeda leader, Ahmed al-Sharaa, taking the reins. The longest American war, which went on for over two decades and was also the most expensive one (\$2 trillion), resulted in a hasty abandonment, only to hand Afghanistan back to the Taliban.

**Can Iran Be Subdued?**

This is hardly a reassuring list as Donald Trump lines up American firepower yet again, this time in the Persian Gulf. US forces led by the aircraft carrier strike groups USS Abraham Lincoln and USS Gerald Ford are assuming offensive postures against Iran in a tense battle of who blinks first. Trump's threat of "really bad things" happening is not entirely unfathomable, given that the US and Israeli forces did jointly hit three Iranian nuclear facilities in Isfahan, Natanz and Fordow in June 2025. So, to that extent, there is a psychological precedent to an attack on Iran, in recent times. While the June 2025 strikes had the relative safety of distance, the current sabre-rattling en-

tails the threat of a full-blown "war". But is it even plausible? Can Iran be coerced into kowtowing to Trump's diktats? Can it be defeated and subjected to a regime change? Can Iran end any differently from the outcomes in Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya or Syria? Indeed, Iran will be different from all previous US endeavours. And it's a far more complex and difficult undertaking. The reasons are twofold.

**Iran Is The 'Nucleus' Of The Islamic World**

Firstly, attacking Iran will lead to repercussions way beyond Iran itself. Secondly, its history and culture are proof that there is a unique, faith-based behavioural aspect that may lead to a response that goes way beyond the ordinary. Iran is, above all, a sectarian and theological "idea", which transcends the limited definitions of a nation-state. While Shia theology is not exclusive to one country, with early communities centred around Medina, Kufa, Baghdad and later in Najaf, Karbala et al, post the 1979 Iranian Revolution, Iran became the emotional, spiritual, and political sanctum sanctorum for the 300-million-plus Shias spread across the world, including 25 million in India. The Constitutional foundation and the 'imagined purpose' of Iran is predicated on Wilayat al-Faqih, meaning the "Guardianship of the Islamic Jurist". Under the 'Twelver Shi'ism' framework, which adheres to the belief in twelve divinely ordained leaders known as Imams, the Supreme Leader of Iran, currently Ali Khamenei, becomes the 'Wali al-Faqih', affording him an outsized relevance across the world. The Theory of Umm al-Qura ("Mother of Cities"), developed by Iranian thinker Mohammad Javad Larijani, also makes Iran central to the Islamic World. This has led to Iran inspiring

what is often called the "Axis of Resistance", which manifests in powerful militias such as Hezbollah (Lebanon), Houthis (Yemen), Popular Mobilization Forces (Iraq), Liwa Abu al-Fadh al-Abbas (Syria), Fatemiyoun Brigade (Afghanistan), and even the Pakistani Zainabiyoun Brigade. Thus, any American attack on Iran's sovereignty could wound sensibilities way beyond the territorial borders of Iran and elicit global reactions.

**The 'Appeal' Of Martyrdom**

Then there is a far more deeply behavioural guarantee in attacking Iran, as it tends to readily invoke the Shi'i concept of martyrdom (Shahada), which is considered a deeply theological and spiritual duty that is to be upheld against any perceived enemy. Amongst the most revered statements attributed to Hussein ibn Ali at the Battle of Karbala is, "Hayhat minna al-dhillah", that is, "Death with dignity is better than life under oppression". The other popular rouse is Kullu yawmin □Ashura□, wa kullu ar□in Karbala, that is, "martyrdom and the struggle against injustice is ongoing and universal". Such underpinnings normalise and valorise martyrdom in battle as a noble and conscious act. Such a fiery belief system can wreak havoc on any intruder in asymmetric warfare, as would be inevitable if the Americans attempt to put boots on the ground. The decidedly superior Iraqi forces in the Iran-Iraq War of the 1980s faced the consequences of such Shi'i ideological mobilisation. The Iranians endured significantly higher fatalities owing to brazen tactics such as human wave assaults. In contrast, there was no comparable religious framing of "martyrdom" or "sacrifice" in Saddam's predominantly non-Shia military, then. Therefore, despite early Iraqi gains, Iran

was able to push back and retrieve its lost territory, and even emerge strategically better-positioned. The human cost to the Iranians notwithstanding, the efficacy of their fighting spirit, infused with faith itself, was unmistakable - and decisive.

**A War-Ready Force**

Lastly, unlike many militaries in the Arab Sheikdoms, the Iranian military is battle-hardened. Over the years, it has committed itself to various regional theatres, such as the Iraqi-Syrian swaths. It also has a modicum of professionalism and hardware wherewithal, which makes it far more formidable than the ragtag Taliban militia. Point to note: even that ragtag militia ended up wearing out the Americans in Afghanistan. America must understand that simply the unpopularity of the current Ayatollah regime cannot guarantee popular support for a US invasion of Iran. Such an either-or choice between an Ayatollah rule and an American-propped regime would be a non-starter in a 6,000-year-old civilisation. Also, there is no singular face of opposition - certainly not the Shah progeny in exile in the US - that the Americans can bet on to replace the Ayatollah. Therefore, any attempts by Trump to forcibly "hold" Iranian land are likely to be met with an unprecedented fury, perhaps of the kind that America has never faced before. If even the Vietnamese or Afghans wore out the Americans, can Trump really deal with what Iran has to offer? Attacking Iran would surely lead to what Trump calls "really bad things". Only, they might not be just for Iran.

**- LT. GEN. BHOPINDER SINGH**

(Disclaimer: These are the

**Open Forum**

**Why Trump's Deals With South Korea And Japan Should Be A Warning For India**

On February 2, 2026, President Donald Trump and Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced the finalisation of a framework for an interim agreement between the US and India, ending months of economic uncertainty. However, on February 20, the US Supreme Court struck down most of Trump's tariffs, ruling that he exceeded his tariff authority in using a law reserved for national emergency. India and the US deferred their trade talks following the order, with India saying that it is studying its implications. As for the US Supreme Court ruling, uncertainty still hangs over the question of tariffs, because soon after the order, Trump announced that he would soon sign an order to increase global tariffs to 15%, the maximum allowed under a never-used trade law. As of now, global tariffs of 10% have been in force since 12.01 am on Tuesday.

As the world waits for clarity, it may be important to focus on the challenges that could arise if a deal is indeed finalised between India and the US. Based on the current broad outline, foremost among the challenges New Delhi could face is the possibility of changing goalposts and pressure tactics. Trump's dealings with South Korea and Japan have become cautionary tales highlighting the difficulty of negotiating with Trump's America.

**Trump's America Is Unreliable**

The US's trade deals and its engagements with South Korea and Japan offer a window into the kinds of challenges India could run into. Three trends are noteworthy: expansive use of tariffs, strategic miscommunication and divergences, and shifting goalposts.

As part of the trade deal, South Korea and Japan pledged USD 350 billion and USD 500 billion in investments in the US, respectively, in exchange for a reduction in tariffs on their exports. Nonetheless, despite the deal, their economic relations with the US remain on edge due to the looming uncertainty over tariffs, their expansiveness and the arbitrariness of their application. While much of this can be attributed to President Trump's impulsive personality, an amorphous definition of the US' national security and

leaning towards business interests over the administration, these are equally consequential.

**How Trump Arm-Twisted S. Korea**

Increasingly under Trump, tariffs have now become a toolkit of coercion to achieve political objectives beyond trade. This has emerged as the first challenge for the US's allies. Economic ties are no longer isolated from other aspects of bilateral relations. Jamieson Greer, the US Trade Representative, cited South Korea's non-adherence to its digital services commitment as another reason for the tariff increase, indirectly hinting at the investigation against Coupang, a US technology company operating in South Korea. In the case of the India-US trade agreement, one of the biggest impediments is India's import of Russian oil. Section 4 of the Executive Order signed by Trump on February 6 this year establishes a monitoring mechanism as a pressure point.

The second challenge is related to strategic communication and divergences. In the case of South Korea, there has been significant misunderstanding, despite numerous meetings at the highest level, including with foreign and industry ministers, and even the Prime Minister. For instance, Trump's characterisation of South Korea's delay in passing the trade agreement through the national assembly as "not living up to its deal" underscores a lack of understanding of both South Korea's political system and the details of the US-South Korea MoU, which does not mention any clear implementation timelines for the deal.

**Japan Still Confused**

While South Korea has faced increased tariffs, Japan has been spared. However, despite close engagement with Japan, confusion persists regarding the agreement's details, particularly about processes, procedures and decision-making. Howard Lutnick, the US Commerce Secretary, has said that the US [read Donald Trump] can "pick and choose" which projects to select, irrespective of the merits of the project, directly contradicting Ryosei Akazawa, Lutnick's counterpart, who stressed the importance of profita-

bility and the screening process. While mechanisms exist for Japan to turn down projects or delay them, the consequences could be severe: penalties and auto or reciprocal tariffs.

The third pertains to shifting goalposts. The Trump administration has often deviated from or changed the terms of agreements it had previously made with its allies. For instance, the deal with South Korea promised "no less favourable" terms than those offered by its adversaries (Taiwan) for semiconductor chips, particularly memory. However, the administration has changed the trade terms, after sealing a deal with Taiwan, exempting it from additional semiconductor tariffs quotas. The new deal links MFN (most favoured nation) status to company-specific investment in US manufacturing, effectively creating new conditions for countries like South Korea, thereby violating the earlier agreement. Following this deal, the administration announced 25% tariffs on chips, putting the South Korean memory chip companies in a difficult position. This new status quo signals the US's growing expectation of increased investment from South Korea even in the chip sector. Such a proposition ignores existing investments already made by South Korean companies such as SK Hynix and Samsung Electronics, which amount to roughly USD 40 billion. Additionally, there is a risk of a second tranche of tariff announcements on semiconductor imports and derivative products.

In each of the trade agreements with Korea and Japan, two observations cannot be ignored. Trump has the final authority over decisions, including renegotiating on the deal, and the agreements are not legally binding. Violating them has serious repercussions for the other party, but not for the US, given its predominant economic position.

**New Delhi Must Know What It's Dealing With**

Drawing from these three critical challenges, New Delhi must understand that it is dealing with a mercurial president and a volatile administration. In this context, it must take steps, keeping its economic interests at the centre, ensur-

ing that in exchange for more liberalised policies, which facilitate greater imports and even investments, it receives preferential treatment over its competitors in critical sectors, such as pharmaceuticals and textiles. India must not fall into the trap of abstract assurances; it should demand specific concessions as it moves forward. In the context of the interim trade deal, New Delhi's choice of words such as "intends" when it comes to the "additional products" clause on the USD 500 billion trade promise shows that it understands Trump's playbook. That same understanding should underpin any future talks about a deal.

Based on Korea and Japan's experience, New Delhi can explore various mechanisms to ensure that the deal - if finalised - is honoured by the US. Constituting a joint ministerial committee to oversee the implementation of the agreement may be one such step. Additionally, New Delhi has some political leverage that it can utilise. South Korea and Japan do not enjoy direct political contact with the US President in the manner that India does through Sergio Gor, the newly appointed US Ambassador to India. It must make the most of this comparative advantage. Additionally, like Japan (critical minerals and infrastructure), South Korea (shipbuilding), and even Taiwan (semiconductors), India can identify specific sectors where it has a potential upper hand and can contribute to bolstering US industrial manufacturing, such as pharmaceuticals, in exchange for sectoral concessions.

From Trump's lens, allies, partners, and friends alike will have to prove their loyalty at different intervals, depending on what upsets Trump. Washington will likely try to enforce certain decisions that may resonate beyond the obvious sectors, namely, energy and agriculture. How Delhi navigates this landscape amidst persistent attempts by the US to upset the apple cart remains to be seen.

**- VIVEK MISHRA,  
ABHISHEK SHARMA (RESEARCHERS)**

(Disclaimer: These are the personal opinions of the authors)

**SHARE HAPPINESS**



*In a world that boasts of rising towers,  
Can a man still bloom like flowers?  
Born as human, yet bound by chain  
Is this the fruit of progress we gain?*

*We speak of steps, of paths so wide,  
But leave our truths somewhere to hide.  
A thorny bush can't roses bear  
Yet in each soul, there's good to share.*

*Speak not to boast, but light the way;  
Let ten find hope in what you say.  
Live not just for your fleeting breath  
But for Bharati, who walks near death.*

*She treads through fear, through pain's cold hands,  
Among the lost in no-man's lands.  
For those with neither voice nor grace  
Be the lamp in that shadowed place.*

*Forget the noise, remove the mask,  
Stand with the soldier in his task.  
Like the rifle—silent, true  
Guard the nation as skies turn blue.*

*Rise not, unless you bow your head  
To farmers tilling fields of dread.  
They sow through debt, through sun and storm—  
Yet none reach out to keep them warm.*

*Let not your heart in greed be whole,  
That steals from many to feed one soul.  
Let your heart beat not to take  
But to heal, for humanity's sake.*

*Serve your mother—womb of grace,  
Who shaped herself to give you place.  
Through every ache she bore your name  
So serve her now, without shame.*

*Be like the tree, that asks for none,  
Yet shelters all beneath the sun.  
Offer shade and fruit so true  
Let joy and peace flow out through you.*

*So share the joy, become the light,  
Turn this wronged world into right.  
If not for name, if not for fame  
Then live, at least, to bless the flame.*

**...: Dr. Pureka Raju ...:  
7810032847**

## RTI Raises Safety Concerns Over DGCA Vacancies

An RTI response accessed by India Today has revealed nearly 40% vacancies in key safety wings of the Directorate General of Civil Aviation, raising concerns over regulatory oversight.

An RTI response accessed by India Today has flagged a nearly 40 per cent staff crunch in India's aviation regulator, the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA), raising concerns about its capacity to enforce safety norms amid a series of recent incidents.

The RTI was filed in the aftermath of the January 28 incident involving Mahar-

ashtra Deputy Chief Minister Ajit Pawar's aircraft. It sought comprehensive details on the DGCA's oversight of non-scheduled operator permit (NSOP) holders between January 2023 and December 2025, including safety audits conducted, major violations detected and action taken.

### WHAT RTI ASKED

The application also asked for the number of instances where aircraft or helicopter components were used beyond prescribed expiry limits, along with details of operators penalised, suspended or grounded.

In addition, it sought the DGCA's findings in the Sep-



tember 2023 Learjet 45 crash involving VSR Ventures, including observations on pilot training standards and un-stabilised approaches, and whether the operator had been subjected to any special surveillance before a subse-

quent crash.

### DGCA'S REPLY

In its reply, the DGCA said that the concerned Central Public Information Officer (CPIO) deals only with cadre management of Group 'A' Technical Officers and

that the information sought did not form part of the records held by that office. It added that the application had been forwarded to other concerned CPIOs. While substantive operational details were not provided, the RTI response disclosed staffing data in the DGCA's core safety wings — and the numbers point to significant shortages.

In the Airworthiness Wing, which oversees aircraft maintenance standards and regulatory compliance, 310 posts are sanctioned but only 174 are filled. This leaves 136 vacancies, nearly 44 per cent of the sanctioned strength.

The Air Safety Wing, responsible for audits and safety oversight, has 116 sanctioned posts, of which 86 are filled, leaving 30 vacancies — a shortfall of over 25 per cent.

Most strikingly, the Surveillance and Enforcement Division shows zero sanctioned posts, yet seven personnel are currently working in the division, raising questions about structural and administrative arrangements within the regulator.

The staffing disclosures come against the backdrop of heightened scrutiny over aviation safety, particularly in the non-scheduled and air ambulance segments.



## NFR Adds New Stoppages for 19 Trains in Assam

Maligaon, February 24, 2026: The Northeast Frontier Railway (NFR) has introduced additional stoppages for 19 trains at various stations across Assam to improve passenger convenience and regional connectivity. The new halts are being implemented in phases between February 20 and 28. Key trains, including the Guwahati-Silchar Express, Guwahati-Dibrugarh Express, Kolkata-Sairang Express and Kanchanjunga Express, are among those receiving

additional stoppages at stations such as Kampur, Lan-ka, Hojai, Jamunamukh, Katakhal and Barpathar. On February 24, the Mariani-Guwahati-Mariani BG Express began stopping at Barpathar. The service was flagged off by MP Kamakhya Prasad Tasa in the presence of railway officials and local residents. NFR officials said the move will benefit daily commuters and long-distance passengers by enhancing accessibility and strengthening rail connectivity across the region.

## 25th ZRUCC MEETING CONDUCTED BY SOUTH WESTERN RAILWAY

HUBBALLI, FEB 24:

The 25th meeting of the Zonal Railway Users' Consultative Committee (ZRUCC) of South Western Railway was held at the Chalukya Institute, Hubballi, under the chairmanship of Additional General Manager P. Ananth. The meeting focused on enhancing stakeholder representation and reviewing issues related to passenger amenities, train services, and infrastructure development. Welcoming members, P. Ananth highlighted key achievements of the Zone. Between April and December 2025, South Western Railway commissioned 26 km of doubling, progressed on new line projects, and marked a major engineering milestone with the commissioning of an 805-metre bridge across the Krishna River. Karnataka's rail network expansion and electrification continued



strongly, with 207 track kilometres electrified, taking total electrification to 94% of the network. The Zone reported robust financial and operational performance. Gross Revenue reached ₹6,694 crore, while Freight and Parcel Revenues touched record levels. Punctuality in Mail and Express services stood at 90%, securing the 4th rank nationally. Passenger services were expanded with new trains, extensions, and special services to meet festive demand.

Safety and passenger convenience also saw major upgrades, including KAVACH sanction over 3,712 route kilometres, new ROBs/RUBs, lifts, escalators, and Divyangjan-friendly facilities. The opening of the Alnavar-Dandeli section is expected to boost tourism. Dignitaries, including Members of Parliament and ZRUCC members, attended the meeting. P. Ananth assured that the Railway would make earnest efforts to address stakeholders' demands and suggestions.

## Brutal Assault and Extortion Reported in Assam

The couple was inside a car near Silchar when the group of men appeared in an SUV, asked them about their whereabouts and attacked them before raping the woman one by one in front of her boyfriend.

A 28-year-old woman was allegedly gang-raped and extorted of Rs 10,000 by seven men in front of her boyfriend in Assam. The police said that the couple was inside a car near Silchar when a group of men came in an SUV, asked them about their whereabouts and attacked them before raping the woman one by one. Two people have been arrested in the matter after the survivor identified them, while a search is on to identify and arrest the remaining accused. The woman registered a complaint about the incident, which happened on February 19, and a case



has been registered in this connection, a senior police officer told news agency PTI. The case was registered at Silchar Sadar Police Station under sections 308 (5) (extortion by death threat), 310 (2) (dacoity), 351(2) (criminal intimidation), 61(2) (unlawful act committed by two or more persons, 70(1) (gang rape), 76 (criminal force against woman with intent to disrobe her or compel her to be naked), 79 (Word, gesture or act intended to insult the modesty of a woman) of the Bharatiya Nyay Sanhita, according to the police. Her

statement has been recorded and further investigation into the matter is underway. Meanwhile, a Silchar-based journalist, who had reported the incident, was allegedly thrashed by the family members of one of the accused. He claimed that he was stopped by the members near the ational Highway Road police station, asked why he reported the case and then attacked before being saved by onlookers. The journalist has also filed a complaint in connection with the assault, and the police have arrested one person.



## CM Khemchand Meets PM Modi

NEW DELHI, FEB 24

Prime Minister, Narendra Modi today met a three-member delegation of the Manipur government led by its chief minister, Yumnam Khemchand Singh at the PM's office in Seva Teerth here in New Delhi. Besides Yumnam Khemchand, the Manipuri delegation, which called on Prime Minister Modi included the state's two deputy chief ministers, Nemcha Kipgen and Losii Dikho. Nemcha Kipgen, is the first woman deputy chief minister

of Manipur. This is the first time Yumnam Khemchand met the Prime Minister after he took over as the state's chief minister on February 4 last. The chief minister briefed PM Modi on the steps taken up by the new state government to bring peace and harmony in the state. He also urged the Prime Minister to take special care on women empowerment in both hills and valley. The Manipur chief minister and his two deputy chief ministers have invited the Prime Minister to visit the state.



## General Manager Ashutosh Pant Conducts Detailed Inspection of Workshop at BLW

VARANASI, FEB 24:

### Issues Necessary Directions

At Banaras Locomotive Works (BLW), today on 24 January 2026, General Manager Shri Ashutosh Pant conducted a detailed inspection of the workshop. During the visit, he carried out a comprehensive review of various technical aspects related to locomotive manufacturing processes, standard quality measures, and

innovation initiatives. On this occasion, he thoroughly inspected the Loco Frame Shop, Loco Assembly Shop, Loco Test Shop, and Truck Machine Shop.

During the inspection, he closely observed the locomotive manufacturing process and assessed the actual status of technical efficiency, work performance capacity,

and the quality assurance system. He also issued necessary corrective guidelines to officials of various departments associated with locomotive production.

On this occasion, Principal Chief Mechanical Engineer Shri Vivek Sheel, Principal Chief Engineer Shri Shaileendra Kumar Singh, Chief Design Engineer (Electrical)

Shri Anurag Kumar Gupta, Chief Electrical Engineer (Inspection) Shri Bhardwaj Chaudhary, Chief Mechanical Service Engineer Shri Neeraj Jain, Chief Electrical Engineer (Loco) Shri Arvind Kumar Jain, Chief Mechanical Engineer Diesel (POH) Shri S.B. Patel, Deputy General Manager Shri Sagar, along with a large number of department heads and other senior officers, were present.

## Swami Divyanand Ji Maharaj: Beacon of Spirituality

BY SANJAY DWIVEDI

Vrindavan: Revered spiritual leader and Peethadheeshwar of Chitrakoot, Acharya Mahamandaleshwar Dr. Swami Divyanand Ji Maharaj, has emerged as a prominent center of faith and devotion across the nation. A powerful exponent of Dharma, spirituality, and the timeless traditions of Sanatan culture, he continues to inspire countless devotees through his teachings and social initiatives.

Under his divine guidance, the sacred land of Chitrakoot has evolved into a vibrant center of spiritual practice, service, and cultural values. Regular religious ceremonies, spiritual discourses, saint conferences, and welfare-oriented programs are organized under his leadership, drawing devotees from every corner of the country. Swami Divyanand Ji Maharaj has also spearheaded several impactful initiatives in the fields of education, cow protection, environmental conservation, and preservation of Indian cultural heritage. His discourses



are particularly admired for presenting the profound teachings of the Vedas, Upanishads, and the Ramcharitmanas in a simple and accessible manner, making spiritual wisdom relevant to contemporary society. His personality reflects a rare blend of spiritual radiance, scholarship, and compassion. He consistently motivates the youth to embrace Indian values and actively contribute to nation-building and social harmony. The contribution of Swami Divyanand Ji Maharaj in elevating the spiritual grandeur of Chitrakoot Dham is widely acknowledged and deeply respected. Devotees revere him as a guiding light on the path of righteousness, service, and cultural resurgence.

## Kanpur's 100-bed hospital lies shut despite Rs 45 crore spend

Built with ICU, emergency and operation theatres, the fully constructed facility awaits staff approval and equipment installation, as officials cite administrative delays and residents demand urgent government intervention.

A 100-bed government hospital built at a cost of Rs 45 crore in Naubasta, South Kanpur, has remained locked for more than a year, leaving nearly 20 lakh residents without access to a major public healthcare facility in the area. The building stands complete with modern infrastructure, including an intensive care unit, operation

theatres, emergency services and outpatient departments. Yet the main gate remains shut. No doctors, nurses or support staff have been deployed. The delay, officials say, is due to administrative hurdles. Chief Medical Officer Haridutt Nemi said the project has been held up because of pending manpower sanctions and procedural formalities. Files have moved back and forth between departments, and the handover process is still underway. Progress, however, has been slow. For residents, the delay has come at a cost. Akash, a local resident, recalled how his father died of a heart attack while being rushed to a distant hospital. Traffic congestion delayed their journey.

# Conversion, Abuse Racket Exposed in Bhopal

A sex racket run by two sisters in Bhopal, where vulnerable women were lured with the promise of jobs, and then drugged and raped, has been busted by the police. That's not all. One of the survivors claimed she was forced to convert and threatened when she resisted.

Two separate complaints by a beautician and a woman have opened a can of worms into an alleged sex and religious conversion racket run by two sisters and their gang in Bhopal. The racket was busted after the women, a 21-year-old from

Chhattisgarh and a 30-year-old from Bhopal, approached the police with strikingly similar stories -- lured with the promise of jobs, then drugged, raped, and forced to convert. While the sisters, Afreen and Amreen, have been arrested, three others are on the run. The modus operandi of the gang involved targeting vulnerable girls from economically weaker backgrounds, luring them with the promise of jobs, gaining their trust and then sexually exploiting them. The trauma for the 21-year-old beautician, who shared her room with Amreen, started in November 2025. In her complaint,



she said that in November, Amreen took her to Abbas Nagar in Bhopal to meet her relatives.

### INSIDE THE BHOPAL SEX RACKET

Little did she anticipate

the horror that would unfold later. There, she claimed that Amreen's brother, Bilal, mixed an intoxicant in her tea and raped her while she was unconscious. The next month, Amreen took her to

Ahmedabad on the pretext of personal work. There, she was introduced to a man named Yasir, who allegedly raped her as well. She alleged that Chandan Yadav, a close aide of Amreen, also sexually assaulted her on multiple occasions between August 2025 and January 2026.

The survivor claimed she was threatened when she resisted and was blackmailed with photos taken in compromising positions. The ordeal, however, did not stop there. Over the next few weeks, she claimed she was forced to wear revealing and short clothes and taken to pubs to interact with affluent men. There, the beautician

claimed, she was forced to consume drugs. On several instances, she was sexually assaulted. Amid this, she was also pressured to change her religion and made to wear a burqa. However, she eventually managed to flee in January and went to Chhattisgarh to stay with her maternal uncle. She eventually returned to Bhopal in February and lodged a complaint at the Bagsewania police station on February 22.

### SECOND SURVIVOR SPEAKS OUT

The cops smelt a rat. Another woman, who worked as a domestic help at Amreen's house, lodged a similar complaint earlier in the week.

The second woman also alleged that she was drugged and gang-raped by the same trio - Yasir, Bilal and Chandan. She also provided video evidence to the police. Police have registered cases against the three men and the sisters under relevant sections related to rape, criminal conspiracy, and forced religious conversion. The sisters lived in a lavish flat in the upscale Sagar Royal Villas colony in Bhopal's Hoshangabad. Neighbours told India Today that the activities of the two sisters had raised suspicion earlier as well. The neighbours said men and young boys frequently visited their flat late at night. The resi-

dents also claimed that while burqa-clad women were often seen visiting the flat, Afreen and Amreen themselves wore only jeans. Police said the statements would be verified during the investigation. The incident has prompted protests by local Hindu outfits. Hindu Utsav Samiti president Chandrashekhar Tiwari said the outfit would launch awareness campaigns for women and young girls in Bhopal. He also said that women brigades would be formed at the neighbourhood level. The police, meanwhile, have appealed for calm, fearing that the issue might lead to communal unrest.

## Sri Lanka Arrests 12 Indian Fishermen

COLOMBO: (FEB 24)

Sri Lankan Navy has arrested 12 Indian fishermen and seized their boat for allegedly poaching in the island nation's waters, an official statement said on Tuesday. Sri Lanka's North Central Naval Command on Sunday spotted a group of Indian fishing boats engaging in illegal fishing, trespassing into Sri Lankan waters, a statement issued by the Sri Lankan Navy said. "During an operation conducted in the dark hours of 22 Feb 26, the Sri Lanka Navy seized 12 Indian fishing boats and apprehended 12 Indian fishermen while they were poaching in Sri Lanka waters, in the sea area south of Mannar", it added.

# India Named Key Partner in Netanyahu's Hexagon Bloc

Days before PM Narendra Modi's Israel visit, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said he plans to form a regional grouping, a Hexagon of alliances. Netanyahu said the bloc, which would include India, Greece and Cyprus, along with other unnamed Arab, African and Asian states, would take on radical Shia and Sunni adversaries.



On the eve of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to Israel, a pitch for a new geopolitical alliance has emerged from Jerusalem. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu unveiled what he called a "hexagon of alliances". Netanyahu's proposed bloc aims to counter what he described

as "radical axes" in the Middle East (Western Asia). He has named India as a core partner, alongside Israel, Greece and Cyprus. Other Arab, African and Asian countries are expected to be part of the framework, according to Netanyahu's statement released by the Israeli foreign office on February 22. The announcement comes amid rising tensions between Israel and Iran and Pakistan and Saudi Arabia joining hands for a Nato-like pact, with Turkey looking to join it. Netanyahu positioned the initiative as both strategic and forward-looking. At the invitation of Netanyahu,

Modi will pay a State visit to Israel on February 25-26. This will be the second visit of the Prime Minister to Israel, according to India's Ministry of Foreign Affairs. During the visit, the two leaders are "expected to exchange perspectives on regional and global issues of mutual interest," India's Ministry of Foreign Affairs said in a statement released on Tuesday.

WHAT IS NETANYAHU'S HEXAGON OF ALLIANCES?

Speaking at a cabinet meeting on February 22, Netanyahu outlined the concept, according to the Israeli government's statement.

"In the vision I see before me, we will create an entire system, essentially a 'hexagon' of alliances around or within the Middle East," the Israeli

PM said. "This includes India, Arab nations, African nations, Mediterranean nations (Greece and Cyprus), and nations in Asia that I won't detail at the moment. I will present this in an organised manner," Netanyahu added. "The intention here is to create an axis of nations that see eye-to-eye on the reality, challenges, and goals against the radical axes, both the radical Shia axis, which we have struck very hard, and the emerging radical Sunni axis. All of these nations share a different perception, and our cooperation can yield great results and, of course, ensure our resilience and our future," Netanyahu said. The framework is designed to deepen cooperation in security, intelligence sharing and defence.



## Suicide bomber blows himself up next to police vehicle in Moscow, cop killed

The attack happened minutes after midnight near the Savyolovsky Train Station in the Russian capital's downtown, according to Moscow's branch of the Interior Ministry. It said the assailant approached a traffic police vehicle and detonated an explosive device, killing an officer on the spot and injuring two others, who were hospitalised. Russia's Investigative Committee said it has launched a probe into the attack. It didn't name the assailant or give any information about his possible motives or any further details. The attack came on the day marking the fourth anniversary of Russian President Vladimir Putin's decision to send troops into Ukraine.

An unidentified assailant detonated an explosive device next to a patrol vehicle in Moscow early Tuesday, killing himself and a police officer, and leaving two other officers injured, officials said. The attack happened minutes after midnight near the Savyolovsky Train Station in the Russian capital's

## US military boards 3rd oil tanker linked to Venezuela in Indian Ocean

Donald Trump's Republican administration has been seizing tankers as part of its broader efforts to take control of Venezuela's oil. The Pentagon's post did not state whether the Bertha was formally seized and placed under US control.



US military forces boarded a third sanctioned oil tanker in the Indian Ocean after tracking it from the Caribbean Sea in an effort to target illicit oil connected to Venezuela, the Pentagon said Tuesday. US Southern Command said in a post on X that US forces boarded the Bertha overnight, conducting "a right-of-visit, maritime interdiction and boarding." "The vessel was operating in defiance of President Trump's established quarantine of sanctioned vessels in the Caribbean and attempted to evade," the post said. "From the Caribbean to the Indi-

an Ocean, we tracked it and stopped it." Venezuela has faced US sanctions on its oil for several years, relying on a shadow fleet of falsely flagged tankers to smuggle crude into global supply chains. President Donald Trump ordered a quarantine of sanctioned tankers in December to pressure Venezuela's then-President Nicols Maduro before Maduro was apprehended in January during an American military operation. The Bertha is a vessel flagged to the Cook Islands and is under US sanctions related to Iran, according to the website of the

Treasury Department's Office of Foreign Assets Control. Video posted by the Pentagon shows US military helicopters flying toward the tanker. Trump's Republican administration has been seizing tankers as part of its broader efforts to take control of Venezuela's oil. The Pentagon's post did not state whether the Bertha was formally seized and placed under US control. Maduro was brought to the US to face charges of working with drug cartels to facilitate the shipment of thousands of tons of cocaine into the US and has pleaded not guilty.

## Kids among 13 killed in Pakistani airstrikes on Afghanistan: UNAMA

KABUL, FEB 24

At least 13 people, including women and children, were killed in Pakistan's airstrikes on Afghanistan's Nangarhar and Paktika, the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) said, local media reported on Tuesday. UNAMA stated that 13 people were killed and seven others were injured in Pakistan's airstrikes in Bahsud and Khogiani districts of Nangarhar on February 21-22 from 11:15 p.m. to 1:45 a.m., Afghanistan's leading news agency Khaama Press reported. A school and a mosque were hit in two attacks targeting Paktika's Barmal district, while a house was destroyed in Orgun district of Paktika. UNAMA condemned Pakistan's airstrikes and urged all parties to immediately stop hostilities and follow international humanitarian law so that civilians are not



harmed. It demanded transparent investigations and accountability and emphasised the need for protective measures for people in conflict-hit regions. Tensions have increased between Pakistan and Afghanistan in recent months. UNAMA has repeatedly stressed the need to protect people amid increasing airstrikes. On February 22, Afghanistan's Ministry of National Defence accused the Pakistani military regime of carrying out deadly airstrikes in various residential areas of the Nangarhar and Paktika provinces, resulting in the death of

several civilians. According to the Ministry, the strikes targeted a madrasa and multiple residential homes, killing and injuring "dozens of civilians", including women and children. The violation of Afghan airspace comes amid what Kabul describes as repeated acts of Pakistani aggression. Condemning the attack in the strongest possible terms, the Afghan Ministry called it a blatant violation of Afghanistan's national sovereignty and a clear breach of "international law, the principles of good neighbourliness, and Islamic values".

## Imran Khan Treated for Eye Issue

The jailed chief of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) was moved from Rawalpindi's Adiala Jail to Islamabad's Pakistan Institute of Medical Sciences (PIMS) in a 15-vehicle convoy of black cars accompanied by signal jammers and a heavy security escort.

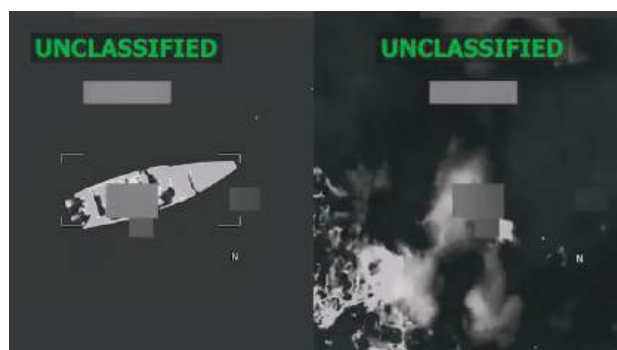


Amid escalating concerns over his health condition, Pakistan's former Prime Minister Imran Khan was moved from Rawalpindi's Adiala Jail to Islamabad's Pakistan Institute of Medical Sciences (PIMS) on Tuesday under extraordinary security for follow-up treatment on his deteriorating eyesight, officials said. The jailed chief of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) was moved in a 15-vehicle convoy of black cars accompanied by signal jammers and a heavy security escort.

At PIMS, doctors administered a second intravitreal anti-VEGF injection — a specialised therapy used to treat retinal disease and preserve vision. A medical board including cardiology and internal-medicine specialists first assessed Khan and declared him clinically stable, with normal cardiac tests, before the ophthalmic procedure was carried out as day-care surgery by retinal surgeons from PIMS and Al-Shifa Eye Hospital, according to an official hospital statement. He remained stable throughout and was returned to Adiala Jail after the procedure with follow-up instructions, the hospital said. Khan's deteriorating health has become a flashpoint in Pakistan's already volatile political climate. Earlier this month, his son Kasim Khan alleged that prolonged solitary confinement and medical neglect had left the 1992 World Cup-winning former Pakistan captain nearly blind in his right eye, saying his father had "lost most of the vision," with reports indicating only about 15 per cent eyesight remains.

## US military strike in Caribbean kills 3, anti-drug death toll rises to 151

The attack brought the death toll to at least 151 people since the Trump administration began targeting those it calls 'narcoterrorists' in small vessels in early September.



The US military said it killed three people Monday in a strike on an alleged drug-smuggling vessel in the Caribbean Sea as part of the Trump administration's months-long campaign against alleged traffickers.

Monday's attack brought the death toll to at least 151 people since the Trump administration began targeting those it calls "narcoterrorists" in small vessels in early September. As with most of the military's statements on the more than 40 known

strikes, US Southern Command said it targeted alleged drug traffickers along known smuggling routes. The military did not provide evidence that the vessel was ferrying drugs but posted a video on X that showed a small boat with outboard engines being destroyed. "Intelligence confirmed the vessel was transiting along known narco-trafficking routes in the

Caribbean and was engaged in narco-trafficking operations," Southern Command stated in a post on X. "Three male narco-terrorists were killed during this action."

President Donald Trump has said the US is in "armed conflict" with cartels in Latin America and has justified the attacks as a necessary escalation to stem the flow of drugs into the United States. But his

administration has offered little evidence to support its claims of killing "narcoterrorists."

Critics have questioned the overall legality of the strikes as well as their effectiveness, in part because the fentanyl behind many fatal overdoses is typically trafficked to the US over land from Mexico, where it is produced with chemicals imported from China and India. The boat strikes also drew intense criticism following the revelation that the military killed survivors of the very first boat attack with a follow-up strike. The Trump administration and many Republican lawmakers said it was legal and necessary, while Democratic lawmakers and legal experts said the killings were murder, if not a war crime.

## Unchecked Abuse Hurts Pakistan's Policing: Report

ISLAMABAD, FEB 24

Citing a new report by the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP) which reveals that the Punjab province's Crime Control Department (CCD) might be more violent than any other specialised squads in the country, a report has stated that policing in Pakistan cannot improve if contempt for human life goes unpunished. The CCD's first year of operations saw at least 670 encounters that claimed lives of 924 suspects between April-December 2025. During the same period, only two police personnel were killed. "While a disproportionate ratio may suggest the police force is highly trained and professional, the astounding difference here implies something else is at play. The government has no valid counterpoint to

the HRCP's call for an independent judicial inquiry," an editorial in leading Pakistani daily 'The Express Tribune' mentioned. More than two encounters occurred on an average per day, with heavy concentration in districts like Lahore and Faisalabad. The official statements about these killings stated that suspects opened fire, police conducted "retaliatory" fire, suspects were fatally injured. Civilian witnesses were not found, although some of the encounters occurred in busy areas. "Policing in Pakistan cannot improve if such contempt for human life goes unpunished. Encounters are flat-out illegal under Pakistani and international law. Yet, despite decades of embarrassing revelations, federal and provincial governments continue to do little more than pay lip service to the issue.

# President Accuses Muhammad Yunus of House Arrest

Bangladesh President Mohammed Shahabuddin told newspaper Kaler Kontho that he was virtually kept under house arrest by the regime of Muhammad Yunus for 18 months. He was neither allowed to venture out for the traditional Eid namaz nor for his treatment after bypass surgery in Singapore. This is a damning indictment of Yunus for the way the head of state was treated.

Shahabuddin said that he was virtually under house arrest for 18 months, and denied travel rights even for health reasons. In an exclusive interview with Bangladeshi newspaper Kaler Kontho, Shahabuddin said that the restrictions on his travel disrupted the Eid traditions followed by the president since the liberation of the country. "It was as if I was under house arrest in this palace," said Shahabuddin, referring to Bangabhaban, the official residence of the president. On Tuesday, Kaler Kontho published the second part of its exclusive interview with Bangladesh President Sha-

habuddin. In the first part, Shahabuddin described the unconstitutional actions of Yunus, including the plot to remove him, and keeping him in the dark on the US trade deal. "The President participates in the holy Eid-ul-Fitr and Eid-ul-Azha prayers at the National Eidgah Maidan, this tradition has been going on since the country's independence. But Dr Yunus's government has put obstacles in that tradition," Shahabuddin told Kaler Kontho. He said he wasn't allowed to go to the National Eidgah Maidan to participate in the two Eid prayers. "I was clearly informed through the security department that you



will not go to the National Eidgah to participate in the Eid prayers," he added. Shahabuddin complained that while Chief Adviser Yunus, as the de facto prime minister, made 14 foreign trips, he wasn't allowed to

travel abroad even for health reasons. "I had a bypass surgery at the National University Hospital of Singapore. A year after the surgery, I had a follow-up appointment at the hospital there. I wrote to the Ministry of Foreign

Affairs to go to Singapore for treatment. In response, I was directly prohibited," said Shahabuddin.

"They said, if necessary, they will arrange to bring a doctor from abroad," he said. He mentioned the same thing was repeated when he had an appointment at Cambridge Parkway Hospital in London but was not allowed to go.

Shahabuddin felt so "sidelined" during Yunus's rule that he told Reuters in an interview in December 2025 that he had no intention of continuing as the president. In this interview, he said that was because he was feeling

stifled, but was now "relaxed" as an elected government had been sworn in.

He stated that his remarks to Reuters were being misinterpreted, and were made from a position of resentment brought about by "the mental pressure and humiliation" the regime inflicted on him. He further clarified that he had no intention of stepping down until his term ends in 2028, and would only resign voluntarily now if the BNP government wanted him to do so.

Describing the way he had been treated by the interim regime, Shahabuddin contented that it was because the regime wanted him to

step down so they could take over the Presidency.

In the interview he stated, "Their main objective was to break me mentally so that I would resign voluntarily, allowing them to unconstitutionally install someone of their choice and delay elections or cling to power. With a President of their choosing, they believed they could do whatever they wanted—this mindset drove the mental harassment inflicted on me."

Muhammad Yunus took over as the chief adviser of the interim regime in Bangladesh on August 8, 2024, after a violent agitation toppled the regime of then prime minister Sheikh Hasina.

## PM Modi highlights success of AI Impact Summit 2026

NEW DELHI, FEB 24

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Tuesday highlighted that, at the AI Impact Summit held in Delhi, India drew inspiration from its own civilisational impulse in putting forward its organising ideas: sovereignty over data, inclusion by design, and accountability by default.

PM Modi was referring to an article on X, written by Union Minister Hardeep Singh Puri on the achievements at the AI Impact Summit 2026, which was attended by over 20 heads of state, more than 500 AI leaders from over 100 countries, and was the largest conference of its kind ever held in the Global South.

The minister wrote that under Prime Minister Modi's leadership, the first Global South nation to host the global AI summit series did not



merely convene a conversation, but laid out the terms on which it intends to compete: A Delhi Declaration that rewrites the rules of AI governance, digital infrastructure

processing nearly half the world's real-time payments, investment commitments in the hundreds of billions, sovereign models built from scratch, and entry into the

supply chain security architecture of the AI age.

Puri highlighted the PM's MANAV vision: Ethical guardrails, accountable governance, sovereignty over data so that the raw material of intelligence is not extracted the way commodities once were, broad access so that benefits reach a farmer in Madhya Pradesh as surely as an engineer in Bengaluru, and legal validity so that every deployed system is subjected to democratic scrutiny.

The minister further stated that PM Modi's formulation about giving AI an open sky while keeping command in human hands draws a line that many advanced economies have been reluctant to draw.

Those principles now carry multilateral weight through the Delhi Declaration, adopted at the summit and already

being called the first major AI governance blueprint from the Global South; taking a development-oriented view, anchored in a techno-legal approach that favours flexible guardrails over rigid compliance. It organises global collaboration around three pillars: People, planet, and progress.

Population-scale solutions like BharatGen, which supports 22 Indian languages, acknowledge that most of the world does not operate in English.

A proposed global compute bank, modelled on India's subsidised GPU access at Rs 65 per hour, lowers entry barriers everywhere. The insistence on data sovereignty challenges AI extractivism: The pattern in which developing nations' data is harvested to train models they must then pay to use, Puri added.

## Ease of Doing Business 2.0 soon:Sridhar Babu

HYDERABAD, FEB 24

Telangana will soon roll out Ease of Doing Business 2.0 as part of its strategy to position the State as a preferred global investment destination, IT and Industries Minister D. Sridhar Babu said on Tuesday. The Minister was speaking after inaugurating the Growth X 2026 conference organised by the Federation of Telangana Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FTCCI) at JRC Convention Centre, Jubilee Hills. Mr. Sridhar Babu said the proposed policy would be developed through stakeholder consultations with the objective of accelerating industrial growth, strengthening investor confidence, and providing greater assurance to investors. Emphasising that growth must be planned and not accidental, he said the government had prepared Telangana Vision 2047 to guide long-term economic expansion.

The State, currently a \$200-billion economy, aims to grow to \$1 trillion by 2034 and \$3 trillion by 2047, he



reiterated. To achieve these goals and ensure balanced regional development, the government has adopted a three-pronged strategy — "CURE, PURE and RARE". He stated that the government's agenda is to bring every region — from urban centres to rural areas — onto the growth path. Highlighting structural shifts in the economy, the Minister said technologies such as artificial intelligence and Industry 5.0 are reshaping work culture and business models, and that future competitiveness would depend on strong ecosystems rather than individual companies.

He said the State was committed to building the future proactively rather than waiting for it to unfold.

He added that the State government seeks to function not merely as a regulatory authority granting approvals, but as a collaborative partner working alongside industry, and invited entrepreneurs to work closely with the government.

Among those present were BJP State president Ramchander Rao, Dr. D. Nageshwar Reddy, FTCCI representative R. Ravi Kumar, representatives of Skyrout Aerospace, and Growth X 2026 convener Pankaj Diwan, among others.

## AMD, Meta sign multi-year deal to power next-gen AI infrastructure with 6 gigawatts of GPUs

NEW DELHI, FEB 24

US chipmaker AMD and social media giant Meta on Tuesday announced a major multi-year partnership to build the next generation of artificial intelligence (AI) infrastructure.

Under the agreement, AMD will deploy up to 6 gigawatts of its AMD Instinct GPUs to support Meta's expanding AI operations. The companies said the deal strengthens their existing strategic partnership and aligns their roadmaps across silicon, systems and software.

The aim is to deliver AI platforms specifically designed for Meta's large-scale workloads. The first phase of deployment will use a custom AMD Instinct GPU based on the MI450 architecture. Shipments for the initial one-gigawatt deployment are expected to begin in the second half of 2026. The systems will also include 6th Generation AMD EPYC CPUs, codenamed "Venice," and will run on



AMD's ROCm software platform.

The infrastructure will be built on the AMD Helios rack-scale architecture, which was jointly developed by AMD and Meta through the Open Compute Project to support scalable AI infrastructure. Dr. Lisa Su, Chair and CEO of AMD, said the collaboration will help deliver high-performance and energy-efficient infrastructure tailored to Meta's needs. Meta founder and CEO Mark Zuckerberg said the long-term partnership with AMD will help the compa-

ny deploy more efficient AI compute systems and diversify its computing infrastructure. He added that AMD is expected to remain a key partner for years to come as Meta continues to invest heavily in AI. In addition to GPUs, the two companies are expanding their partnership around AMD EPYC processors.

Meta has already deployed millions of EPYC CPUs and significant volumes of AMD Instinct MI300 and MI350 series GPUs across its global data centres. As AI systems grow in

complexity, CPUs play a crucial role in managing workloads alongside GPUs. Meta will be a lead customer for AMD's upcoming 6th Gen EPYC processors, including "Venice" and "Verano," which are designed to deliver strong performance while improving cost and energy efficiency.

As part of the agreement, AMD has issued Meta a performance-based warrant for up to 160 million shares of AMD common stock. The shares will vest in stages as shipment milestones are met, beginning with the first one-gigawatt deployment and increasing as purchases scale to six gigawatts.

The vesting is also linked to stock price targets and specific technical and commercial milestones. Jean Hu, AMD's Executive Vice President and Chief Financial Officer, said the partnership is expected to drive significant multi-year revenue growth and strengthen the company's long-term financial performance.

## India's Economy Likely Grew 8.1% in Q3: State Bank of India



NEW DELHI, FEB 24

Country's economy is estimated to have grown by 8.1 per cent in the third quarter of the current financial year. This has been stated in a research report released today by State Bank of India. According to the report, high-frequency indicators suggest that economic activity remained resilient in the quarter ended 31st December 2025. It noted that the economy has sustained strong growth momentum despite

global headwinds.

The report said rural consumption continues to remain robust, backed by encouraging trends in both farm and non-farm sectors. It also observed that urban consumption has recorded a steady uptick since the last festive season, supported by fiscal stimulus. The assessment comes at a time when India is set to revise its GDP base year from 2011-12 to 2022-23. The new GDP series is scheduled to be released on 27th February 2026.

## SC Questions Arbitrary EV Charger NOCs

NEW DELHI, FEB 24

The Supreme Court on Tuesday agreed to examine a public interest litigation (PIL) seeking effective implementation of the Centre's electric vehicle (EV) charging infrastructure guidelines and to prevent arbitrary denial of NOCs by housing societies.

Issuing notice on a plea filed by a Greater Noida-based resident, a bench of Chief Justice of India (CJI) Surya Kant and Justice Joydip Bagchi sought responses from the Union of India, the State of Uttar Pradesh, the Nirala Estate housing society in Greater Noida, and its property management agency Cushman & Wakefield Property Management Services India Pvt Ltd.

The petition has been filed under Article 32 of the Constitution by Rachit Katyal, who contended that despite clear Central government guidelines promoting EV adoption, housing societies continue to obstruct the installation of private charging infrastructure.

According to the plea, the petitioner is the owner and resident of a flat in Greater Noida (West) Nirala Estate Phase-3 and had purchased an electric vehicle in furtherance of "the increasing need for sustainable and eco-friendly transportation and national EV policies".

## Sensex & Nifty plunge around 1.2% today

MUMBAI, FEB 24

Benchmark domestic equity indices, the Sensex and the Nifty, plunged around 1.2 per cent today as IT stocks extended their rout amid persistent concerns over artificial intelligence-led disruptions. The Sensex tumbled 1 thousand and 69 points to close at 82 thousand 226, while the Nifty slipped 288 points to settle at 25 thousand 425. Earlier, the markets opened under selling pressure, tracking sharp declines in the US markets. The sell-off intensified in the afternoon trade, led by a fall in technology shares and volatility amid the monthly expiry of Futures and Options contracts of Nifty.



In the Sensex pack, 22 out of 30 companies registered a downward move. Among the top laggards, Tech Mahindra sank 6.6 per cent, HCL Tech slipped 6.1 per cent, and Eternal dropped nearly 5.3 per cent. Among the top performers, NTPC surged over 1.9 per cent, HUL gained 0.9 per cent, and Tata Steel rose over half a

per cent. Among the sectoral indices at BSE, 12 out of 24 sectors logged losses except Consumer Durables, which remained unchanged. The technology pack was the epicentre of the massive fall, with the focused IT tumbling 4.8 per cent and IT declining over four and a half per cent, emerging as the worst-performing sectoral gauge. Meanwhile, Realty dropped 2.6 per cent. Among the top gainers, Power jumped over one per cent, Metal rose one per cent, and Utilities climbed 0.9 per cent.

The overall market breadth at the BSE was negative, as shares of 2 thousand and 802 companies declined, 1 thousand and 422 advanced, and 143 remained unchanged.

## True benefit of AI to come only when it is multilingual: Amitabh Kant

NEW DELHI, FEB 24

Former NITI Aayog CEO Amitabh Kant on Tuesday said that the true benefit of artificial intelligence (AI) will come only when it is multilingual, capable of understanding and communicating in many languages, including local and international ones. Speaking to the media on the sidelines of the launch of his book, titled "Smarter Than the Storm", the former G20 Sherpa said that in the future, India aims to be at the forefront of emerging technologies. A

key focus of the book is the role of artificial intelligence and emerging technologies in shaping future-ready economies and governance systems. "What is essential now is to make this (AI) compatible with renewable energy or modular systems, including solar, wind and clean energy. Secondly, optimisation is necessary. With proper guidance on software, it can be made efficient," Kant noted.

Co-author Siddharth Sinha said that the Government of India, through the IndiaAI mission, is democ-

rating access to computing and data sets. The recently concluded 'India AI Impact Summit' has also brought the country onto the global AI map.

"Because the innovation that's going to transform and answer your queries insofar as how we solve for social sectors is concerned, that's going to come from the grassroots level," he said at the book launch event. Sinha further stated that you can use AI to do everything, from predicting floods and wildfires to making data centres even more

efficient, and even tracking wildfires.

"But at the same time, AI has its own sort of imprint in terms of the energy that it consumes," he mentioned. The book offers a forward-looking blueprint for decision-makers operating in an increasingly unpredictable global order. It brings together insights on climate action, AI-led innovation, governance reform, and economic strategy, positioning the book as essential reading for business leaders, policymakers, entrepreneurs, and change-makers.

## Union Cabinet Raises Equity Limit for Powergrid to ₹7,500 Crore Per Subsidiary

NEW DELHI, FEB 24

The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs (CCEA) has raised the equity limit of each subsidiary of Powergrid from Rs 5,000 crore to Rs 7,000 crore under the extant Maharashtra CPSE guidelines.

The Union Minister for Transport and Roadways, Nitin Gadkari, noted that this move would allow the Power Grid Corporation of India Ltd. to participate more effectively in "capital-intensive transmission projects, including Ultra High Voltage Alternating Current (UHVAC) and High Voltage Direct Current (HVDC) networks."

With this enhanced threshold, Powergrid will be able to participate more effectively



in capital-intensive transmission projects, including Ultra High Voltage Alternating Current (UHVAC) and High Voltage Direct Current (HVDC) networks.

The decision is also expected to enhance competition under the Tariff Based Competitive Bidding (TBCB) framework, enabling faster development of critical trans-

mission infrastructure and supporting India's growing power demand and renewable energy integration.

In his latest tweet, Gadkari penned, "With this enhanced threshold, POWERGRID will be able to participate more effectively in capital-intensive transmission projects, including Ultra High Voltage Alternating Current (UHVAC) and

High Voltage Direct Current (HVDC) networks." "The decision will also strengthen competition under the Tariff Based Competitive Bidding (TBCB) framework, enabling faster development of critical transmission infrastructure and supporting India's growing power demand and renewable energy integration," he said. The approval will enable Powergrid, the largest and most experienced transmission service provider in the country, to expand its investment in its core business and support the evacuation of renewable energy capacity, helping achieve the target of 500 GW from non-fossil-based sources, according to CCEA.

## IDFC First Bank Fraud: 556 Cr Recovered

NEW DELHI, FEB 24

Haryana Chief Minister Nayab Singh Saini on Tuesday told the state assembly that the government has succeeded in recovering nearly Rs 556 crore linked to the IDFC First Bank fraud case. Addressing the House, Saini said that about Rs 556 crore - which includes roughly Rs 22 crore as interest - was returned within a span of 24 hours. Earlier on Sunday, IDFC First Bank had reported a fraud of Rs 590 crore carried out by certain employees along with other individuals in accounts associated with the Haryana government. Saini assured the Assembly that all funds belonging to Haryana government departments had been



fully restored, according to a PTI report. He said that the entire sum had been credited back to the government's accounts and that the recovery process was completed within 24 hours.

What is the IDFC First Bank fraud case?

The suspected irregularity surfaced after entities connected to the Haryana government detected discrepancies between the actual balances held in bank

accounts and the figures recorded in official statements. IDFC First Bank disclosed that employees at its Chandigarh branch carried out unauthorised dealings in accounts linked to the Haryana government, leading to a mismatch in deposits estimated at nearly ₹590 crore. The amount involved exceeds the bank's third-quarter net profit of ₹503 crore. Also Read | What is the IDFC First Bank Rs 590 crore fraud case? Explained in 10 points On Monday, IDFC First Bank Managing Director and Chief Executive V. Vaidyanathan said the Rs 590-crore fraud involving Haryana government accounts occurred due to collusion between bank employees and outside parties. Speaking during a special conference call with

investors and analysts ahead of the equity market opening, Vaidyanathan said that the bank would set aside provisions in connection with the fraud. Saini has said that the bank had informed the government that the fraud was mainly linked to a specific branch in Chandigarh, where four to five mid-level and junior employees were allegedly involved in the conspiracy. Saini added that strict action would be taken against all those found responsible, whether they are bank staff, private persons, or government officials, emphasizing that no one implicated in the case would be let off. A day earlier, on Monday, Saini had announced that the state's Anti-Corruption Bureau would carry out a detailed investigation into the matter.

# MAHARASHTRA'S 35,000-TONNE STRAWBERRY BOOM

On winter mornings in western Maharashtra, strawberry fields glow under a soft veil of mist. Neat rows of low green plants stretch across red soil, dotted with bright berries that seem to hold tiny drops of sunshine. The air carries a faint sweetness, and the hills feel almost storybook-like. In the misty hamlet of Bhilarwadi near Panchgani, Anjana Dewasthale's friend Shashikant Bhilare grows strawberries. Years ago, Anjana joined him for a "pick-your-own" experience, plucking bright red berries straight from the plants. Because his farm follows strict export standards, she did not have to worry about chemicals. She brought home a small sapling from that trip. To her surprise, it later bore fruit in the window garden of her apartment in Thane — a little piece of the hills thriving in the city. If you live in Pune, Thane, or Mumbai, you have probably heard similar stories. Strawberries — a low-growing plant from the *Fragaria* genus in the rose family — have become a favourite among urban gardeners, loved for their sweet, juicy fruit.

## Mahabaleshwar's dominance

The Mahabaleshwar-Panchgani belt produces more than 85% of India's strawberries. From November to early March, the region transforms into a strawberry carnival: roads lined with billboards, roadside stalls offering blush-pink ice cream, milkshakes, jams, syrups, and the classic strawberries with fresh cream. On these gentle slopes, strawberries ripen under skies that rarely allow heavy rain. Dry air and steady warmth — between 18–25°C — create the perfect cradle for sweetness. Beneath them lies iron-rich red soil, nourishing each plant with quiet strength. Most farms are no larger than an acre, yet brim with care. Crop rotation keeps the soil healthy, ensuring each harvest carries the luscious flavour for which Mahabaleshwar is famed.

## Anatomy of a strawberry

On cool hillside slopes, plants spread their green leaves — three to a cluster, each finely serrated. Small white flowers bloom on thin stalks, heralding fruit. Runners creep across the soil, rooting new plants. Soon, berries emerge: petite jewels, 2–5 cm long, soft and juicy, with a sweet-tart taste and a fragrance that lingers. Their colours range from ruby red to pale pink or even white. Once picked, they hold their freshness only briefly — a delicate gift from nature.

## A revolution in the fields

Strawberry farming in India changed forever in 1992, when Balasaheb

Bhilare of Bhilar village imported Chandler seedlings from California. His experiment transformed Bhilar into the heart of cultivation. In 2010, Mahabaleshwar strawberries earned the Geographical Indication tag, a stamp of authenticity. By the time Bhilare passed away in 2021, his legacy had spread across 4,000 hectares, with over 5,000 families producing 35,000 tonnes annually.

## Beyond Mahabaleshwar

In recent years, strawberry cultivation has expanded to Nashik, with Bargaon Ghatmatha in Surgana taluka emerging as a key hub. This tribal belt is known for varieties such as Selva Rani, Nabila, and Sweet Charlie. Other cultivation pockets include Nagsheva-di, Ghodambe, Pohali, Sarad, Chikhali, Shinde, Hatgad, and Ghagbaari. In 2016, the Rotary Club of Nashik hosted the city's first Strawberry Festival, though the event was discontinued after the Covid pandemic.

## Markets and traders

"While Mahabaleshwar strawberries take around two hours to reach Pune, those from Nashik take five to six hours, depending on road conditions," says Jaisaram Manumal, a trader at Pune's Gul Tekdi Market Yard. Manumal, who has traded strawberries for three decades, adds: "During peak season — early February to mid-March — Pune's wholesale market receives 6,000 to 7,000 kg daily from Mahabaleshwar and Nashik. I sell about 3,000 kg myself."

## Grower profile: Manohar Bhilare

Among the many suppliers to Pune's market is Manohar Bhilare from Avakali village, a

### VARIETIES AND SUPPLIERS

Unlike mangoes, strawberry varieties are less familiar to most consumers, even though Maharashtra cultivates 13 different types.

Grown in Mahabaleshwar:

- R1
- Nanja
- Sensation
- Sweet Sensation
- Nebula
- Melissa
- Parthenon
- Winter Dawn (California)
- Camarosa (California)
- Nabila (Italy)
- Elide (Italy)
- Muranno (Spain)
- UF/IFAS strains (Egypt)

Suppliers such as SB Agritech, Hill Top Farms, Paramhans Agro Sciences, and Mauli Strawberry Farm provide planting material. SB Agritech, the leading importer since 1998, guides cultivation across 300+ hectares. Each year, nurseries in Wai propagate around 20 million seedlings, harvested as runners by September and replanted post-monsoon. Ask any grower about strawberry varieties and they will put it simply: "Strawberries really fall into just two taste groups — sweet and tangy. The sweet ones include Nebula, R1, and Melissa. Winter Blow and Parthenon carry a mix of sweetness with a sharp edge. Of these, Parthenon is the toughest variety, which is why it is shipped to cities such as Bengaluru, Hyderabad, Chennai, and Kolkata." From an acre of land, farmers typically earn between Rs 10 and 12 lakhs. Each acre holds about 25,000 plants, with saplings priced at Rs 10 to Rs 12 each. That means the initial planting costs hover around Rs 2.5 lakhs. Once you add irrigation, mulching, fertilisers, and labour, the investment climbs by another Rs 1.5 lakh.

fourth-generation farmer who pioneered direct marketing in the 1990s. In 2012, he and his son Nilesh — a Food Science graduate — expanded into processing. Today, their enterprise produces IQF fruits, pulps, crushes, fillings, and toppings from strawberries, raspberries, blueberries, mangoes, guavas, and more. Working with over 2,000 growers across 30,000 acres, the Bhilare family supplies more than 20 tonnes daily to dairy and bakery processors, supported by automated plants and cold storage facilities near Mapro Garden. Manohar shares: "Our family cultivates two acres of strawberries. This year, the monsoon arrived late, so planting was delayed. But cooler weather lasted longer, which improved both quality and yield. Prices have remained steady at Rs 250–300 per kilogram. We earn between Rs 10 to Rs 12 lakhs per acre."

## Consumer delight

For Pune resident Nawaz Vijaykumar, strawberries are a family favourite: "We absolutely love



take in sweeping valley views. Popular spots include Laxmi Strawberry Farm in Avakali, Bhilar village farms, Green Valley Farm near Club Mahindra Sherwood Resort, and the iconic Mapro Garden along the Panchgani-Mahabaleshwar Road. And perhaps that is the true charm of the strawberry story in Maharashtra. It begins on mist-covered slopes in Bhilarwadi and Mahabaleshwar, where hands tend low green plants under winter skies. But it does not end there. It travels — in crates to city markets, in chilled trucks to distant states, and sometimes, in the form of a single sapling carried home after a weekend visit. Like the one that fruited in Anjana Dewasthale's window garden in Thane, it carries with it the scent of red soil and cool hill air. From hillside farms to urban balconies, strawberries continue to bridge landscapes and lives — a small, bright reminder that even the most delicate fruit can root itself far beyond where it was first grown.

# HOW INDIAN FARMERS ARE GIVING PULSE FARMING A MODERN UPGRADE

Across India, farmers are finding new ways to successfully grow pulses. With timely irrigation, improved seeds, and smarter farming practices, they are improving yields and supporting food security for communities across the country. Pulses such as chickpeas, lentils and various beans play an important role in guaranteeing nutritional security while also contributing to soil health through biological nitrogen fixation. Despite their relevance, pulse crops have historically shown lower productivity compared to cereals. This has largely been due to their cultivation under rain-dependent conditions, limited use of quality inputs, and reliance on traditional farming practices. In recent years, the increasing availability of irrigation facilities, along with the adoption of modern farming techniques, has helped overcome many of these constraints. Together, these factors have contributed to more stable yields and improved productivity in pulse cultivation.

Role of irrigation in strengthening pulse productivity and importance of a timely water supply. Although pulses are generally considered drought-tolerant, they require adequate soil moisture at critical stages of growth to achieve optimum yields. Flowering and pod formation are particularly sensitive phases. Moisture stress during these stages often leads to flower drop, poor pod setting and reduced grain filling, ultimately lowering yields. Irrigation helps address this issue by guaranteeing a timely and controlled supply of water when crops need it most.

## Supplementary and protective irrigation

Supplementary irrigation during dry spells plays a valuable role in stabilising pulse production. Even one or two protective irrigations at critical growth stages can considerably reduce yield losses. Assured access to water also allows better planning of sowing operations and encourages farmers to invest in improved crop management practices without the constant risk of crop failure.



## Efficient irrigation methods

Modern irrigation techniques, particularly drip irrigation, have further improved water use efficiency in pulse cultivation. By delivering water directly to the root zone, drip systems minimise evaporation and runoff losses. When irrigation is combined with fertigation, nutrients are supplied along with water, improving nutrient availability and uptake. This results in better crop growth, higher yields and reduced input wastage.

## CONTRIBUTION OF MODERN FARMING TECHNIQUES

**1. Use of improved varieties**  
The adoption of improved, high-yielding pulse varieties has been a key factor in increasing productivity. These varieties are typically short-duration, tolerant to moisture stress and resistant to major pests and diseases. Their improved genetic potential allows them to perform better under both irrigated and limited-moisture conditions, making them suitable for diverse farming situations.

## 2. Balanced nutrient management

Proper nutrient management is essential for realising the yield potential of pulse crops. Balanced application of fertilisers, especially phosphorus, supports root development and effective nodulation. Strong nodulation improves the natural nitrogen-fixing capacity of pulses, reducing dependence on external nitrogen inputs while improving soil fertility.

## 3. Precision and conservation agriculture practices

Precision and conservation-based practices have improved the efficient use of land, water and nutrients. Techniques such as raised-bed planting, mulching and timely irrigation scheduling help conserve soil moisture and maintain favourable soil structure. These practices support better crop growth and increase resilience during periods of water stress.

## 4. Cropping systems and diversification

Inclusion of pulses in crop rotations, intercrop-



ping, and mixed farming systems improves land-use efficiency and soil health. Pulses enrich the soil through nitrogen fixation, benefiting subsequent crops and reducing fertiliser requirements. Such systems contribute to long-term sustainability while also improving overall farm productivity.

## 5. Use of digital and advisory tools

The gradual adoption of digital tools and farm advisory services has added a modern dimension to pulse cultivation. Soil moisture sensors, weather-based advisories and decision-support systems help farmers make informed choices regarding irrigation timing, fertiliser application and pest management. These tools reduce unnecessary input use while improving economic returns.

- Practices farmers can follow to improve pulse productivity
- Provide protective irrigation at critical stages such as flowering and pod formation.
- Adopt efficient irrigation methods, such as drip irrigation, where feasible.

- Use certified, high-yielding and stress-tolerant pulse varieties.
- Apply fertilisers in a balanced manner, with special attention to phosphorus.
- Practise soil and water conservation methods such as mulching and raised beds.
- Integrate pulses into crop rotations and intercropping systems.
- Make use of weather forecasts and advisory services for timely farm operations.

The combined adoption of irrigation and modern farming techniques has brought about a noticeable improvement in pulse productivity. Irrigation reduces dependence on uncertain rainfall and protects crops during sensitive growth stages, while improved varieties, balanced nutrient management and precision farming practices enrich yield potential.

Together, these measures have strengthened the sustainability and resilience of pulse cultivation, confirming that pulses continue to play an important role in food security and soil health.





# England becomes first team to enter semis

KANDY (SRI LANKA)

Two-time former champions England became the first team to reach the semifinals of the ICC Men's T20 World Cup after captain Harry Brook scored a historic century, beating Pakistan by two wickets in a Super 8 stage match at the Pallekele International Cricket Stadium in Kandy on Tuesday.

Brook made history by becoming the first captain to score a hundred in a men's T20 World Cup match. His impressive 100 off 51 balls included 10 fours and four sixes, helping England chase down Pakistan's total of 164 for 9 with little time to spare.

He reached the 50-ball milestone with a boundary off Shaheen Shah Afridi. Brook is only the third England batter to achieve a T20 World Cup century, following Alex Hales and Jos Buttler. Additionally, this was the first century by an England captain in men's T20Is, breaking the previous highest score by a skipper in a T20 World Cup, which was 98 by Chris Gayle in 2010.

While chasing 165, England struggled at times, but Brook counterattacked to take charge. Sam Curran (16) and Will Jacks (28) provided valuable support, but it was the captain who led the way, overpowering Pakistan's bowlers with bold shots.

Earlier, Liam Dawson starred with the ball, taking 3 wickets for 24 runs to limit Pakistan despite a flat batting pitch. Jamie Overton (2 for 26) and Jofra Archer (2 for 32) also contributed significantly after Pakistan chose to bat. Sahibzada Farhan was the top scorer with a solid 63 off 45 balls, partnering with Babar Azam (25) for a 46-run stand. However, they lost wickets regularly, which stopped Pakistan from fully capitalising. Fakhar Zaman added 25 off 16, while Shadab Khan finished not out on 23.

Having defeated Sri Lanka in their first Super Eight match and with Pakistan's game against New Zealand being washed out, England's latest victory ensured they became the first team to secure a spot in the last four of the 2026 tournament.



## 'We've come here to do the job, and we got it done,' says Brook

PALLEKELE

England captain Harry Brook said his side arrived with a clear mission and executed it to perfection after becoming the first team to reach the semifinals of the ICC Men's T20 World Cup 2026, edging Pakistan by two wickets in a thriller at the Pallekele International Cricket Stadium in Kandy on Tuesday.

"We've come here to do that job, and we got it done," Brook said after the Super 8 stage match. Brook led from the front with a historic 100 off 51 balls, smashing 10 fours and four sixes in a commanding knock that anchored England's chase of 165.

In doing so, he became the first captain to score a century in a men's T20 World Cup and only the third England

batter to register a hundred in the tournament after Alex Hales and Jos Buttler. His ton also marked the first century by an England captain in men's T20Is.

Explaining his promotion to No. 3, Brook credited head coach Brendon McCullum. "Baz, the mastermind behind it. He came up in the morning and spoke with me. We wanted to try and maximise the Power-play a little more. They know I like to take the game on. Thankfully, it came off, and we got a decent start."

Brook admitted the idea had been on his mind. "I'd been thinking about it for a while." He also revealed a light-hearted exchange with McCullum before the game: "Baz said that this morning - 'what do you think about No. 3? Pakistan is your team.'"

Earlier in the evening, England's bowlers set the tone. Pakistan chose to bat but managed only 164 for 9. Sahibzada Farhan scored a solid 63, with useful contributions from Babar Azam (25), Fakhar Zaman (25), and Shadab Khan (23 not out).

Liam Dawson stood out with 3 for 24, while Jamie Overton (2 for 26) and Jofra Archer (2 for 32) kept control of the scoring.

Brook highlighted the importance of early breakthroughs. "Important in any game of T20 cricket to get off to a good start, and Jofra's been able to do that. Puts them on the back foot early."

The chase was anything but simple. England struggled at times, even with support from Will Jacks (28) and Sam Curran (16). However,

Brook's counterattack helped stabilise the innings. The finish became tense, reminding everyone of past disappointments.

"Always nice to just win a game of cricket. A bit nervous at the end. I was about to say to Baz, 'Hopefully this isn't another Oval (vs India)'," he admitted. On whether the batting order would remain the same going forward, Brook remained measured. "That's something for me and Baz to have a chat about. I don't think much will change, but you never know."

With a Super Eight win over Sri Lanka already in the bag, and Pakistan's clash against New Zealand washed out, England's victory confirmed them as the first semi-finalists of the 2026 tournament.

# FIH Pro League: India go down 3-4 in shootout after 1-1 draw against Spain

HOBART

India went down fighting 3-4 in a shootout against Spain following a tense 1-1 draw in regulation time during the Hobart leg of the FIH Men's Pro League 2025-26. Despite holding a 1-0 advantage until the 59th minute, courtesy of a brilliant strike from Maninder Singh, a late equaliser from Spain's Bruno Font forced the shootout.

Spain started strongly, controlling early possession and testing the Indian defence. They won their first penalty corner in the 4th minute, but the drag-flick was comfortably saved by Indian goalkeeper Mohith. Spain thought they had taken the lead in the 8th minute, but Jose Basterra's goal was disallowed. Shrugging off the pressure, India earned a penalty corner in the 14th minute, but Amit Rohidas's drag-flick was denied by Spanish goalkeeper Luis Calzado, keeping the first quarter goalless.

The breakthrough arrived in the 19th minute. Skipper Hardik Singh dispossessed a Spanish player, turned brilliantly, and set up Maninder, who smashed a tomahawk into the net to give India a 1-0 lead. Spain immediately re-



sponded by winning a penalty corner, but Pepe Cunill's shot was saved by Suraj Karkera. Karkera pulled off another stunning save moments later to deny Basterra. India's Abhishek also came close after a superb dribble, but India held their slender 1-0 lead at half-time.

In the third quarter, Spain pressed high while India looked to absorb the pressure. Spain's persistence earned them back-to-back penalty corners, both expertly saved by Mohith. As the quarter wound down, Spain was reduced to 10 men following a green card for Fortunio. India nearly capitalised on the advantage in the 44th minute, but Calzado made a tight save against Jagraj Singh's penalty corner

strike. The final quarter saw India reduced to 10 men after Sanjay received a green card in the 45th minute. Spain quickly won a penalty corner, but Karkera stood tall once again. As Spain pushed desperately for an equaliser, India found spaces on the counter. Vishnukant Singh won a penalty corner in the 52nd minute, but Rohidas missed the target. Minutes later, Rajinder Singh's drag-flick also failed to find the back of the net. With India trying to run down the clock, a costly defensive lapse in the 59th minute allowed Bruno Font to strike a superb equaliser. Spain won three consecutive penalty corners in the frantic final 13 seconds, but the Indian defence held firm to end regulation time at 1-1.

# Afghanistan appoint Richard Pybus as head coach after Jonathan Trott's exit

KABUL

The Afghanistan Cricket Board (ACB) has appointed Richard Pybus as the new head coach of the Afghanistan men's national team on Tuesday. Pybus will replace former coach Jonathan Trott, who stepped down from the role after the ICC Men's T20 World Cup 2026. "The Afghanistan Cricket Board (ACB) is pleased to announce the appointment of Richard Pybus as the Head Coach of the Afghanistan National Team. He will join AfghanAtalan ahead of the upcoming white-ball series



against Sri Lanka in March," the board said in a statement. Pybus has a long coaching experience. He is a three-time ICC Cricket World Cup-winning head coach and director of cricket, having played

a central role in establishing high-performance systems across teams. He previously served as Head Coach, Director of Cricket, and Head of High Performance for the West Indies cricket team between 2013 and 2019. During that period, the West Indies achieved a historic treble in 2016, with their men's, women's, and U-19 teams winning ICC world titles in the same calendar year. Pybus also coached the Pakistan cricket team and guided them to the 1999 ICC Cricket World Cup final, where they finished runners-up to Australia.



# ISL 2025-26: Odisha, Inter Kashi share points in Bhubaneswar

BHUBANESWAR

Odisha FC and Inter Kashi FC played out a goalless draw in Gameweek 2 of Indian Super League (ISL) 2025-26 at the Kalinga Stadium, in Bhubaneswar on Tuesday. Odisha FC, playing their first match of the season, and Inter Kashi FC, building on their encouraging league debut, were evenly matched throughout.

Despite chances at both ends, neither side could find the breakthrough as the contest ended in the first stalemate of the season. Despite nine attempts from Odisha and eight from Inter Kashi, only two shots on target were registered by each side. Odisha's Rahul KP was named the Player of the Match.

The visitors started brightly. In the opening minute, Inter Kashi midfielder Tomba Singh made a sharp low save from distance. Odisha responded around the quarter-hour mark when Rahul KP fired over from long range, following a quick transition initiated by Lalithanga Khawlhing. Shortly after, Suhair VP, headed over for Odisha from

close range after a set-piece delivery by Isak Vanlaluatfela. Midway through the first half, Thoiba Singh won a free-kick for the hosts on the right and later headed narrowly wide from Khawlhing's delivery. Suhair again failed to hit the target from another set-piece situation. At the other end, Planas saw a close-range effort blocked by the defence. Just before the break, Vanlaluatfela tested Luis Tarrés with a low strike from distance, but the Inter Kashi custodian gathered comfortably as the teams went into the interval.

Early in the second half, Inter Kashi forward Rohit Danu had a header blocked inside the area. A little after the hour mark, Vanlaluatfela came closest for the Juggernauts, but his left-footed effort from a tight angle was blocked by defender David Humanes.

In the 73rd minute, Danu dragged a shot wide from the left after being picked out by Prasanth Mohan. Deep into stoppage time, he attempted another effort from distance, which sailed just over the crossbar.

# 'A promise to Lucknow': LSG unveils new logo

LUCKNOW

Lucknow Super Giants have unveiled their new logo ahead of the upcoming 2026 season of the Indian Premier League (IPL) on Tuesday. The revamped logo features the Garuda, a crown, and an elephant, with the franchise shifting from its earlier blue colour to a bold red as part of its new identity. The design bears resemblance to the logo of the Manchester Super Giants, which also incorporates an elephant alongside its signature winged element. Ahead of the LSG logo change, Manchester Originals were rebranded as Manchester Super Giants by the Sanjiv Goenka Group, which has bought a massive 70 per cent stake in the team. The new logo of The Hundred team, unveiled on January 26, featured a prominent.

# Rinku Singh flies home to UP to attend a health emergency in family: Report

NEW DELHI

India all-rounder Rinku Singh has left the team hotel and travelled to Uttar Pradesh to deal with a health emergency in his family, ahead of the must-win clash with Zimbabwe in the Super 8 stage of the ICC Men's T20 World Cup at the MA Chidambaram Stadium in Chennai, reports said on Tuesday.

According to reports, Rinku Singh's father, who is suffering from liver cancer, 4th stage, has been admitted to a hospital and is on ventilator support. Sources said Rinku, who did not attend a practice session in Chennai on Tuesday, will most probably not participate in the next game. There are chances that India may bring Sanju Samson into the playing eleven for the must-win match against Zimbabwe.

Rinku has figured in all the matches India have played so far in the T20 World 2026, scoring 24 runs in all. He is a vital cog in the team in the role of a finisher, coming in the death overs,



and his absence will be a setback for the hosts as it impacts the balance in the team. Rinku is also a good fielder.

Rinku scored a zero in the previous match, the Super 8 stage clash with South Africa, in which India were bowled out for 111 after allowing the Proteas to recover from 20/3 to post 187/7 thanks to a 35-ball 63 by David Miller. Defending champions India lost to South Africa by 76 runs in their first game of the Super 8 stage in Ahmed-

abad. They now have to win their remaining two matches in the Super8s to maintain their chances of qualifying for the semifinals.

For the match against Zimbabwe, their second in the Super 8 stage, India are likely to make another change by bringing in left-arm spinner Axar Patel, who was controversially left out of the previous match against South Africa, with the team management preferring Washington Sundar in his place.

# Maha Open ATP Challenger: Nagal powers through; Dhamne impresses as Indian stars light up day

PUNE

India's top-ranked star Sumit Nagal delivered a commanding performance while local teenager and the country's rising youngster Manas Dhamne showcased nerves of steel to spearhead the Indian charge in the Maha Open ATP Challenger 75 Men's Tennis Championship at the Shiv Chhatrapati Kreedra Sankul in Pune on Tuesday.

Nagal thrilled a lively home crowd with a clinical 6-1, 6-2 victory over seventh seed Rio Noguchi of Japan, securing victory in an hour and 9 minutes, dictating play from the baseline and sealing the contest in straight sets. The Indian No.1 looked sharp in all departments, breaking serve consistently to advance com-



fortably into the second round. Local boy Dhamne, who secured a place in the main draw through a Wildcard, continued his impressive progress on the Challenger circuit, battling past the winner of last week's Delhi Challenger, Stefanos Sakellariadis of Greece, 6-4, 7-6(4). The Pune teen, ranked 489, displayed maturity beyond his years, holding his nerve in a tight second-set tiebreak to secure a memorable win over the 220-ranked Greek.

Elsewhere, eighth seed Edas Butvilas of Lithuania gave a lesson in tennis to outclass local Indian wild card Aditya Balsekar 6-0, 6-1. Meanwhile, Indian entrant Karan Singh went down to qualifier Maks Kasnikowski (POL) 6-3, 6-1.

The third seed, Ilya Simakin of

Russia, edged past qualifier Mitsuki Wei Kang Leong of Malaysia, winning 4-6, 6-2, 7-6(10) in a closely fought encounter lasting 2 hours and 24 minutes.

Sixth seed Federico Cina from Italy registered a dominant 6-1, 6-0 win over Japanese qualifier Takuya Kumasaka. Britain's Felix Gill staged a remarkable comeback to defeat Belgian Michael Geerts 1-6, 7-6(9), 6-4, and fifth seed Frederico Ferreira Silva of Portugal moved into the next round with a 6-3, 6-4 victory over Petr Bar Biryukov. Qualifier Tung-Lin Wu of Chinese Taipei continued his good run, accounting for lucky loser Alexander Binda of Italy 6-1, 6-2. In the second round to be played on Wednesday, Dhamne will take on former world no. 40 Ilya Ivashka.



## 1st WODI: Mooney, Healy guide Australia to easy 6-wicket win over India



BRISBANE: Australia produced a clinical all-round performance to defeat India by six wickets in the opening ODI at Allan Border Field on Tuesday, chasing down a modest target of 215 with authority to take a 1-0 lead in the three-game ODI series and also level the overall multiformat series' tally to 4-4. After bowling India out for 214, the hosts made light work of the chase, riding on half-centuries from captain Alyssa Healy and the ever-reliable Beth Mooney. India had promised more at different stages, but ultimately fell short on a surface that offered seam movement early and grip for the spinners as the innings progressed. Opting to bat first, India were jolted in the opening over when Megan Schutt trapped Pratika Rawal lbw, and the early pressure intensified with the dismissal of Shafali Verma soon after. Smriti Mandhana weathered a testing passage, surviving a few nervy moments before compiling a composed 58 to steady the innings.



## Kalki 2 Begins: Amitabh, Kamal Reunite After 40 Yrs

Veteran icons Amitabh Bachchan and Kamal Haasan have reunited on the sets of Kalki 2, marking their first collaboration in nearly four decades. The sequel recently went on floors in Hyderabad, sparking excitement among fans.

Confirming the reunion on his blog, Bachchan shared that he would be working with Haasan again after "ages," recalling their last outing together in Geraftaar. The 1985 action drama, which also starred Rajinikanth, was a major box-office success and remains memorable for its powerhouse cast.

Bachchan also posted glimpses from the Hyderabad shoot and explained his absence from his weekly 'Sunday Darshan,' citing work commitments. Assuring fans of his return, he wrote, "Work first.. rest later."

Kalki 2 is the sequel to the 2024 blockbuster Kalki 2898 AD, directed by Nag Ashwin. Headlined by Prabhas, the dystopian sci-fi epic draws inspiration from Hindu scriptures and is set in a futuristic world. Prabhas plays Karna from the Mahabharata, while Bachchan reprises his role as Ashwatthama. Haasan is expected to continue his pivotal arc as Supreme Yaskin.

The first film launched what is being called the Kalki Cinematic Universe. However, Deepika Padukone, who featured in the original, will not appear in the sequel, as confirmed by the makers earlier.

With filming now underway and two legends sharing screen space again, Kalki 2 is shaping up to be a major cinematic event — blending mythology, spectacle and unmatched star power.



## Lily Collins Cast as Audrey Hepburn

Emily in Paris star Lily Collins will play Audrey Hepburn in an upcoming film that will show the making of the 1961 romantic comedy Breakfast at Tiffany's. Inspired by Sam Wasson's bestselling nonfiction book Fifth Avenue, 5 AM: Audrey Hepburn, Breakfast at Tiffany's and the Dawn of the Modern Woman, the yet-to-be-titled project's screenplay has been written by Alena Smith. The director of the upcoming project has not been revealed.

Lily Collins to portray Audrey Hepburn Taking to her Instagram handle, Collins shared her excitement to play the legend. She posted a picture of Hepburn and a news article about her casting and wrote, "It's with almost 10 years of development and a lifetime of admiration and adoration for Audrey that I'm finally able to share this (sic)". She feels honoured and ecstatic to play the iconic character.

The film is being developed by Collins' Case Study Films alongside Imagine Entertainment and producer Scott LaStaiti, reported Deadline.

Alena Smith has written the screenplay. Alongside Collins, the upcoming film also stars Truman Capote, Edith Head, and director Blake Edwards, among others.

Based on Truman Capote's 1958 novella, Breakfast at Tiffany's was directed by Blake Edwards for Paramount, earning recognition for the global fashion and cultural icon. The film was nominated for five Oscars, with Hepburn competing for Best Actress. It won two Oscars — Best Score and Song. Hepburn won an Oscar for Roman Holiday. She also starred in classics like Sabrina and Funny Face.

Coming back to Collins, she will star in Netflix's Emily in Paris, which has been renewed for a sixth season.

## KRITI SANON COMMANDS THE SPOTLIGHT AT LONDON FASHION WEEK 2026

Bollywood's premier style maven, Kriti Sanon, once again solidified her status as a global powerhouse with a breathtaking appearance during London Fashion Week. Stepping onto the international stage with an air of effortless sophistication, Sanon's presence at the high-profile showcase became a definitive highlight of the season. Her ability to blend high-concept couture with wearable elegance captured the attention of the world's fashion elite, marking a significant milestone in her journey as a cross-cultural style ambassador. This global recognition comes at a pinnacle moment in her career, as Sanon currently stands as one of the top-tier actresses in the Indian film industry.

Sanon's ensemble was a masterclass in textural contrast and refined heritage in Burberry. She donned a striking chocolate-brown trench coat that served as the anchor of her look, featuring a structured silhouette and a waist-cinching belt that exuded timeless authority. Breaking the monochromatic palette, she accessorized with a vibrant teal patterned scarf, adding a necessary pop of color and visual complexity. The look was rounded out with sleek, knee-high leather boots and a classic structured handbag, while her hair was styled in a polished, high-fashion top-knot that accentuated her sharp features and sophisticated makeup palette.

Beyond the garments, Kriti's appearance served as a powerful fashion statement on the global platform. By seamlessly navigating the transition from Indian cinema to the front rows of London's most prestigious runways, she has redefined the modern "it-girl" aesthetic with a distinctly international flair. Her stature in the industry has reached an all-time high, with her presence at such events underscoring her influence as a leading lady who shapes trends both on and off the screen. Adding to her stellar lineup, fans are eagerly anticipating her next big-screen outing, as she will be seen next in the highly awaited Cocktail 2 alongside Shahid Kapoor and Rashmika Mandanna.



## Ranveer Singh Moves Karnataka HC to Quash FIR Over 'Kantara: Chapter 1' Remark

Bollywood actor Ranveer Singh has approached the Karnataka High Court seeking to quash a private complaint and FIR registered against him over remarks linked to Kantara: Chapter 1. The plea challenges proceedings pending before a Bengaluru Magistrate court and an FIR lodged by the High Grounds Police Station. The respondents include the police and complainant Advocate Prashanth Methal.

The matter came up before Justice M. Nagaprasanna on February 23, when Singh's counsel sought an urgent hearing, stating that police had already issued two notices to the actor. The court questioned the urgency but agreed to hear the petition on Tuesday.

The controversy stems from comments Singh made at the closing ceremony of the International Film Festival of India in Goa last year while praising actor Rishab Shetty for his performance in Kantara. Referring to a scene, Singh mentioned a "female ghost," which the complainant alleged was a reference to Goddess Chamundi and the sacred Daiva tradition, hurting Hindu religious sentiments.

After police initially did not register an FIR, Methal filed a private complaint. On January 28, 2026, a Magistrate ordered an investigation under Section 175(3) of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, directing police to register an FIR. The complaint cites offences under Sections 196, 299, and 302 of the BNS. Videos of the remarks went viral, drawing criticism online. Singh later issued an apology.



## Zeenat Aman Reaffirms That Mutual Respect, Not Marriage, Is Sacred



Zeenat Aman's perspective on live-in relationships has received flak. Defending herself, she has reaffirmed her longstanding view that mutual love and respect are the true foundation of a healthy relationship, far more important than legal or religious sanction (read formal marriage).

The yesteryear screen idol stated that relationships should be based on equality, personal connection, and mutual respect rather than societal approval, paperwork, or external validation. She called it "absurd" to believe marriage is required for fulfillment or that it can magically fix an unhappy relationship.

Zeenat Aman says that, in modern times, young people increasingly enter partnerships simply for human connection, as equals and not for wealth, alliances, parental approval, or even children. Her views belong to the school that the bond between two people should be "sacred to them," regardless of whether it's formally recognized by society

## Mahesh Babu Heads to Georgia for Rajamouli's 'Varanasi'

Mahesh Babu was spotted at the airport early Tuesday morning. According to industry buzz, the actor is heading to Georgia to film a major schedule for his upcoming movie, Varanasi.

The film features an ensemble cast including Priyanka Chopra Jonas and Prithviraj Sukumaran. Notably, Varanasi marks Priyanka's highly anticipated return to Indian cinema. Directed by the visionary S.S. Rajamouli, reports suggest that 50% of the film's production is already complete.

The upcoming Georgia schedule will focus on massive action sequences and pivotal scenes featuring the hero and Prithviraj (as the chief antagonist).

Last year, a grand event was held at Ramoji Film City in Hyderabad to unveil the title and Mahesh Babu's first look.

The poster received a thumping response from fans and critics alike. In the film, Mahesh Babu will be essaying the role of Lord Ram. Scheduled for release in April 2027, Varanasi is expected to be one of the most expensive films ever produced in India. MM Keeravani is its music director.

