IN BRIEF

### Bengaluru to host Plumbex India 2026 from April 16

BENGALURU: The Indian Plumbing Association (IPA) has announced that Plumbex India 2026, the nation's premier exhibition for water, sanitation, and plumbing products and technologies, will be held from April 16 to 18l 2026 at the Bangalore International Exhibition Centre (BIEC), Bengaluru. As the largest and most influential platform for the plumbing, water, sanitation and building industry, Plumbex India has spent decades catalysing sectoral growth, contributing to standardization, and introducing global technologies to the Indian market. Over the years, it has played a pivotal role in advancing the plumbing and sanitation sector by creating a unified platform for knowledge exchange, innovation showcases, and business collaboration. Previous editions have attracted thousands of visitors and hundreds of exhibitors, reinforcing its role in driving industry growth, innovation adoption, and sustainable practices across the construction and infrastructure value chain.

### ITC opens new hotel in Mohali

KOLKATA: ITC Hotels Limited on Monday announced the opening of a 113-key Welcomhotel at Mohali in Chandigarh. It would be the 30th Welcomhotel and would expand ITC Hotels Limited footprint in the tricity region of Chandigarh, Panchkula and Mohali. Located near Chandigarh International Airport, the hotel is operated under a management contract and is positioned to cater to rising demand for premium hospitality across business and leisure segments. The property features contemporary rooms and suites, multiple dining venues, banqueting and meeting spaces, and wellness facilities including a swimming pool, fitness centre and a spa slated to open shortly, a statement said. Managing Director Anil Chadha said the launch reflects the company's strategy of strengthening presence in high-growth urban markets.

ITC Hotels said it currently operates over 150 hotels with more than 14,000 keys across 90 destinations.

### Kerala signs MoUs with central PSUs

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM: The Kerala government on Monday signed memoranda of understanding with three central public sector companies to roll out a Rs 2,000 crore logistics master plan at the Vizhinjam International Seaport, in a move aimed at reshaping the state's maritime sector. The agreements were executed on Monday in the presence of Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan at the Legislative Assembly Building, a CMO release said here. This initiative marks a strategic shift to transform the port into a comprehensive economic development hub, ensuring that critical infrastructure remains under public sector oversight even as the port operates on a Public-Private Partnership (PPP) model.

### SL plans to expand Jaffna Airport

COLOMBO: Sri Lanka is planning to expand the Jaffna International Airport with an aim to accommodate a higher volume of foreign tourist arrivals into the country and provide services to tourists in the North, officials said. Civil Aviation Minister Anura Karunathilake said that by expanding the airport, the government hopes to develop the northern province's economy with more people touring the region. Karunathilaka said that the first phase of the project is already underway, with the second phase expected to commence by June this year and is scheduled for completion by July next year.

# Apparel exports up 1.6% in April-Jan period, says report

**Several key markets have shown encouraging growth,says AEPC Chairman Sakthivel**

**EXPORTS PUSH**

- Apparel exports rose 1.6% YoY during April–January period.
- Growth was modest compared to stronger gains in some other sectors
- Key markets include the US and EU
- AEPC has been pushing for market diversification and exports

New Delhi

INDIA'S APPAREL exports registered a moderate growth of 1.6 per cent during April-January 2025-26 despite global headwinds and supply chain disruptions, AEPC said on Monday.

Apparel Export Promotion Council (AEPC) Chairman A Sakthivel said exports to several key markets have shown encouraging growth, including Italy (16 per cent), the UK (4.8 per cent), UAE (10.6 per cent), Saudi Arabia (18.5 per cent), Germany (8.7 per cent), and Spain (7.1 per cent).

Strong performance has also been recorded in Japan, Iceland, and Australia.

"Despite global headwinds, geopolitical uncertainties, and ongoing supply chain disruptions, the sector registered a moderate export growth of 1.6 per cent during April–January 2025-26 compared to the corresponding period of the previous financial year," he said.

The council on Monday celebrated its 48th foundation day. Over the years, the council has consistently taken up industry concerns with the government and relevant stakeholders to promote, protect, and safeguard the interests of the ready-made garment (RMG) sector, Sakthivel said.

He added that several key government initiatives that are expected to accelerate sectoral growth, including PM Mitra Parks, Production Linked Incentive (PLI) Scheme, Mega Textile Parks, the Export Promotion Mission, and the Samarth skilling programme.

Additional support measures such as promoting extra-long staple cotton cultivation, enhancing ease of doing business, improving credit access for MSMEs through expanded credit guarantee coverage, and establishing national centres of excellence for skilling are also expected to provide significant momentum to the industry, he said.

"Looking ahead, AEPC plans to further expand the global footprint of Indian apparel exports through diversification into new and non-traditional markets, supported by targeted export promotion activities during 2026-27," Sakthivel said.

According to report, this broader export performance shows that textiles and clothing faced softer demand compared with some other merchandise segments. The 1.6 % increase in apparel shipments reflects continued global demand but also challenges in some markets and competitive pressures.

Ready-Made Garments (RMG), a key component of apparel exports, have shown positive year-on-year growth in other partial datasets, indicating pockets of resilience even if overall export growth remains modest.

Indian textile and apparel exports have been affected by trade dynamics in major markets, such as lower exports to the United States due to higher tariffs, which at times have weighed on growth.

**"Despite global headwinds, geopolitical uncertainties, and ongoing supply chain disruptions, the sector registered a moderate export growth of 1.6 per cent during April–January 2025-26 compared to the corresponding period of the previous financial year," AEPC chairman A Sakthivel said**

Exporters continue to adapt by diversifying to markets in the EU, UK, West Asia and Africa, helping cushion impact from tariff-related volatility.

The Government of India has been strengthening industry support, such as extending the Textile PLI (Production-Linked Incentive) scheme to boost competitiveness, attract investments, and improve global market share.

New export promotion initiatives and financial schemes like the Market Access Support (MAS) Scheme aim to help exporters navigate market challenges and expand reach. Indian apparel exporters are benefiting from manufacturers seeking alternatives to traditional suppliers ( Bangladesh and China) amid shifting global trade patterns.

# India Inc projects 9.1% salary hike this year: Report

New Delhi

CORPORATE India is expected to roll out an average salary increase of 9.1 per cent in 2026, with Global Capability Centres (GCCs) leading the growth in pay, a new report said on Monday.

GCCs are expected to offer the highest increments at 10.4 per cent, driven by strong global demand for digital and technology capabilities, according to the latest Future of Pay report by EY India.

The financial services sector is likely to see salary hikes of around 10 per cent, followed by e-commerce at 9.9 per cent and life sciences and pharmaceuticals at 9.7 per cent, the report said. The report also highlighted a gradual cooling in attrition levels. Overall attrition declined to 16.4 per cent in 2025 from 17.5 per cent in 2024, indicating a more stable job market.

However, more than 80 per cent of exits remain voluntary, suggesting that employees are still switching jobs for better opportunities rather than due to layoffs.Financial services recorded the highest attrition at 24 per cent, while professional services and hi-tech and IT sectors also saw elevated levels.

In comparison, GCCs reported relatively lower attrition at 14.1 per cent, as per the report. Abhishek Sen, Partner and Leader, Total Rewards, HR Technology and Learning at EY India, said companies are rethinking how they invest in talent.

"The future of pay is no longer just about the size of annual increments but about identifying the right skills to reward and balancing competitiveness with long-term sustainability," he noted.

The report points to a major shift towards skills-based compensation. Nearly half of the organisations surveyed are moving from traditional role-based pay structures to skill-based frameworks.

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Professionals with expertise in artificial intelligence, generative AI, machine learning, cybersecurity and cloud computing can command salary premiums of 30 to 40 per cent, as these skills are becoming critical for business growth.

# Guwahati airport's new terminal starts operations

Guwahati

THE new terminal at Guwahati's Lokapriya Gopinath Bardoloi International Airport (LGBIA) began commercial operations on Sunday evening, raising annual passenger capacity to 13.1 million and reinforcing the Assam city's position as the principal aviation gateway to India's strategic North-Eastern region to South and Southeast Asia.

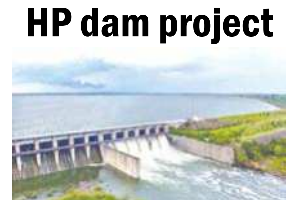
The transition followed a phased, operations-led activation, with live trials conducted across check-in, baggage handling, security and aircraft turnaround before full deployment. The terminal was inaugurated by Prime Minister Narendra Modi on December 20, 2025.

The commencement of operations was attended by Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma and Jeet Adani, Director, Adani Airport Holdings Ltd (AAHL), India's largest private airport operator. The event was marked by the issuance of a ceremonial boarding pass to the first departing passenger and the arrival of an Akasa Air flight from Mumbai at the new facility.

A traditional lamp-lighting ceremony and cultural performances were held in the arrivals forecourt, with participation from artisan communities, tea garden workers, frontline staff and Central Industrial Security Force (CISF) personnel, underscoring the region's cultural identity alongside infrastructure expansion.

The Chief Minister said: "We are thankful to (Adani Group Chairman) Mr Gautam Adani for keeping his commitment of investing Rs 50,000 crore made during Advantage Assam 2.0, last year. I believe that with the operationalisation of this new terminal, Assam's tourism will get a boost. It will be a game-changer for Assam."

# Patel Engg bags ₹910.08-crore HP dam project



NEW DELHI: Patel Engineering has been declared as the lowest bidder by Himachal Pradesh Power Corporation for the development of package 1 of the Renuka Ji Dam project valued at Rs 910.08 crore. The project, located at village Dadahu in Sirmaur district of the state, is scheduled to be completed within a timeline of 30 months, Patel Engineering said in a statement on Monday. The company said it has been declared lowest bidder by Himachal Pradesh Power Corporation Ltd (HPPCL) for the construction of package 1 of Renuka Ji dam project in Himachal Pradesh at a cost of Rs 910.08 crore, including GST. The scope of works under this package comprises the construction of three diversion tunnels, each with a diameter of 9.5 meters and lengths of 1379 meters, 1468 meters, and 1590 meters, respectively. The company's managing director, Kavita Shirvaikar, said: "This project not only strengthens our portfolio but also positions us to contribute meaningfully to sustainable water management and hydropower development."

# HFCL joins IIT Delhi to develop next-gen optical fiber tech

New Delhi

HOME-GROWN telecom gear company HFCL Ltd has joined the consortium of a Department of Telecommunications (DoT)-funded research project led by the Indian Institute of Technology, Delhi (IIT Delhi), focused on advancing hollow-core fiber (HCF) technology for next-generation communication networks.

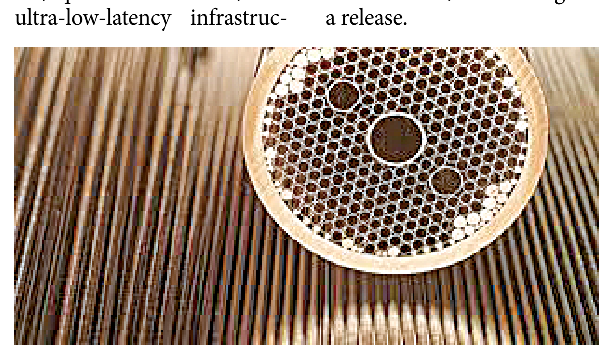
Hollow-core fiber is an optical fiber that significantly cuts latency and energy consumption versus conventional fiber. Globally, it is being explored for high-capacity, long-haul, and latency-sensitive network applications, including advanced data centres and next-generation telecom infrastructure.

With hyperscalers now racing to build AI data centres, hollow-core fiber is emerging as the critical backbone for 6G, quantum networks, and ultra-low-latency infrastructure. According to a release, HFCL Limited has joined the consortium led by the IIT Delhi focused on advancing hollow-core fiber technology for next-generation communication networks. The project aims to develop novel optical fiber technologies relevant to future 6G and quantum communication systems.

As a consortium partner, HFCL will contribute industry expertise, manufacturing perspective, and application insights to support the translational aspects of the research.

"With increasing AI workloads, hyperscale computing demand, and the evolution toward 6G networks, the need for ultra-low-latency optical infrastructure is expected to grow significantly.

The DoT-supported initiative seeks to strengthen India's indigenous capabilities in this strategically important domain," according to a release.



# Odisha's critical mineral sector likely to touch $20 bn by 2032: Study

New Delhi

ODISHA'S critical minerals sector is set to hit $ 18-20 billion by 2032 from $ 8 billion currently, while the processing and manufacturing share will quadruple, a study by an industry body said.

According to new projections by the Net Zero Energy Transition Association (NETRA) released at the recently concluded Global Cleantech Expo-Odisha 2026, the state is set for a transformative leap in the critical minerals sector.

The study revealed that Odisha's mineral production value is expected to skyrocket from $ 8 billion in 2025 to $ 18-20 billion by 2032, with a dramatic shift in the state's mining, processing, and manufacturing profile, from 40 per cent, 10 per cent and 5 per cent in 2025 to 50 per cent, 40 per cent, and 30 per cent, respectively, by 2032, driven by focused policy and industrial investment.

The two-day Global Cleantech Expo-Odisha 2026, held in Bhubaneswar on February 20-21, was inaugurated by state MSME Minister Gokulananda Mallik.

The expo featured over 75 exhibitors from across the clean technology spectrum, including Luminous, GMR, AMAZE, Havells, MGM Green Energy, ICON Solar, Trontek, NED Energy, Navitas, Novasys, PV Blink, World Green Energy and others.

The event witnessed the presence of senior government officials and industry leaders, highlighting Odisha's growing stature as a cleantech investment destination.Debi Prasad Dash, Executive Director, NETRA, said, "Odisha's rapid rise as a preferred destination for critical minerals and cleantech investment reflects the state's progressive vision and proactive policy environment. With significant reserves of over 30 critical minerals, Odisha is uniquely positioned to anchor India's clean energy future".

# Bharat Taxi will not let drivers earn below base rate, says Amit Shah

**FOR A SAFE RIDE**

- Drivers can become co-owners by purchasing a Rs 500 share.
- Driver representatives will have reserved seats on the board of directors
- Bharat Taxi plans to enroll 15 crore drivers within two years.
- The profit-sharing model may take up to three years to fully activate


New Delhi

UNION Cooperation Minister Amit Shah on Monday said the newly launched co-operative cab service Bharat Taxi will guarantee a minimum base rate per kilometre for all drivers on its platform, asserting that existing ride-hailing aggregators had deliberately avoided setting such a floor to maximise corporate profits at the expense of workers.

Addressing a town hall interaction with cab and auto drivers from Delhi-NCR and Gujarat, Shah said the cooperative ride-hailing platform would return 80 per cent of profits to drivers based on kilometres driven, with the remaining 20 per cent retained as cooperative capital.

"I asked all three companies whether they had set a minimum base rate for their drivers. They said no," Shah told the gathering during the 40-minute interaction. "We will not do this. Whatever business you do, your minimum should be fixed. And whatever is more than that has to come back to you."

Shah drew repeated parallels between Bharat Taxi and the Amul Dairy cooperative, which he described as a template for worker-owned enterprise at scale. "36 lakh mothers and sisters invested just Rs 50 each and built Amul, which has a turnover of Rs 1,25,000 crore," he said.

**Shah announced that a dedicated 'Saarathi Didi' feature would be introduced in the Bharat Taxi app, allowing women passengers travelling alone to prioritise female drivers for their rides. The announcement came in response to Neelam Sharma, a single mother from Bihar who had taken up cab driving after her husband died of cancer and whose account had been suspended without notice by a previous aggregator**

"In a private dairy, the profit goes to the owner. In Amul, 85 per cent goes back to the producer. Bharat Taxi is the same concept for mobility."

Drivers on the platform can become co-owners by purchasing a share worth Rs 500, Shah said, adding that seats on Bharat Taxi's board of directors would be reserved for driver representatives as membership grows. "When the board makes a policy against the drivers, your representative will stand up and ask -- how can you do this to our company?" he said.

Shah said Bharat Taxi aimed to enroll 15 crore drivers within two years and expand to every city with a municipal corporation within three years. The platform is currently operational in Delhi-NCR and Rajkot. He acknowledged that the profit-sharing model would take up to three years to fully activate, asking drivers to remain patient during the establishment phase.

"Like a child who we raise for 30-40 years and who then takes care of us, you have to be patient for the first three years," he said.

Shah announced that a dedicated 'Saarathi Didi' feature would be introduced in the Bharat Taxi app, allowing women passengers travelling alone to prioritise female drivers for their rides. The announcement came in response to Neelam Sharma, a single mother from Bihar who had taken up cab driving after her husband died of cancer and whose account had been suspended without notice by a previous aggregator.

"Women who travel alone will give priority to Saarathi Didi," Shah said. "Even if brothers earn a little less from this, it is our collective responsibility."

Shah said Bharat Taxi would establish a three-channel grievance system for drivers comprising online, physical and call centre modes, addressing longstanding complaints that existing platforms offered support only to passengers.

"Even if a driver does not know how to complain online, they can call and register their complaint. It will be automatically recorded," he said.

All policy changes on the platform will be communicated to drivers at least one week in advance via app notifications, Shah added.

Shah urged all drivers associated with the platform to stop referring to themselves as drivers and instead adopt the term 'Saarathi', citing Lord Krishna's role as Arjun's charioteer in the Mahabharata. Lord Krishna drove Arjun's chariot and fought the whole war. Arjun touched his feet after the war.