



THE Hans India



Nationwide shutdown looms over VB-G RAM G
Demanding the repeal of the proposed Viksit Bharat - Guarantee for Rozgar and Aajeevika Mission - Gramin (VB-G RAM G), activists and workers' organisations on Wednesday announced protests against the new scheme from July 1.

Fasting across religious faiths
In the Vedas 'vrata' or 'nomu' are religious rituals, vows, or observances aimed at fulfilling a desire, seeking blessings, ensuring family welfare, to attain specific goals such as health, wealth, prosperity or overcoming adversity.

Resilient India posts all-time high \$863 bn exports in FY26
India's exports reached a record \$863 billion in FY2025-26, demonstrating resilience despite disruptions caused by the West Asia conflict and US tariffs, a senior Commerce Ministry official said on Wednesday.

Pragma Jaiswal's photoshoot gains traction
Actress Pragma Jaiswal continues to command attention on social media despite not having a film release scheduled this year. The actress, known for her elegant fashion choices and strong online presence, has once again become the center of discussion.

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KEEP HORMUZ OPEN: MODI

Raises safety of seafarers with Trump at G7 Summit

EVIAN-LES-BAINS

PRIME Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday urged US President Donald Trump to ensure the safety of seafarers and maintain freedom of navigation through the Strait of Hormuz, highlighting India's dependence on the strategically vital maritime route amid efforts to secure a peace agreement with Iran.

During a bilateral meeting with Trump on the sidelines of the G7 Summit in France, Modi said the reopening and protection of the Strait of Hormuz was crucial not only for regional stability but also for the global economy. "You and I agree that keeping the Strait of Hormuz open is vital for the global economy," Modi said, stressing that India has consistently advocated unrestricted maritime movement.

Modi and Trump held wide-ranging talks focusing on the proposed bilateral trade deal, bilateral defence and security ties and the West Asia crisis.

"Lakhs of Indian seafarers operate in maritime sector; I believe that their security is equally important," PM Modi told President Trump. India lost 3 Indian seafarers in an



US President Donald Trump with PM Narendra Modi on the sidelines of the G7 summit in Evian-les-Bains, France, on Wednesday

attack by US Navy last well at MT Settebello. Two more vessels with Indian crew on board were also attacked in the same week. Modi thanked President Trump for his efforts to restore peace in West Asia and expressed hope for a lasting resolution to the conflict. "We have always said that there should

be freedom of navigation... Lakhs of Indian seafarers operate in the maritime trade sector. I believe that their security is equally important. I am confident that the deal (with Iran) will have provisions for the security of the seafarers," Modi said in his media comments.

DON'S BIG PROMISE

'IF INDIA IS ATTACKED, WE WILL BE THERE FOR MODI'

Says Trump on defence ties with India

EVIAN-LES-BAINS: While commenting on the defence relationship between the United States and India, US President Donald Trump said even though the countries do not have a formal defence agreement, Washington would be there for New Delhi. Answering a question about defence ties, Trump said, "I think it's a great relationship.

'A TOTAL KILLER, A TOUGH TRADER'

Trump all praise for PM at G7 bilateral

EVIAN-LES-BAINS: US President Donald Trump on Wednesday



showered praise on Prime Minister Narendra Modi in France's Evian on the sidelines of the G7 Summit 2026. Assigning adjectives like "a killer and a tough trader" to PM Modi, Trump said he has immense respect for the leader. "He's a very tough

negotiator... You look at this man. I'll give you a lesson. He's the most beautiful-day showered praise on Prime Minister Narendra Modi in France's Evian on the sidelines of the G7 Summit 2026. Assigning adjectives like "a killer and a tough trader" to PM Modi, Trump said he has immense respect for the leader. "He's a very tough



Delhi slum rehabilitation policy 2026 finalised: Sood

NEW DELHI: The 'Delhi Slum and JJ Cluster Rehabilitation and Resettlement Policy-2026' was finalised during a review meeting chaired by Union Home Minister Amit Shah here on Wednesday, Delhi Home and Urban Development Ashish Sood said. "A significant decision was taken today towards providing dignified housing to millions of families living in Delhi's slums and JJ clusters. In a review meeting chaired by Union Home and Cooperation Minister Amit Shah, the 'Delhi Slum and JJ Cluster Rehabilitation and Resettlement Policy-2026' was finalised", Sood said in a post on X.

Calling the decision "historic, he said such a step has been taken to make the city the capital of a developed India.

"In a developed Delhi, no one will have to reside in slums. Under Prime Minister Narendra Modi's leadership, in the presence of Union Minister of Housing and Urban Affairs Manohar Lal and Chief Minister Rekha Gupta, Union Home Minister Amit Shah has finalised the policy to construct houses in places of slums in the national capital," the Delhi Minister said further in a separate video message.

"Till January 1, 2027, our government will provide houses to people in the same areas where they are currently living in slums", he said. He also said that Delhi's BJP government will soon notify this policy to accelerate rehabilitation efforts. Additionally, tenders for at least 5 PPP-based rehabilitation projects will be issued every month, and essential facilities such as anganwadi centres, schools, health centres, and playgrounds will be ensured in the rehabilitation colonies.

"We will work on this policy in five slum clusters in the next 45 days," Sood said.



'We're the most famous couple'

MELONI TELLS PM MODI AT G7 SUMMIT

EVIAN-LES-BAINS

LEADERS of the Group of Seven (G7) gathered in France's Evian-les-Bains on Tuesday to discuss key global challenges, reaffirm their support for Ukraine, and welcome

the breakthrough deal between the US and Iran. Amid this serious event, a brief interaction between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his Italian counterpart Giorgia Meloni has caught all the attention on social media,

with the 'Melodi' buzz making a return. A viral video shows PM Modi and Meloni greeting each other and shaking hands moments before lining up for a group photo with other leaders, including US President Donald Trump. While the

audio isn't very clear, PM Modi appeared to refer to their popularity on social media to Meloni. To this, the Italian Prime Minister said, "Yes, we are the most famous couple on Instagram".

This came nearly a month after PM Modi, during his trip to Rome, gifted Meloni a packet of Parle's Melody toffee - in reference to the viral 'Melodi' term.

WINDOWS

India, EU agree to sign FTA by year-end

EVIAN-LES-BAINS: India and the European Union will sign the ambitious free trade agreement

by the end of this year, top EU leader Ursula von der Leyen said on Wednesday after holding talks with Prime Minister Narendra Modi that largely focused on boosting two-way economic engagement against the backdrop of a fragile geopolitical environment. In the meeting, held on the sidelines of the G7 summit in this French commune, the two sides also resolved to step up security and defence cooperation. Besides Von der Leyen, the President of the EU Commission, the meeting was joined by European Council President Antonio Costa.

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CJP seeks Delhi Police nod for June 20 protest

NEW DELHI: The Cockroach Janta Party (CJP) on Wednesday said it sought the Delhi Police's permission for a protest at Jantar Mantar on June 20 and expressed confidence that its request would be approved.

In a statement, the party said it had completed all formalities required by the police and submitted details of the proposed protest, including the number of volunteers and other logistical arrangements.

Earlier, CJP founder Abhijeet Dipke had announced that they would start an indefinite sit-in at Jantar Mantar from June 20 until Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan resigns.

the Delhi Police of a peaceful demonstration and dharna at Jantar Mantar on June 20, 2026. Delhi Police has said they will get back to us tomorrow morning. We are confident that the police will grant permission," CJP spokesperson Saurav Das said in the statement.

In a video statement after meeting police officers, Das said he spent the day at the Parliament Street police station completing procedural requirements related to the proposed protest.

"I have submitted the entire plan, the number of volunteers required and every other formality as required by the police. We hope that the Delhi Police will cooperate with us," he said.



Telegram moves Delhi HC against govt curbs

Centre claims 'shocking' activities on platform

NEW DELHI: The Delhi High Court on Wednesday asked the Centre to file its reply on Telegram's plea against its order temporarily restricting access to the messaging app ahead of the June 21 NEET-UG 2026 re-examination. As the matter came up before a vacation bench of Justice Tejas Karia, Telegram's counsel claimed the curbs were illegal, but Solicitor General (SG) Tushar Mehta defended the government action, saying the platform was being misused and he would reveal "something shocking" on Thursday. The court adjourned the hearing to Thursday and issued notice to the Centre. During the hearing, Telegram's counsel questioned the legality of the government order blocking the platform.

Uddhav Sena stares at split

6 MPs set to join Shinde camp ■ NDA to get boost in Lok Sabha

MUMBAI

SIX Shiv Sena (UBT) MPs reportedly formed a separate group in the Lok Sabha on Wednesday and submitted a letter to Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla. The six MPs are expected to join the Eknath Shinde-led Shiv Sena on Friday, the party's foundation day. Sena functionaries said the process of forming the separate group was completed smoothly.

The Shiv Sena (UBT) has nine MPs in the Lok Sabha.



Barring Arvind Sawant, Anil Desai and Rajabhai Waze, all the remaining MPs are understood to have joined the new group. Sena (UBT) MPs Sanjay Raut, Sawant and Desai also met Birla and

urged him not to recognise any separate group formed by defecting Sena (UBT) MPs. However, Sena functionaries claimed that Birla had recognised the group of six MPs as a separate bloc.

SAMAJWADI SPLIT NEXT?

► Claims UP minister
► Akhilesh responds

NEW DELHI: Amid turmoil in TMC and buzz of a brewing split in Shiv Sena (UBT), speculation of a possible split in former Akhilesh Yadav's Samajwadi Party (SP) surfaced after state minister OP Rajbhar claimed that the Opposition party could face a major exodus.

DEAL NOT FINAL: TRUMP

Changes tune on Tehran ■ Threatens to drop bombs on Iran

EVIAN-LES-BAINS

JUST as things were looking up for the peace efforts in the Middle East, US President Donald Trump on Wednesday crushed hopes again, with fresh warnings to Iran.

During his remarks at the G7 Summit in France, Trump said that no deal had been finalised with Iran and warned he would resume



"dropping bombs" and go back to shooting if Tehran did not abide by its obligations. Trump clarified that

only a memorandum of understanding was in the works, and that no deal had been finalised. "If I don't like it, we will go back to shooting at them," Trump said, adding: "If they don't behave, we'll go right back to dropping bombs right smack in the middle of their head." He made the remarks sitting alongside Egyptian President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi.



India's defence production surges to Rs 1.78 lakh cr in 2025-26

NEW DELHI: India's annual defence production touched an all-time high of Rs 1.78 lakh crore in the financial year 2025-26, the defence ministry said on Wednesday. The milestone represents a 15.6 per cent growth over the previous fiscal year's output of Rs 1.54 lakh crore and a staggering 110 per cent increase since 2020-21 when the figure was Rs 84,643 crore, it said. Defence Minister Rajnath Singh said the "remarkable rise" in India's defence production in recent years is the result of the collective efforts of the Department of Defence Production and all other stakeholders. "This upward trajectory is a clear indicator of the country's expanding defence industrial base," he said. "With sustained policy support, several new initiatives, increased private sector participation, and growing export capabilities, the defence production sector is poised for continued acceleration in the years ahead," he said.

Meta starts charging for Insta, FB & WhatsApp

NEW DELHI

Launches a new 'Meta One' subscription brand

META has officially started charging for Instagram, Facebook and WhatsApp. Not for the apps themselves, which remain free, but for a new layer of "Plus" features that the company is rolling out globally under a fresh subscription brand called Meta One.

Meta's bet is that enough power users and creators will pay for the extras to make subscriptions a meaningful new revenue line. While that is reasonable maths for a company with three billion users, it is also a signal that the free, ad-supported,

algorithm-driven social feed of the last 15 years is winding down.

Analysts believe that it's an urgent attempt to offset soaring AI costs as Mark Zuckerberg tries to play catch up in the AI space where it is lagging behind. Meta increased its 2026 capital expenditure forecast to an unprecedented \$125 billion - \$145 billion, primarily to fund AI compute infrastructure, data centres, and higher component costs.

Instagram Plus costs \$3.99 a month. Subscribers get story insights showing how many



people rewatched a story, unlimited custom audience lists beyond Close Friends, the ability to spotlight a story for a week, the option to extend a story past 24 hours, a preview mode that lets one to watch

other people's stories without showing up as a viewer, and Super Heart animated reactions. One can also post straight to the profile without it appearing in followers' feeds. While Facebook Plus

is also \$3.99 a month and gives you a similar bundle, focused on profile customisation, reactions and analytics, WhatsApp Plus is cheaper at \$2.99. "It is not about social expression. It is about personalising the messaging app: custom themes, ring-tones, more pinned chats, list customisation and premium stickers," say the experts.

Then there is the AI tier. Meta is testing Meta One Plus at \$7.99 and Meta One Premium at \$19.99 for heavier Meta AI users. The Premium plan unlocks deeper reasoning

on complex tasks and more image and video generation across Meta's apps. Free Meta AI access remains but with usage limits. These plans start testing next month in Singapore, Guatemala and Bolivia.

For creators and businesses, Meta One Essential at \$14.99 bundles the Verified badge, impersonation protection and an enhanced linksheet. The top tier, Meta One Advanced at \$49.99, promises higher placement in Facebook and Instagram search, a bolder Follow button on Reels, automatic follow invitations, deeper competitive analytics and team access controls.

IRREGULAR by MANJUL

Competitive exams may soon come with a nationwide lockdown

Trust deficit persists in spite of IAF overseeing NEET-UG re-test papers

CHANDIGARH

WITH the Indian Air Force (IAF) tasked with the transportation of NEET-UG re-test question papers, students on Wednesday said that the government appears to have taken foolproof measures this time, but some added that the authorities had failed them once before, making it difficult to place complete trust in the system again.

Talking to IANS, a student said: "The government appears to have taken foolproof measures this time. Paper setters were quar-

antined, the transportation of papers is being handled by the Air Force, and the papers are being stored securely, reducing the chances of any leak. However, the damage caused by the earlier paper leak cannot be undone. Students suffered because of it, and many feel accountability is still lacking. While the authorities have improved the process, students have already faced stress, uncertainty, and the burden of preparing again. These measures are welcome, but they should have been in place from the beginning."

Another student said: "I have been preparing for NEET for around two-and-a-half years.

Our syllabus was completed nearly nine months ago, and since then, we have been revising the same topics repeatedly. It becomes frustrating after a point, and we often wonder whether all this effort will be worth it. There is still uncertainty about the exam — whether the paper will be difficult or easy. We do not know what to expect. The authorities failed us once, so it is difficult to place complete trust in the



system again."

Professor Manish Goyal said: "Students are still under stress. One student told me that he still cannot

believe he has to appear for the examination again. Imagine a student who scored 697 marks in the previous test — such a student

would never want to go through the examination process again. Now there is pressure on whether they will be able to achieve the

same score in the re-test."

"At the same time, the authorities appear to have closed almost every possible avenue for a paper leak. Earlier, the leak was allegedly linked to individuals involved in the translation process, but this time those involved have been quarantined. That means even the potential sources have been addressed," he added.

The Indian Air Force (IAF) has transported question papers for the NEET-UG 2026 re-test to 18 locations across the country as part of extensive security arrangements ahead of the

examination scheduled for June 21.

The move comes amid heightened efforts by authorities to ensure that the re-test is conducted smoothly and without any irregularities. Officials said the use of Air Force aircraft is aimed at ensuring the secure and timely delivery of question papers to designated hubs across the country.

The National Testing Agency (NTA) and other government agencies have put in place a multi-layered security system for the re-examination.

'NEET leak betrayed 22 lakh students, Pradhan must quit'

JAIPUR

CONGRESS leader Sachin Pilot on Wednesday accused the Centre of failing to fix accountability in the NEET paper leak case, saying that despite 22 lakh students being affected, neither has Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan resigned nor has any meaningful action been taken against those responsible.

Speaking ahead of Rahul Gandhi's interaction with students in Kota, Pilot said the examination system has failed millions of aspirants and their families, who invest years of hard work and sacrifice in the hope of securing a better future.

"The NEET paper leak betrayed 22 lakh students



and shattered their trust. Even after a CBI probe was ordered, neither has the Education Minister resigned nor has any meaningful accountability been fixed. The government continues to evade responsibility," Pilot said.

He said the crisis had

exposed deep flaws in the country's education and examination systems and had pushed many students into despair.

"Young people spend years preparing for these examinations. Their families make enormous sacrifices, often foregoing

basic comforts to educate their children. When that trust is broken, it becomes a matter of national concern," he said.

Pilot also linked examination irregularities to the growing mental health crisis among students, noting that several young

people, including aspirants in Rajasthan, had been driven to suicide. Backing Rahul Gandhi's programme in Kota, Pilot described it as the beginning of a nationwide campaign to seek accountability and reforms in the examination system.

"Rahul Gandhi's campaign reflects the voice of the country's youth. He is coming to Kota to listen to students, understand their concerns and demand accountability from a government that has remained asleep despite the futures of lakhs of students being jeopardised," he said.

Pilot alleged that local authorities were attempting to obstruct the event by removing banners and posters and discouraging participation.

CBI arrests IFoS officer in Rs 75 cr fund case



CHANDIGARH

THE Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) has arrested Navneet Srivastava, a senior Indian Forest Service (IFoS) officer and former CEO of the Chandigarh Renewable Energy and Science and Technology Promotion Society (CREST), in connection with the major misappropriation of funds from IDFC Bank accounts.

The arrest was made after the investigation revealed Srivastava's alleged role in the fraudulent diversion of public funds while he was heading the organisation. The accused was produced before the Special Judge, CBI, Chandigarh, and has been remanded to police custody for three days.

Investigation has shown that funds parked in three bank accounts of CREST

maintained with IDFC Bank at Chandigarh were fraudulently misappropriated and routed into various shell companies. These proceeds were allegedly converted for personal use by the beneficiaries, resulting in a loss of approximately Rs 75 crore to CREST.

Further probe revealed that part of the crime proceeds was diverted into the account of a private company in which Srivastava's wife and a close relative serve as directors.

This development comes after the CBI earlier arrested the then Project Director, Sukhwinder Singh Abrol, and the Accountant, Sahil Kukkar, of CREST. Both have already been charge-sheeted and are currently in judicial custody.

It may be recalled that the CBI took over the investigation from the Economic Of-

fences Police Station, Chandigarh. Recently, the agency filed its first charge sheet in the case against 13 accused persons, including five officials of the private bank, two public servants from CREST under J&K Administration, two shell entities, along with three of their partners, directors, and one private individual. All the accused persons named in the charge sheet are presently in judicial custody.

The case pertains to a systematic financial fraud involving multiple layers of shell companies and diversion of government funds meant for renewable energy and science & technology promotion initiatives.

The CBI has reiterated its commitment to conducting a thorough, impartial, and expeditious investigation to bring all those responsible to justice.

Restaurant ordered to pay Rs 15k compensation

DELHI/JALANDHAR

THE District Consumer Disputes Redressal Commission, Jalandhar, has held that a restaurant's levy of service charges without obtaining the consumer's consent amounts to an unfair trade practice and directed it to refund the amount collected along with compensation of Rs 15,000.

The complaint was filed by Sanjeev Duggal, a practicing advocate from Phagwara, against Maya Inns Pvt. Ltd. and its directors, following a buffet dinner he had with his family at the restaurant on November 8, 2023. According to the complaint, Duggal visited the restaurant with three adults and one minor child and was allegedly charged buffet charges for four adults. He further claimed that the restaurant levied service charges of Rs 128.13 and Rs 23.40 in two separate bills, totalling Rs 151.53, at the rate of 3 per cent. The complainant alleged that when he objected to the service charge and to billing the minor child as an adult, the restaurant staff misbehaved toward him.

He also raised concerns regarding the quality of certain food items and sought a refund of the service charges along with compensation of Rs 5 lakh



for mental agony, harassment and humiliation.

Contesting the complaint, the restaurant denied allegations of service deficiencies, misbehaviour, and unfair trade practices. It argued that the amount was collected as "staff contribution", which was prominently displayed on the menu card, and claimed that such charges would have been waived had any objection been raised by the customer. The restaurant also relied upon interim orders passed by the Delhi High Court in proceedings relating to service charges levied by hotels and restaurants. While denying liability, it expressed willingness to refund the disputed amount of Rs 151.53.

After examining the evidence and hearing both sides, the consumer forum found that the restaurant had admitted collecting the amount and agreed to refund it.

"It is proved that the OP charged service charges and not the staff contribution, without obtaining consent from the consumer, which constitutes an unfair trade practice and the complainant is entitled to a refund of the said amount," the commission said in its order.

The commission observed that even if the restaurant intended to collect the amount as a staff contribution, it was under a duty to clearly inform customers about such charges in advance.

"The entire pleadings and even the documents, nowhere show that the complainant was ever informed beforehand in a clear and unambiguous manner regarding the compulsory levy of such service charges/staff contribution," it said. The consumer forum directed the opposite parties to comply with the order within 45 days from receipt of its copy.



Punjab: 2 modules busted; 3 held with 5.7 kg heroin

CHANDIGARH

IN a major crackdown against drug trafficking and illegal narcotics networks, Punjab Police have busted two modules by arresting three accused in two separate operations, said Director General of Police (DGP) Gaurav Yadav here on Wednesday.

The police have also recovered 5.775 kg of heroin, 1.33 lakh restricted capsules and tablets, 39 cartridges of KF 7.65 calibre, and Rs 36,600 in cash from their possession.

Those arrested have been identified as Manjinder Singh (24), a resident of Lakha Bhedian; Jagjit Singh (22), a resident of Mallanwala; and Gurdev Singh (55), a resident of Mamdot Uttar in Ferozepur.

Apart from recovering contraband, police teams have also impounded their car bearing registration number PB 46 AP 3255. The DGP said that further investigation is underway to establish forward and backward linkages in these cases to uncover the complete network,

trace the financial trail, and identify all people involved in the crime. Sharing operational details on the first operation, Senior Superintendent of Police (Ferozepur) Bhupinder Singh Sidhu said that police had received a reliable input that Manjinder Singh and Jagjit Singh are indulging in drug smuggling. Acting swiftly, police teams intercepted them near Daana Mandi Basti Vakeela Wali, when they were travelling in their car, and during the search, 5.775 kg of heroin was recovered, he said.

In another operation, the SSP said that the police team had received a reliable input that Gurdev Singh runs a Medical Store in Mamdot village, where he sells restricted capsules and tablets. Acting swiftly, police teams in the presence of a drug inspector raided the medical store and recovered 1,33,640 restricted tablets and capsules, Rs 36,600 cash and 39 cartridges of KF 7.65 calibre from the shop, he said, while adding that the accused Gurdev has been arrested.

Clinic operator beaten to death, 30 booked

VICTIM'S FAMILY, VILLAGERS BLOCK HIGHWAY

SHIVPURI: A 40-year-old clinic operator was allegedly beaten to death by a mob in Madhya Pradesh's Shivpuri district, prompting angry family members and villagers to block a highway and demand immediate arrests, police said on Wednesday.

The incident occurred in Bhayavan village under Bhauti police station limits on Tuesday evening. The deceased, identified as Prabhan Singh Lodhi, succumbed to injuries at Pichhore Civil Hospital after being allegedly assaulted by a group of people over a dispute linked to a woman. According to the complaint lodged by his wife, Meena Lodhi, a mob barged into their house while Prabhan Singh was having dinner, dragged him outside and attacked him with sticks, iron rods and stones. She alleged that when family members attempted to



intervene, they were also assaulted. Police have registered a case against 30 persons, including 15 named accused and 15 unidentified individuals. The named accused include Ramniwas Pal, Devendra Pal, Raju Pal, Balveer Pal, Sudama Pal, Parmeshwardas Pal, Mijaji Pal, Keshpal, Pradeep Pal, Dinesh Pal, Angad Lodhi, Anil Lodhi, Pushpendra Pal, Shaitan Pal and Mohar Singh Pal. Pichhore SDOP Prashant Sharma said preliminary investigation indicated that the violence stemmed from a dispute involving a woman. The woman, who was married earlier this year, had reportedly approached police after

alleging assault by members of her family. She later expressed her wish to go with Prabhan Lodhi, a move opposed by her relatives. Police said both sides had reached the Bhauti police station earlier on Tuesday and levelled allegations against each other.

After counselling, they were sent back to the village. A few hours later, the attack on Prabhan Lodhi took place.

The victim's death sparked outrage among relatives and villagers, who gathered outside the police station and staged a blockade on the Shivpuri-Pichhore highway, causing traffic disruption for several hours.

The protesters demanded swift action against all those involved. Senior police officials reached the spot and assured the family that strict action would be taken, following which the blockade was lifted.

Raj CM approves rare earth exploration and special NIA court

JAIPUR: Rajasthan Chief Minister Bhajanlal Sharma has approved a series of key decisions aimed at strengthening the state's mining sector, judicial infrastructure and disaster preparedness, while directing officials to ensure their time-bound implementation.

According to an official statement issued by the Chief Minister's Office, the decisions are expected to boost

economic activity, improve governance and enhance civil protection mechanisms across the state. In a major push to mineral exploration, the Chief Minister approved the grant of an exploration licence for Rare Earth Element (REE) minerals over an area of 207.63 square kilometres in Navatala and Devigarh villages of Balotra district. The licence has been granted to the Central Mine Planning and

Design Institute (CMPDI).

The mineral block falls in the Pachpadra and Shergarh regions and is expected to contribute to mineral resource development and generate employment opportunities in the area. Rare Earth Elements are strategically important minerals used in sectors such as electronics, renewable energy, electric vehicles and defence manufacturing. The Chief

Minister has also approved the establishment of a special court for cases investigated by the National Investigation Agency (NIA). The move is aimed at strengthening the judicial system and ensuring faster disposal of cases related to national security and other matters investigated by the agency. The government said the dedicated court would improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the legal pro-

cess in such cases.

As part of the 2025-26 Budget announcements, CM Sharma has approved the formation of Civil Defence Corps units in eight newly created districts.

The districts include Balotra, Didwana-Kuchaman, Phalodi, Salumber, Khairthal-Tijara, Deeg, Kotputli-Behror and Beawar.

According to the government, the initiative will

strengthen disaster management, civil defence and emergency response systems in these districts by encouraging citizen participation and improving preparedness during natural disasters and other emergencies.

The Chief Minister has directed officials to ensure the effective and timely execution of all approved decisions so that their benefits reach the public at the earliest.



Women police to be on board in DTC ladies buses

NEW DELHI

WOMEN police personnel will be deployed inside all Delhi Transport Corporation (DTC) ladies special buses operating on identified routes, transport officials said on Wednesday.

The decision was taken at a meeting chaired by Delhi Lieutenant Governor Taranjit Singh Sandhu and attended by officials of Delhi Police and the transport department.

"Delhi Police had been requested to deploy women police personnel on the la-



adies' special buses plying on these routes, especially during morning and evening hours. Taking a highly serious view of women's security, the LG issued strict directions to the authorities, categorically stating that the safety of women should not be compromised at any cost," a transport department official said.

According to the officials, another decision taken at the meeting was to directly integrate panic button alerts installed in buses with the 112 PCR emergency response system of the Delhi Police.

"Delhi Police will provide the necessary female workforce. Women home guard marshals could additionally be deployed to assist the police personnel in buses," they added. The official emphasised that building a secure environment requires a zero-tolerance approach and immediate, highly visible operational interventions on the ground. These buses, initially to run on already identified routes, mostly around far-flung areas of Outer Delhi, will be operated entirely by women staff.

MCD fast-tracks 229 public toilet blocks

Corporation sets strict deadlines for fund approval

NEW DELHI

TO expedite construction of 229 new toilet blocks by easing bureaucratic red tape, the Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD) has ordered its officials to shorten fund-clearance timelines across the 12 zones, officials said.

According to officials, the civic body's latest push is aimed at swiftly addressing the lack of hygienic sanitation facilities for lakhs of commuters, particularly women, children, and the elderly, who navigate the capital's busiest stretches.

The MCD commissioner recently chaired a review meeting to eliminate logistical bottlenecks. Following the review, all chief engineers and zonal deputy commissioners have been directed to ensure that fund requirements are compulsorily uploaded onto the Delhi Development Information System (DDIS) within a tight three-day window to avoid further delays, an official order said.

The infrastructure drive, which was undertaken in May 2026, will be funded under the Chief Minister's



Development Fund (CMDF) and will use a standardised design to ensure high maintenance and quality standards across the city.

A zone-wise breakdown revealed that crowded commercial and residential hubs will receive bulk of the infrastructure.

Karol Bagh is set to get the most number of new toilet blocks, as many as 34, followed by Keshav Puram with 32, and Rohini and West zones with 23 each.

Other areas earmarked for establishment of public toilets include South (20), City SP (19), Shahdara

South (19), Central (17), Shahdara North (16), Najafgarh (15), Narela (6) and Civil Lines 5.

"For the average Delhiite, especially those working outdoors or commuting long distances, a clean public washroom is a basic necessity that impacts their health and daily dignity," an MCD official said.

Officials across the zones have now been tasked with swift preparation and submission of final site-specific requisitions via designated digital portals so that construction can commence immediately, officials said.

LG directs POCSO compliance check in Delhi schools

NEW DELHI

DELHI Lieutenant Governor Taranjit Singh Sandhu on Wednesday directed a comprehensive audit of schools to assess adherence to the provisions and guidelines of the POCSO Act.

Sandhu chaired a meeting to review the implementation status of the Protection of

Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act across the capital, along with Delhi Police, the Women and Child Department and the Department of Education.

"Directed a comprehensive audit of schools across Delhi to assess adherence to the provisions and guidelines of the POCSO Act. The education department has also been in-

structed to enforce strict compliance and initiate firm action against institutions found lacking in implementation," Sandhu said in a post on X.

The LG further directed Delhi Police to ensure robust and visible deployment around school premises and prominent student hubs.

"Particularly during school dispersal hours, to proactively



deter any untoward incidents and strengthen public confidence. Emphasised a zero-tolerance approach towards eve-teasing, harassment, and molestation of women and children," he added.

The safety, dignity, and well-being of every student remain non-negotiable. We are committed to building a secure, fearless, and protective environment for every child in Delhi, he added.

Sandhu to lead Yoga Day celebrations at Baansera park

NEW DELHI

DELHI Lieutenant Governor Taranjit Singh Sandhu will lead Yoga Day celebrations on June 21 from Baansera Park near ITO of the Delhi Development Authority, officials said on Wednesday. DDA is organising celebrations of the 12th International Day of Yoga at 29 locations across the city, including other parks and green spaces under it, they said.

"The programmes will comprise Yoga asanas, pranayama, breathing exercises, meditation and wellness activities under the guidance of trained instructors," a statement said.

This year, the theme for celebrations is "Yoga for Healthy Ageing", highlighting the role of Yoga in enhancing physical, mental and emotional well-being across all age groups.

"Through its extensive network of sports complexes, public parks and green spaces, DDA will facilitate large-scale public participation in the observance, reinforcing the message of healthy living, physical fitness and holistic well-being," it added.

Sandhu will lead the Yoga celebrations at Baansera. He will be joined by DDA Vice Chairman N Saravana Kumar along with other senior DDA officers and distinguished participants. The programmes will comprise Yoga asanas, pranayama, breathing exercises, meditation and wellness activities under the able guidance of trained Yoga instructors deputed by the Ministry of Ayush, Government of India.

Yoga sessions will also be organised at many DDA parks and green spaces including Baansera, Swarn Jayanti Park (Rohini), Coronation Park (Burai), Hauz Khas Park, Satya Park (Naraina Phase-II), District Park (G-17, Paschim Vihar), Ashoka Garden and others.



Five held for aiding cyber fraud; Rs 9 lakh frozen

NEW DELHI

DELHI Police has busted a cybercrime syndicate allegedly involved in facilitating the siphoning of fraud proceeds through bank accounts and arrested five persons, while preventing the withdrawal of nearly Rs 9 lakh suspected to be linked to cyber fraud, officials said on Wednesday. The police arrested Vikash (22), Vansh (21), Faiyaz Alam (22), Amit (28) and Balvir Kumar (23), all residents of Delhi, on Tuesday from Uttar Pradesh's Bareilly.

The operation was

launched after a private bank's branch manager in Jasola alerted police about suspicious transactions, police said. During the investigation, officers of Sarita Vihar police station uncovered a commission-based network that allegedly arranged and operated bank accounts that were used for routing and withdrawing money obtained through cyber frauds.

An FIR has been registered at the Sarita Vihar police station under relevant provisions of the BNS, police said, adding that the probe has revealed a direct link to a

major CEO/social media impersonation fraud reported in Mumbai, which allegedly duped a private company of around Rs 10.40 crore.

In that case, registered by the South Cyber Police Station of Mumbai Crime Branch, fraudsters allegedly siphoned off money through 63 transactions carried out between June 3-15, officials said. The financial trail being examined in the Delhi case may exceed Rs 10 crore, police said, adding that investigators are working to identify the entire network and trace the flow of funds.

2015 double murder case

Hostile witnesses, flawed probe: Court acquits six

NEW DELHI

A Delhi court has acquitted six men accused of murdering two youths in Sangam Vihar in 2015, saying the prosecution's case suffered from serious evidentiary deficiencies, including hostile eyewitnesses and a lack of conclusive corroboration.

In an order dated June 8, Additional Sessions Judge Hargurvarinder Singh Jaggi said the prosecution's case is severely undermined by its own star public witnesses retracting their statements and alleging police coercion.

"The lack of independent witnesses during the evidence recovery, the absence of CCTV, and the inconclusive ballistic reports leave a massive gap in the chain of circumstances. The case appears to suffer from severe evidentiary weaknesses. There are significant flaws in the police investigation, and a lack of definitive scientific cor-



roboration," the court said.

According to the prosecution, the killings stemmed from rivalry in an illegal gambling business. It alleged that Sumit was shot dead near Valmiki Mandir on Tigri Road and Akash was abducted and later murdered in a jungle area of Sangam Vihar on April 5.

The complainant and purported eyewitness denied witnessing the incident and claimed his signatures were taken on blank papers. The judge observed that while DNA evidence indicated the presence of the victims' blood on clothes allegedly recovered

from some accused, such evidence by itself was insufficient to establish guilt in the absence of reliable eyewitness testimony and an unbroken chain of circumstances.

The court acquitted Ravi Gupta, Satish Kubda alias Ajay, Arjun alias Tilly, Akash alias Machine alias Rocky, Sunil alias Sapola and Sunil, son of Ram Chander, of charges under IPC provisions relating to murder, abduction and criminal conspiracy. Ravi Gupta, Satish Kubda and Akash were also acquitted of Arms Act charges.

"The defense has successfully created significant reasonable doubt by highlighting these investigative flaws and presenting a plausible alternative narrative of false implication," the judge said.

However, the accused Nitin Gupta was convicted under Section 174A IPC for absconding after being declared a proclaimed offender.

2 held in Guru Randhawa gym firing case

NEW DELHI

TWO alleged associates of the Lawrence Bishnoi gang have been arrested for allegedly opening fire outside a gym linked to Punjabi singer Guru Randhawa in Paschim Vihar, police said on Wednesday. One of the arrested men had returned from Russia less than two weeks before the incident. Police said the accused, Arman (19) and Tushar alias Tashu alias Pinku (21), both residents of Sonapat district in Haryana, were apprehended in Bahadurgarh after a manhunt.

According to police, the duo are alleged shooters linked to gangster Anil Pandit, a member of the Lawrence Bishnoi gang who is believed to be operating from the United States.

Police said two motorcycle-borne assailants allegedly opened fire outside a gym on Outer Ring Road in Paschim Vihar around 4 am on June 11 and fled the scene; no one was injured, and seven empty cartridges were recovered.

Police said a case was registered at Paschim Vihar East police station in outer Delhi. The incident drew attention after a social media post allegedly made by Anil Pandit went viral, claiming responsibility for the attack on behalf of the Lawrence Bishnoi gang, police said.

Miranda House hosts open house for UG aspirants

NEW DELHI

MIRANDA House on Wednesday commenced its open house session 2026 for undergraduate aspirants, welcoming around 100 students and their parents to the college campus as admissions to Delhi University draw closer.

The four-day initiative, which began on June 17, is aimed at helping prospective students understand the admission process, course choices and campus life at the college.

The sessions will continue on June 18, 19 and 22, according to a statement. More than 700 registrations have been received for the programme so far, with students and parents from across Delhi-NCR signing up to participate.

Visitors were taken on guided tours of the campus, including the library, laboratories, classrooms and other facilities, giving them an

Draws over 700 registrations on Day 1



opportunity to familiarise themselves with the academic environment and student support systems available at the college.

The open house featured an interactive session with Principal Bijayalaxmi Nanda and Bursar Dr Nandini Dutta, who responded to queries related to the Common University Entrance Test

(CUET), Delhi University admissions, preference-sheet filling, course selection and academic opportunities, the statement said.

Faculty members from various departments also interacted with the aspirants during laboratory visits and introduced them to the college's academic facilities, research activities and learning

opportunities, it read.

The college said the open house sessions are intended to provide prospective students with accurate information and personalised guidance as they prepare for the undergraduate admission process. Interested students and parents can register for the programme through the college website, the statement added.

INTER-STATE AUTO THIEF GANG BUSTED; 8 HELD

NEW DELHI

IN a major breakthrough against organised vehicle theft, the team of Anti-Auto Theft Squad (AATS), South-West District, Delhi Police, has busted a notorious inter-state auto thief gang and arrested eight accused persons, including five auto thieves and three receivers of stolen vehicles.

With their arrest, police recovered a total of 10 stolen vehicles, including nine cars and one motorcycle, along with 18 pairs of fake number plates, 21 remote keys used for preparing duplicate vehicle keys, and vehicle theft equipment, including OBD scanners, drill machines, and lock-breaking tools.

Keeping in view the recent rise in vehicle thefts in the South-West District, a dedicated team of AATS/SWD was constituted under the leadership of Inspector Ram Kumar and the supervision of ACP Sanghamitra to identify and apprehend auto lifters operating in Delhi-NCR. The team analysed CCTV footage, gathered technical and human



intelligence, and developed information about an active vehicle theft syndicate.

On February 3, acting on a tip-off, the team laid a trap near Baba Gangnath Marg, Munirka. At about 7:00 am, a Hyundai Creta was intercepted after the driver attempted to flee. The accused, Asim alias Hasim alias Diwana (35), a resident of Meerut, Uttar Pradesh, was apprehended. Verification revealed that the vehicle bore fake registration plates and had been stolen in an e-FIR registered at Police Station Model Town.

Accordingly, FIR No. 44/2026 under relevant BNS provisions was registered at

Police Station Kishangarh. Further investigation led to the arrest of seven associates, including receivers of stolen vehicles. The accused were found to be part of an organised inter-state vehicle theft syndicate that used duplicate keys and electronic devices to steal vehicles and either sell them using forged documents or dismantle them for spare parts.

Police recovered 10 stolen vehicles, 18 pairs of fake number plates, 21 remote keys, and vehicle-theft tools. The operation resulted in the detection of 10 vehicle theft cases across Delhi. Further investigation is in progress.

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Govt's U-turn on Harappan 'Dancing Girl' is quite baffling

MORAL policing begins quite early these days. Now, sanskari commissars ensured that Class 9 students didn't see the iconic 'Dancing Girl' of Mohenjo-daro in its present form—with the torso uncovered. For decades, school students have seen the artefacts of the Indus Valley Civilisation, including the Dancing Girl, in the textbooks published by the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT), an autonomous organisation established by the government in 1961. Its primary objective, its website says, was to assist and advise the Central and state governments on policies and programmes for qualitative educational development. Accordingly, its duties include preparation and publication of

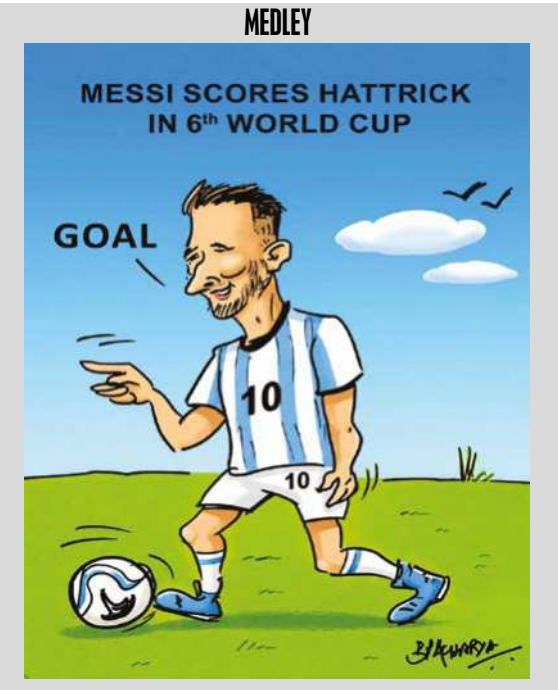
"model textbooks, supplementary materials, newsletters, journals, and educational kits, multimedia digital content, and other educational materials." What kind of "model textbook" can preach moral policing over accurate presentation of facts and visuals? This was not the first time that sanskaris have objected to the famed bronze figurine, but their objections were reportedly brushed aside by "some government expert." Still, the retouched photograph is featured in the opening chapter, 'History of Arts', of Madhurima, the new arts education textbook for Class 9. In the doctored image, the figurine's torso was shaded from the shoulders down. Historian Michel Danino, who headed the textbook development committee

for NCERT's new Class 6 social science books, had told a newspaper last month that the NCERT was against placing the Dancing Girl on the opening page of a chapter on Indus Valley Civilisation. Danino, who is no longer a member of the committee, said "shading of her [Dancing Girl's] trunk is an act of censorship; unless we wish to return to Victorian morality, such prudishness is misplaced—should students, then, be barred from entering the National Museum, where the original figurine is housed, not to speak of many semi-nude or nude statues of goddesses, apsaras, etc.?" He expressed indignation at the creation of "a fake artefact which exists nowhere. That is just not done." He is wrong: it is done in India—not

merely done, but disturbingly normalised. Shading of the Dancing Girl's torso is not an isolated lapse in judgement; it belongs to a long and growing tradition of sanitising history to suit contemporary notions of propriety. Instead of allowing students to encounter the past on its own terms, institutions entrusted with education are recasting it through the lens of present-day moral anxieties. The result is neither history nor pedagogy, but a carefully curated fiction.

The irony is difficult to miss. The same civilisation whose achievements are celebrated in textbooks is deemed unsuitable for students when represented through one of its most famous artefacts. A bronze figurine created nearly

4,000 years back is altered because modern gatekeepers fear that young readers may see what generations of scholars, museum visitors and schoolchildren have seen without scandal. The artefact survives; only its representation is censored. Such interventions reveal a troubling lack of confidence in both students and teachers. If adolescents can study wars, famines, social hierarchies and political violence, surely, they can also view an ancient sculpture in its original form. To suggest otherwise is to confuse education with protectionism and learning with moral supervision. Thankfully, the government has decided to restore the original Harappan Dancing Girl in textbooks. At least, for now.



FASTING ACROSS RELIGIOUS FAITHS



TALKING OF MANY THINGS

IN the Vedas 'vrata' or 'nomu's are religious rituals, vows, or observances aimed at fulfilling a desire, seeking blessings, ensuring family welfare, to attain specific goals such as health, wealth, prosperity or overcoming adversity. They involve specific, ritualized restrictions, such as avoiding certain foods on specific days, strict adherence to certain customs and vows, or a 'sankalpam', to gain spiritual merit. They primarily serve to align the individual with cosmic order, purify the mind and body, and foster discipline through voluntary sacrifice. They also represent a divine ordinance acting as a binding commitment to ethical conduct and spiritual focus, often involving fasting or specific ascetic practices to propitiate deities.

Such rituals call for spiritual discipline and lead to purification, adherence to divine laws and atonement, or 'prayaschitta', to neutralize past sins, negative karma, or to overcome defects in one's life. By sacrificing comforts such as food, the devotee creates a closer connection with the Almighty, thus fostering gratitude and devotion. In Vedic literature, Agni is often termed vratapā protector of the vrata, indicating that these observances ensure orderly behav-

our and divine protection.

A 'mauna vrata' is one form of such rituals. It is a spiritual and intentional vow of silence rooted in Indian traditions, where an individual abstains from speaking for a set period to cultivate inner peace, self-discipline, and introspection. It aims to reduce external stimuli, conserve mental energy, and achieve clarity of thought by turning one's focus inward.

Such a vow, however, is generally not permissible in Islam, and is considered an innovation or 'bid'ah'. The Holy Quran, no doubt, mentions a fast of silence observed by Maryam, an ardent devotee of Allah and the only woman mentioned by name in that scripture, who is recognized as a paragon of purity, piety, and submission to Allah. That practice, however, was for previous generations and was cancelled by Prophet Muhammad, who emphasized that abstaining from permissible speech is not an act of obedience.

The religious scriptures of major faiths contain many references to such practices. For instance, Parvati, the principal Hindu Goddess of love, beauty, marriage, children, and devotion, who is the consort of Lord Shiva, represents the divine feminine energy, or 'Shakti' that balances Shiva's asceticism. She began to be known as 'Aparna', or without leaves, because of the extreme penance she undertook to marry Lord Shiva, during which she gave up all food, including leaves. The name signifies her intense dedication and sacrifice, establishing her as a model of devotion.

Likewise, 'Varalakshmi' vrata is a significant Hindu puja, observed on the second Friday of the 'Shravana' month. It is

While a vrata covers a wide range of ritual vows in Hinduism, the Christian approach is centered on voluntarily humbling oneself before God through fasting, prayer, and sacrifice to focus on spiritual growth. The Islamic equivalents of vrata are generally called 'Sawm' or fasting or 'Siyam'.

dedicated to Lakshmi, the Goddess of wealth and prosperity, to whose boon granting form, married women fast and pray, for the well-being, health, and longevity of their husbands and children.

In 'Maha Bhagavata', Satyabhama, one of Lord Krishna's consorts, is famously known for her beauty and immense wealth. She believes that she holds the absolute highest place in Krishna's heart and wants to ensure that she would have Lord Krishna as her husband in every birth. The celestial musician and an ardent devotee of Lord Vishnu, Sage Narada, informs her that in her current birth, she has Lord Krishna as her husband on account of her good fortune. To continue to have that fortune in all her future lives, she performs a special vow, which involves gifting Krishna to Narada and then trying to buy him back. Satyabhama tries to weigh Krishna against all her wealth, jewels, and gold, but the scales continue to remain lower on Krishna's side. It is only when she stops being proud and asks for help, and when a single Tulasi leaf is placed, with pure devotion, on the scale by Rukmini, consort of Krishna, and the first Queen of 'Dwaraka', the Kingdom of Krishna, and the embodiment of Goddess Lakshmi, that the scales balance. The message conveyed is that Krishna can be pleased only with sincere devotion, or 'bhakti', but not with wealth.

Also in the Hindu mythology is described the tale of how

the severe and intense penance of the venerated Sage Vishwamitra, characterised by decades-long austerity and aimed at surpassing Sage Vashistha, transforms him from the powerful warrior King Kaushika to a revered 'Brahmarshi'. The penance involves overcoming massive temptations, including Apsaras, or celestial nymphs, Menaka and Rambha, before finally mastering his anger and ego to attain supreme spiritual status. Yet another example can be found in Ramayana. Ravana, the ten-headed demon king of Lanka and an ardent devotee of Lord Shiva, performs an intense penance to Lord Brahma and Lord Shiva to gain immense power, knowledge, and invincibility. He sacrifices his ten heads, which grow back each time, symbolizing his dedication. This devotion grants him boons, making him a dominant ruler, a master of scriptures, and the possessor of the Celestial Weapon, 'Chandras'. Turning to Christian equivalents of such rituals, we find that the equivalent of a vrata is found in the spiritual disciplines of fasting and abstinence.

For example, 'Lent', the 40-day period before Easter, beginning on 'Ash Wednesday', is somewhat like a long-term vrata, involving abstinence, fasting, increased prayer, and acts of charity. The fasting is designed to foster self-denial, focus on prayer, and draw closer to God. Denying oneself food entirely for a period to focus on spiritual matters, is on the lines of Jesus'

40 days in the wilderness. Likewise, a 'vow' is a personal, voluntary promise made to God, such as committing to a season of fasting, a specific prayer routine, or abstaining from a habit.

Some examples are, the 'Daniel Fast', which is a common practice based on the Bible where individuals abstain from rich foods, such as meat, dairy or wine, for 21 days, consuming only vegetables and water and the 'Ember Days', which are traditional days of prayer and fasting which occur quarterly.

In summary, while a vrata covers a wide range of ritual vows in Hinduism, the Christian approach is centered on voluntarily humbling oneself before God through fasting, prayer, and sacrifice to focus on spiritual growth.

The Islamic equivalents of vrata are generally called 'Sawm' or fasting or 'Siyam'. Like the Hindu custom, Islamic fasting involves abstaining from food, drink, and sexual activity, from dawn until sunset to cultivate self-control, piety, and devotion to God. Examples include, 'Ramadan', also known as 'Ramzan', or obligatory fasting. The month-long fast during Ramadan is the most significant form of worship, to a mandatory, universal vow observed by all able Muslims. Several other fasts are also undertaken, such as 'Sunnah' fasts, or recommended vows, which are voluntary fasts, like the Hindu 'Kanya Vratas' or vows for desire. 'Shawwal', or fasting six days after Ramadan, observing the 'Ashura', or fasting on the 10th of Muharram. In addition, 'Kaffarah' or expiation fasts undertaken to make up for breaking a previous fast or as a penalty for certain transgressions and 'Nazar' vows, or specific voluntary fasts a person

promises to keep if a particular wish is fulfilled are also known. Fasting on Mondays and Thursdays is highly recommended by Prophet Muhammad.

A lighthearted tale now, to lighten the mood. The story goes that a representation was made by Chitracharya, record keeper of Yama, the Hindu God of Death, Justice and Afterlife, to Lord Brahma, the God of Creation, and the first deity of the Holy Trinity or 'Trimurti's, along with Vishnu and Shiva, about the embarrassing consequences of the Varalakshmi vrata. The gist of the grievance was that on account of the observance of the ritual, women were succeeding in getting the same husband for seven successive births. The women were happy. Not so, however, their husbands because men, by nature, would like a different wife in each birth. Lord Brahma was in a dilemma, as the vrata was an ancient tradition, regarded holy and desirable. Chanakya, the legendary Indian philosopher, teacher, economist, and royal strategist, known for masterminding the establishment and celebrated famously for his sharp political wisdom, was summoned to assist in the resolution of the crisis. The brilliant Chanakya, as always, came up with a novel and unique solution and suggested that Lord Brahma insist that the boon would be granted to women only on the condition that the mothers-in-law also would be the same in all the births! The ladies observing the tradition, understandably, refused to accept the condition. Both parties, men, and women were happy, not to mention Lord Brahma!

(The writer was formerly Chief Secretary, Government of Andhra Pradesh)

Merit or birthright? Why Telangana's 'local only' judge demand threatens impartial justice

CHOLLETI

AN extraordinary general body of the Telangana High Court Bar Association (THCBA) on Monday passed a resolution requesting that the High Court and the Supreme Court collegium prioritise practising advocates "belonging to Telangana origin only" when recommending names for elevation to the High Court. The resolution invokes themes that resonate across India — representation, social justice and the value of lawyers who have sustained practice in a particular High Court — and raises fundamental legal and constitutional questions about who may be considered for judicial office and how the collegium should weigh 'locality' against merit and other legitimate criteria.

The resolution and the rationale:

According to the association's extraordinary meeting and subsequent resolution, the request calls for the collegium to follow principles of social justice and ensure that elevation to the bench gives "proper representation to all the sections of people," by prioritising advocates of Telangana origin, who practise in the Telangana High Court. The association's stated concerns are familiar: local advocates are thought to have better knowledge of regional laws, languages, social contexts and institutional practices. Long standing practitioners claim an established relationship with the court and its litigational culture. And a perception exists that too many judicial vacancies are filled by outsiders or by candidates perceived as less connected to local bar and bench communities. These are legitimate policy concerns that speak to questions of trust, accountability and the bench's social composition.

The Legal framework:

The constitutional text sets the outer bounds of eligibility. Article 217 requires a person to have been an advocate of a High Court for at least 10 years to be qualified for appointment as a High Court judge. Article 124 sets similar eligibility for the Supreme Court. These articles impose nationality and experience thresholds but are silent on place of origin or state of enrolment beyond the requirement of practice at a High Court. The Collegium process and the Memorandum of Procedure (MoP) — the procedural matrix evolved by the Supreme Court and used by High Court collegia — stress merit, integrity, standing at the Bar, experience, published judgments and encourage regard for social diversity and representation. The MoP contemplates weight being given to professional standing and to consultative inputs from the local bar and judges. It does not, however, endorse categorical exclusion of candidates who are not of a particular state origin.

Precedents and bar-level pushback around locality demands:

Demands by bar associations and local bodies for prioritising local practitioners are not new. Reports show that bar bodies in different jurisdictions in India have protested proposals to elevate advocates, who do not practise regularly before a particular High Court, or asked that local counsel be given preference. Some associations have even threatened abstentions or abstaining from work when they believe consultative norms were ignored. Conversely, proposals to elevate advocates from the Supreme Court or advocates who practise mainly outside a High Court's rolls have also drawn objections. These episodes demonstrate a recurring tension: local bars

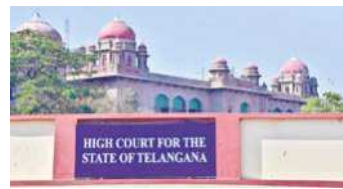
want a say and protection for home-grown talent; collegia seek to balance merit, representation and institutional needs.

Legal and constitutional objections to 'TG-only' rule:

A categorical rule that only advocates of Telangana origin may be considered presents myriad problems. First, it risks conflict with equal treatment norms and the constitutional commitment to non-discrimination — appointments must be open to all who meet the constitutional eligibility criteria. Second, the constitution's experience thresholds refer to practice in a High Court. They do not confer a right to geographic exclusion. Third, limiting the pool to state origin advocates may curtail merit: the collegium system, for all its scrutiny, seeks candidates with outstanding ability and temperament. Artificially narrowing that pool could compromise overall judicial quality. Fourth, such a rule may undercut impartial justice by introducing parochial pressures into what is designed to be a consultative but expert process. Finally, the practicalities of modern legal practice — interstate mobility, Supreme Court practice, multi-jurisdictional litigation — mean many of the best candidates have diverse practice footprints that transcend state borders. Constitutional text and the MoP do not support a parochial quota. They permit, instead, a nuanced approach that properly values local experience as one of several factors.

Weighing local practitioners:

That said, the association's concerns have merit when framed as preferences rather than inflexible rules. Local practitioners often bring deep familiarity with state statutes, local languages and socio



legal context — qualities that improve judicial access and legitimacy. Where a High Court has a sustained deficit in representation by persons from particular social classes, castes, genders or regions of the state, active attention to homegrown candidates can promote social justice and public confidence. The collegium legitimately considers representational balance. The MoP expressly mentions social diversity and dispersal as considerations. The answer is not categorical exclusion but calibrated prioritisation: clearer consultative engagement with the local bar, well publicised shortlists that include local talent, and affirmative outreach to underrepresented communities within the state.

Practical recommendations to reconcile local claims and constitutional norms

A balanced way forward would preserve collegial independence while responding to legitimate local anxieties:

The High Court Collegium should publish general criteria it emphasises in each round (e.g., representation, local experience) and record consultative inputs from the bar — without compromising confidential elements of the vetting process.

Rather than an exclusionary demand, the bar association could submit a ranked shortlist of local advocates with verified credentials and judgments for the collegium's consideration; this preserves the collegium's final discretion while ensuring local talent is visible. The MoP could be clarified —

through collegium practice directions or a public memorandum — to state how local practice and regional representation are weighed against other parameters.

To address social justice goals, the collegium and state authorities should foster mentorship and training programmes that increase the pipeline of high quality, diverse candidates from within the state.

If the bar fears opacity or perceived unfairness, it should press for greater procedural transparency (publication of non-sensitive selection criteria and anonymised statistics on regional representation) rather than exclusionary membership rules.

Preference, not parochialism, should guide reform:

The Telangana Bar Association's demand reflects anxieties that many state bars across India have voiced—the desire for local representation, social justice and an accessible bench that understands regional problems. Those concerns merit serious engagement by the collegium and reformers. But constitutional structure, the Memorandum of Procedure, and the imperatives of judicial quality caution against categorical rules that close the candidate pool by place of origin. The healthier path is a principled, transparent consultative regime in which local experience is an honoured, measurable factor — one among several — that the collegium publicly recognises and actively cultivates, while retaining its constitutional duty to recommend judges on the basis of merit, integrity and the public interest.

(The writer is with the Cholleti Black-Robe Chambers, Hyderabad, and writes on economy, politics and law)

LETTERS

The Rs 1,600 crore SCCL black hole

ACCOUNTABILITY can no longer wait as a staggering, cavernous discrepancy given that nearly 40 lakh tonnes of coal, valued at an estimated ₹1,600 crore, have vanished into thin air from the stockyards of the state-run Singareni Collieries Company Ltd (SCCL). It came to light after physical inspections of several mining sites reportedly revealed empty, dusty stockyards, directly contradicting official records that boasted of substantial reserves. The opposition was quick to accuse the Congress-led state government of presiding over, or turning a blind eye to, large-scale irregularities and the potential illegal diversion and black-marketing of a vital national resource. In governance, silence is rarely interpreted as neutrality; more often, it is read as complicity or paralysis. As the controversy snowballs, the Telangana government's lack of a detailed, transparent response is only fuelling the narrative of a systemic cover-up. SCCL is a critical pillar of Telangana's industrial and energy backbone. When a resource as heavily regulated and physically massive as coal disappears on this scale, it points to either a catastrophic failure of internal audit mechanisms or a deeply entrenched, highly coordinated network of illicit siphoning. The state leadership must act swiftly to clear the air, because in a democracy, the smoke from such a political storm will not dissipate until the truth is unearthed.

Calicut Krishnan Ramanathan, Ghaziabad-201001

Need to diversify fuel sources

THIS is further your editorial 'India must diversify fuel supply chains despite US-Iran MoU' (THI June 17). It rightly calls for diversifying fuel supply chains, but the larger lesson is to diversify fuel sources. Dependence on imported oil leaves nations vulnerable to geopolitical tensions, shipping disruptions and price volatility. India should accelerate investments in solar, wind, tidal and geothermal energy, which are clean, green, neat, renewable and effectively inexhaustible. Every unit of energy generated domestically strengthens energy security while reducing pollution and import bills. The most durable solution lies in expanding indigenous renewable energy capacity and reducing reliance on fossil fuels.

Harsh Pawaria, Rohtak

EU is bang on: Strait of Hormuz

THE editorial 'India must diversify fuel supply chains despite US-Iran MoU' prudently points out the need for India to be in its guard in expanding energy sources, notwithstanding the MoU being signed between the US and Iran facilitating the reopening of the Strait of Hormuz. One prominent point that stands out is that Israel is not a willing entity to this deal. It is quite clear that the MoU is more on Iranian terms as the US wants to end the war in a hurry despite Israel's consternation. India must think in terms of more fuel storages being built to tide over any future crisis. Meanwhile, the EU's view that the Strait of Hormuz must be a free and unhindered sea route without any toll or restrictions is a level-headed proposition that the world wants urgently.

K R Venkata Narasimhan, Madurai

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BENGALURU ONLINE

Cabinet expansion decision rests with high command: Ahmed

BENGALURU: Amid growing political buzz over the Legislative Council elections and the much-anticipated Cabinet expansion in Karnataka, senior Congress leader and former minister Zameer Ahmed Khan met former MP D.K. Suresh in Bengaluru on Wednesday, triggering fresh speculation in political circles.

Speaking to reporters after the meeting, Zameer Ahmed said the Congress is a high-command-driven party and all decisions regarding Cabinet expansion will be taken by the party leadership. "I was expecting a ministerial berth in the first list, but it did not happen. I am hopeful of finding a place in the second list. Even if that does not happen, I have no disappointment. I have never publicly demanded a ministerial position.

My supporters have staged protests seeking representation for me, which is natural," he said. Rejecting reports of dissatisfaction, Zameer asked reporters whether his face reflected any disappointment. He also highlighted his proximity to the party leadership, stating that he had actively campaigned for the Congress during elections in Kerala and Telangana. On the upcoming Legislative Council election, Zameer expressed confidence about the Congress securing victory. Referring to the Congress Legislature Party meeting held at a resort in Bidadi, he said around 140 legislators were united behind the party candidates. "We are fully united. Even if 28 legislators vote for a candidate, victory is assured.

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

AP team studies Singapore models for Amaravati growth

- A delegation led by MA&UD minister Narayana visited Singapore to study global best practices in urban planning, sustainable infrastructure and scientific waste management
- Officials hold discussions with NUS Cities and Surbana Jurong on climate resilience, smart infrastructure, digital twin technology, urban analytics and capacity-building initiatives for Amaravati
- The team also examined Singapore's waste-to-energy and resource recovery systems at the Tuas South Incineration Plant, with plans to explore suitable models for Andhra Pradesh's urban development

HANS NEWS SERVICE
VIJAYAWADA

A high-level Andhra Pradesh delegation led by municipal administration and urban development (MA&UD) minister P Narayana visited Singapore to study global best practices in urban planning, sustainable infrastructure and scientific waste management, with a focus on applying key learnings to the development of Amaravati and other cities in the state.

The visit was undertaken on the directions of Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu, who has stressed

the need to build Amaravati and major urban centres by adopting international standards in planning, governance and infrastructure development.

The delegation, which included MA&UD principal secretary S Suresh Kumar and APCRDA additional commissioner Praveenchand, held discussions with leading Singapore institutions such as NUS Cities, Surbana Jurong and the Tuas South Incineration Plant.

At NUS Cities, officials explored opportunities for collaboration in urban planning, climate resilience, gov-



Members of AP municipal administration and urban development department delegation at Tuas South Incineration Plant in Singapore on Wednesday

ernance, capacity building and data-driven city management. Discussions centred on how global expertise could support Amaravati, one of the world's largest greenfield capital city projects. Areas identified for possible cooperation included urban analytics, digital twin technology, climate studies, executive training programmes and the establishment of an Urban Futures Lab.

The delegation also visited the Surbana Jurong Innovation Hub in Singapore's Jurong Innovation District

to understand how urban planning can be integrated with economic development, sustainability and smart infrastructure. Officials examined technologies related to energy-efficient buildings, intelligent monitoring systems, green construction practices and innovation-led urban growth.

As part of its study on municipal solid waste management, the team toured the Tuas South Incineration Plant and interacted with officials of Singapore's National Environment Agency.

The visit provided insights into waste collection, waste-to-energy conversion, ash management, resource recovery and environmental safeguards.

Speaking during the visit, minister Narayana said the state government is committed to building clean, green and economically productive cities. He noted that Singapore's success highlights the importance of integrated planning, institutional coordination and long-term urban governance.

Principal secretary Suresh Kumar said the visit offered valuable insights for Amaravati's development and opened avenues for technical collaboration and knowledge exchange. He added that the government would examine suitable models and technologies that could be adapted to Andhra Pradesh's urban development and waste management initiatives.

The MA&UD department said the outcomes of the visit would be reviewed further to identify actionable partnerships, pilot projects and capacity-building programmes aimed at strengthening urban development across the state.

Amarnath hits back at TDP over 'fabricated' row

- YSRCP leader and former minister says his recent remarks were not meant against women but against home minister Anitha's comments

- States that irrespective of the party affiliation, women deserve to be respected and he will continue to support the party women

- Accuses the coalition gov't of using 'fabricated' controversies to divert attention from its failures

HANS NEWS SERVICE
VISAKHAPATNAM

FORMER IT minister and YSRCP regional coordinator Gudivada Amarnath said that his recent remarks were never meant against women but in response to unparliamentary language used by home minister Vangalapudi Anitha against Vijayamma, YS Bharathi Reddy and former chief minister Y S Jagan Mohan



Former IT Minister and YSRCP regional coordinator Gudivada Amarnath speaking at a media conference in Visakhapatnam on Wednesday

Reddy for quite a while. Despite their political affiliation, Amarnath told in a media conference here on Wednesday, that women deserve to be respected and that his family political legacy that continued for three generations always upheld dignity and values.

However, Amarnath claimed that controversy was deliberately created over his remarks by the TDP three days after his speech to gain political advantage and divert attention from the coalition government's alleged failures.

He questioned the selective outrage of TDP leaders, wondering why were quiet when derogatory remarks were made against Y S Vijayamma, Y S Bharathi Reddy, former minister R K Roja, among

others, or when leaders in their own party made 'objectionable' statements targeting other women.

Referring to home minister Anitha's recent comments such as 'who is he?', 'that fellow', addressing a former minister, Amarnath said it clearly indicates her arrogance. "No matter what, I will continue to defend YSRCP leaders and workers against personal attacks and stand by my remarks against the Home Minister as I did not say anything wrong," he said. The former minister alleged that the coalition government is using 'fabricated' controversies to divert the attention from its failure in maintaining law and order in the state.

Pointing out to rising number of murders, attacks on women, political violence, missing children cases, lock-up deaths and the escape of a ganja smuggler from police custody, Amarnath questioned the Home Minister's silence over such burning issues. "However, her attack on the opposition continues," he remarked. Underlining YSRCP's commitment to women and Dalit empowerment, Amarnath stated that leaders who insulted Dalits and were silent on derogatory remarks made against women have no moral right to lecture others on dignity and social justice.

Lokesh pitches Anantapur as satellite hub

VIJAYAWADA

IT and electronics minister Nara Lokesh invited the chief technology officer (CTO) and founder of a company that builds and operates remote sensing satellites to Anantapur after the latter posted that getting land for making a satellite factory on the outskirts of Bengaluru is more difficult than making satellites. "Trying to get land for making a satellite factory in the outskirts of BLR has been way more difficult than actually making said satellites," Kshitij Khandelwal, CTO and founder of Pixelpace, posted on X.

Lokesh invited Kshitij to Anantapur near Bengaluru.

"Kshitij, there's a new investor-friendly destination on



the outskirts of Bengaluru. It's called Anantapur," he said.

He added that Andhra Pradesh is building Space Cities, aerospace parks and ready-to-go industrial ecosystems so founders can spend their time building satellites instead of hunting for land. The minister even asked the Andhra Pradesh Economic Development Board (APE-DB) to contact Kshitij.

Earlier, responding to Kshitij's post, Karnataka's minister for large, medium industries and infrastructure development, M B Patil, said that his office would get in touch with him. This is not the first time that Lokesh has tried to woo aerospace firms from Karnataka. Last year in October, Lokesh extended an open invitation to aerospace companies to consider Andhra

Pradesh as an option after then Karnataka Chief Minister Siddaramaiah announced withdrawal of the proposed land acquisition in Devanahalli taluk for an aerospace park near Bengaluru, following opposition from farmers who were set to lose their land for the project.

"Dear Aerospace industry, sorry to hear about this. I have a better idea for you. Why don't you look at Andhra Pradesh instead? We have an attractive aerospace policy for you, with best-in-class incentives and over 8000 acres of ready-to-use land (just outside Bengaluru)! Hope to see you soon to talk across the table," Lokesh had posted while tagging a story on the Karnataka government's decision.

PMVBRY to disburse Rs 2,400 cr sops

HANS NEWS SERVICE
VIJAYAWADA

THE Government of India has launched the Pradhan Mantri Viksit Bharat Rozgar Yojana (PMVBRY), formerly known as the Employment Linked Incentive (ELI) Scheme, with the objective of promoting large-scale employment generation, improving employability, and expanding social security coverage across sectors, particularly in manufacturing.

With a total financial outlay of Rs 99,446 crore, the scheme aims to facilitate the creation of more than 3.5 crore jobs nationwide over two years. Of these, nearly 1.92 crore beneficiaries are expected to be first-time entrants into the formal workforce. The



Additional Central Provident Fund Commissioner Andrew Prabhu and Regional Provident Fund Commissioner-II Abdul Khader addressing the media in Vijayawada on Wednesday

benefits apply to jobs created between August 1, 2025, and July 31, 2027.

Addressing a press briefing at the EPFO zonal office here on Wednesday, Andrew Prabhu, additional Central Provident Fund commissioner and Abdul Khader, Regional Provident Fund Commissioner-II, explained the significance and implementation of the scheme.

Under Part A, first-time

employees registered with EPFO and earning up to Rs 1 lakh per month are eligible for an incentive equivalent to one month's wage, up to Rs 15,000, paid in two instalments after six and twelve months of continuous service. The second instalment is linked to completion of a financial literacy programme.

Under Part B, employers will receive incentives of up to Rs 3,000 per month per additional employee for two years. Manufacturing sector employers will receive the benefit for an additional two years. The incentives are aimed at encouraging sustained employment and formal workforce expansion.

To mark the successful implementation of the scheme, a national-level event will be held at Vigyan Bhawan, New Delhi, on Friday, in the presence of the Prime Minister. Benefits worth approximately Rs 2,400 crore will be disbursed to eligible beneficiaries. In the erstwhile Krishna district, a regional event will be organised at VR Siddhartha Engineering College, Kanuru, with participation from public representatives, industry leaders, employers, employees and EPFO officials.



BRS working president MLA KT Rama Rao interacting with party leaders and workers during the meeting at Palair in Khammam district on Wednesday

KTR alleges rampant corruption in Revenue department

Targets Minister Ponguleti Srinivas Reddy accusing him of amassing wealth through irregularities in land and mining-related deals

HANS NEWS SERVICE
KHAMMAM

ALLEGING rampant corruption in the Revenue department, BRS working president KT Ramarao said while the State's revenues are declining, the wealth and influence of certain ministers are growing disproportionately.

Addressing the party workers in Palair constituency on Wednesday, KTR accused Revenue Minister Ponguleti Srinivas Reddy of amassing wealth through alleged irregularities in land and mining-related dealings and questioned the status of investigations into previous enforcement actions against him.

He also alleged large-scale irregularities in revenue department and claimed that farmers were being subjected to uncertainty over land-related issues. Referring to recent controversies involving ministers and officials,

he slammed the Revenue Minister for behaving in arrogant manner and disregarding even fellow cabinet colleagues.

KTR further alleged that the Congress government had failed to fulfill several election promises, including farm loan waivers, housing schemes, enhanced pensions, unemployment assistance and welfare commitments made to various sections of society.

Targeting Chief Minister Revanth Reddy, KTR criticised what he described as the government's approach towards development and governance. He accused the administration of creating hardship for people through demolition drives and failing to deliver on major promises despite incurring substantial borrowings since assuming office.

The former minister defended the previous BRS government's record, stating that investments in ir-

rigation projects, welfare programmes, power supply, education and healthcare infrastructure had significantly contributed to Telangana's development. He cited projects such as the Sitarama Lift Irrigation Scheme and the establishment of educational and medical institutions in Khammam district as examples of achievements under the BRS regime.

Claiming that public dissatisfaction with the Congress government was growing, KTR urged party workers to strengthen the BRS at the grassroots level and mobilise support ahead of future elections.

MP Vaddiraju Ravichandra, MLC Tata Madhu, former Minister Puvvada Ajay Kumar, former MLA's Kannada Uppender Reddy, M Nageswara Rao, T Venkateswarlu, former ZP chairman L Kamal Raj and several senior BRS leaders and local party functionaries attended the meeting.

HANS NEWS SERVICE
HYDERABAD

POLITICAL tensions intensified after senior BRS leader T Harish Rao alleged a Rs 2,000 crore scam in tenders related to Telangana residential schools. Responding strongly, Ministers Ponnamp Prabhakar and Adluri Laxman Kumar refuted the allegations and challenged Harish Rao to prove the charges, stating that both Ministers were ready to resign if corruption was established.

Ponnamp Prabhakar questioned the basis of the allegations, stating that the total value of procurement tenders across welfare departments itself does not amount to Rs 2,000 crore. He said mak-



ing such serious accusations without evidence was inappropriate and could mislead the public.

The Minister defended the government's welfare initiatives, particularly those aimed at weaker sections,

and said departments working for the upliftment of poor communities should not be targeted with baseless claims. He alleged that such remarks reflected a negative attitude towards welfare programmes.

Ponnamp said the government functions with transparency and is prepared to face any investigation if wrongdoing is proven. He warned that the people of Telangana would not accept attempts to create confusion

through false allegations.

Recalling his political journey, the Minister said he, along with Minister Adluri Laxman Kumar and other leaders, had built their political careers through public service and grassroots work. He said their commitment towards weaker sections and social welfare was evident through their actions.

Minister Adluri Laxman Kumar also reiterated that they were ready to face consequences if any corruption charges against them were proven. The exchange has added to the ongoing political debate between the ruling Congress and opposition BRS over allegations related to government tenders and welfare schemes.

Gymnastics instructor jailed for 20 yrs for sexually assaulting preschool child

HANS NEWS SERVICE
HYDERABAD

A Special Court of Rajendranagar, Ranga Reddy District has sentenced a gymnastics instructor to 20 years rigorous imprisonment for sexually assaulting a three-and-a-half-year-old girl at a private preschool under the limits of Miyapur Police station in 2019. According to the police, on June 20, 2019, the alleged accused Kura Kiran Sai, 31, took advantage of a delay

in the school van's arrival. The alleged accused took the girl to the top floor of the gymnastics room, sexually abused her, and fled after the sexual assault, leaving her in tears on the ground floor of the gymnastics area.

The school principal, Chilakamukku Deepika, 37, was also convicted for the severe negligence that caused the sexual assault to happen, and she was sentenced to three years in prison. Police said the victim's father filed a formal

complaint after noticing her abnormal behaviour. The victim expressed her pain, refused to return to school, and named the instructor as the sexual abuser. Based on the complaint, the police arrested both accused persons on July 2, 2019, and filed a charge sheet against them after the investigation. After a full-fledged trial, the Special Judge for Trial and Disposal of Rape and POCSO cases delivered the verdict, convicting the accused persons and awarding Rs 3 lakh compensation to the victim.

PPA assures full protection for TG villages affected by Polavaram backwaters

HYDERABAD: The Polavaram Project Authority (PPA) has assured complete protection for Telangana villages likely to be impacted by backwater and submergence effects from the Polavaram Project, responding to concerns raised by former Irrigation Minister and Siddipet BRS MLA T. Harish Rao.

In an official communication, the PPA stated that all habitations in Telangana affected up to the project's Full Reservoir Level (FRL) would either be safeguarded through engineering measures or acquired under Rehabilitation and Resettlement (R&R) provisions. The PPA assured that the issues pertaining to backwater impacts are receiving top priority and due administrative attention.

The assurance reiterates commitments made during an interstate meeting held on April 8, 2025, involving officials from Telangana and Andhra Pradesh. The Authority said scientific assessments, flood-mitigation plans, and protective interventions would be implemented to prevent adverse impacts on villages, farmlands, and livelihoods in the Godavari basin.

Gill is handling (the captaincy job) very well. His individual performance has also improved a lot. He is one of the finest players; I don't know why they don't select him for T20s. He is a good player for all formats and should never have been dropped from any format,

- Mohammed Azharuddin



Messi scores a hat-trick triumph

KANSAS CITY

LIONEL Messi celebrated his record-breaking sixth World Cup appearance with a hat-trick, powering defending champions Argentina to a comfortable 3-0 win over Algeria in a FIFA World Cup 2026 Group J opener at the Kansas City Stadium on Wednesday.

In the process, Messi equalled the all-time FIFA World Cup goalscoring record with his 16 World Cup goals, tying Miroslav Klose of Germany. He also notably holds the records for most caps (199) and most goals (117) for Argentina, while also holding the international record for most World Cup match appearances (26) and being the only player to score in the World Cup group stage, round of 16, quarterfinals, semifinals and final.

Messi started the day three adrift of Miroslav Klose's mark of 16 goals on the global stage, but within 76 minutes of this match he

was on level terms with the former Germany international.

Messi and Algeria's Fares Chaibi both had efforts ruled out for offside in a breathless opening, but Argentina's captain fantastic soon made his mark. Picking up possession 30 yards from goal, he expertly rolled his marker, surged forward and curled a superb finish beyond the grasp of Luca Zidane.

Algeria largely kept the reigning champions at arm's length for the rest of the half, with an Alexis Mac Allister header over the crossbar Argentina's only real chance. Anis Hadj Moussa carved out one of the Fennec Foxes' better opening moments earlier, but a deflection took the sting out of his low effort and Emiliano Martinez gathered comfortably.

Messi was once again at the heart of Argentina's brightest attacking moments after the break. He first flashed a 20-yard effort over the bar before slipping in Lautaro Martinez, whose

dangerous cross was cut out by Zidane.

The Argentina talisman's second goal soon followed, with Zidane unable to hold Mac Allister's powerful strike, allowing Messi to pounce on the rebound and finish coolly with his right foot.

The 38-year-old completed his hat-trick with a trademark curling finish from the edge of the area, capping his 200th senior international appearance in style.

In his historic international career, Messi has guided Argentina to the 2021 and 2024 CONMEBOL Copa America titles and 2022 CONMEBOL-UEFA Cup of Champions crown and further cemented his legacy by leading his country to a historic FIFA World Cup title in 2022.

Having equalled Klose's record, Messi will have the chance to claim it outright when Argentina face Austria on June 22. Algeria, meanwhile, take on Jordan in their next Group J outing.



Kylian Mbappe reacts after scoring a goal

Mbappe sparks in France's 3-1 win over Senegal

EAST RUTHERFORD (US):

Kylian Mbappe scored twice to move past Pele and Lionel Messi with 14 World Cup goals, Bradley Barcola added another as France rebounded from a surprisingly poor first half to beat Senegal 3-1 Tuesday in its opener.

Mbappe had 14 touches in the scoreless first half, the fewest of any player, then showed his brilliance when he put Les Bleus ahead in the 66th minute. He burst past Senegal captain Kalidou Koulibaly, turned onto a diagonal pass from Michael Olise and slid the ball past goalkeeper Edouard Mendy from just outside the 6-yard box. Barcola entered in the 80th and doubled the lead two minutes later, running onto Adrien Rabiot's through ball and lifting the ball past Mendy for his fourth international goal. Senegal forward Ibrahim Mbeye cut the deficit with an angled shot five minutes into stoppage time.

Mbappe then had a spectacular long-range goal a minute later, over Mendy's outstretched arm and just under the crossbar.

Mbappe moved one ahead of Messi and Just Fontaine on the World Cup career scoring list and is tied with Germany's Gerd Muller, trailing only Brazil's Ronaldo (15) and Germany's Miroslav Klose (16).

RESULTS

- France 3 Senegal 1
- Iraq 1 Norway 4
- Argentina 3 Algeria 0
- Austria 3 Jordan 1
- Portugal vs Congo DR 10:30 pm

Fixtures (in IST)

ON THURSDAY

- England vs Croatia 1:30 am at AT&T Stadium, Arlington, Texas
- Ghana vs Panama 4:30 am at BMO Field, Toronto, Canada
- Uzbekistan vs Colombia 7:30 am at Estadio Banorte, Mexico City, Mexico
- Czechia vs South Africa 9:30 pm at Mercedes-Benz Stadium, Atlanta, Georgia

ON FRIDAY

- Switzerland vs Bosnia-Herzegovina 12:30 am at SoFi Stadium, Inglewood, California
- Canada vs Qatar 3:30 am at BC Place, Vancouver, Canada
- Mexico vs South Korea 6:30 am at Estadio Akron, Guadalajara, Mexico

Women's T20 WC Australia thrash B'desh by 9 wkts

LEEDS: Australia continued their strong start to the ICC Women's T20 World Cup 2026 with a dominant nine-wicket victory over Bangladesh at Headingley on Wednesday. After restricting Bangladesh to just 77/8 in 20 overs, the six-time champions chased down the target in only 9.3 overs with opener Georgia Vull leading the way with an unbeaten 45.

Chasing a modest target of 78, Australia were briefly tested by some disciplined bowling from Marufa Akter, who conceded only four runs in the opening over. However, the pressure did not last long as Beth Mooney and Vull quickly took control of the chase.

Mooney got Australia's first boundary in the second over before Vull shifted gears. The young opener struck a six and a four against Marufa in the third over and continued to find the gaps with ease.

BRIEF SCORES:

Bangladesh 77/8 in 20 overs (Nigar Sultana 27, Ritu Moti 16; Ellyse Perry 2-14, Sophie Molineux 2-14, Kim Garth 2-18) lost to Australia 78/1 in 9.3 overs (Georgia Vull 45*, Ellysa Perry 19*; Marufa Akter 1-28) by 9 wickets.

Tri-series: India A crush Afghanistan A by 101 runs

DAMBULLA: A compelling all-round performance helped India A thrash Afghanistan A by 101 runs here on Wednesday, bolstering their chances of making the tri-series final.

After amassing 319 by nine riding on fifties by skipper Tilak Varma, Priyansh Arya and Kumar Kushagra, India A bowlers produced a unified show to bundle out Afghanistan A for mere 218 in 36.5 overs.

Nishant Sindhu was the pick of the bowlers as he returned 4/31 from his 6.5 overs, while pacer Yash Thakur claimed 2/48 from his seven overs. Anshul

Kamboj, Vipraj Nigam, Suryansh Shedge, and Anukul Roy claimed one wicket apiece.

For Afghanistan, Bahir Shah (57 off 52 balls; 4 fours, 1 six) and Faisal Shinozoda (46) provided some resistance but most of their batters failed to convert their starts.

BRIEF SCORES:

India A: 319/9 in 50 overs (Tilak Varma 59, Priyansh Arya 58, Kumar Kushagra 58; Abdollah Ahmadzai 2/62) beat Afghanistan A 218 in 36.5 overs (Faisal Shinozoda 46, Bahir Shah 57; Nishant Sindhu 4/31, Yash Thakur 2/48) by 101 runs.

India seal ODI series with 170-run win

LUCKNOW: Captain Shubman Gill battled intense heat and cramps to produce a masterful 154, while the increasingly confident Ishan Kishan scored a statement century as India recorded a dominant 170-run win over Afghanistan in the second ODI here on Wednesday to seal the series.

India have taken a 2-0 unassailable lead in the three-match series. Afghanistan's decision to bowl first under the scorching afternoon sun backfired as Gill and Kishan, who scored his second ODI hundred in his comeback series, helped India put up a formidable 402.

The conditions were very demanding through out



the game with several players struggling with cramps while Gill also battled with an ice collar. In fact, the Indian skipper didn't return to the field once he got out.

BRIEF SCORES:

India: 402 all out in 49.5 overs (Shubman Gill 154, Ishan Kishan 125; N Kharode 4/76). Afghanistan: 232 all out in 44.3 overs (Rahmat Shah 79, Sediqullah Atal 42, Rahmanullah Gurbaz 41; Arshdeep Singh 3/45, Gurnoor Brar 3/60).

Hyderabad Heroes bag first win; Mumbai Dreamers stay unbeaten

Rugby Premier League Day 2

HYDERABAD: The second day of the Rugby Premier League season 2 witnessed hosts Hyderabad Heroes, and Mumbai Dreamers register wins at the Ganti Mohana Chandra Balayogi Athletic Stadium, Gachibowli, Hyderabad on Wednesday.

Hyderabad Heroes beat Delhi Redz 31-17 (men)

Looking to bounce back from their opening defeat, Hyderabad Heroes made a flying

start through Sumit Kumar and Maurice Longbottom. Despite sustained pressure from Delhi Redz, Taitaifono Tavita extended the Heroes' advantage before Luciano Gonzalez and Javed Husain brought the Redz back into the contest. Tavita struck again in the second half, while Patrick Odongo kept Delhi in the hunt. However, Wolfram Hacker's late

try sealed the victory for the Heroes. Mumbai Dreamers defeat Bengaluru Bravehearts 19-7 (men) Dreamers applied pressure on the Bravehearts early to gain territory. Bravehearts sustained the pressure but Lucas Mignot sprinted end to end to open the score with a try for Dreamers. Guillaume Bouche backed it up with another try for the Dreamers at the end of the first quarter.



Person of Indian origin hits jackpot of Rs. 5.5 cr in UAE

ABU DHABI: A person of Indian origin in Abu Dhabi, Shajeer vanga, has hit a jackpot of Rs. 5.5 crore in the UAE millionaire campaign conducted by the Sharja Islamic Bank within two months of opening an account. The bank announced details of the winners in its X account.

The campaign is conducted every year with a view to encourage the customers to make savings, with a prize money of 20 million dirhams. The customers who deposit 10,000 dirhams are eligible to take part in the regular draw, with the winners eligible to secure cash rewards and luxury vehicles.

Vanga has expressed his happiness over the good fortune in bagging the jackpot. He says after becoming aware of the millionaire campaign I decided to win the booty on some day or the other.

He says the cash award will change his life. "With it I will get my family to the UAE." Vanga has thanked the bank.

Nationwide showdown looms over VB-G RAM G

ACTIVISTS DEMAND REPEAL OF NEW SCHEME FROM JULY 1

NEW DELHI

DEMANDING the repeal of the proposed Viksit Bharat - Guarantee for Rozgar and Aajeevika Mission - Gramin (VB-G RAM G), activists and workers' organisations on Wednesday announced protests against the new scheme from July 1.

Addressing a press conference here, members of the NREGA Sangharsh Morcha, agricultural workers' unions and labour rights groups claimed that an analysis of the government's own data showed the promised 125 days of employment under the proposed scheme was neither financially backed nor administratively feasible. The draft rules released by the Centre expose the "shrinking employment guarantee" under the scheme, they alleged, adding that "The draft rules continue the opaque erasure of MGNREGA."

They further alleged that the proposed framework centralises powers with the Centre while reducing



According to an analysis by the activists, no major state would be able to generate even half of the promised 125 days of employment per active job card in the proposed interim allocations

the effective employment guarantee available to rural workers. According to an analysis by the activists, no major state would be able to generate even half of the promised 125 days of employment per active job card in the proposed interim allocations. "This law destroys the spirit of the rural employment guarantee act... There is already a downward trend in employment generated," activist Nikhil Dey said.

"The burden will be on the states, and the push

would be not to provide employment because the states will have to bear the expenditure," he said. All India Agricultural Workers Union General Secretary B Venkat said they would hold protests at every village against the new scheme.

"From July 1, nationwide demonstrations would be held at the village, block, panchayat and ward level. We will also hold some protests in Delhi," he said, adding that 'jail bhara' campaigns would also be held along with the Samyukt

Kisan Morcha (SKM). They will also approach Opposition parties to raise their issues.

According to figures released by groups, Andhra Pradesh would be able to generate only about 42 person days per active job card under the proposed allocation, while Chhattisgarh would generate 39 person days, Bihar 31, Karnataka 26, Madhya Pradesh 26 and Uttar Pradesh 28. Maharashtra would be able to generate only about 14 person days per active job card, they claimed.

The groups said the gap between the promised employment guarantee and actual allocations translated into massive funding shortfalls for states.

Based on their calculations, Madhya Pradesh would require an additional Rs 31,013 crore to provide 125 days of employment per active job card, while Rajasthan would need Rs 27,212 crore, Uttar Pradesh Rs 27,987 crore, Maharashtra Rs 22,549 crore, Karnataka Rs 17,481 crore and Bihar Rs 15,939 crore.

TMC's Guha held, third ex-minister behind bars

KOLKATA: Udayan Guha, the former West Bengal Minister in charge of the North Bengal Development Department in the previous Mamata Banerjee-led cabinet, was arrested on Wednesday from his residence in Phoolbagan, Kolkata.

Although the officials are yet to specify the exact charges under which Guha was arrested, sources said police had been trying to track him for some time.

However, a source in the state police said the former minister is accused of involvement in post-poll violence in his native district of Cooch Behar following the 2021 West Bengal Assembly elections, which marked the beginning of the third consecutive term of Mamata Banerjee as Chief Minister.

Guha's arrest has likely been in connection with those cases registered against him in relation to the 2021 post-poll violence.

He is the third minister in the previous Mamata Banerjee-led cabinet to be arrested since the new Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) government led by Chief Minister Suvendu Adhikari took charge on May 9.

Former state Fire Services Minister Sujit Bose was the first member of the previ-



Udayan Guha

ous cabinet to be arrested last month by the officials of the Enforcement Directorate (ED) for his alleged involvement in the multi-core municipalities' job case.

Then on June 9, Ujjal Biswas, the former Correctional Services Minister in the previous Mamata Banerjee-led cabinet, was arrested on charges of illegally hoarding relief material of the state government.

Now, on Wednesday, Udayan Guha is the third minister of the previous cabinet to be arrested.

Udayan Guha is the son of Late Kamal Guha, who was an All India Forward Bloc (AIFB) leader from Cooch Behar district and a member of the Left Front cabinet in West Bengal for over two decades.

Udayan started his legislative career with AIFB, when for the first time he got elected from Dinhatra Assembly constituency in Cooch Behar district in 2011.

Mamata's protest walk sees low turnout

KOLKATA: Trinamool Congress president and former West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Wednesday led a protest walk in central Kolkata against the recent hawkers' eviction drives carried out by the state administration across different parts of the state.

However, the event failed to make a mark because of fewer attendees. Although a public meeting was initially planned at the end of the protest walk from Esplanade to Subodh Mallick Square, both in central Kolkata, it was later cancelled.

The former Chief Minister left immediately after the protest walk ended.

Since the landslide defeat of Trinamool and Mamata Banerjee's personal defeat in the recently concluded West Bengal assembly elections, she has restricted her political programmes mainly to occasional video messages on social media.

After her nephew and Trinamool general secretary Abhishek Banerjee was attacked at Sonarpur in South 24 Parganas district of West Bengal last month, she sat on a protest demonstration on June 2, which was her last public programme. On Wednesday, she led a protest walk against the hawkers' eviction. However, the event failed to attract a large number of attendees, with only a few front-ranking Trinamool leaders participating.

Major fire under control along Indo-Nepal border

KOLKATA: Quick response by personnel of the 41Bn Sashasthra Seema Bal (SSB) prevented a fire at a market along the Indo-Nepal border from spreading and causing damage to life and property on the night of June 16.

A major fire broke out around 9.35 p.m. at the Bhatgaon Border Market, situated around 100 meters from the Bhatgaon company camp of the 41Bn SSB at Ranidanga in the Darjeeling district of West Bengal.

Personnel from the camp reacted immediately and rushed to the spot with fire extinguishers, sand buckets and water. They actively participated in firefighting operations, even after fire trucks arrived. The jawans helped in breaking open shutters and gates to allow firefighters access to the blaze.

Gujarat bus accident: Death toll touches seven

NEW DELHI/VADODARA: Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Wednesday expressed condolences over the fatal luxury bus accident on the Vadodara-Jarod Road in Gujarat, as the death toll from the crash rose to seven and 28 people were injured, including two in critical condition.

In a post on the social media

platform X, HM Shah described the incident as "extremely tragic" and said his condolences were with the families of those who had lost their loved ones.

He said the local administration was providing medical facilities to the injured and prayed for their speedy recovery.

"The accident that occurred on the Vadodara-Jarod Road

in Gujarat is extremely tragic. My condolences are with those who have lost their loved ones in this accident. The local administration is providing medical facilities to the injured. I pray for the speedy recovery of those who have been injured," HM Shah wrote. The accident occurred at around 4 am. near Kotambi village when a luxury

bus travelling from Banswara in Rajasthan to Surat rammed into the rear of a truck parked on the roadside.

According to preliminary information, the truck had been halted while its driver was checking tyre pressure.

The collision crushed the front portion of the bus, trapping several passengers inside.

Local residents and passing motorists rushed to the scene before emergency services arrived and launched rescue operations.

Police, fire brigade personnel and teams from the National Disaster Response Force (NDRF) carried out a large-scale rescue effort.

Firefighters used a JCB

machine to separate the two vehicles and cut through the mangled metal of the bus to extricate trapped passengers.

Most of the passengers travelling on the bus were from Rajasthan. The injured were shifted to Sir Sayajirao General (SSG) Hospital and private hospitals in Vadodara, where treatment is continuing.

Since we have concluded the mother of all trade deals, we have been moving fast to deliver on our commitments. We will sign the Free Trade Agreement by the end of the year and accelerate work on an investment agreement

-Ursula Von der Leyen, President, European Commission

BIZ BRIEFS

Dark Chocolate range by ITC

Fabelle Chocolates, ITC's homegrown luxury chocolate brand, unveiled its new 64 per cent Dark Chocolate range. Crafted with premium Ghana OriginCocoa, the range features various flavours including, Cranberry Noir, Orange Eclipse and No Added Sugar Dark Chocolate Bar. Subash Balar, Business Head - Confectionery, ITC Ltd, said: "The modern Indian consumer is rethinking indulgence, seeking greater transparency, balance, and choice without giving up on experience."

ABHFL expands presence in TG

Aditya Birla Housing Finance Limited (ABHFL), a housing finance company, has expanded its footprint in Telangana with the launch of a new branch in Sangareddy. With this, ABHFL's total network in the state has increased to 10 branches. To mark the launch, the company is offering zero login fees along with spot loan sanctions of up to Rs50 lakh, valid from June 17 to 30.

GI ingredients by VAAA Super

Aetis Enterprises LLP has launched VAAA Super Foods, a premium food brand focused exclusively on GI-tagged (Geographical Indication) ingredients sourced from their native regions and offered in single-origin form. The brand has debuted with three products — Lakadong Turmeric Powder from Meghalaya, Byadagi Chilli Powder from Karnataka, and Gulbarga Toor Dal from Kalaburagi, Karnataka. The products are available through Amazon India and the company's website.

SBI Life rolls out campaign

SBI Life Insurance, an insurance company has released a new Digital Video Campaign (DVC) under its long-standing #Papa-HainNa digital initiative, to commemorate Father's Day. The new digital film is based on the story of a father who discovers that preparing a child for the future is not only about shielding them from every challenge, but about empowering them to navigate life on their own — letting them fall so they can learn to rise, confidently.

Vedanta Power debuts on D-St

Vedanta Power Limited (VPL), the power generation business of Vedanta Group, listed its shares on the BSE and NSE. The historic listing ceremony on 15th June was led by Vedanta Group Chairman Anil Agarwal, formally marking Vedanta Power Limited's debut on the Indian Stock Exchanges. Anil Agarwal, Chairman, Vedanta Group, said: "24 years ago, Vedanta became the first Indian company to list on the London Stock Exchange and went on to become a FTSE100 company."

Resilient India posts all-time high \$863 bn exports in FY26

Engineering goods, electronics, pharma and petroleum products powered record exports as SEZ expansion gathers pace

NEW DELHI

INDIA'S exports reached a record \$863 billion in FY2025-26, demonstrating resilience despite disruptions caused by the West Asia conflict and US tariffs, a senior Commerce Ministry official said on Wednesday.

Speaking at an outreach programme on the achievements of Gujarat's Special Economic Zones (SEZs), Additional Secretary in the Department of Commerce Ajay Bhadoo said India's export ecosystem had remained strong through a challenging global environment.

"This has been a very difficult year, from US tariffs to the West Asia crisis, but India has proved its resilience," he said.

- Growth achieved despite US tariffs and West Asia conflict
- Exports have nearly doubled from \$441 billion in a decade
- Gujarat contributed around \$110 billion in exports



Bhadoo noted that India's total exports have nearly doubled over the past decade, rising from around \$441 billion to \$863 billion, driven by engineering goods, petroleum products, electronics, pharmaceuticals, gems and jewellery, and chemicals.

He said Gujarat contributed nearly \$110 billion to the country's exports and would continue to play a key role in export growth.

The government plans to

promote more SEZs across the country. Bhadoo highlighted the recent notification of Tata Semiconductor Manufacturing Pvt Ltd's semiconductor SEZ at Dholera as part of this effort.

Kandla SEZ Zonal Development Commissioner Dnyaneshwar B. Patil said Gujarat's SEZs accounted for around 21 per cent of India's total SEZ exports. Investments and employment in the state's SEZs have also risen

significantly over the past decade, with jobs increasing to more than 2.22 lakh.

Patil said four semiconductor SEZs, including projects by Tata Semiconductor Manufacturing, Micron Technology, Kaynes Semicon and CG Semi Technologies, have been notified in Gujarat. He outlined a roadmap targeting 20 per cent annual export growth and 10 per cent annual employment growth from Gujarat's SEZs.

RBI removes rate caps on select NRI deposits till Sept 30

MUMBAI

THE Reserve Bank on Wednesday temporarily withdrew interest rate ceiling on fresh Foreign Currency Non-Resident (Bank) deposits of 3-5 years' maturity till September 30, a move aimed at attracting foreign capital.

It has also temporarily withdrawn restriction on interest rates on Non-Resident External (NRE) deposits of 3 years and above tenors, including deposits that are renewed upon maturity, till September 30, 2026.

"The interest rate ceiling applicable to fresh FCNR(B) deposits mobilised by banks, including the deposits that are renewed upon maturity, for three years and above



-- up to and including five years tenors, is temporarily withdrawn with effect from June 17, 2026, for the period until September 30, 2026," the central bank said in a circular.

The relaxation came into effect from Wednesday.

An FCNR (B) deposit is a term deposit account meant for Non-Resident Indians (NRIs) to park overseas earnings in foreign currencies in India.

The notification also said interest rates on NRE/NRO

deposits should not be higher than those offered by the bank on comparable domestic rupee term deposits.

Earlier this month, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) had announced a host of measures to attract foreign capital in the backdrop of rupee depreciating against the US dollar.

One of the measures was a facility of concessional forex swap for bearing the full hedging cost shall be provided till September 30, 2026 to AD banks for raising fresh 3-5-year FCNR(B) deposits. Separate notifications in this regard have also been issued for commercial banks, co-operative banks, regional rural banks, and small finance banks.

APITCO pacts with MSM Unify for skill development initiative

HANS BUSINESS HYDERABAD

MSM Unify, an education and workforce platform of MSM Global Education Private Limited, has been empanelled by APITCO Limited as a training provider and consulting firm. The two years agreement, authorises MSM Global Education to perform assignments across skill development, capacity building, professional training, and educational consultancy in partnership with APITCO. The empanelment positions MSM Unify to participate in India's government-led skilling ecosystem.

Sanjay Laul, Founder, MSM Unify, said: "India's skilling challenge is not a government problem alone.

Centre garners ₹3,000 crore from GIC Re stake sale

NEW DELHI: THE government on Wednesday said it has sold a five per cent stake in the public sector reinsurance company, the General Insurance Corporation of India (GIC), with an enthusiastic response from investors to the offer for sale.

The stake sale is expected to garner about Rs 3,000 crore to the exchequer, taking the total proceeds from five PSU disinvestments so far in the current fiscal to around Rs 16,000 crore.

Non-retail investors oversubscribed the offer for sale (OFS) on Tuesday, putting in bids worth Rs 4,000 crore. The OFS opened for retail investors on Wednesday.

"Offer for Sale (OFS) in GIC Re closed with enthusiastic response from the in-



vestors. Government of India has divested 5 per cent of its stake in GIC Re with full subscription of base and green-shoe offer," Department of Investment and Public Asset Management (DIPAM) Secretary Arunish Chawla said on X.

Through the two-day OFS at a floor price of Rs 352 per share, the government proposed to divest 2 per cent of equity holding in GIC, with an additional 3 per cent as a green shoe option, taking the total stake dilution to 5 per cent, equivalent to over 8.77 crore shares.

Tesla expands India footprint with Hyderabad experience centre

HANS BUSINESS HYDERABAD

AMERICAN electric vehicle manufacturer Tesla has entered the Hyderabad market with the launch of its first Experience Centre in Telangana.

Located at Knowledge City in HITEC City, the facility showcases the Model Y Rear-Wheel Drive and Model Y Long Range variants, which are now available for booking through Tesla's official website. The company has also started delivery and after-sales services from its facility at Bollaram Industrial Area. Customers who place orders before June 30, 2026, will receive a complimentary Wall Connector.

With the Hyderabad launch, Tesla now operates Experience Centres in Bengaluru, Mumbai, Delhi, Gurugram. These centres offer customers hands-on access to Tesla vehicles, product demonstrations and test-drive opportunities. Test drives for the Model Y can be scheduled through the Experience Centre or Tesla's customer support.

The 2026 Model Y Premi-

The experience centre at HITEC City showcases Model Y variants; deliveries to begin in July



um Rear-Wheel Drive offers seating for up to five passengers, 2,138 litres of storage space and power-folding seats. Powered by ultra-responsive motors, it accelerates from 0 to 100 km/h in 5.9 seconds and delivers a WLTP-certified range of up to 500 km. Deliveries are expected to begin in July 2026.

Tesla also showcased the Model Y Long Range All-Wheel Drive SUV, designed as a family vehicle with a three-row, six-seat configuration. It offers a WLTP-certified driving range of up to 681 km, accelerates from 0 to 100 km/h in 5.0 seconds and

BoB offers up to 6.25% interest on NRI FCNR(B) deposits

HANS BUSINESS HYDERABAD

BANK of Baroda (BoB) has announced that it is offering higher interest rates of up to 6.25 per cent p.a. to Non-Resident Indians (NRIs) under the 'bob Legend FCNR(B) Deposit Scheme'.

The bank is offering 6.25 per cent interest rates on US Dollar deposits, 4.75 per cent on British Pound Sterling (GBP) and Australian Dollar (AUD) deposits, 5.15 per cent p.a. on Canadian Dollar (CAD) deposits and 3.75 per cent p.a. on Euro (EUR) deposits.

Further, NRIs can benefit from the dual advantages of wealth creation and liquidity by availing of the hassle-free overdraft/loan facility against FCNR(B) deposits, providing enhanced financial flexibility while enabling them to maximise their returns.

Domestic demand, reforms to cushion impact of rising crude prices: Crisil

Energy-intensive sectors may face higher costs, but broad-based growth drivers remain intact

NEW DELHI

India is expected to remain resilient despite elevated energy prices driven by the West Asia conflict, supported by strong economic fundamentals, structural reforms and healthy domestic demand, according to a report released on Wednesday.

A report by Crisil said that while a sustained energy shock could increase cost pressures across sectors and weigh on economic activity, India's growth outlook remains comparatively strong.

Although crude oil prices have moderated following the announcement of a memorandum of understanding between the US and Iran this week.

The report further stated that India's diversified economic structure and strong domestic demand could help cushion the impact of higher energy costs.

It identified that land transport, mining, agriculture, chemicals, rubber and plastic products among the sectors most directly exposed to higher energy prices.

These industries play a critical role in the economy and serve as key inputs for several downstream sectors.

In addition, pharmaceuticals, electronic products, processed food and metal products are likely to experience higher input costs if energy prices remain elevated.

However, sectors such as financial services, real estate and professional services face relatively limited direct exposure to energy related cost pressures despite accounting for a significant share of economic output.

Moreover, the report highlighted measures that could help mitigate the impact of rising energy prices.

Government support for fertiliser imports and domestic production, along with continued policy interventions, could help reduce pressure on the agriculture sector, it said. According to Crisil, India's economy has benefited significantly from structural reforms and stronger corporate balance sheets in recent years, which should provide a buffer against external shocks.

AI workforce tops 9.2 lakh as hiring priorities evolve

Demand shifts from experimentation to enterprise-wide implementation

MUMBAI

EMPLOYERS in India are now seeking deployment of artificial intelligence in governance and scaling up workflow, reflecting a shift in the hiring trend of AI talent from experimentation to execution, a report said.

Hiring demand has shifted decisively from AI experimentation to implementation, with employers increasingly seeking professionals who can deploy, manage, integrate and scale AI solutions across core business operations, according to staffing and workforce solutions company Qness Corp's India AI Workforce Analysis 2026 report.



The report, based on secondary data and 3.5 lakh job postings, found that India has around 9,20,000 AI professionals. Of them, 2,57,000 are in core AI roles and 6,63,000 in AI-embedded roles. The report found differ-

ences in job descriptions. Global capability centres (GCCs) are hiring for reusable internal AI platforms, enterprise integration and governance, while IT services firms are recruiting to deliver AI across client pro-

grammes. Enterprises are hiring selectively to connect AI to finance, risk, operations, customer experience and employee systems, the report said. It said about 66-68 per cent of demand from 3.5 lakh active postings is for core AI roles, while 32-34 per cent is for AI-embedded roles.

However, this demand mix is the reverse of the supply base, where 72-74 per cent of the overall 9,20,000 workforce sits in AI-embedded roles and only 26-28 per cent are employed in core AI roles, said the report.

"What stands out in our analysis is the emergence of three distinct engines of AI growth. GCCs are building reusable AI platforms and

governance capabilities, IT Services are industrialising AI deployment at scale, and enterprises are embedding AI directly into business workflows and decision-making. Together, they are creating a new talent landscape where execution capability matters more than experimentation," Qness IT Staffing CEO Kapil Joshi said.

He said, more than 70 per cent of India's AI workforce now holds roles outside traditional AI specialists, while nearly one-third of all AI demand is emerging from business functions such as operations, customer service, marketing, finance, governance, and workforce management.

SpaceX overtakes Microsoft, becomes fourth-most valuable US company

NEW DELHI

SPACEX continued its stellar post-listing rally on Tuesday, overtaking Microsoft to become the fourth-largest company in the US by market capitalisation while announcing a \$60-billion all-stock acquisition of AI coding platform Cursor.

Shares of the Elon Musk-led company rose about 8 per cent in early trading, lifting its market value to nearly \$2.74 trillion. The gain pushed SpaceX ahead of Microsoft and further widened its lead over Amazon, valued at around \$2.65 trillion.

The latest rise extends a remarkable run since SpaceX's record-breaking stock mar-

ket debut on Friday. After soaring 20 per cent on its first full trading day, the stock has continued to attract strong investor interest, making it one of the most closely watched IPOs in recent years.

Investor enthusiasm has been driven by both SpaceX's core space and satellite businesses and its aggressive expansion into artificial intelligence. The acquisition of Cursor, a rapidly growing AI coding assistant valued at \$60 billion, marks one of the company's biggest AI bets. Cursor develops software that can autonomously write code and assist developers, competing with leading AI coding tools such as Claude Code and Codex.



'The Odyssey' India premiere

Christopher Nolan, Matt Damon and Tom Holland to visit Mumbai



India is set to witness a landmark cinematic event as acclaimed filmmaker Christopher Nolan will visit Mumbai this July for the Indian premiere of his highly anticipated

mythological action epic 'The Odyssey'. Joining the Academy Award-winning director will be Hollywood stars Matt Damon and Tom Holland, along with Oscar-winning producer Emma

Thomas. In a major recognition of the Indian market, Universal Pictures International has included Mumbai as an official stop on 'The Odyssey's' global premiere tour, alongside

prominent international cities such as London, Paris, and New York. Notably, this marks the first-ever Christopher Nolan film to have its premiere in India, underlining the growing significance of the country in the global entertainment landscape.

The grand premiere is scheduled to take place at PVR Icon IMAX, Phoenix Palladium, Mumbai. The film is slated for a worldwide theatrical release on July 17, with advance IMAX ticket bookings already open across India.

'The Odyssey' is being hailed as a technological milestone in filmmaking. Shot across multiple international locations, it is the first feature film in cinema history to be filmed entirely using IMAX cameras. The production utilizes newly developed IMAX film technology, promising an immersive large-screen experience for audiences worldwide.

Written and directed by Christopher Nolan, the film reimagines Homer's legendary tale of Odysseus and his decade-long journey home following the fall of Troy. The project boasts an impressive ensemble cast featuring Matt Damon, Tom Holland, Anne Hathaway, Robert Pattinson, Lupita Nyong'o, Samantha Morton, Zendaya, and Charlize Theron. Produced by Emma Thomas and Christopher Nolan under their Syncopy banner, 'The Odyssey' is among the most anticipated global releases of the year.

The Mumbai premiere is expected to become one of the biggest Hollywood events ever hosted in India, bringing together international cinema icons and Indian movie enthusiasts on a historic occasion.



'The India Story' poster unveils Kajal Aggarwal as a fierce lawyer

The makers of 'The India Story' have released the film's first official poster, offering a powerful glimpse into a socially relevant courtroom drama centered on the alarming issue of food adulteration. Backed by Zee Studios in association with MIG Production & Studios, the film is gearing up for a worldwide theatrical release on July 24, 2026.

The newly unveiled poster features Kajal Aggarwal in the role of a determined lawyer, while Shreyas Talpade appears as a distressed father fighting for justice. A young girl portrayed as his daughter is also featured prominently, highlighting the emotional core of the narrative.

Adding to the intrigue, the poster showcases the iconic Bombay High Court in the backdrop, along with a pesticide cylinder placed inside a courtroom witness box. The imagery strongly hints at a legal battle linked to food contamination and its devastating impact on ordinary families.

Directed by Chettan DK and written and produced by Sagar B. Shinde, 'The India Story' aims to spotlight a major public health concern that affects millions but often receives limited attention. By combining emotional storytelling with legal drama, the film seeks to raise awareness about the dangers of food adulteration and its long-term consequences.

The project will be released in Hindi, Telugu, and Tamil, expanding its reach to audiences across the country. The film's technical crew includes cinematographer Nishant Bhagwat, music composer Mangesh Dhakke, editor Ashish Mhatre, lyricist Shakeel Azami, and sound designer Anmol Bhave.

With its socially relevant theme, compelling characters, and thought-provoking premise, 'The India Story' is emerging as one of the most anticipated issue-based dramas of 2026.

Hrithik Roshan cameo adds excitement to 'Alpha'

The newly released 'Alpha' trailer has significantly raised expectations for the upcoming action thriller, offering audiences a more impactful glimpse into the film than its previously released teaser. With the movie scheduled to arrive in theatres on July 3, the latest promotional material has successfully reignited interest and generated fresh momentum ahead of release.

Following a teaser that received a mixed response from viewers, the makers appear to have struck the right chord with the trailer. Packed with high-octane action sequences, stylish visuals, and stronger emotional undertones, the trailer presents a much more compelling picture of what audiences can expect from the film.

Leading the charge is Alia Bhatt, who impresses in a powerful action-oriented role.

The actress showcases a confident and intense screen presence, highlighting a new dimension to her on-screen persona. Sharvari also leaves a strong impact, with her action scenes emerging as one of the major highlights of the trailer.

Adding further intrigue is Bobby Deol, whose character appears menacing and formidable. His commanding presence enhances the suspense surrounding the film's narrative. Veteran actor Anil Kapoor also plays a significant



role, bringing additional depth and gravitas to the ensemble cast.

One of the trailer's biggest crowd-pleasing moments is the tease of a special appearance by Hrithik Roshan. The brief glimpse of the superstar has already become a major talking point among fans, strengthening the connection between 'Alpha' and the expanding YRF Spy Universe.

With expectations riding high, 'Alpha' is considered one of the most important upcoming projects from Yash Raj Films. Industry observers believe the film's box-office performance could influence the future trajectory of the studio's ambitious spy franchise.

If the teaser left audiences wanting more, the trailer has successfully delivered the excitement and scale many were hoping for, setting the stage for a highly anticipated theatrical release.

Rakul Preet Singh focuses on growth, meaningful roles over stardom

Actress Rakul Preet Singh says her priority remains professional growth and meaningful storytelling as she continues to evolve in a career spanning multiple film industries. The actress recently opened up about her approach to acting, fame, and the growing influence of social media on performers.

According to Rakul, audience appreciation is the greatest reward for any actor, and she believes success should be measured by the impact of one's work rather than celebrity status. She emphasized that while stardom is gratifying, her primary focus has always been on delivering memorable performances and being

part of stories that resonate with viewers.

Reflecting on her journey in cinema, Rakul revealed that she consciously chooses projects that challenge her creatively. The actress said she does not want to be confined to a specific image or genre and instead looks for opportunities that help her discover new dimensions of her craft. She believes every film should contribute to her growth as an artist and offer valuable learning experiences.

The actress also shared her perspective on social media and its effect on actors. Rakul noted that when she entered the industry, social media was not as influential as it is today. However, she feels that the digital space has

become increasingly powerful, particularly in recent years.

While acknowledging that online opinions can affect newcomers, Rakul advised actors to remain focused on their work and avoid getting distracted by constant commentary on social platforms. She stressed that paying excessive attention to online chatter can be counterproductive and may negatively impact an artist's confidence and performance.

With a strong belief in authenticity and continuous learning, Rakul Preet Singh continues to shape her career around meaningful cinema and personal growth, reinforcing her position as one of the industry's versatile performers.

Pragya Jaiswal's photoshoot gains traction

Actress Pragya Jaiswal continues to command attention on social media despite not having a film release scheduled this year. The actress, known for her elegant fashion choices and strong online presence, has once again become the center of discussion with a stylish new photoshoot that is rapidly gaining traction among fans.

The latest photographs showcase Pragya in a contemporary fashion ensemble featuring a lace bralette paired with a light blue oversized shirt. Complementing the look are white denim shorts that have become a major talking point on social media. The relaxed styling and modern fashion approach have earned appreciation from followers, with many praising her effortless sense of style.

Captured beside a sunlit window, the photos highlight the actress's confidence and natural charm. Her minimal makeup, soft hairstyle, and understated accessories add to the overall appeal, creating a sophisticated yet relaxed look. The visuals reflect a blend of glamour and simplicity that has resonated strongly with fashion enthusiasts.

While fans continue to await updates regarding her upcoming film projects, Pragya has successfully remained in the spotlight through her active social media engagement. The actress frequently shares glimpses of her fashion shoots, travel experiences, and lifestyle moments, helping her maintain a strong connection with her audience.

Over the years, Pragya Jaiswal has built a reputation not only for her performances on screen but also for her evolving fashion choices. Her latest photoshoot further reinforces her status as one of the most stylish actresses in the industry.

Although there are no immediate movie releases on the horizon, the actress continues to make headlines through her fashion-forward appearances, proving that her popularity extends well beyond the silver screen.

'Cocktail 2' revives iconic song 'Tum Hi Ho Bandhu' with a new twist

As the release of 'Cocktail 2' draws closer, the makers have unveiled a refreshed version of the iconic chartbuster "Tum Hi Ho Bandhu," bringing back one of Bollywood's most-loved party anthems for a new generation of listeners. The recreated track is expected to play a key role in the film's music album and has already generated considerable excitement among fans.



Actor Shahid Kapoor, who headlines the sequel, shared the song on social media with a playful message announcing the film's arrival. The much-awaited romantic entertainer is scheduled for a theatrical release on June 19. Originally featured in the 2012 blockbuster 'Cocktail,' "Tum Hi Ho Bandhu" became an instant sensation. The song was composed by Pritam, penned by Irshad Kamil, and sung by Kavita Seth and Neeraj Shridhar. It was picturized on Saif Ali Khan, Deepika Padukone, and Diana Pentz. For the sequel, music producer Abhijit Vaghani has recreated the track with contemporary arrangements while preserving its original spirit. He revealed that the goal was to retain the song's timeless energy while introducing modern musical elements that appeal to today's audiences. The release of the revamped anthem follows the launch of other tracks from the film, including "Tujhko," "Vallah," "Mashooqa," and "Jab Talak," all of which have contributed to the growing buzz around the project. Serving as a spiritual successor to the original romantic drama, 'Cocktail 2' aims to recreate the magic of its predecessor while presenting a fresh story for audiences. With the return of "Tum Hi Ho Bandhu," the film has added another nostalgic element to its promotional campaign, further raising expectations ahead of its release.