



THE Hans India



Scrap Ranji if it doesn't matter: Vengsarkar blasts selectors
Cricket legend Dilip Vengsarkar has slammed the Aji Agarkar-led selection committee for ignoring Ranji Trophy star Auqib Nabi for the Afghanistan Test, calling the decision 'absurd' and questioning the value of domestic cricket performances. **P6**

Hashtags, hate and half-truths: The dark side of India's digital politics
The rise of social media in India was once hailed as a democratic revolution. It promised to dismantle the monopoly of traditional media, amplify unheard voices, deepen citizen participation, and establish a direct connection between political leaders. **P4**

India's residential market matures; Hyderabad joins growth surge in Q1 2026
India's residential real estate market has transitioned into a "structurally mature, demand-anchored growth phase", with Q1 2026 recording 93,065 new unit launches and 95,973 unit sales across the top eight cities, a report said on Saturday. **P7**

Preethi Pagadala's elegant look speaks beyond fashion
Preethi Pagadala once again proves that simplicity and confidence can create the most striking visual impact. In this stunning photograph, the young actress appears effortlessly graceful as she poses in a flowing white outfit against a warm natural backdrop. **P8**

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WINDOWS
SKM announces nationwide stir from May 27

NEW DELHI: The Samyukt Kisan Morcha (SKM) on Friday announced a nationwide agitation beginning May 27, calling upon farmer unions and agricultural workers to burn copies of the Centre's recent minimum support price (MSP) order and the Commission for Agricultural Costs and Prices (CACP) report on price policy for the 2026-27 Kharif season. The CACP is an expert advisory body under the Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare, and is responsible for recommending MSPs for notified crops during Kharif and Rabi seasons. The farmers' body, that had led the 2021-22 farmers' agitation at Delhi's borders, said it would intensify protests against the Union government over the announced MSP structure for the 2026-27 Kharif season, the recent increase in fuel prices, and the worsening fertiliser situation.

2 Indians die while descending from Everest

KATHMANDU: Two Indian mountaineers who summited Everest have died while descending, an official said on Friday. The climbers, identified as Arun Kumar Tiwari and Sandeep Are, were exhausted while they were coming down from the peak and could not be saved despite the best efforts of their guides, said Rishi Bhandari, secretary general of the Expedition Operators Association of Nepal. It appears that Are summited on Wednesday and Tiwari on Thursday around 5.30 pm, Bhandari told PTI. The guides "worked really hard" but were not able to save them, he said.

IUML, VCK join Vijay govt

CHENNAI: A M Shahjahan and Vanni Arasu, legislators belonging to the Indian Union Muslim League and Viduthala Chiruthaigal Katchi respectively were sworn in as ministers by Governor Rajendra Vishwanath Arlekar on Friday in a simple ceremony held at the Lok Bhavan in Chennai. In the presence of Chief Minister C Joseph Vijay, Shahjahan who won from Papanasam Assembly constituency and Vanni Arasu, who emerged victorious from Tindivanam segment took the oath of office and secrecy.

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We are working on the heat-wave problem. Just wait a little, there will be a cold-wave

EC ANNOUNCES POLLS FOR 26 SEATS

NDA may lose a Rajya Sabha seat in June 18 polls

National Democratic Alliance is likely to get 17 seats in these elections, while the Congress will get five, the JMM two and the TVK one; former PM HD Deve Gowda, Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge set to retire

HANS NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI

THE NDA is likely to lose one Rajya Sabha seat in the biennial elections for 26 seats in 12 states across the country, while the Congress-led opposition is

set to gain three. The Election Commission on Friday announced elections for 26 Rajya Sabha seats on June 18 following the retirement of incumbents, including former prime minister HD Deve Gowda, Congress president Mallikarjun



HD Deve Gowda, Mallikarjun Kharge

Kharge and party leader Digvijaya Singh, besides two Union ministers Ravneet

Singh and George Kurian. In a statement, the EC said the elections for the Rajya

Sabha seats will be held in 10 states where 24 incumbents are retiring on different dates beginning June 21 to July 19. Of the total 26 seats where elections are being held, the NDA currently has 18 and the Congress four while one seat is with the JMM and three are with the YSRCP. The NDA is likely to get 17 seats in these elections, while the Congress will get five, the JMM two and the TVK one. The NDA currently has 149 MPs in the upper house while the opposition has 78 and non-aligned regional

parties have 17 MPs in the 244-member house. The Rajya Sabha elections will be held in four seats each in Andhra Pradesh, Gujarat and Karnataka, three seats each in Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan, two seats in Jharkhand and one seat each in Manipur, Meghalaya, Arunachal Pradesh and Mizoram. Besides, one seat each in Maharashtra and Tamil Nadu will also go to the polls on June 18. The last date for filing of nominations is June 8,

according to the EC. In a separate notification, the EC also announced by-elections to fill the vacancies created by the NCP's Sunetra Pawar in Maharashtra and the AI-ADMK's C Ve Shanmugam in Tamil Nadu following their resignations after they were elected to the state assemblies. While the NDA is set to bag Pawar's seat, going by its strength in the state assembly, the TVK is likely to get the lone Rajya Sabha seat from Tamil Nadu going for a bypoll.

RBI's Rs 2.87L crore gift to Centre amid austerity

HANS NEWS SERVICE
MUMBAI

THE Reserve Bank on Friday announced a record dividend of Rs 2.87 lakh crore to the government for the year-ended March 2025, providing a financial boost for the exchequer amid rising import bills and supply chain disruptions due to the West Asia conflict.

The dividend is 6.7 per cent higher than Rs 2.69 lakh crore for the 2024-25 fiscal year. In a statement, the RBI said its net income, before risk provision and transfer to statutory funds, aggregated Rs 3.96 lakh crore in FY26 as against Rs 3.13 lakh crore in FY25. "The balance sheet of the Bank expanded by 20.61 per cent to Rs 91,97,121.08 crore as on March 31, 2026,"

The RBI's Central Board of Directors, at its meeting, reviewed the global and domestic economic scenario, including risks to the outlook, and also approved the dividend.



the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) said. The RBI's Central Board of Directors, at its meeting,

reviewed the global and domestic economic scenario, including risks to the outlook, and also approved

the dividend. According to the statement, the revised Economic Capital Framework (ECF) provides flexibility to maintain the Contingent Risk Buffer (CRB) between the range of 4.5 per cent and 7.5 per cent of the size of the balance sheet.

"Taking into consideration the current macro-economic factors, financial performance of the Bank and maintenance of appropriate risk buffers, the Central Board decided to transfer Rs 1,09,379.64 crore towards the CRB for FY 2025-26 as against Rs 44,861.70 crore in the previous year," it said. The CRB at 6.5 per cent of the size of the RBI balance sheet, compared to 7.5 per cent for 2024-25.

100 'oxygen parks' soon to improve city climate

HANS NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI

CHIEF Minister Rekha Gupta announced on Friday that the Delhi government plans to develop 100 "oxygen parks" featuring dense tree cover to improve the city's climate and address pollution issues. Laying the foundation stone of the park to be developed on 3-acre land in Mukhmelpur village in north Delhi's Buzurg, Gupta stated that this will be the first such park in the city.

"Delhi was turned into a gas chamber for years, but nobody was concerned to take steps to address pollution in Delhi," the chief minister said and announced that her government has set a target of planting more than 70 lakh trees, shrubs and hedges across the city this year. She



noted that her government has been actively working for the past year to combat pollution, and the establishment of these parks is part of that initiative. The chief minister said the parks will have dense fruit-bearing trees to provide shelter to birds and provide oxygen. "These parks with dense trees are a requirement of Delhi," she said. The park in

Mukhmelpur designed with both public convenience and environmental sustainability in mind, will feature walking tracks, energy-efficient lighting, huts for seating and relaxation, a landscaped pond and a variety of shade-giving tree species. Large green lawns and open spaces will also be developed as part of the project, said a CMO statement.

Centre to bring back some persons deported to B'desh

HANS NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI

THE Centre on Friday told the Supreme Court that it has decided to bring back some people, who were earlier deported to Bangladesh, to India and would then verify their claim of Indian citizenship.

Solicitor General Tushar Mehta, appearing for the Centre, told a bench headed by Chief Justice Surya Kant that keeping in view the peculiar facts and circumstances of the case and by not treating it as a precedent to be followed in other matters, the government has decided to bring them back. "The government would bring them back and thereafter examine their status. Depending upon the outcome, we will take steps accordingly," Mehta



told the bench, which also comprised Justices Joymalya Bagchi and Vipul M Pancholi. The top law officer said that it may take 8-10 days to bring these persons back to India. The bench posted the matter for hearing in July.

The top court was hearing a plea of the Centre challenging a September 26, 2025 order of the Calcutta High Court by which it had set aside the central government's decision to deport Sunali Khatun and others to Bangladesh and termed it as "illegal".

Uber airport share service launched

PURNA SINGH
NEW DELHI

IN a fresh push towards cleaner and smarter urban transport, the Delhi Government on Thursday rolled out a large-scale airport ride-sharing initiative aimed at cutting traffic congestion, reducing vehicular pollution and lowering travel costs for commuters.

Chief Minister Rekha Gupta formally flagged off the Uber Airport Share service at the Delhi Secretariat in the presence of Environment, Forest and Wildlife Minister Manjinder Singh Sirsa. The service has been launched at Indira Gandhi International (IGI) Airport, one of the country's busiest travel hubs, and is expected to transform the way passengers commute to and from the airport. The



shared mobility initiative will allow travellers heading in the same direction to pool rides through the Uber app, offering a cheaper and more efficient travel option while reducing the number of vehicles on the roads. The Delhi Government said nearly seven lakh airport passengers stand to benefit from the affordable, technology-enabled and seamless ride-sharing

system. The service will operate through the Multi-Level Car Parking (MLCP) facility at the airport, where passengers can conveniently access shared rides. Officials said the initiative could bring nearly one lakh app-based and airport-connected vehicles into Delhi's growing shared mobility ecosystem with support from multiple operators and stakeholders.

'Cockroach Janata Party' demands Pradhan's resignation

HANS NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI

BACK with the tagline "Cockroaches Never Die" after its original X handle was withheld in India, the "Cockroach Janata Party" (CJP), a satirical social-media account, launched a campaign on Friday demanding the resignation of Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan.

The campaign, spearheaded through CJP's new X handle -- "Cockroach Is Back" -- and its Instagram platform, centres on alleged systemic failures in the education sector, particularly concerns surrounding the NEET-UG 2026 "paper-leak" controversy.

CJP founder Abhijeet Dipke urged followers to



support an online petition demanding Pradhan's resignation. "How are you, cockroaches? Everyone is saying you are doing great on the internet, but I think now it is time to do some real work. Today, we are starting a petition demanding the resignation of the education minister," Dipke said. Calling for accountability in the education system has adversely affected students.

Delhi govt eases DJB policy to reduce water charges

PURNA SINGH
NEW DELHI

IN a major policy shift aimed at reducing the financial burden on property owners, the Delhi Government has revised the Delhi Jal Board's infrastructure charge system, announcing that water and sewer charges will now be based on actual water demand instead of total plot size. The decision is expected to benefit thousands of residents, particularly those with partially constructed properties, smaller housing

units and buildings located in lower-category colonies. Announcing the reform, Chief Minister Rekha Gupta said the government has been continuously working to strengthen water supply and sewer infrastructure across the capital while ensuring that citizens receive fair and practical services. She said that under the earlier system, infrastructure charges were imposed according to the entire premises area, regardless of how much of the property was actually constructed



or how much water was required. The revised mechanism, however, will levy

charges strictly according to water demand generated by the built-up area.

Chief Minister Rekha Gupta says her government has been continuously working to strengthen water supply and sewer infrastructure across the capital while ensuring that citizens receive fair and practical services

Gupta explained that if additional construction or new development increases water consumption needs, only then will infrastructure charges rise. Open spaces within plots will no longer

be included while calculating charges. She cited an example, saying that if a 200-square metre plot has construction on only 50 square metres, charges will now be calculated solely

on the basis of the water requirement of the constructed portion rather than the entire land parcel. "This will provide major relief to Delhi residents. Earlier, even open areas were included while calculating infrastructure charges despite having no water requirement," she said. The Delhi Government also announced a series of detailed relaxations and concessions under the revised Infrastructure Fund Charges (IFC) policy for water and sewer connections.

HC allows 2nd postmortem of Twisha, CBI likely to probe

HANS NEWS SERVICE
JABALPUR

THE Madhya Pradesh High Court on Friday permitted a second postmortem of Twisha Sharma, the Noida woman who was allegedly harassed for dowry and died last week, her family members said. Samarth Singh, the absconding husband of Twisha who was allegedly harassed for dowry, on Friday withdrew his anticipatory bail application filed in the Madhya Pradesh High Court. The HC has allowed

the petition filed by Twisha's father Navnidhi Sharma, their lawyer Ankur Pandey told PTL. He said the high court has directed the state government to make arrangements for a team of doctors from the All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS), Delhi, to be flown to Bhopal. The family approached the high court two days after a lower court turned down their plea for a second autopsy.

Twisha was found hanging at her marital home in Bhopal's Katara Hills area

on May 12. The family of the 33-year-old model turned actor accused her in-laws of pushing their daughter to death.

Her in-laws claim she was addicted to drugs. While her postmortem was done at AIIMS Bhopal, her family had sought a second autopsy, citing discrepancies. Two days ago, Judicial Magistrate First Class Anudita Gupta in Bhopal rejected the family's plea, stating that the conscience of the court must be satisfied to order a re-postmortem. High Court

Court issues notice to Twisha Sharma's mother-in-law; MP gov't proposes to transfer Twisha Sharma death case to CBI

issued notice to ex-judge Giribala Singh, booked for the death of her daughter-in-law Twisha Sharma allegedly due to dowry harassment, on pleas seeking cancellation of her anticipatory bail in the case. Twisha Sharma's father Navnidhi

Sharma and the MP government have filed pleas in the HC seeking quashing of the anticipatory bail given to Giribala Singh by a Bhopal court. The single bench of Justice Avanindra Kumar Singh has fixed the hearing in the case for May 25. The



government proposed to transfer the case involving Twisha Sharma, the Noida

woman who was allegedly harassed for dowry and died last week, to the Central

Bureau of Investigation, officials said. The notification has been issued by Home Department Secretary Krishnaveni Desavatu, an official said. "It is proposed to transfer the investigation of the case registered at Katara Hills Police Station under Sections 80 (2), 85, 3(5) of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, and Section 3/4 of the Dowry Prohibition Act, regarding the dowry death incident that occurred on May 12, 2026, to the Central Bureau of Investigation," the notification said.

300 booked for violent clashes during Dalit wedding procession

Stones were hurled at the procession when it entered an upper-caste locality during the wedding ceremony, triggering clashes

HANS NEWS SERVICE
MATHURA

POLICE booked over 300 individuals, including 41 named accused from both sides, in connection with the violent clashes that erupted during a Dalit wedding procession here on May 20, officials said on Friday.

Police separately filed a case over an alleged attack on policemen, naming 15 people and booking 50 unidentified persons. The incident took place in Narhali village under the Highway police station area when a wedding procession from Bharna Kalan village in the Govardhan area arrived for the marriage of Lakshmi and Poonam, daughters of Bhagwan Das, to Ashok and Kuldeep, sons of Nemichand.



According to allegations, stones were hurled at the procession when it entered an upper-caste locality during the wedding ceremony, triggering clashes.

However, the other side claimed the dispute escalated after some members of the procession allegedly played songs containing caste-based derogatory re-

marks and used objectionable language.

They alleged that when residents objected, members of the procession assaulted them and entered houses to vandalise property.

Senior Superintendent of Police Shlok Kumar said the crime branch is probing the incident. Highway Police Station SHO Shailendra

Singh said Radha, daughter-in-law of the injured elderly woman Shanti alias Santoshi Devi, lodged a complaint naming 17 people from the Dalit community and 250 unidentified people.

Those named include the bride's brothers, police said. In another complaint, the bride's brother Dilip named 24 people, besides 20 unidentified people. Police said additional force from several police stations has been deployed as a precautionary measure.

Authorities appealed to members of both communities to maintain peace. Officials said the injured elderly woman's condition has improved, and she is likely to be discharged from the hospital by Friday evening.

Ramdev aide Balkrishna gets Global Peace and Health Award

Nature and the timeless wisdom of India's ancient traditions offer meaningful solution to rising mental stress, unhealthy lifestyles, and escalating global health challenges, says Acharya Balkrishna

HANS NEWS SERVICE
HARIDWAR

RENOWNED Ayurveda expert Acharya Balkrishna was honoured with the "I AM PEACEKEEPER - Champion Health Award 2026" at the Billionaires for Peace Conclave 2026 held in Mumbai on Wednesday. The award recognises his outstanding contribution to global wellness, humanitarian service, peace-building and the promotion of holistic healthcare through Ayurveda.

The honour marks another major milestone for Ayurveda and India's traditional healthcare systems, which are increasingly gaining global recognition. Through his leadership and scientific approach, Acharya Balkrishna has played a key role in transforming Ayurveda from a traditional healing practice into a globally acknowledged system supported by modern research



and evidence-based studies. Under his guidance, Patanjali Ayurved has actively worked towards presenting ancient Indian wisdom through contemporary scientific validation. Speaking after receiving the award, Acharya Balkrishna

said healthy individuals form the foundation of peaceful societies and strong nations. He described Ayurveda as a complete science of life that promotes balance, positivity and overall wellbeing. Referring to India's philosophy of "Vas-

udhaiva Kutumbakam", he said the world is increasingly looking towards India for sustainable solutions to peace and holistic health.

He also highlighted the growing challenges posed by stress, lifestyle disorders and modern health issues, saying that nature-centric living and India's ancient wisdom can offer meaningful solutions. According to him, Yoga and Ayurveda can help create not only a disease-free world but also a stress-free and conflict-free society.

Calling the award a collective recognition, Acharya Balkrishna dedicated it to India's cultural heritage, the timeless science of Ayurveda and all those who have embraced natural living. The conclave brought together Nobel Peace Prize laureates, policymakers, spiritual leaders and global thinkers to discuss peace, human welfare and sustainable development.

Man held for Suvendu PA murder, alleges torture

HANS NEWS SERVICE
AYODHYA

RAJ SINGH, who was arrested in connection with the murder case of West Bengal Chief Minister Suvendu Adhikari's personal assistant Chandranath Rath, has alleged that he was wrongly arrested, mistaken for another person with the same name and later released following a Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) probe that found no link between him and the case.

Speaking to ANI after his release, Raj said he was picked up by the police while returning from Ayodhya with his mother.

He alleged that he was not shown any evidence at the time of arrest and was pressured to confess to a crime he did not commit.

"I was wrongfully arrested, mistaken for another Raj Kumar Singh. I had gone to Ayodhya with my mother for



darshan. While coming back home, a police team arrested me. They did not listen, nor ask for evidence. They threatened me with an encounter and tried to force me to confess," Singh alleged.

He further claimed that he was later taken to Kolkata, where he was allegedly subjected to custodial pressure.

"Later, I was taken to Kolkata, where the CID tortured me to admit a crime I had not committed. Their intention was to frame me as a criminal," he said, adding that the CBI later "showed the truth"

through its investigation.

Singh thanked the CBI for what he called a fair probe and appealed to Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath to take action against the police team involved in his arrest.

"I thank the CBI for a fair investigation. I appeal to CM Yogi Ji to take action against that police team," he said.

"I have been with the BJP -- my father, too, was with the BJP. I have been associated with the Kshatriya Mahasabha, but no organisation supported me.

Women chased by cops in car, threatened; video goes viral

HANS NEWS SERVICE
ETAH

TWO women riding a scooter were allegedly chased and threatened by policemen in a car in Etah, Uttar Pradesh, an officer said.

The incident occurred in the Kotwali Nagar area on Thursday evening. A video of the altercation later went viral on social media.

The women alleged that the car occupants, who identified themselves as police, chased them, hit their scooter and gave them threats.

Etah Kotwali Police Station SHO Prempal Singh said the matter was under investigation.

Additional Superintendent of Police Shwetabh Pandey said, "No complaint has been filed by the women. The video is being looked into." -- PTI

Red alert issued as heatwave sweeps UP

HANS NEWS SERVICE
BANDA

THE Meteorological Centre here has issued a red alert for 10 districts in the state for Friday, warning of 'severe' to 'very severe' heatwave conditions. The alert has been issued for Banda, Chitrakoot, Kaushambi, Prayagraj, Fatehpur, Pratapgarh, Mirzapur, Varanasi, Bhadohi and Jaunpur districts, where severe heatwave conditions are likely during the day.

An orange alert has been sounded for 34 districts, including Baghat, Meerut, Ghaziabad, Hapur, Gautam Buddha Nagar, Bulandshahr, Aligarh, Mathura, and Agra.

The weather office has also issued a yellow alert for 17 districts, including Deoria, Lakhimpur Kheri, Sitapur, Hardoi, Farrukhabad, Lucknow, Barabanki, and Ayodhya.

The MeT said maximum



temperatures are likely to rise gradually by 2-3 degrees Celsius in eastern Uttar Pradesh over the next 48 hours, while no major change is expected elsewhere during the week.

Under the warning classification issued by the weather office, a yellow alert means people should remain updated, as heatwave conditions may persist for two days.

An orange alert advises residents and authorities to remain prepared as severe heatwave conditions may

continue for two days or heatwave conditions of varying intensity may persist for four days or more.

A red alert calls for immediate action as severe heatwave conditions are likely to continue for more than two days and pose a serious risk to public health.

An intense heat wave swept Uttar Pradesh on Thursday, with Banda recording the highest maximum temperature in the state at 47.6 degrees Celsius.

HC seizes Lucknow mayor's powers till she administers oath to corporator

HANS NEWS SERVICE
LUCKNOW

THE Allahabad high court on Thursday seized the administrative and financial powers of the Lucknow mayor till she administers oath to corporator Lalit Kishore Tiwari. The Lucknow bench of the court passed the direction in a matter related to ward number 73 in the city's Faizullaganj area, where even five months after the election tribunal declared Tiwari elected as the corporator, he is yet to be administered the oath. The court ordered that until the corporator declared elected by the tribunal is administered the oath, the mayor's financial and administrative powers shall remain suspended. The order was passed by a bench of Justices Alok Mathur and S Q H Rizvi. The court had, on May 13, again taken a stern view of the failure to administer oath to Tiwari.

Saini woos Japanese investors at Indo-Japan conclave

HANS NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI

HARYANA Chief Minister Nayab Singh Saini on Friday invited Japanese companies to expand their investments in Haryana, saying the state has emerged as India's largest hub for Japanese industries and offers a strong ecosystem for global manufacturing, logistics and innovation.

Addressing the Indo-Japan Conclave in New Delhi, the Chief Minister said India and Japan share a long-standing strategic and economic partnership built on common values such as trust, discipline, harmony, respect for tradition and commitment to excellence. He said the two countries can jointly build resilient supply chains

and create a next-generation industrial ecosystem for a greener and smarter future.

Major Japanese industrial hub

Saini said Haryana currently hosts nearly 394 Japanese industries and more than 600 Japanese business establishments, making it the preferred destination for Japanese investment in India. He added that Japanese technology and industrial cooperation have significantly contributed to the state's economic and industrial growth.

Recalling his visit to Japan in October last year, the Chief Minister said nine Japanese companies had committed investments worth nearly Rs. 5,000 crore in Haryana. He said the growing trust between the two sides has

transformed Haryana into a "Home Away From Home" for Japanese companies.

The Chief Minister stressed that Haryana values not just business-to-business or government-to-government ties, but also "Heart to Heart" relationships with Japan.

Work culture attracting investors

Explaining why Japanese industries prefer Haryana, Saini said the state has successfully adopted the Japanese work culture that focuses on quality, operational stability, disciplined manpower, reliable supply chains and long-term commitment.

He said industrial regions such as Gurugram, Manesar, Sonapat, Bawal and Jhajjar have evolved into successful



examples of India-Japan industrial integration. According to him, Haryana is no longer merely an investment destination but a trusted strategic partner for Japan.

Boost investment potential

Highlighting Haryana's infrastructure strengths, the Chief Minister said nearly two-thirds of the state lies in

the NCR region and every district is connected through national highways. Projects such as the Dedicated Freight Corridor, Delhi-Mumbai Expressway, Rapid Rail, metro connectivity and greenfield corridors are further strengthening the state's connectivity. He said Haryana is developing 64 industrial estates, logistics hubs,

EV ecosystems, food parks and advanced manufacturing zones, while 10 new Industrial Model Townships (IMTs) are also planned.

Saini said the Japanese Industrial Township in Jhajjar and the proposed Japanese cluster in Naraingarh will give a fresh push to India-Japan industrial cooperation.

Automobile and logistics sectors

Inviting Japanese investors to expand their businesses in Haryana, the Chief Minister said the state manufactures nearly 50 per cent of India's cars and 33 per cent of its two-wheelers, creating strong opportunities in the automobile sector, particularly in Sohna and Kharkhoda IMTs.

He also said Haryana is rapidly emerging as a logistics hub and offers investment opportunities in dry ports, container freight stations and multimodal logistics parks.

Faster clearances

The Chief Minister said the Haryana Government has focused on both "Ease of Doing Business" and "Speed

of Doing Business." More than 140 services are now available digitally under one roof, while project approval time has been reduced from 24 days to 12 days.

To assist Japanese investors, the state government has also established a dedicated "Sakura Desk" to provide support from the pre-investment stage to expansion and issue resolution.

Saini added that Haryana is rapidly progressing in sectors such as electric mobility, semiconductors, artificial intelligence, robotics, green hydrogen and renewable manufacturing. He said Haryana's MSMEs can also become a vital part of global supply chains through collaboration with Japanese industries.

Three-day interim bail for Umar Khalid in UAPA case

A bench of Justices Prathiba M Singh and Madhu Jain permitted Khalid to be released from June 1 to June 3 to enable him to meet his mother who has to undergo surgery

HANS NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI

THE Delhi High Court on Friday granted three-day interim bail to activist Umar Khalid, who is in custody in a case under anti-terror law UAPA concerning the "larger conspiracy" behind

the February 2020 riots in the city's northeastern parts. A bench of Justices Prathiba M Singh and Madhu Jain permitted Khalid to be released from June 1 to June 3 to enable him to meet his mother who has to undergo a surgery. The bench noted that the

Supreme Court rejected Khalid's regular bail plea on January 5 but granted him the reprieve by taking an "empathetic view." "Taking an empathetic view, this court is inclined to grant him interim bail for three days from June 1 to June 3 to enable the appel-



lant to spend time with his mother," the court concluded. ASG S V Raju, appearing

should be permitted to visit her with a police escort.

The court was hearing Khalid's appeal against the trial court's May 19 order that dismissed his interim bail plea. He had urged the trial court to grant him 15 days' interim bail to attend a 40-day post-death ritual of his uncle and take care of his mother, who has to undergo a surgery.

The trial court, however, opined that attending the ceremony of his deceased uncle was "not that neces-

sary" and that other family members were available to take care of his mother.

Khalid was booked under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA) for being one of the "masterminds" of the February 2020 riots that had left 53 people dead and more than 700 injured.

The violence had erupted during protests against the Citizenship (Amendment) Act (CAA), 2019, and the National Register of Citizens (NRC). Activists Shar-

jeel Imam, Khalid Saifi and former Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) councillor Tahir Husain, among others, were also booked for their alleged involvement in the larger conspiracy case, which is being investigated by the Delhi Police's Special Cell.

On September 2, 2025, a bench of Justices Navin Chawla and Shalinder Kaur had denied bail to Imam, Khalid, Miran Haider and other accused in the case. The Supreme Court upheld the order in January.

City police steps up security arrangements ahead of Bakrid

HANS NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI

THE Delhi Police has stepped up security arrangements across the national capital ahead of Eid-ul-Azha (Bakrid), with intensified foot patrolling, vehicle checking, picket inspections and a series of Aman Committee meetings being conducted across multiple districts, officials said on Friday. Police said community-outreach programmes, guard briefings and coordination meetings are being organised to ensure peaceful celebrations during the festival.

In Shahdara district, a meeting was held at the office



of the deputy commissioner of police (DCP), where senior officers interacted with local representatives and community members, asking them to adhere to government norms and regula-

tions. "Special emphasis was laid on three key elements -- coordination, vigilance and public participation -- to ensure that the festival is celebrated in a peaceful and harmonious atmosphere,"

a senior police officer from Shahdara said.

Officers urged residents to maintain communal harmony and immediately report any suspicious activity or rumour-mongering. In East Delhi, police have conducted interactive meetings with resident welfare associations (RWAs) and market welfare associations (MWAs) at several places as part of confidence-building measures ahead of the festival.

"Station house officers (SHOs) are holding separate Aman Committee meetings, while personnel are organising Prahri meetings at multiple locations," an officer from East district said.

Two held for running cyber fraud-cash conversion racket

HANS NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI

WITH the arrest of two men from Goa, the Delhi Police on Friday claimed to have busted an interstate cyber-fraud-and-cash-conversion racket. Police said transactions worth nearly Rs 40 lakh routed through the network have also been uncovered. Accused Arjun Lal Yadav (29) and Deependra Mahala (25), both residents of Rajasthan, were apprehended from South Goa's Madgaon following a multi-state operation, an officer said.

The syndicate operated across Delhi, Goa and Rajasthan, and allegedly converted proceeds of cyber fraud into physical cash through commercial establishments in Goa, he added.

"The investigation began after a complainant reported that his mobile phone was compromised during what appeared to be a routine software or system update. Criminals subsequently gained unauthorised access to the accounts linked to the complainant and his mother's bank accounts and siphoned off Rs 1.5 lakh within minutes," the officer said.

The victim got a complaint lodged through the National Cyber Crime Reporting Portal, following which an FIR was registered at the Cyber police station of Outernorth district. During investigation, police traced Rs 98,000 of the defrauded money to a fuel station located in Vasco in South Goa. Police said the accused allegedly ran a structured cash-conversion racket through a dedicated phone number active on social-media platforms.

DU hostlers observe nightlong sit-in over lack of water, forced eviction

HANS NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI

STUDENTS living in the University Hostel for Women (UHW) of the Delhi University (DU) staged an overnight sit-in over a lack of water supply and "extortion" by the administration, according to a Left-backed student group.

The All India Students' Association (AISA) also alleged "forced eviction" of students. "For over a week,

these students have been pushed to the brink.

While they are in the middle of semester examinations and preparing for NET exams, the administration has declared a virtual red alert, shutting down the water supply across two full blocks and stripping the reading room of basic chairs," the group said in the statement. The students' protest started around 9.30 pm on Thursday and continued till early Friday.

AISA alleged that assurances given by the hostel provost to restore amenities and extend the residency deadline were not fulfilled. However, in the morning, the administration issued a signed mandate granting an unconditional extension to residents till June 30 and a written guarantee that all infrastructural demands, including reading room chairs and mess coolers, will be met without any further delay, the group said.

Court acquits 5 men accused in bank dacoity-cum-murder case

HANS NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI

A Delhi court has acquitted five men accused in a 2018 dacoity-cum-murder case at a Corporation Bank branch, saying the prosecution failed to establish their involvement beyond a reasonable doubt after key eyewitnesses and bank staff failed to identify them during the trial. Additional Sessions Judge Sumit Dass was hearing the case against Sachin (son of Satpal), Sachin (son of Inderjeet), Vicky alias Pushkar, Parvesh and Pawan

Pandey, who were accused of looting the branch at Kheda Dabar in south-west Delhi and killing its cashier in 2018. In the order dated May 19, the court said, "The accused persons in the present case have been able to create doubt upon the story of the prosecution, for which benefit has to be given to them.

Accordingly, the accused are entitled to the benefit of doubt." According to the prosecution, the accused were involved in the incident at Corporation Bank's Kheda Dabar

branch on October 12, 2018, where armed men allegedly stormed the bank, snatched the security guard's weapon, looted around Rs 3 lakh and opened fire, killing cashier Santosh Kumar. Witnesses said the assailants fled on motorcycles after the robbery. An FIR was registered at the Chhawla police station under charges including dacoity, murder and offences under the Arms Act. During the trial, several bank officials, customers and the security guard confirmed that a dacoity and killing had taken place.

SC grants interim bail to two Delhi riots accused

Refers question of law to larger bench on whether prolonged incarceration and delay in trial can override the statutory restrictions on bail under anti-terror laws such as UAPA

HANS NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI

THE Supreme Court on Friday granted interim bail of six months to two Delhi riots accused while referring to a larger bench the question of law on whether prolonged incarceration and delay in trial can override the statutory restrictions on bail.

A bench of Justices Arvind Kumar and P B Varale refused to comment on the recent verdict given by a bench headed by Justice B V Nagarathna in which it criticised the January 5 verdict denying bail to activists Umar Khalid and Sharjeel Imam. While justifying denial of bail to activists Umar Khalid and Sharjeel Imam earlier this year, saying it was done not because Article 21 was considered subordinate but considering their role and accused-based evaluation.

A bench of Justice Arvind Kumar and PV Varale



granted interim bail of six months to Saifi and Ahmad, and imposed certain conditions on them including that they will not speak to media or make social media posts about the case.

The Delhi Police has sought reference of the question of law to a larger bench on whether prolonged incarceration and delay in trial can override the statutory

restrictions on bail under

anti-terror laws such as the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, 1967 (UAPA).

The bench justified the denial of bail to Khalid and Imam in the Delhi riots case, saying it was based on an accused-based evaluation, role ascribed to them and not that Article 21 was considered subordinate.

The bench granted interim bail to two Delhi riot accused Abdul Khalid Saifi and Tas-

eem Ahmad for six months, subject to certain conditions. It said that the prosecution may seek cancellation of bail for the two if the conditions imposed by the courts are violated.

The bench directed that the matter be placed before Chief Justice of India (CJI) Surya Kant for the constitution of an appropriate bench for an authoritative pronouncement on the question of law.

Police busts illegal forex trading call centre, 6 held

HANS NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI

THE Delhi Police has busted an illegal forex trading call centre operating from Indore in Madhya Pradesh and arrested six people allegedly involved in duping victims across the country through fake online investment schemes, an official said on Friday.

According to the police, the accused allegedly ran a sophisticated fraud operation using a fake trading platform to lure people into investing in forex and online trading products by showing fabricated profits and trading gains. Police said the syndicate cheated victims out of around Rs 1 crore by con-



vincing them to invest in gold, silver, Nifty, Bank Nifty, and cryptocurrency-linked assets.

"The operation was unearthed during an investigation into a complaint filed on the National Cyber Crime Reporting Portal (NCRP), who alleged that a woman induced him to invest in forex trading," the officer said. Police said the victim was repeatedly persuad-

ed to transfer money under various pretexts, including leverage charges, GST, penalties, TDS and account unlocking fees. During the investigation, it was found that the complainant had transferred more than Rs 10.5 lakh into multiple bank accounts allegedly operated by the fraudsters, they said.

"A team carried out technical surveillance, mobile track-

ing, IMEI analysis and scrutiny of financial transactions before tracing the network to Indore," the officer said. Based on inputs and local intelligence, police conducted a raid at the scamster's place in Indore's RNT Marg, where they allegedly found a fully operational illegal call centre. Police said 41 people, including 35 tele-callers, were present at the office and were actively contacting potential victims and persuading them to invest money through the fake trading platform.

The six arrested accused were identified as Kartik Aggarwal, alleged mastermind and owner of the operation; Raja Aggarwal, co-owner of the call centre; and team leaders Harsh Keshre, Nikhil Bhalse, Deepak Umath and Vipin Yadav. "The syndicate used fake identities, mule bank accounts, fake SIM cards and layered banking channels to evade detection," the officer said.

Digital push to tendering: Govt signs SBI pact for 'e-Pay' platform

PURNA SINGH
NEW DELHI

With the rollout of the e-Pay solution, the entire payment mechanism will be digitised, reducing paperwork and manual intervention while ensuring faster and more transparent transactions for stakeholders participating in government tenders

the implementation of a new digital payment platform called 'e-Pay'.

The new system is designed to strengthen transparency, improve efficiency and promote ease of doing business in government procurement processes. It will offer enhanced e-banking services, seamless digital

payment support and comprehensive Management Information System (MIS) assistance for procurement-related operations.

At present, the e-tendering ecosystem largely depends on manual payment methods and physical processing systems. With the rollout of the e-Pay so-

lution, the entire payment mechanism will be digitised, reducing paperwork and manual intervention while ensuring faster and more transparent transactions for stakeholders participating in government tenders.

As part of the reform measures, the IT Department has also integrated



the Earnest Money Deposit (EMD) feature into the Delhi Government eProcurement Portal.

The digital integration

will allow bidders to make and verify payments online with real-time transaction confirmation, significantly reducing delays and admin-

istrative hurdles. The new mechanism will also eliminate the need for bidders to submit physical demand drafts, making the tendering

process fully paperless and more convenient for businesses and contractors.

Under the partnership, SBI will assist the Delhi e-Governance Society in managing secure online payment services connected to the Delhi Government's e-tendering ecosystem. The MoU was formally signed by the Director of DeGS and SBI's Deputy General Manager.

Delhi Information Technology Minister Pankaj Kumar Singh said the initiative reflects the government's focus on strengthening digital governance and improving public service delivery through technology-driven reforms.

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Cockroach Janta Party: When satire becomes a threat

IT began as a joke but got taken seriously—so seriously that the government acted against it. That is the story of the Cockroach Janta Party (CJP), which is merely a week old. On May 16, an activist, who reportedly was earlier associated with the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP), Abhijeet Dipke, launched CJP, a satirical take on Chief Justice of India (CJI) Surya Kant's comment on the unemployable youth with fake degrees who eventually become "parasites" and "cockroaches," attacking the system. The CJI's remarks were not very elegant; these were especially hurtful as the young have been the victims rather than tormentors of the system. Among other things, they suffer because of a dearth of quality jobs and

a conducive environment in which they can become wealth creators. And now, they are also hit by the incompetence and corruption in the bodies that carry out exams for coveted seats in higher education and jobs. The remarks were deeply resented by not just youth but also others. This was the reason that the CJI later issued a clarification, stating he was misquoted and his remarks were directed specifically at individuals entering the legal profession through "fake and bogus degrees." This, however, didn't stop the usage of the term 'cockroaches' online and the party espousing their cause; in fact, the party received wide support from various politicians, activists, artists, and millions of other users across

social media platforms. It is said that the CJP was able to get more followers than the ruling BJP and Congress, though the figures have not been verified. The government overreacted by reportedly directing X to withhold the account following inputs from the Intelligence Bureau (IB), which flagged "national security concerns." Apparently, the Ministry of Electronics & Information Technology (MeitY) invoked Section 69A of the Information Technology Act, 2000, to demand action against the CJP account. Senior Congress leader Shashi Tharoor pointed out that the episode "confirms to us the extent to which there is frustration and dissatisfaction that the public can express through being able to tap into

an initiative like this." In the meanwhile, Trinamool Congress MP Mahua Moitra accused the government of stifling dissent. The government should have avoided action against the CJP, because it was quite clearly a joke. Which serious political party would claim to be the "voice of the lazy"? Or claim that the "eligibility criteria" to join the CJP was to be "unemployed, lazy, and chronically online" with the "ability to rant professionally"? More than anyone else, the government took the joke seriously. By moving to block the account, the government ended up validating the very criticism the satire sought to make. A parody page that may otherwise have remained a passing internet joke suddenly acquired

political significance because of official intervention. In trying to suppress ridicule, the authorities amplified it. The episode also raises troubling questions about the increasing tendency to invoke sweeping powers such as Section 69A against online expression that is inconvenient or embarrassing rather than genuinely dangerous. Democracies are expected to tolerate mockery, even harsh mockery, because satire is often a barometer of public sentiment. What makes the CJP episode particularly revealing is that the government appeared more offended by the language of protest than by the underlying anger that produced it. A confident government would have laughed away the joke.

LETTERS

Promote alternative career paths
This refers to "NEET aftermath: Parents and teachers must anchor our students," (THI, May 22). The paper leak has rightly angered people, but anger alone will not protect the next batch of students. What is more worrisome is the singular importance we have attached to just one examination. Families invest everything — emotionally and financially — into a single outcome, leaving young people with no psychological fallback. Schools and parents must actively normalise alternative career paths, not as consolation but as genuine choices. Counselling should be embedded in the academic calendar, not offered after a crisis strikes. Systemic reforms matter, but the cultural shift around success and failure is equally urgent.

Prajesh Paramasivan, Neelambur-641048

Students must focus on GCC space

With reference to the article "Bright story of growth in GCC space awaits us beyond layoffs" (THI May 22), the increasing wave of layoffs in global technology companies has become a major concern for employees, students and parents across the country. In recent months, leading multinational firms have laid off thousands of workers worldwide. However, the changing situation should not alarm our IT professionals given that India is the preferred destination for GCCs because of its skilled workforce and growing digital ecosystem. More global firms are setting up technology centres in the country, which is expected to open fresh employment opportunities. Employees must adapt themselves to this transformation. Those who fail to keep pace with emerging technologies may find it difficult to survive in the changing market. Workers should also branch out into communication skills, teamwork and problem-solving abilities. Educational institutions should step in and update their syllabus according to industry requirements. Youngsters must understand that the IT industry now opens opportunities not only in coding but also in analytics, robotics, AI systems and digital transformation. Companies should invest in reskilling and upskilling programmes rather than simply laying off workers. Internal training sessions and mentorship initiatives can help employees move into new domains. Governments and industry bodies can bolster employees through skill development schemes. Skilled professionals who adapt themselves to the changing demands are likely to secure rewarding careers in the future. India's GCC ecosystem is expected to create large-scale employment opportunities in the long run. Employees, students and educational institutions must work together to prepare for the changing technological landscape instead of getting discouraged by temporary setbacks.

Raju Kolluru, Kakinada

Engineers should eye GCC positions.

THIS refers to "Bright story of growth in GCC Space awaits us beyond layoffs". Rather than worry over layoffs, professionals must take comfort from the fact India's growing GCC ecosystem offers real hope. Many mid-level professionals are still anxious about job security and the rapid shift towards AI-driven roles. Rather than relying solely on market forces, we need practical steps: targeted government-industry partnerships for short-term AI and data science certification programmes, easier credit for tech startups, and clearer pathways for experienced engineers to move into GCC positions. Companies too must invest more in internal reskilling instead of sudden headcount cuts.

M Barathi, Bengaluru - 560076

Reskilling is the need of the hour

Propos "Bright story of growth in GCC space awaits us beyond layoffs," (THI, May 22). The anxiety around layoffs is understandable, but the bigger concern is whether India's IT workforce is preparing itself for what comes next. GCCs are expanding, and that is genuinely good news. But expansion does not automatically translate into opportunity if skills remain static. Many mid-level professionals are still anchored to roles that AI is steadily absorbing. Reskilling cannot remain a talking point in corporate presentations. Universities, employers, and industry bodies must together create credible, accessible pathways for professionals to transition into AI-adjacent roles. India has the scale and the talent base to lead this shift. The question is whether we move with enough urgency before the window narrows.

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BENGALURU ONLINE

Flight services from Bengaluru to Bidar and Kalaburagi to resume: MB Patil

BENGALURU: Infrastructure Development Minister M B Patil on Friday announced that flight services from Bengaluru to Bidar and Kalaburagi, the district headquarters of the Kalyana Karnataka region, will resume from June 1 and June 10 respectively.

Speaking on the occasion, he said that Star Air (Ghodawat Enterprises Limited) will operate flights on the Bengaluru-Bidar-Bengaluru and Bengaluru-Kalaburagi-Bengaluru sectors. The Government is extending viability gap funding of ₹28.47 crore to support the operations. Advance booking for flights on both routes has already commenced, he added.

Patil said the flight service to Kalaburagi had earlier been suspended due to financial losses. In the case of Bidar, services were being operated with special support from the Kalyana Karnataka Regional Development Board. Taking into account the growth of industries, education, tourism, agriculture and commercial activities in the Kalyana Karnataka region, the Government has decided to revive the services under the regional air connectivity initiative, he said.

The Minister said the Government is committed to enhancing air connectivity to Tier-2 and Tier-3 cities across the State. Such initiatives will not only accelerate regional economic growth but also contribute to infrastructure development, he noted.

Read more at <https://epaper.thehansindia.com>

Hashtags, hate and half-truths: The dark side of India's digital politics



THE rise of social media in India was once hailed as a democratic revolution. It promised to dismantle the monopoly of traditional media, amplify unheard voices, deepen citizen participation, and establish a direct connection between political leaders and the public. In many ways, it succeeded. Political communication became immediate, interactive, and accessible on an unprecedented scale.

But now the same platforms have steadily polluted the country's political ecosystem. What began as an instrument of participation has, in many instances, degenerated into an unregulated arena of misinformation, abuse, manufactured outrage, and character assassination. The consequences extend far beyond politics; they strike at the very culture of democracy.

Indian politics has always been intensely competitive and emotionally charged. But social media transformed both the speed and scale of political confrontation. Earlier, allegations against political rivals passed through editorial scrutiny, legal checks, and institutional filters before reaching the public domain. Newspapers and television channels, despite their flaws and biases, still functioned within identifiable structures of accountability. Social media erased those barriers overnight.

Today, anonymous handles with no credibility or accountability can circulate fabricated claims, morphed videos, edited speeches, fake documents, and defamatory accusations to millions within minutes. Once amplified through coordinated digital networks, repetition itself

When outrage becomes currency and truth becomes irrelevant, democracy pays the price

creates the illusion of truth. The political ecosystem has consequently shifted from ideological contestation to perpetual digital warfare. Truth is no longer merely the first casualty of political conflict; it is increasingly treated as irrelevant.

Perhaps the gravest danger posed by social media is the near-total absence of accountability.

Traditional journalism, at least in principle, carried institutional responsibility. Publications could face defamation suits, public scrutiny, legal consequences, and professional censure for unethical reporting. Editors and publishers were answerable for what they printed. Of course, it is a different matter that these days even journalists seem to be getting increasingly influenced by social media and are vying to belittle the views expressed by fellow journalists acting more like activists.

Political operatives, ideological influencers, troll networks, and anonymous accounts routinely spread allegations without evidence. Many posts are cleverly framed as "questions," "sources suggest," or "reports indicate," enabling users to evade direct liability while successfully planting suspicion in the public mind. The damage, however, is immediate and often irreversible.

A false allegation may trend nationally for a day, dominate television debates, influence public perception, and quietly disappear later without apology, correction, or consequence. By the time fact-checkers intervene, the political narrative has already hardened.

This has created a dangerous incentive structure where outrage is rewarded, restraint ignored, and sensationalism travels faster than truth.

In a healthy democracy, political rivalry should revolve around governance, policy, ide-



The digital public square has become a theatre of political hostility, where anonymous allegations, viral half-truths and manufactured narratives often overpower evidence. This article examines how social media polluted India's political ecosystem and asks whether democratic discourse can still recover civility, accountability and respect for truth

ology, and public performance. Increasingly, however, Indian political discourse online revolves around the destruction of individuals rather than debate over ideas.

Political opponents are routinely portrayed not merely as rivals but as enemies, traitors, criminals, dictators, communal agents, or anti-national conspirators — often without substantiated evidence. Families are dragged into political battles. Private lives are scrutinized. Old videos are selectively edited. Rumours are packaged as "exposés." The objective is not persuasion but delegitimation.

Almost every major political formation now possesses an aggressive digital ecosystem dedicated less to defending its own ideas and more to attacking opponents relentlessly. The tragedy is that civil disagreement — the cornerstone of parliamentary democracy — is steadily disappearing.

Social media algorithms are designed not to promote truth or balance, but engagement.

Anger, outrage, fear, and polarization generate more clicks than reasoned analysis. Consequently, users increasingly inhabit ideological echo chambers where they consume only information that reinforces pre-existing beliefs.

Supporters of one political camp accept every allegation against rivals unquestioningly while dismissing all criticism of their preferred leaders as propaganda. Facts themselves become partisan.

A democracy cannot function effectively when citizens no longer agree even on basic facts. Nuance disappears. Complexity is reduced to hashtags. Serious policy discussions are drowned out by viral abuse and performative outrage.

Another disturbing feature of India's social media is that political messaging today is systematically engineered through coordinated hashtag campaigns, bot amplification, influencer networks, edited clips, selective leaks, meme factories, and targeted disinformation operations. Public percep-

tion itself can now be artificially manufactured. Visibility is mistaken for legitimacy.

The loudest voices online are often not the most credible — merely the most aggressively amplified.

The pollution generated by social media extends beyond political parties and leaders. Institutions themselves have become targets of sustained digital delegitimation.

The judiciary, Election Commission, investigative agencies, armed forces, universities, journalists, economists, and even constitutional authorities are routinely attacked whenever their actions conflict with partisan expectations.

Social media toxicity is not accidental; it is deeply tied to the economics of digital platforms which interests most of those who own these digital channels. These platforms profit from engagement, not civility. Outrage sustains attention. Polarisation increases interaction. Conflict keeps users online longer. As a result, inflammatory political content is often algorithmically rewarded.

Political actors exploit this structure ruthlessly because digital aggression delivers immediate visibility. Falsehood spreads not only because it is politically useful, but because it is commercially incentivised. The ultimate casualty is informed citizenship.

The answer, however, cannot lie in censorship alone. Excessive state control over digital speech carries dangers of its own and can easily become an instrument of political suppression. What India urgently needs is a culture of balanced accountability.

Political parties must discourage anonymous abuse and misinformation instead of covertly benefiting from it. Social media platforms must evolve

A historic step towards social justice

AMARAWAJI NAGARAJU

THE national debate on caste enumeration has once again moved to the centre of India's political and social discourse. Recent observations by the Supreme Court emphasizing the importance of caste data in the Census have added renewed urgency to a long-pending issue. For communities that have consistently demanded equitable representation, welfare, and social justice, the development carries both symbolic and policy significance.

Our Constitution guarantees equality to every citizen. Yet, the realities of social and economic inequality continue to shape access to education, employment, political representation, and public resources. Despite decades of affirmative action and welfare policies, the absence of comprehensive and updated caste-based data has remained a major policy gap. Governments continue to frame reservation policies and welfare interventions largely on estimates and outdated assumptions rather than contemporary evidence.

The last comprehensive caste census in India was conducted in 1931. After Independence, official Census exercises have largely restricted caste enumeration to Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. Consequently, there is no reliable nationwide data on the population, educational status, economic conditions, or



representation of Other Backward Classes and several marginalized communities. These paradoxical policies meant to advance social justice are being implemented without a precise understanding of the social realities they seek to address.

Caste enumeration:

In this context, the Supreme Court's observations assume considerable importance. The underlying principle is simple, yet profound: meaningful equality cannot be achieved without understanding the actual structure of inequality. In a democracy committed to inclusive governance, representation and opportunity must be informed by evidence, not speculation. Policymakers across the world increasingly recognise that data-driven governance is indispensable for effective welfare planning and equitable distribution of resources.

The demand for caste enumera-

tion has been consistently raised by several political and social movements over the years. Their argument is rooted in a fundamental democratic question: who has access to the nation's wealth, institutions, education, and decision-making structures, and in what proportion? Without credible data, these debates remain confined to rhetoric. The Court's intervention has now provided institutional legitimacy to a conversation that many believe was delayed for far too long.

The Telangana caste survey:

Telangana's recent caste survey has emerged as an important example in this regard. Conducted with administrative coordination and public participation, the exercise attempted to systematically gather socio-economic and educational data across communities. While debates on methodology and implementation may continue, the broader sig-

nificance of the initiative lies in its attempt to shift governance toward evidence-based policymaking. In an era where governments worldwide rely on data to frame targeted welfare measures, India too must strengthen its statistical foundations.

Globally, countries routinely collect demographic and social indicators to address disparities in health-care, education, employment, and income distribution. In diverse societies, such exercises are not viewed as instruments of division but as tools for inclusion. India, with its layered social realities, arguably has an even greater need for accurate and transparent data systems.

Critics of caste enumeration, however, raise concerns that such exercises could deepen social divisions or intensify caste-based politics. These concerns cannot be dismissed lightly. Yet, acknowledging inequality is not the same as perpetuating it. Democracies cannot correct structural disadvantages without first identifying them. Just as a physician cannot prescribe treatment without diagnosis, governments cannot meaningfully address social inequities without reliable evidence.

Data privacy and public trust:

Another critical dimension is data privacy and public trust. In the digital age, the collection of personal information naturally raises concerns about misuse and surveillance.

Therefore, any caste enumeration exercise must be conducted with transparency, scientific rigor, and strong legal safeguards. Data protection mechanisms should ensure that information is used exclusively for policy and welfare purposes, not for partisan political gains.

The debate now demands clarity and political maturity from the Union government. Caste enumeration should not be viewed merely through an electoral lens, but as an administrative and constitutional necessity. A credible framework must emerge through consultations with states, sociologists, statisticians, and policy experts. Public expectations today are increasingly shaped by a demand for evidence-based governance rather than broad political assurances.

Dr B R Ambedkar envisioned an India where equality would not remain a constitutional promise alone but become a lived social reality. Achieving that vision requires more than slogans or symbolic commitments. It requires institutions willing to confront uncomfortable truths with honesty and policy courage.

A comprehensive caste census is not merely a bureaucratic exercise. Properly designed and responsibly implemented, it can become a transformative democratic reform, one that strengthens representation, improves welfare delivery, and deepens the Republic's commitment to social justice. For a nation still grappling with entrenched inequalities, understanding the true contours of deprivation may well be the first step toward correcting them.

Expand PNG infra fast, Nadendla to companies

- Civil supplies minister directs PNG firms to speed up infrastructure expansion and public outreach to shift households from LPG to Piped Natural Gas across the state
- Announces large-scale skill training for youth through ITIs and polytechnics, with free accommodation, food and stipends, to meet manpower needs in the growing PNG sector and boost employment
- PNG connections will be mandatory for major temples conducting Annadanam

HANS NEWS SERVICE
VIJAYAWADA

FOOD and civil supplies minister Nadendla Manohar directed officials and PNG companies to accelerate efforts to shift people from LPG usage to Piped Natural Gas (PNG) across the state.

He assured that the government machinery would fully support PNG companies in expanding infrastructure and creating public awareness about the benefits of PNG usage.

The minister conducted a special review meeting at the Secretariat here on Friday with representatives of PNG companies and senior officials from various departments. Transport minister B C Janardhan Reddy participated in the meeting through video conference.

Speaking on the occasion, Manohar said the coalition

government is committed to providing alternative gas solutions to the public quickly and efficiently. He stated that the government aims to ensure uninterrupted cooking gas supply to households and urged the five PNG companies operating in the state to be fully prepared for rapid expansion. He noted that people are increasingly turning towards PNG gas in line with changing times and asked companies to strengthen infrastructure and intensify promotional campaigns.

The minister assured that the government is granting approvals for gas expansion works in cities and towns at a faster pace and promised immediate resolution of any issues faced by companies. He also said the government would facilitate land allotment on lease basis for setting up PNG filling stations. Highlighting the need



Civil supplies minister Nadendla Manohar holds a review with officials and representatives PNG companies at the Secretariat in Amaravati on Friday

for skilled manpower, the Minister said youth should be trained in PNG technical skills through ITIs, polytechnic colleges and other skill institutions.

Under the supervision of AP Skill Development and district collectors, batches of 100 youth from each district would be trained every 15 days with free accommodation, food and stipend support. He said linking trained youth with PNG companies would create employment opportunities while addressing manpower shortages in the sector.

Manohar also stressed the need for extensive awareness campaigns through women self-help groups, SERP and MEPMA net-

works to educate people about the convenience, cost savings and safety benefits of PNG usage. He instructed gas companies to coordinate with women's groups and offer incentives for their participation in expansion activities.

The minister announced that PNG connections would be made mandatory for major temples where Annadanam is conducted. He said the government would resolve pending issues in temples like Kanaka Durga temple and Srikanthasthewara temple to speed up PNG implementation, following directions from Chief Minister N. Chandrababu Naidu. He also stated that simplified guidelines

would soon be introduced for tenants using PNG connections and availing LPG subsidy benefits.

He said the government is preparing regulations to ensure PNG users also receive the Rs 2,400 Deepam-2 scheme subsidy annually, as directed by the Chief Minister.

Special focus would be given to expanding PNG connections in apartments, group housing complexes and villas in urban areas.

He warned that another review on the performance of PNG companies would be conducted within 15 days and made it clear that visible progress in expansion activities must be achieved by then.

AP plans gold mining expansion to boost jobs, economy

- Mines minister Ravindra reviews operations at the Jonnagiri gold mine in Kurnool district, where nearly one kilogram of gold is being produced daily using advanced underground mining technology
- Says AP is focusing on expanding mining activity, identifying new gold zones in Ramagiri and speeding up mineral block tenders near Visakhapatnam to drive industrial growth
- Pattikonda MLA Shyam Babu states that the Jonnagiri project has generated jobs for 300-400 local youth, reduced migration from drought-prone villages and strengthened economic activity in the region

HANS NEWS SERVICE
KURNOOL

MINISTER for mines and geology and excise Kollu Ravindra on Friday said the state government is focusing on expanding the mining sector to generate employment, increase industrial growth and strengthen the economy.

The minister, accompanied by Pattikonda MLA K E Shyam Babu visited the Jonnagiri gold mine operated by Geo Mysore Services India Private Limited near Jonnagiri village in Tuggali mandal and reviewed mining and mineral processing operations.

During the inspection, the minister examined underground mining activities, ore extraction systems, and gold refining processes being carried out with advanced technology.

He said mining operations are currently being conducted at a depth of nearly 300 metres and may be expanded further in the coming years. According to officials, the mine is producing around one kilogram of gold every



Mines and geology minister Kollu Ravindra visits Jonnagiri gold mine in Kurnool district on Friday

day, while the monthly production has reached nearly 30 kilograms.

Ravindra said geological assessments indicate the presence of nearly 13,000 tonnes of mineral reserves in and around the Jonnagiri belt, making it one of the most significant private gold mining projects in the country.

Highlighting the state government's mining policy, the minister said Andhra Pradesh possesses vast mineral resources with strong industrial potential. He noted that efforts are underway to identify and develop additional gold mining zones in the Ramagiri region of Anantapur district.

He also pointed out that rare earth minerals available along the state's coastline

have immense international demand and said the government is accelerating the tendering process for mineral blocks near Visakhapatnam.

The minister added that value-added industries based on quartz and granite resources are also being promoted to encourage manufacturing activity and create large-scale employment opportunities.

Speaking on the occasion, MLA Shyam Babu said the Jonnagiri gold mine has brought fresh economic activity to the region by providing direct and indirect employment to local youth. He said nearly 300 to 400 people from nearby villages have already secured jobs through the project, reducing seasonal migration in drought-prone areas.

State welcomes ECLGS 5.0 for MSME relief

HANS NEWS SERVICE
VIJAYAWADA

MINISTER for micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs) Kondapalli Srinivas welcomed the Centre's launch of the Emergency Credit Line Guarantee Scheme (ECLGS) 5.0, describing it as a crucial relief measure for industries affected by the ongoing political and economic instability in West Asia.

The minister said the scheme would help businesses secure additional working capital through government-backed credit guarantees at a time of rising global uncertainty and supply-chain disruptions. He stated that the Central government would provide guarantee coverage on additional loans extended by scheduled banks and financial institutions under the scheme.

Explaining the framework of ECLGS 5.0, the minister said MSMEs would receive 100 per cent credit guarantee coverage in the event of loan default, while non-MSME sectors would be eligible for guarantee protection of up to



Picture for representational purpose only

90 per cent.

Eligible businesses can avail additional credit of up to 20 per cent of the highest outstanding working capital utilised during the fourth quarter of the 2025-26 financial year, he said. The scheme allows each eligible borrower to access additional credit support of up to Rs 100 crore.

According to the minister, the facility will apply only to loans sanctioned before March 31, 2027, and disbursed by June 30, 2027. He clarified that only borrowers maintaining regular repayment records with banks and financial institutions would qualify for the scheme. The scheme will be adminis-

tered and monitored by the National Credit Guarantee Trustee Company Limited (NCGTC).

Highlighting Andhra Pradesh's MSME ecosystem, Srinivas said the state currently has nearly 20.77 lakh MSME units, including 4.98 lakh manufacturing enterprises, around 10 lakh service-sector units and 5.74 lakh trading establishments.

The minister urged MSMEs impacted by the West Asia crisis to utilise the scheme to strengthen liquidity and sustain operations. He also thanked the Central Government for introducing ECLGS 5.0 at a critical time for domestic industries.

Atchanna hits back at Jagan's charges on deaths

VIJAYAWADA

AGRICULTURE minister K Atchannaaidu on Friday strongly criticised YSRCP chief Y S Jagan Mohan Reddy for linking family deaths to the TDP and Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu.

Speaking in Amaravati, Atchannaaidu said people were well aware of the circumstances surrounding the murder of Jagan's grandfather, Y S Raja Reddy. He alleged that victims of that era had spoken of a "reign of oppression and anarchy" under the rule of the Raja Reddy case had since died, he claimed one accused remained in the YSRCP, exposing the party's "double standards." Rejecting Jagan's claims about former CM Y S Rajasekhara Reddy's helicopter crash, Atchannaaidu said Chandrababu's Assembly remarks only referred to faith in Lord Venkateswara and had no link to YSR's death. He accused Jagan of twisting the statement for political gain.

On the murder of Y S Vivekananda Reddy, Atchannaaidu alleged the YSRCP initially portrayed it as a heart attack before evidence proved otherwise.

KTR accuses Revanth, Bandi Sanjay of sheltering POCSO accused

HANS NEWS SERVICE
HYDERABAD

BRS Working President KT Rama Rao on Friday alleged that a young woman in Telangana suffered injustice due to the collusion between Chief Minister Revanth Reddy and Union Minister Bandi Sanjay.

Speaking sharply against the State Government, KTR accused the Chief Minister of intimidating the victim's family, orchestrating a counter-case against them, and shielding the accused for nine days.

Rao condemned the "reckless remarks" made by the CM on the case, asserting that it was the State Government that subjected the minor girl to severe distress, forcing her to wait at the police station until midnight when she went there with her parents to report the injustice. He questioned how the accused was allowed to remain at large for over a week, alleging it was due to the "close ties" between Bandi Sanjay and Revanth Reddy.

"The accused was finally arrested only after the High Court refused to grant bail, and after public outrage across Telangana," KTR said. He criticised the CM, who also holds the Home portfolio, for offering excuses like, "The police were, too, busy due to the Prime Minister's visit." KTR questioned whether the Prime Minister's visit justified allowing associates to roam freely while crimes went unchecked. KTR said his party had maintained silence out of sensitivity toward the young girl, avoiding politicisation of the matter. However, he was compelled to speak after the CM levelled criticism against BRS.

He demanded clarity on whether there was any other instance in the country where an accused in a POCSO case was shielded for nine days. Reports suggest the accused was allegedly sheltered in a hospital owned by a close associate of the Chief Minister. KTR called for a thorough government inquiry into the matter.

He challenged both Bandi Sanjay and the CM to reveal who orchestrated the conspiracy to file a counter-

case alleging a "honey trap" against the victim's family. KTR also alleged that the two leaders personally contacted media offices to suppress the publication of reports exposing the case.

Concluding his statement, KTR asserted that whenever injustice is committed against women in Telangana, it is the BRS that steps forward to fight for justice, and accused the ruling government of failing its duty to protect the vulner-

TG govt set to revise land market value from May 28

- Property registrations to follow new rates from month-end
- HILT policy guidelines finalised to boost revenue
- Cabinet panel reviews revised land values
- N Uttam Kumar Reddy orders action against revenue leakages
- Mallu Bhatti Vikramarka pushes departments to mobilise additional revenue
- Officials told to align collections with 2026-27 budget targets.
- Government aims to plug all financial leakages

HANS NEWS SERVICE
HYDERABAD

THE market value of lands in Telangana is set to increase from May 28. The Stamps and Registration Department has made elaborate arrangements to register properties with the revised market values from the end of this month.

In a bid to generate additional revenue, the government has also finalised guidelines for the HILT policy, and the State Industries Department is expected to

issue a notification soon.

The Cabinet Sub-Committee on Resource Mobilisation held a meeting with officials of the Registration and Industries Departments to review the revised land market values. Irrigation Minister N Uttam Kumar Reddy instructed officials to take strict action against individuals involved in illegal activities that cause financial losses to the state exchequer.

Deputy Chief Minister Mallu Bhatti Vikramarka directed officials of all de-



partments to focus on mobilising additional revenue sources to meet the budgetary requirements of the current financial year and accelerate the state's economic growth.

He emphasised that re-

source mobilisation should be aligned with the budget estimates proposed for the 2026-27 financial year. Officials were instructed to completely plug all leakages and fully utilise every available revenue source to

achieve the budget targets. Bhatti further clarified that officials across departments must work towards enhancing revenue strictly in accordance with the pre-determined timeline and implementation calendar.

ACB raids Medchal deputy collector in DA case

HANS NEWS SERVICE
HYDERABAD

THE sleuths of Telangana Anti-Corruption Bureau (ACB) on Friday carried out raids at the house of Medchal-Malkajgiri Deputy Collector Vamsi Mohan in connection with a disproportionate assets (DA) case booked against him.

The Rangareddy district ACB special teams carried out searches at eight places linked to him across Medchal and Ranga Reddy districts to collect more details about the DA assets beyond his known sources of income. Mohan earlier worked as Serilingampally RDO. Following allegations that Mohan amassed disproportionate assets, the ACB booked a case against him. The investigation has also brought attention to allegations linked to government land transactions during Vamsi Mohan's period as Shamirpet and later Serilingampally revenue officer.

NORTH EASTERN RAILWAY

Open Tender Notice No.: NER-BSB0sN-OT-25-2026
"Open Tenders" through Online (E-Tendering) are invited by Divisional Railway Manager (Signal & Telecomm)/Varanasi/ N.E. Railway for and behalf of the President of India for the following works:- S.No. 1. Tender Notice No. and Description of work: NER-BSB0sN-OT-25-2026; Name of work: Provision of Interlocking of 14 Nos. Level Crossing gates in BSB Division; Approx. Value: ₹4,78,36,883.12; Earnest Money: ₹9,56,700/-; Cost of Tender Form: ₹0.00/-; Completion period: 12 Months; Tender Closing date & Time: 12.06.2026 upto 15.00 hrs. 1. Tender online will be submitted up to 15.00 hrs. on date 12.06.2026. 2. For full details and submission of bid kindly visit the official website of Indian Railways i.e. www.ireps.gov.in.
Divl. Rly. Manager (S&T) Varanasi
CPRO/Signal-40
DO NOT SMOKE BIDI/CIGARETTE IN TRAINS

NORTHERN RAILWAY

NOTICE INVITING TENDER
85-SRDEE-G-DLI-2026-27
Electrical work in connection with "Augmentation of Infrastructural facilities renovation and allied works to improve maintenance facilities at Various Outlets location under Electrical RSD DLI (at ANVT, NDLS, GZB, DLI Main & TKD)
Approx. cost of the works in :- Rs. 5614097.00/-
Address of the office :- Sr. Div. Elect. Engineer/General, DRM Office, Delhi Division, Northern Railway, State Entry Road, New Delhi, 110055
Earnest Money :- Rs. 112300.00/-
Last Date & time of submission of tender :- 15/06/2026, 16.00 Hrs.
Opening of tender :- 15/06/2026, 16.00 Hrs.
Website & notice board :- www.ireps.gov.in & Sr. Divl. Elect. Engineer/General, New Delhi.
1741/2026
SERVING CUSTOMERS WITH A SMILE

NORTHERN RAILWAY

OPEN E-TENDER NOTICE
The Sr. Divisional Engineer-III, Northern Railway, Delhi Division invites E-Tender for the following work:
1. Name of Work: Annual P. Way Zone work for 2026-27 in the section of SSE/Pway/NDLS under ADEN/NDLS.
2. Approx. Cost of work: Rs. 1,49,00,381.09/- (Rupees One Crore Forty Nine Lakh Three Hundred Eighty One and Nine Paise Only)
3. Earnest Money to be Deposited: Rs. 2,98,000.00/- (Rupees Two Lakh Ninety Eight Thousand Only)
4. Cost of tender document: Rs. 0.00/-
5. Date & Time of submission of tender bid and opening of tender: 15.06.2026 @ 15:00 Hrs.
6. Website particulars where complete details of tender documents can be seen: www.ireps.gov.in
* The tenderers must be registered on the Indian Railway E-Procurement system (IREPS) site i.e. www.ireps.gov.in for participating in the e-tender system. * For all terms and conditions please refer tender document. * No manual offers are acceptable. * Cost of tender document and Earnest money will be acceptable through net banking or payment gateway only. No. 128-W/280/e Tender Notice/NIT/22/2026-27/W-3 Dated:-22.05.2026
SERVING CUSTOMERS WITH A SMILE 1728/26

NORTHERN RAILWAY

Open E-TENDER NOTICE
For and on behalf of President of India, Sr. Divisional Mechanical Engineer (Chg.), Northern Railway, Delhi Division invites open e-tender on "SINGLE PACKET SYSTEM" for following work from experienced and capable tenderers:
Name of Work: Supply & installation of F-Type mounting bracket stand locking arrangement for S-Trap gripping & protection as per ICF drg. no.32963203 and Annexure-A, and SS cage/trainer in S-Trap (90-94 mm OD) as per Annexure-B of Railway Board L.No.2021/M(C)/141/2P/2 dated 08.05.2025 in LHB coaches over Delhi Division.
Work Place: Delhi Division (ANVT, DLI, DEE, NDLS, NZM)
Period of Work: Three (03) Months
Advertised Value: Rs.47,30,172.60/- (including provision of GST)
Earnest Money to be deposited: Rs.94,600.00/-, through net banking or gateway only
Tender Document Cost: Nil
Date and Time availability of E-Tender Document: From 21.05.2026 to 12.06.2026 at 12:00 hrs
Date and Time of E-Tender Closing: 12.06.2026 12:00 hrs
Date and Time of E-Tender Opening: On 12.06.2026 after 12:00 hrs, if the date of opening happens to be holiday then E-Tender shall be opened on the next working day.
Place for opening E-Tender: Mechanical Department, Divisional Railway Manager's Office, Northern Railway, State Entry Road, New Delhi-55
Note: The complete particulars of the tender may be found in website www.ireps.gov.in
No: NRDLI/MCNW912025RST Date: 22/05/2026 1733/2026
SERVING CUSTOMERS WITH A SMILE

I think every team has those little bit areas to improve and some areas very strong. You can't be a completely 100% perfect team. Doesn't matter how good a player you will have, throughout the tournament there has been lots of discussion about our middle order and things like that but I feel everyone is stepping up - Rashid Khan

HC pulls up WFI over decision to declare Vinesh Phogat ineligible

NEW DELHI

THE Delhi High Court on Friday pulled up the Wrestling Federation of India (WFI) for its decision to declare celebrated grappler Vinesh Phogat "ineligible" from participation in domestic events and asked the

Centre to constitute an expert panel to evaluate her.

A bench of Chief Justice D K Upadhyaya and Justice Tejas Karia observed that the WFI's departure from the earlier practice of permitting the participation of reputed athletes "speaks volumes," and asked the Centre to ensure that Phogat, who is seeking

her return from a maternity break, is allowed to participate in the upcoming Asian Games selection trials.

The bench emphasised that motherhood is celebrated in the country, and the federation should not act with "vengeance." It asked the Centre to constitute an expert panel to evaluate Phogat

after the government counsel submitted that the framework provided by the Sports Authority of India permits relaxation of eligibility criteria in certain cases. "Ask the experts to evaluate her chances. Ensure that she participates," the court orally said, as it clarified it would take up the matter at 2:30 pm again to enable the

government counsel to come back with further details with respect to the constitution of the team of expert. The court was hearing Phogat's appeal against a single-judge's order of May 18 refusing her immediate relief on the issue of her participation in the selection trials on May 30-31 for this year's Asian Games despite be-

ing declared "ineligible" by the WFI. Phogat's senior counsel urged the bench to grant her the opportunity to participate in the trials, contending that the show-cause notice issued to her on May 9, a day before her participation in a domestic event in Gonda, showed that "somebody is clutching at straws" to oust her.



J&K's Aaquib Nabi ignored Scrap Ranji if it doesn't matter: Vengsarkar blasts selectors

Nabi was the primary catalyst in Jammu and Kashmir's Ranji Trophy triumph in the 2025-2026 season with 60 wickets to his name

MUMBAI

CRICKET legend Dilip Vengsarkar has slammed the Ajit Agarkar-led selection committee for ignoring Ranji Trophy star Aaquib Nabi for the Afghanistan Test, calling the decision 'absurd' and questioning the value of domestic cricket performances.

The Board of Control for Cricket in India selection committee, led by Ajit Agarkar, has come under scathing attack for the shocking selection calls for the one-off Test against Afghanistan.

Gurnoor Brar, who has done well for India A and in the Vijay Hazare Trophy, was picked ahead of the Ranji Trophy's top wicket-taker, Aaquib Nabi, in the Test squad. Nabi was the primary catalyst in Jammu and Kashmir's Ranji Trophy triumph in the 2025-2026 season with 60 wickets to his name. A consistent performer in red-ball cricket, he also took 44 wickets at an average of 13.27 in the 2024-2025 Ranji season. Cricket legend Dilip Vengsarkar has slammed Agarkar for ignoring a proven performer, asking the BCCI to do away with the Ranji Trophy

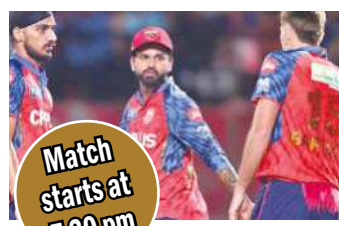


if performances in India's premier domestic red-ball event are not even considered.

"The selectors' decision to ignore him is absolutely absurd and baffling. What kind of selection is this? It is just not acceptable. It is an injustice," Vengsarkar told The Times of India newspaper on Thursday. "Can you imagine Nabi's plight right now? He took 60 wickets in the Ranji Trophy. He has worked hard for it and deserves a place ahead of everybody else."

PBKS seek dramatic turnaround to keep playoff hopes alive

LUCKNOW: Punjab Kings will need something spectacular to arrest a disastrous slide and keep their fading playoff hopes alive when they take on an already-eliminated Lucknow Super Giants, in their IPL clash, here on Saturday. Punjab's campaign has unravelled dramatically since their record 265-run chase against Delhi Capitals on April 25. From remaining unbeaten till the midway stage and looking like genuine title contenders with six wins in seven matches, the last season's runners-up have crashed to six successive defeats, leaving their playoff hopes hanging by a thread. Now placed fifth, Punjab not only need to beat LSG in their final league game here on Saturday but also depend on Sunday's double headers (MI vs RR and KKR vs DC) to earn a place in the playoff. The Shreyas Iyer-led side would hope both Mumbai Indians and Kolkata Knight Riders lose their respective matches. A Rajasthan Royals win over Mumbai would officially end Punjab's hopes, while a KKR victory over Delhi Capitals could bring net run rate into play. At present, PBKS hold a slight edge in NRR over KKR. But before permutations come into the picture, Punjab first need to rediscover their form after a prolonged slump that has exposed flaws across departments. Their aggressive top order of Priyansh Arya, Prabhsimran Singh and Cooper Connolly has failed to provide the explosive starts that defined the first half of their season. Priyansh has managed just one fifty in his last seven innings and was dismissed for a duck in the previous game, while Prabhsimran too has struggled for consistency with only one fifty in his last five innings. Connolly has shown glimpses but has not converted starts into substantial scores.



Match starts at 7:30 pm



Chaliha's impressive run ends in quarters

KUALA LUMPUR: India's Ashmita Chaliha produced a spirited performance before going down narrowly to world No. 23 Line Hojmark Kjaersfeldt of Denmark in the women's singles quarterfinals of the Malaysia Masters Super 500 badminton tournament here on Friday.

Returning after an eight-month rehabilitation following a medial meniscus tear in her right knee, the 71st-ranked Indian squandered a hard-fought opening game advantage to lose 23-21 18-21 11-21 to the eighth seed in a contest lasting a little over an hour at the Axiata Arena.

Chaliha started brightly, opening up an 11-6 lead at the interval in the opening game. Line clawed her way back after the break to narrow the gap to 13-12 and later moved ahead 19-18, but the Indian held her nerve in a gruelling battle to pocket the game. The second game followed a similar pattern as Chaliha again surged ahead 10-5 before the Dane restored parity at 13-13. Line then broke away from 15-15 to force the match into a decider.

The final game, however, was largely one-way traffic as Line stamped her authority early with an 8-4 lead and never allowed Chaliha a route back, comfortably sealing the contest to enter the semifinals.

Pak hockey players complain about pending dues, daily allowance

KARACHI: Pakistani hockey players' financial woes continued as they are yet to receive pending dues from the national federation (PHF) and their daily training camp allowance has also been reduced ahead of the FIH World Cup to be held in the Netherlands and Belgium in August this year. The Pakistan Hockey Federation's (PHF) interim set-up announced that players and officials of the national team will now receive a daily allowance of USD 110 on foreign tours. But the players have complained that their training camp allowance has been reduced from USD 11 (3000 rupees) to USD 3.5 (1000 rupees).

According to a reliable source close to the PHF, the senior players had asked the PHF to confirm about how much allowance they would get for the training camp duration. Pakistan on Thursday named their 20-member squad for next month's FIH Pro League matches in Belgium and England but didn't name the captain, a move that didn't go down well with the players.

Shakeel Ammad Butt has been leading Pakistan since early last year. "They have announced we will get USD 110 daily allowance for foreign tours, including the World Cup qualifying event we had played in Egypt but we will only believe it unless we are paid that amount," one player said on condition of anonymity. He said in the past also the PHF officials had made similar promises but never fulfilled that. "Right now we just want to know whether it is true they will pay us just 1000 rupees daily for the camp duration."



Maaya to mix Junior, Pro events for smooth transition

NEW DELHI: India's bright teenage tennis prospect Maaya Rajeshwaran Revathy is carefully balancing junior and professional tournaments this season as she prepares for a gradual transition to the senior circuit.

The 16-year-old, who will soon compete at the junior French Open, has largely featured on the junior circuit this year, a move her coaching team says is aimed at building confidence, gaining match expo-

sure and securing a strong junior ranking before taking a bigger leap into professional events. Maaya, who trains full-time in Spain at Rafa Nadal Academy, said the exposure to a more competitive environment in Europe has accelerated her development. "At a certain level, it's more about how you compete. In Europe, you are competing every day with equal players and that gives you a lot of experience," Maaya said during a virtual media interaction facilitated by SAI. She won

a J300 event in France on clay in April apart from finishing semifinalist at a couple of events in Spain and Egypt. "For us every week is an opportunity for improvement. That's been the objective since the start of the year, to just keep getting better, get more matches and feel more comfortable on the tour." Maaya is supported through Target Asian Games Group (TAGG) scheme of the government and has received a sum of Rs 15 lakh

Ebola surveillance stepped up at Kochi airport after emergency meet

Thermal screening, 21-day travel history verification, and self-declaration forms have been made mandatory for international passengers

KOCHI

AUTHORITIES stepped up Ebola surveillance and precautionary measures at Cochin International Air-

port Limited (CIAL) on Friday following an emergency preparedness meeting between management and the Airport Health Organisation.

A CIAL spokesperson said a 24-hour monitoring system has now been activated at the airport as part of efforts to detect possible symptoms early and strengthen coordinated public health response measures.

"Thermal screening, 21-

day travel history verification, and self-declaration forms have been made mandatory for international passengers," he said in a statement after the meeting.

Passengers arriving from countries including the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Uganda, and South Sudan will be placed under special health surveillance in view of global alerts over Ebola outbreaks, authorities

said. The meeting was attended by Airport Director Manu G, Airport Health Officer Dr Raphael Teddy, Senior Medical Officer Dr Aysha Manika K A, and representatives from CISE, Immigration, airlines, the Airports Authority, and CIAL.

APHO Public Health Specialist Dr Anna presented the preparedness and response plan covering Ebola prevention, case identification, and

infection control measures.

Officials noted that there is currently no widely approved vaccine or specific treatment for the Bundibugyo Ebola virus (BDBV), one of the five known Ebola virus species.

"The disease can spread from animals to humans and also through direct contact with bodily fluids of infected persons," officials said.

Authorities said the incubation period ranges from 2

to 21 days, while fever, sore throat, headache, and flu-like symptoms are among the early signs of infection.

"Mortality rates can range between 30 and 50 per cent," officials added.

Isolation wards have been arranged at Ernakulam General Hospital, Government Hospital Kalamassery, and District Hospital Aluva as part of the preparedness plan.



Doctor rapes patient after sedation; hospital 'sealed'

The doctor allegedly called the patient alone into the operation theatre during treatment and asked the female staff and the victim's father to step outside; victim alleges that the doctor administered an intoxicating injection and sexually assaulted her



LUCKNOW

A doctor at a private hospital here was accused of raping a female student after administering her a sedative injection during treatment, police said on Friday. In the wake of the allegation, the state health minister directed that the hospital be sealed and the doctor's degree be confiscated. The student had been admitted to Tejas Hospital on May 18 after suffering a health episode, officials said.

"According to the complaint, the doctor allegedly called the patient alone into the operation theatre dur-

ing treatment and asked the female staff and the victim's father to step outside.

The victim alleged that the doctor administered an intoxicating injection and sexually assaulted her," Deputy Commissioner of Police (North) Twinkle Jain told reporters. The student told the police that she realised what had happened after the effect of the injection subsided, following which her family lodged a complaint.

The doctor, a resident of the Tambaur area in Sitapur district, was detained for questioning, and the alleged victim sent for medical ex-

amination. A case has been registered in connection with the matter, the officer said. Uttar Pradesh Deputy Chief Minister Brajesh Pathak, who also holds the health portfolio, said on X that directions had been issued to seal Tejas Hospital in the Bakshi Ka Talab area here and suspend the medical licence of the accused doctor, Vijay Giri.

Pathak said instructions had also been given to the Ayurveda department to confiscate the doctor's Ayurvedic medical degree so that he "can never discharge any kind of medical responsibility in future."

Bengal govt notifies free bus travel for women from June 1

KOLKATA: The West Bengal government has notified free bus travel for women in all state government-run buses from June 1 as part of a scheme aimed at enhancing women's empowerment and improving access to public transport.

According to a notification issued by the state Transport Department on May 21, women commuters will be eligible for free travel in both short-route and long-route state-run buses operating in West Bengal.

The Transport department notification said a smart card with QR code, photograph and beneficiary details will be issued to all eligible women upon application through the BDO or SDO offices concerned.

It said that the smart card shall be issued to women of the state on the basis of supporting documents like

Aadhaar card, elector's photo identity card (EPIC), VB-G RAMG job card, Ayushman Bharat health card, driving license, Pan card, passport, pension document with photograph, identity card of central/state government/psus, identity cards issued by schools/colleges/universities.

Till issuance of the smart cards, women passengers will be allowed to avail the facility on production of valid photo identity documents such as Aadhaar card, voter identity card, driving licence, PAN card, passport and government-issued service identity cards, among others, the notification said.

Conductors will issue 'zero value tickets' to women passengers after verification of identity documents, it said.

The scheme will come into effect from June 1, 2026, the notification added. -- PTI



Lecturer held for leaking NEET UG physics paper

NEW DELHI: The CBI has arrested a Pune-based lecturer for allegedly leaking the physics paper of NEET UG 2026 to a select group of aspirants, officials said on Friday. The CBI has arrested Manisha Sanjay Havaladar, presently employed with the Seth Hiralal Saraf Prashala in Pune, terming her another "source" for the paper leak. "The CBI has identified another key accused who was the source for the leak of NEET-UG 2026 physics questions," a CBI spokesperson said in a statement.

The agency alleged that Havaladar was involved in the NEET UG process after being appointed an expert by the Na-



tional Testing Agency (NTA). "She had complete access to the physics question paper."

In April, she shared some of the questions with co-accused Manisha Mandhare," the statement said. The CBI arrested Mandhare, a botany teacher from Pune, in connection with the NEET paper leak on May

16. The agency found that the questions Havaladar shared with the aspirants tallied with the physics paper of NEET UG 2026. "The CBI conducted searches at various locations across the country and seized several incriminating documents, laptops, bank statements and mobile phones. A detailed analysis of the seized items is underway," the agency said.

On May 12, the NTA cancelled the National Eligibility cum Entrance Test (Undergraduate), or NEET, held on May 3 for medical admissions amid allegations of paper leak. A re-examination has been scheduled for June 21.

DMK's 'bent coconut tree' jibe draws retort from VCK

CHENNAI: The DMK on Friday made a sarcastic "coconut tree bending towards a neighbour" remark targeting the VCK and IUML after they joined the TVK government, prompting the VCK to retort that it "did not grow at the mercy of other parties." Aiming to assuage the feelings, DMK chief M K Stalin appealed to party members not to use harsh words as to hurt anyone.

Both Viduthalai Chiruthaigal Katchi and IUML, allies of the DMK till the 2026 Assembly election, announced support to the TVK government which fell short of a simple majority of 118 in the Assembly. VCK leader Vanni Arasu, who emerged victorious from Tindivanam Assembly constituency and A M Shahjahan who was elected from Papanasam were sworn in as ministers by Governor Rajendra Viswanath

Arlekar at the Lok Bhavan here today in the presence of Chief Minister C Joseph Vijay.

Shahjahan was made Minister for Minorities Welfare while Vanni Arasu was made Minister for Social Justice. DMK deputy general secretary A Raja, with a penchant for making controversial remarks, alluded the two parties joining the TVK Cabinet as a "coconut tree bending towards a neighbour".

India's residential market matures; Hyd joins growth surge in Q1 2026

ALONG WITH BENGALURU AND DELHI-NCR, HYDERABAD POSTED ROBUST DOUBLE-DIGIT SALES GROWTH IN Q1 2026 AMID RISING PREMIUM HOUSING DEMAND AND STEADY PRICE APPRECIATION

NEW DELHI

INDIA'S residential real estate market has transitioned into a "structurally mature, demand-anchored growth phase", with Q1 2026 recording 93,065 new unit launches and 95,973 unit sales across the top eight cities, a report said on Saturday. The report from PropTiger said the supply rose 1.1 per cent sequentially and sales improved 1 per cent quarter-on-quarter.

The weighted average price reached a record high of Rs 10,050 per sq ft -- crossing the five-digit benchmark for the first time -- "signalling that value creation now drives market health rather than transaction volume."

"The Indian residential market has transitioned into a structurally more disciplined phase. Growth today is increasingly being driven by demand quality, inventory discipline, and



- India's housing market entered a more mature, demand-driven growth phase in Q1 2026
- New launches stood at 93,065 units while sales reached 95,973 units across top eight cities
- Average housing prices crossed `10,000 per sq ft for the first time
- Bengaluru led growth with 33% YoY rise in sales
- Hyderabad posted strong double-digit sales growth alongside Delhi-NCR and Chennai
- Premium and upper mid-income housing drove most new launches
- Q2 outlook remains positive with steady sales and price growth expected.

buyer confidence rather than speculative expansion," said Prakash Tejwani, CEO, PropTiger.

The supply remained flat at -0.1 per cent on a YoY basis, while sales moderated to -2.2 per cent, reflecting healthy normalisation rather than structural weakness, the report noted.

Bengaluru emerged as the standout performer, recording sales of 15,603 units, up 33 per cent year-on-year and 12 per cent sequentially. The city also maintained near-parity between new supply and sales absorption, indicating a well-balanced market. The GCC and startup employment engine continues to prove more durable than conventional IT hiring cycles, providing Bengaluru with a structurally differentiated demand base.

Mumbai Metropolitan Region remained the largest market by volume and value with 26,116 sales units in Q1

2026. Though the performance moderated on YoY basis, it reflected base-effect normalisation against an exceptional 2025, rather than a loss of demand momentum, the report noted.

Chennai, Hyderabad and Delhi-NCR also posted robust gains in sales from 11 per cent to 43 per cent, while Pune, Kolkata and Ahmedabad showed mixed trends.

A disproportionate share of new launches in Q1 2026 -- particularly in Mumbai MMR, Bengaluru, and Delhi NCR -- remained concentrated in the premium and upper mid-income segments, driving the average property prices higher. The outlook for Q2 2026 is constructive, the firm said, predicting a steady sequential growth of 2-4 per cent and sustained year-on-year price appreciation of 4-8 per cent across major metros driven by limited mid-segment supply.

India emerges as Asia Pacific's top real estate yield market

Office, logistics, retail and student housing assets in India outperformed regional peers on returns, while Q1 investment inflows crossed \$2.29 billion

NEW DELHI

INDIA offers the highest real estate yields across every major asset class in the Asia Pacific region and recorded an 189 per cent year-on-year jump in investment volumes in the Q1 CY 2026, a report said on Thursday.

The report from CBRE said that cap rates in India consistently outpace every other market in the region across office, retail, logistics, hotels, and student housing sectors, in some cases by as much as 320 basis points. India's Q1 2026 investment volume rose to \$2,295.19 million from \$839.85 million a year earlier, second to only Singapore that led the region in investment volumes with a 364 per cent year-on-year increase. "We are seeing genuine, broad-based demand across sectors driven by India's economic fundamentals, its growing corporate base, and a young, consumption-led population," said Anshuman Magazine, Chairman & CEO, India, South-East Asia, Middle East & Africa, CBRE.



"Global investors who have been cautious till now are actively looking to deploy capital here, and we expect this momentum to strengthen further as more institutional-grade products come to market," he added. The report highlighted sustained interest from domestic institutions, family offices, and global capital markets players as they increasingly allocate to Indian real estate through direct acquisitions, REITs, and structured debt instruments. India is one of the top markets for real estate debt interest in Asia Pacific, signalling maturing capital markets, the report noted.

The report noted India's Grade A office cap rates range from 7.50 per cent to

8.40 per cent in core central business district locations, compared to 3.25 per cent to 3.80 per cent in Singapore and 2 per cent to 3 per cent in Tokyo.

India is named among the top three preferred markets for Grade A office investment enquiries in Asia Pacific, alongside Singapore and Japan. Student housing yields in India stood at 8.50 per cent-9 per cent, around 320 basis points higher than the next-highest market, Australia. The institutional-grade logistics cap rates in India stand at 7.15 per cent-7.75 per cent, around 115 basis points more than the second-ranked market, Vietnam with the rates of 6 per cent-7 per cent.

UPRERA bars builders from using homebuyers' money for assured return schemes

LUCKNOW: Uttar Pradesh Real Estate Regulatory Authority has barred builders from using homebuyers' money for "assured return" schemes and made it mandatory for all registered projects to operate through three separate bank accounts, officials said on Thursday. The new framework, aimed at tightening financial discipline



and preventing diversion of project funds, was discussed at a meeting convened by

UP RERA with bankers and financial institutions. Uttar Pradesh Real Estate Regulatory Authority (UP RERA) Chairman Sanjay Bhoosredy chaired the meeting, which was attended by senior officials of nationalised banks, financial institutions and the State Level Bankers' Committee.

Experts bullish on long-term real estate prospects in South India

HANS BUSINESS HYDERABAD

INDUSTRY experts believe that South India's long-term real estate growth trajectory continues to remain fundamentally strong.

The three large states of Karnataka, Tamil Nadu and Telangana contribute almost 25 per cent of India's GDP. Tamil Nadu is the second largest



contributor to India's GDP with share of 9 per cent while Karnataka is close behind with share of 8 per cent. Karnataka is largely driven by IT/ITES, Tamil Nadu has diversified economic base including

real estate, IT/ITES, automobiles and manufacturing clusters. Industry participants also point out that professionally managed real estate investment platforms, AIFs and REITs continue to witness growing investor interest as the sector becomes increasingly organized and transparent. Investors today are evaluating opportunities through a long-term lens, focusing more

on structural demand drivers.

Shradh Mittal, Founder & CEO, Arnya Real Estate Fund Advisors, said: "Real estate investments are fundamentally linked to long-term economic indicators such as urbanization, infrastructure growth, employment generation, and end-user demand. Markets backed by strong industrial ecosystems and economic activity continue to remain

attractive for long-term real estate capital."

Shradh, further added: "South India has consistently demonstrated resilience across market cycles. The region continues to benefit from manufacturing-led growth, infrastructure development, and sustained residential demand, which continue to support long-term investor confidence."

BIZ BRIEFS

Amazon expands beauty store

Amazon.in, an e-commerce platform, announced the expansion of its premium beauty selection, with over 100 new brands set to go live. Amazon will include renowned international brands such as, Dolce & Gabbana, Laura Mercier, Elemis, Urban Decay and more. Siddharth Bhagat, Director, Amazon India, said: "India's beauty industry is seeing a clear shift from availability-led shopping to more intentional, discovery-led consumption, driven by growing awareness of global beauty trends."

Paisabazaar's new campaign

Paisabazaar, a financial marketplace, announced the launch of a new integrated brand campaign for the Credit Premier League (CPL) featuring former Indian cricketer and commentator Irfan Pathan. CPL is Paisabazaar's initiative aimed at recognising and rewarding consumers with strong credit health.

FRAI organises seminar in Hyd

The Federation of Retailers Association of India Telangana chapter held a seminar in Hyderabad on tackling illicit trade and unfair market practices. Retailers, traders and policymakers raised concerns over counterfeit goods, illegal distribution, predatory pricing and deep discounting by quick commerce and e-commerce players. Participants said these practices harm genuine businesses, consumer trust, government revenues and livelihoods of small traders.

Domestic demand cushions India against global uncertainty: RBI

Financial conditions, crude oil prices challenges for external sector outlook

NEW DELHI

INDIA'S economic activity exhibited resilience in April, with industrial and services sectors maintaining strength across several segments even as the global economy continued to be shadowed by uncertainties in West Asia, according to the RBI's monthly bulletin released on Friday. Industrial and services activity stayed strong in many segments. Early results of listed private non-financial companies for Q4:2025-26 also showed an improvement in business performance over the previous quarter, with aggregate sales and operating profit recording a double-digit growth, the bulletin stated.

It highlighted that in the agriculture sector, rapid progress of summer sowing was



supported by above normal pre-monsoon rainfall and sufficient reservoir storage levels. However, a higher probability of above-normal minimum temperatures and unseasonal rains in some parts of the country could pose risks to the harvesting of remaining rabi crops. The current public foodgrain

stocks remain well above the buffer norms ensuring domestic food security.

The financial conditions, crude oil prices and capital flows continue to pose challenges to the external sector outlook. Nevertheless, robust services exports, positive net FDI flows, foreign exchange reserve buffers and a number

of proactive policy measures undertaken by the Government and the Reserve Bank are likely to cushion the Indian economy against external headwinds.

In March, net foreign direct investment remained positive for the second consecutive month. Foreign portfolio investors continued to remain net sellers in April and May, though the pace of outflows moderated, the bulletin observed.

CPI inflation rose to 3.5 per cent in April, driven mainly by food inflation, while core inflation remained steady indicating limited pass-through of higher input cost conditions. Although headline inflation remains firmly within the tolerance band, the pass through to domestic prices needs to be monitored, it pointed out.

Institutional buyers bid ₹2,380 crore in Central Bank of India OFS

MUMBAI

INSTITUTIONAL investors on Friday put in over Rs 2,380 crore worth bids in the Offer For Sale (OFS) of Central Bank of India shares, which got over-subscribed more than two times.

The government is selling up to 8 per cent stake in the Central Bank of India at a floor price of Rs 31 per share. If fully subscribed, the stake sale would fetch Rs 2,456 crore to the government.

Till the close of trading hours on Friday, institutional investors put in bids for over 76.86 crore shares, which is about 2.36 times of the 32.58 crore shares on offer.



At the indicated price of Rs 31.01 a share, non-retail investors put in over Rs 2,380 crore worth bids for Central Bank OFS. The OFS offer includes a 4 per cent green shoe option, taking the total stake that the government intends to offload to 8 per cent. This is the first OFS by the government in the current fiscal. Retail investors will be able to bid in the share sale offer on Monday. The floor price

of Rs 31 a share is 8.58 per cent lower than the stock's Thursday's closing price of Rs 33.91 on the BSE. Shares of Central Bank of India slipped 7.90 per cent to close at Rs 31.23 on BSE on Friday. The OFS will help the government inch towards meeting the Securities and Exchange Board of India's minimum public shareholding norm. According to SEBI, all listed companies must maintain public shareholding of 25 per cent. The government currently holds 89.27 per cent stake. If the government exercises the green shoe option, its total stake in the state-owned bank will come down to 81.27 per cent.

FLIPKART PARTNERS WITH INDIA POST TO BOOST LAST MILE PARCEL DELIVERY

NEW DELHI: E-commerce major Flipkart has signed an agreement with the Department of Posts for efficient last mile parcel delivery, an official statement said on Friday. The partnership aims to leverage the delivery network of the Department of Posts along with Flipkart's strong presence in India's e-commerce sector to provide efficient, reliable and customer-centric parcel delivery solutions across the country, the statement said. "The Department of Posts (DoP), Ministry of Communications, and Flipkart India Private Limited have signed an agreement for last mile parcel delivery services.

Oben Electric bets big on Telangana after strong Rorr Evo response

HANS BUSINESS HYDERABAD

OBEN Electric, an electric motorcycle manufacturer, showcased Oben Rorr Evo, its newly launched electric motorcycle in Hyderabad. The company said it is witnessing strong demand for the new model, with Hyderabad emerging as highest booking market nationwide since its launch on April 30.

The vehicle is equipped with a 3.4 kWh LFP battery offering an IDC range of 180 km, acceleration from 0-40 km/h in 3 seconds and a top speed of 110 km/h. The motorcycle also supports fast charging from 0-80 per cent in 90 minutes and comes with an 8-year battery warranty.



The bike features a 5-inch colour TFT display, OTA updates, turn-by-turn navigation, geo-fencing, remote immobilisation and fall detection with emergency SOS through Oben Electric's proprietary ARXUS connected technology platform. It has 10 litres storage and integrates SmartIQOben Electric's AI-powered

ride optimisation technology, which enhances range by up to 15 per cent. Madhumita Agrawal, CEO, Oben Electric, said: "Hyderabad emerging as our highest booking market nationwide for the Rorr Evo reflects the city's strong shift towards electric motorcycles that deliver both performance and practicality."

Higher gold import duty could cut demand by 50-60 tonnes this year, says WGC

MUMBAI

INDIA'S gold demand is expected to contract by 50-60 tonnes this calendar year, around 10 per cent lower than the previous year, following the import duty hike, according to the World Gold Council (WGC). "Looking at 2026 as a whole, we estimate that combined jewellery and bar and coin demand could decline by around 50-60 tonnes, around 10 per cent lower than the previous year, due to the impact of the import duty hike," WGC said in its India gold market update. The gold import duty was raised sharply from 6 per cent to 15 per cent, making it the single-largest increase on record and fully reversing the duty cut of July 2024. The Prime Minister has also appealed to consumers to avoid



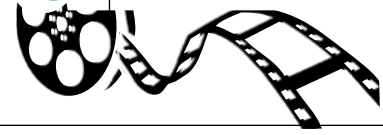
buying gold for a year.

Other factors, such as the gold price, changes to income levels, inflation, or effects from the monsoon, would further influence annual demand, it added. "Our econometric models suggest that changes in import duties tend to impact gold demand in both the short and long term, although the impact differs across jewellery and investment products such as bars and coins. Investment demand appears more sensitive to duty changes, while jewellery demand has shown greater resilience," said WGC.

Dalmia Bharat to acquire JAL Cement assets in ₹2,850 cr deal

NEW DELHI: Dalmia Bharat on Friday said it will acquire the cement assets of debt-ridden Jaiprakash Associates, which has been acquired by billionaire Gautam Adani-led Adani Enterprises through insolvency proceedings. Dalmia Cement (Bharat) Ltd (DCBL), a wholly-owned subsidiary of Dalmia Bharat, has already executed a Business Transfer Agreement (BTA) with Jaiprakash Associates Ltd for the transaction, which is expected to complete within two weeks, a statement said.

Following the takeover, Dalmia Bharat's cement capacity will increase to 54.7 million tonnes per annum (MTPA). The BTA has been signed for acquisition of cement plants at Rewa (Madhya Pradesh), Churk, Chunar and Sadwa (Uttar Pradesh), with 5.2 MTPA cement capacity and 3.3 MTPA clinker capacity, at an enterprise value of Rs 2,850 crore, Dalmia Bharat said.



Indian OTT platforms ignoring NRIs

Becomes a serious problem for Telugu cinema



SUHAS SISTU

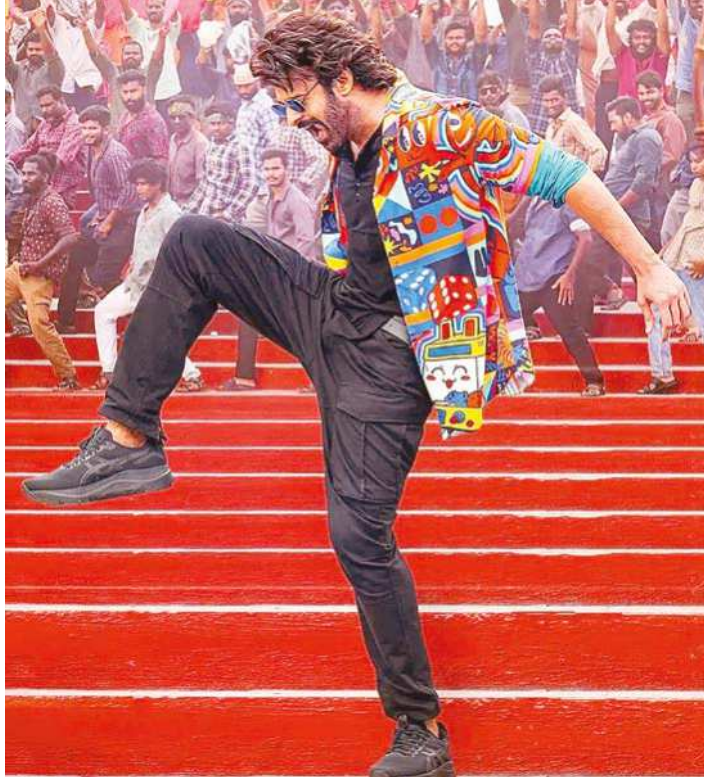
The growing frustration among overseas Telugu audiences is exposing a major flaw in the Indian OTT streaming ecosystem. While Indian viewers are enjoying instant digital premieres of new Telugu films, Non-Resident Indians (NRIs), especially in the United States, are increasingly being left without legal access to the same content. This repeated issue is now turning into a serious concern for the future of Indian OTT platforms and their global credibility.

Recent Telugu OTT releases like *Bad Boy Karthik*, *Sathi Leelavathi*, and *The Raja Saab* have highlighted the problem once again. Though these films premiered on major streaming giants like

Amazon Prime Video and JioHotstar in India, many subscribers in the United States discovered that the movies were either unavailable or significantly delayed on the same platforms overseas.

For Telugu cinema, the overseas market — particularly the U.S. — has played a crucial role in building global recognition. From theatrical collections to social media promotions, NRIs have consistently supported Telugu films and helped expand their international reach. Yet, despite paying premium subscription charges across multiple OTT services, many overseas audiences are unable to legally stream newly released Indian films on release day.

The larger issue lies in how Indian OTT platforms continue marketing films with aggressive "streaming now



worldwide" campaigns while quietly restricting access in international territories. This lack of transparency is slowly damaging audience trust. Many viewers abroad now feel sidelined, even though they represent one of the most loyal and financially strong consumer bases for Indian entertainment.

Industry experts believe poor international OTT planning can have long-term consequences. When legal viewing options disappear, piracy naturally becomes the easiest alterna-

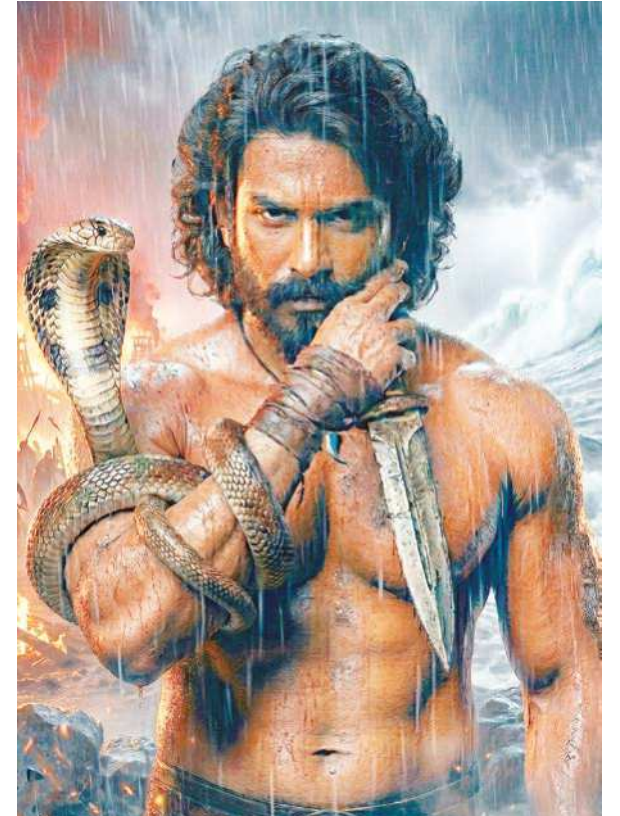
tive for frustrated audiences. This not only affects the streaming platforms but also impacts producers, distributors, and actors who depend heavily on overseas popularity and engagement. If Indian OTT services continue ignoring the overseas audience, they risk weakening one of the strongest global markets that has supported Telugu cinema for years. The demand clearly exists — what is missing is proper global streaming planning and equal access for audiences everywhere.

'Nagabandham' poster raises expectations; slated for July 3 release

The makers of *Nagabandham* have unveiled a powerful new poster featuring young actor Virat Karrrna, further increasing anticipation for the film's grand theatrical release on July 3. Directed by Abhishek Nama, the ambitious project has already created strong buzz through its promotional campaign, including striking posters, an intriguing glimpse, and chartbuster singles.

The latest poster presents Virat Karrrna in an intense avatar, standing fearlessly in heavy rain with a giant cobra wrapped around his arm. Holding a massive blade and surrounded by fiery battle visuals and stormy seas, the actor's rugged transformation and fierce expression have become major talking points on social media.

According to the production team, post-production work is progressing rapidly as the film approaches release. The makers revealed that some of India's leading VFX studios are handling the CGI work to ensure a visually rich cinematic experience. The quality showcased in the promotional material has already impressed audiences and raised expectations among movie lovers.



Produced under the NIK Studios banner, "*Nagabandham*" is being mounted on a large scale by blending mythology with historical fiction elements. The film aims to offer audiences a visually grand theatrical spectacle.

For the Hindi market, Zee Studios is presenting

the movie and planning a wide release across North India and Hindi-speaking territories.

With aggressive promotions, high-end visuals, and a unique mythological backdrop, "*Nagabandham*" is steadily emerging as one of the most awaited Telugu releases of the season.



Satyadev's 'Samavarthi' FL promises an ecological action thriller

Satyadev Kancharana is gearing up to impress audiences once again with a powerful new avatar in *Samavarthi*. The makers recently unveiled the film's title and first-look poster, which has already created strong curiosity among cinema lovers and fans of intense action dramas.

Directed by Ajay Nag V, the film is being produced under the Rudra Pictures and Panchabhuta Productions banners. Touted as an ecological action thriller, "*Samavarthi*" is expected to combine action, survival elements, and emotional storytelling against a unique backdrop.

The newly released

first-look poster showcases Satyadev in a calm yet deadly avatar. Wearing headphones and maintaining a composed expression, the actor appears completely fearless even as multiple attackers armed with knives and axes surround him. His stylish appearance and intense body language have become the major highlights of the poster.

Interestingly, the title "*Samavarthi*" is associated with Yama Dharma Raja and symbolizes equal treatment toward everyone. The makers hint that Satyadev's character will be portrayed as a ruthless force who eliminates enemies without

fear or discrimination, adding a mythological depth to the action-driven narrative.

The film also features a strong supporting cast including Dileesh Pothan, Rajeev Kanakala, Ganavi Laxman, Ravindra Vijay, and Mohan Bhagath in important roles.

Known for choosing unconventional scripts and performance-oriented characters, Satyadev appears to be continuing the same trend with "*Samavarthi*." With its intriguing concept, powerful visuals, and intense character design, the film is already emerging as one of the most anticipated projects in the actor's upcoming lineup.

'Memu Coplam' creates buzz with grand preview event

The upcoming Telugu web series *Memu Coplam* is gearing up for its digital premiere on May 22, and the makers recently hosted a grand preview event in Hyderabad that turned into a star-studded celebration. Streaming on ZEE5, the rural comedy-drama has already generated strong curiosity among OTT audiences with its unique blend of village humor, satire, mystery, and Telugu nativity.

The event witnessed the presence of several notable personalities from the Telugu film industry including Ajay Bhupathi, Kona Venkat, S. Thaman, and Bandla Ganesh. Many speak-



ers praised the series for bringing back rooted Telugu entertainment at a time when OTT platforms are largely dominated by crime thrillers and dark dramas.

Produced by B. V. S. Ravi under the RAW Entertainment banner and directed by Pradeep Maddali, *Memu Coplam* stars Getup Srinu, Raviteja Nannimalla, Nagababu, and Reethu

Chowdary in pivotal roles.

One of the biggest talking points at the event was the revelation that the entire series was completed in just 17 days. Despite the tight schedule, several guests appreciated the impressive production quality and technical standards. Music director Thaman praised composer Saket Komanduri for delivering energetic mu-

sic and emotionally engaging background scores.

Director Ajay Bhupathi highlighted the show's entertaining rural backdrop and comedy-driven storytelling, while Kona Venkat appreciated the cultural authenticity embedded in the narrative. Emotional moments also unfolded during the event when actor Raviteja Nannimalla became overwhelmed while speaking about his journey in the industry.

Blending cockfight culture, village chaos, humor, and emotional storytelling, *Memu Coplam* promises to be a refreshing family entertainer for Telugu OTT viewers this summer.



'Ramayana' deal leaves Bollywood buyers stunned!

The buzz around *Ramayana* is getting louder by the day, but now the film is making headlines for a completely different reason. While the recently released glimpse left audiences spellbound and raised expectations sky-high, the real drama seems to be unfolding behind the scenes in Bollywood's distribution circles.

Producer Namit Malhotra is reportedly demanding a massive ₹450 crores for the Hindi theatrical rights of the epic saga, and the figure has apparently sent top distributors into panic mode. Industry biggies like Anil Thadani, Jayantilal Gada, and Karan Johar are said to be keen on grabbing the rights, but insiders reveal that the jaw-dropping price has made them take a step back.

Trade circles are already comparing the deal with Shah Rukh Khan's upcoming film *King*, whose theatrical rights were reportedly acquired by Pen Marudhar for ₹250 crores. Against that backdrop, *Ramayana's* quote is being called "too risky" even for Bollywood's biggest players.

Sources say distributors are now urging Namit Malhotra to reconsider the price and bring it down to a more realistic number. However, no deal has been finalized yet.

Directed by Nitesh Tiwari, *Ramayana* stars Ranbir Kapoor, Sai Pallavi, Yash, and Sunny Deol in key roles.

Raja Ravinder's first look from 'CASTE' is intense

The makers of *CASTE* have unveiled the powerful first look of Raja Ravindra from the movie, where he appears in the role of Minister Narayana. The intense poster has quickly grabbed attention among movie lovers and raised curiosity about the political backdrop of the film.

Directed and written by A. K. Jampanna, the film is being produced by Thota Lakshmi Koteswara Rao under the Golden Productions banner. Earlier, the film's first look and glimpse received a positive response from audiences, creating decent buzz around the project.

In the newly released poster, Raja Ravindra is seen dressed in white attire with a political party scarf draped over his shoulder. His serious expression and commanding screen presence have made the character look intense and powerful. The makers introduced him as "Minister Narayana," hinting at a strong and impactful role in the narrative.



The film stars Varun Sandesh, Gagan, Satyam Rajesh, and Ravi in lead roles, while actresses Kashika Kapoor and Divi Vadhya play the female leads. The supporting cast also includes Nagababu and Prithvi Raj in important roles. Music for the film is being composed by Anup Rubens.

The makers are expected to announce the official release date of the movie soon. With a strong cast, political drama elements, and intriguing character reveals, "*CASTE*" is steadily building anticipation among Telugu cinema audiences.



Preethi Pagadala's elegant look speaks beyond fashion

Preethi Pagadala once again proves that simplicity and confidence can create the most striking visual impact. In this stunning photograph, the young actress appears effortlessly graceful as she poses in a flowing white outfit against a warm natural backdrop. The image has quickly caught the attention of social media users and fashion enthusiasts for its

classy and serene appeal. Dressed in an elegant layered white dress, Preethi carries a look that perfectly balances glamour with sophistication. The soft sunlight enhances the earthy tones surrounding her, while also highlighting her expressive features and natural charm. Her flowing hair and relaxed pose add a cinematic feel to the frame, making

the photograph look straight out of a fashion editorial. What makes the image particularly appealing is its minimalist beauty. Instead of relying on extravagant styling or dramatic settings, the photograph focuses on raw elegance and emotion. Preethi's confident expression and calm presence give the frame a powerful identity. The simplicity of the styling allows her

personality to shine through naturally. Over the years, Preethi Pagadala has been gaining attention for her fashionable appearances and graceful screen presence. This latest picture further showcases her ability to carry modern fashion with effortless poise. Fans have especially appreciated the earthy aesthetic and the refreshing natural vibe of the shoot.

