

# THE PERFECT VOICE



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## From celebratory chants to wails of pain

AT LEAST 11 DEAD, 33 INJURED IN TRAGEDY AT CHINNASWAMY STADIUM IN BENGALURU

**Bengaluru:** A mound of shoes and sandals lying here and there and some pieces of what appeared to be sports apparel and merchandise were the telltale signs of the stampede that broke out in the immediate vicinity of the Chinnaswamy stadium here, leading to the deaths of 11 persons and injuries to 33 enthusiasts.

As the celebratory mood kicked in to commemorate the first ever IPL title win by the RCB, massive crowds of young men and women, touching lakhs, gathered just outside the stadium.

Many youths managed to climb branches of huge trees and frenzied young men clung to poles and even scaled huge walls to gain entry into the stadium to catch a glimpse of their stars, all at the same time.

Nothing could deter them and crowds continued to swell and the chants of 'RCB' in the busy area brought in an atmosphere of carnival on the streets of Bengaluru.



As jubilation intensified, the crowds turned frantic and were uncontrollable, steadily leading to a stampede. Soon, wails and shouting began to be heard and even before one could realize what was happening, people fell down and became unconscious, who had to be rushed to nearby hospitals.

While all this was hap-

pening, many youths still chose to continue to sit on compound walls near the Saint Mark's Cathedral and not even the continuous blare of sirens of police vehicles could stop them from shouting to cheer their beloved cricket team.

Police men and women though did their best to regulate crowd in and

around the stadium area, they were heavily outnumbered as the maiden win became a youth cultural extravaganza. Appeals from the police informing people that "stadium is full...stadium is full," and urging them to disperse fell on deaf ears.

According to eyewitnesses, a stampede-like situation emerged as fans

### Reactions pour in all over India 'Absolutely heartrending', says PM Modi

**New Delhi:** Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Wednesday described the stampede in Bengaluru during the victory celebrations of Royal Challengers Bangalore's IPL triumph as "absolutely heartrending". In a post on X, Modi said, "The mishap in Bengaluru is absolutely heartrending. In this tragic hour, my thoughts are with all those who have lost their loved ones. I pray that those who are injured have a speedy recovery." Defence Minister Rajnath Singh also expressed deep anguish over the loss of lives.

**Kharge, Rahul express grief**  
**New Delhi:** Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge expressed sadness and urged the state

government to strengthen safety protocols to avoid such incidents in the future. "I am deeply saddened by the tragic stampede in Bengaluru during the celebrations of Royal Challengers Bengaluru's IPL 2025 victory. The loss of precious lives and the injuries sustained by many in this unfortunate incident are profoundly distressing. "My thoughts and prayers are with the families who lost loved ones, and I wish a speedy recovery to the injured," Kharge said in a post on X. Congress leader Rahul Gandhi said the stampede near Bengaluru's Chinnaswamy Stadium during B's IPL victory celebrations is heartbreaking. "My condolences to the families who

lost their loved ones. Wishing a swift and full recovery to all those injured. "In this hour of grief, I stand with the people of Bengaluru. The Karnataka government must provide all possible support and relief to the affected families," Gandhi said in a post on X.

**Shocking, heartbreaking: President Murmu**  
**New Delhi:** President Droupadi Murmu on Wednesday said the loss of lives in a stampede in Bengaluru is shocking and heartbreaking. "The loss of lives in the tragic happening at a stadium in Bengaluru is shocking and heartbreaking. My condolences to the bereaved families and prayers for the speedy recovery of the injured," Murmu said.

crowded the venue of the felicitation. Visuals showed police shifting the injured persons and those who fell unconscious in ambulances to nearby hospitals.

Visuals also showed some of those who were in an unconscious state being administered cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) by those nearby. Po-

lice had a tough time in crowd management as a large number of cricket enthusiasts tried to gain entry, at the same time, into the stadium.

Police used mild force to control the crowd and bring the situation under control ahead of a special felicitation at the stadium for the RCB team organised by the Karnataka

State Cricket Association (KSCA).

"It was a young, vibrant crowd. We cannot use lathi," Shivakumar said. The reason for the stampede was, however, not immediately known.

According to a traffic advisory from the Bengaluru police, entry to Chinnaswamy Stadium was limited to only those with valid

tickets and passes." As there is limited parking facility available near the Chinnaswamy Stadium, those who are attending the event are advised to use public transport and Metro. The public is requested to cooperate," it had said.

-PTI

More details on Page 4...

### Rise of cancer cases in Thane

**Thane:** There has been an increase in the number of cancer cases in the city over the last few years. A total of 4,490 persons were screened for cancer in Thane district over four months, following which 237 suspected cases were identified and referred for diagnosis and further attention, officials said on Wednesday.

Under an initiative aimed at early detection and prevention of cancer, citizens were screened between February and May, said the district administration in a release. It focused primarily on oral, breast, and cervical cancers, the most common forms of the disease.

"A cancer mobile van equipped with modern diagnostic tools is reaching citizens in both rural and urban areas, bringing vital health services to their doorsteps," said District Civil Surgeon Dr Kailash Pawar.

District Collector Ashok Shingare is leading the campaign, the release said.

Early detection can lead to a higher chance of cure.

### Eid-ul-Azha Clerics urge Muslims to follow govt guidelines

**New Delhi:** Ahead of Eid-ul-Azha, Muslim clerics on Wednesday urged members of the community to strictly follow the government guidelines while performing sacrifice and avoid sharing pictures of slaughtered animals on social media.

In his message to Muslims, Jamiat Ulema-e-Hind President Maulana Arshad Madani said that there is no substitute for sacrifice in Islam as it is a religious duty.

A person on whom sacrifice is obligatory must perform this obligation, he said.

However, Madani said that in view of the current situation, it is important that Muslims take precautionary measures on their own and avoid advertising and sharing of pictures of slaughtered animals on social media.

The Shahi Imam of the Jama Masjid, Delhi urged the Muslim community to refrain from performing animal sacrifices in open areas or on the streets.

The festival is to be celebrated on June 7. Jamiat President Madani also urged Muslims to strictly

follow the government guidelines while performing sacrifice, avoid the sacrifice of prohibited animals.

He also said that if mischievous elements, at any place, prevent the sacrifice of a black animal (buffalo) also, influential people should take the administration into confidence, and then sacrifice should be offered.

"If, however, there is no way to fulfil this religious obligation, then a sacrifice should be offered in a nearby place where there is no difficulty," he said.

Advising Muslims to exercise patience and restraint in response to any provocative actions by communal elements, Madani stressed that such incidents should definitely be reported to the local police station.

The Shahi Imam advised people to ensure cleanliness in their localities during the festival.

"Just as festivals like Holi and Diwali are celebrated with dignity across India, Eid-ul-Adha too should be observed with respect and reverence," the Imam said in a statement.

### Three cab drivers arrested

**Mumbai:** The police have booked five cab drivers and arrested three of them after a video showed the accused fighting with the staff at the Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj International Airport here over parking, an official said on Wednesday.

The incident took place on May 31, but a video of it went viral on social media on Wednesday.

According to the official from the Sahar police station, the airport staff and taxi operators clashed over parking, with both sides exchanging kicks and punches.

The CISF personnel deployed at Mumbai airport intervened and controlled the situation. Subsequent investigations showed that a driver and a security guard were the primary instigators, the official said.

The airport staff had asked the cab drivers to leave a spot after dropping off passengers. The matter escalated after a cab driver did not respond to the request to leave the place. Instead, he started hurling abuses, triggering the confrontation, the official said.

### Indian delegation meets European Parliament members



**Brussels:** Reaffirming India's "unwavering commitment" to combating cross-border terrorism, an all-party delegation led by BJP MP Ravi Shankar Prasad on Wednesday met members of the European Parliament, think tanks and Indian diaspora, asserting that New Delhi stands united in its "resolve and action".

The delegation, which reached the Western European nation Tuesday to reiterate India's stance against terrorism, was seen interacting with members of the European Parliament in a video shared by the Embassy of India in Belgium and Luxembourg.

The Indian team had an insightful interaction with leading Brussels-based think tanks during which they held wide-ranging discussions on the menace

of terrorism including cross-border terrorism directed against India.

"They discussed India's counter-terrorism efforts including #OperationSindoor with members of think tank community in Brussels. The Delegation conveyed a unified and unequivocal message of zero tolerance against terrorism," the Indian mission posted on X.

The delegation also engaged with the Indian diaspora in Belgium, underscoring India's unwavering commitment to combating cross-border terrorism," it said.

"India against Terrorism: United in resolve and action," the embassy posted on X.

The diaspora expressed "deep solidarity" with the victims of the April 22 Pahalgalam attack which claimed 26 lives, and "reaf-

firmed their strong support for India's efforts to counter terrorism," it said.

The delegation also paid floral tributes to Mahatma Gandhi's bust at the embassy premises, reaffirming India's "longstanding commitment to peace, non-violence, and tolerance", the embassy said in a separate post.

Prasad, in a post on X, said that the delegation's visit will focus on "fostering international cooperation to combat cross-border terrorism through a series of strategic meetings." The delegation also comprises of Daggubati Purandeswari (BJP), Priyanka Chaturvedi (Shia Sena), Gulam Ali Khatana (BJP), Amar Singh (Congress), Samik Bhattacharya (BJP), M Thambidurai (AIADMIC), M J Akbar (BJP), and former diplomat Pankaj Saran. -PTI

### AICC urges Centre to grant relief to flood victims

**Aizawl:** The All India Congress Committee (AICC) on Wednesday urged the Centre to provide relief to those affected by floods and landslides triggered by heavy rain in Mizoram.

A statement issued by the party said the Mizoram unit of Congress has informed that people of the state have been suffering due to landslides, floods and other calamities.

"In this time of disaster, we demand that the Government of India awaken its conscience, and provide immediate support and relief to the people of Mizoram," it said.

Incidents of landslides, floods, house collapse and other calamities triggered by torrential rain for the past few days in Mizoram have so far killed five people, including three Myanmar refugees, officials said.

According to the latest data released by the state's disaster management and rehabilitation department, 675 landslides have been reported and 269 houses collapsed or were damaged in different parts of the state since May 24.

-PTI

## Court accepts closure report in Powai land case

**Mumbai:** In a relief to developer Niranjan Hiranandani, a court has accepted the ACB's closure report in an alleged Rs 30,000 crore land scam in Mumbai's Powai area, holding that "no criminal offence warranting prosecution is made out".

The order of June 2, passed by Special Judge S E Bangar for cases under the Prevention of Corruption Act, effectively closes the case against Niranjan Hiranandani, the co-founder and managing director of the Hiranandani Group, and others.

"Closure reports are based on cogent investigation, verified compliance, and supported by judicial orders of the constitutional court," said the order, a copy of which was made available on Wednesday.

The Anti-Corruption Bureau (ACB) had registered an FIR in 2012, alleging that the Powai Area Development Scheme (PADS), which was intended for affordable housing, was misused to construct luxury apartments.

ACB claimed that Lake View Developers, an entity of the Hiranandani Group,

in collaboration with the Mumbai Metropolitan Region Development Authority (MMRDA) and Municipal Corporation of Greater Mumbai (MCGM), misused PADS.

The move caused a loss (of Rs 30,000 crore) to the public exchequer and violated statutory obligations under the Tripartite Agreement dated November 19, 1986, the probe agency had alleged.

The special court in 2018 had rejected the agency's "A" Summary report and instead directed further investigation into the



matter.

Following reinvestigation, the ACB filed a "C" Summary report on August 30, 2019, recommending closure of the case. It said no evidence of criminality was found against Hiranandani or the public

authorities named in the case.

Police's A Summary report indicates a case is true, but the accused or evidence is yet to be found, while a C Summary report is filed wherein the matter is found to be "neither true nor false". Santosh Daundkar, the complainant in the alleged PADS land scam, had filed a protest petition, seeking rejection of the closure report.

Daundkar alleged bias in the transfer of the investigating officer, who he claimed was purportedly

in the process of filing a chargesheet.

He called the closure report a "result of administrative interference and suppression of crucial material". Daundkar also submitted that officials failed in their duty to "prevent misuse of government land and monitor the PADS implementation".

However, the special judge noted that the protest petition "lacks merit in view of the binding adjudication by the Bombay High Court".

He held that the allegations concerning breach of

affordable housing obligations, amalgamation of flats, and sale of flats were conclusively examined and remedied by a division bench of the Bombay HC.

Judge Bangar noted that the HC had constituted a three-member joint committee to verify compliance. It had accepted the committee reports in 2016 and 2017, which confirmed that out of 2,200 flats of 80 square metres (each), 1,337 flats were constructed, 12 locked, and 887 remained to be completed as per the plan and timeline.

"The directions for com-

pletion of the remaining flats were passed with monitoring provisions, and any further breach or noncompliance was made subject to the court's ongoing supervision, obviating the need for separate criminal proceedings," the order said, citing the HC ruling.

The special court stressed that in view of the accepted compliance framework and "absence of criminal intent proven during investigation, the ACB rightly concluded that no prosecutable offence remained". -PTI



# Yet another tainted leader likely to join BJP washing machine in Nashik

By Correspondent

**Mumbai:** After his recent meeting with Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis, Shiv Sena (UBT) deputy leader from Nashik Sudhakar Badgujar was expelled from the party for anti-party activities. The action taken against Badgujar today has led to speculations that the tainted leader might join the BJP washing machine and secure his political career ahead of the local self-government body elections.

Shiv Sena (UBT) leader and Rajya Sabha MP Sanjay Raut was on in Nashik recently. But, Badgujar preferred to meet CM Fadnavis instead on Raut. Also, after the meeting Badgujar tried to gain some political weight by talking about the unease he had been experiencing within the party. While this led to speculations about Badgujar actively searching for options in other political parties, the Shiv Sena (UBT) leadership expelled him from the party for anti-party activities. It fanned the speculations further about possibilities of him joining the BJP. However, local BJP MLA Seema Hire, who had defeated Badgujar in assembly elections twice, addressed a press conference on Wednesday giving out details of criminal cases against Badgujar. This washing of dirty linens in public has now put a question mark as to whether



## Why was Badgujar sacked?

**Nashik:** The Shiv Sena (UBT) on Wednesday expelled Sudhakar Badgujar, a deputy leader from its Nashik district unit, for “anti-party” activities, two days after he met Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis. Badgujar called his expulsion “one-sided” and “wrong”. The party's former district chief Datta Gaikwad announced Badgujar's sacking during a press conference after he received a call from Sena (UBT) president Uddhav Thackeray and senior leader Sanjay Raut about the decision. “Just now, I received a phone call from Uddhavji and Sanjay Raut saheb. They said that Sudhakar Badgujar has been expelled from the party for anti-party activities,” Gaikwad told the media. Badgujar had met CM Fadnavis during the latter's visit to Nashik on June 2. He had also openly expressed his unhappiness over the party's functioning. Badgujar had claimed that he, Vilas Shinde, who is the Nashik city chief of Sena (UBT), and about a dozen other leaders were unhappy. Vilas Shinde had invited Deputy CM Eknath Shinde, who heads the rival Shiv Sena, to his daughter's wedding on Monday (June 2), which BJP leader and minister Girish Mahajan also attended.

Badgujar will join the BJP washing machine. Badgujar had been accused of threatening and terrorising BJP workers in past two assembly elec-

tions. He is currently facing 17 criminal cases. His name had also appeared in news when he had a dance during a party with 1993 Mumbai blast accused

Salim Kutta. Also, he is said to be behind circulating state BJP president Chandra Shekar Bawankule's photographs at a casino in Makau and

arrest of former union minister Narayan Rane while he was still having his lunch. Hire spelt out all these accusations against Badgujar at a press conference in Nashik on Wednesday building a strong case against Badgujar's possible entry in the party.

Hire also accused Badgujar of wanting to join the BJP in order to get rid of several corruption charges he is facing and the charge of attempted murder that his son is facing. It was because of Badgujar that several of the BJP workers had to leave the party in the past, she said while protesting against the possible entry of the tainted leader in the party.

“BJP values honesty and loyalty. The party has democracy and the leaders would evaluate anybody wanting to join the party based on the votes polled to them in elections. The party will sustain a big jolt if Badgujar is inducted in the party ahead of the local body elections which the party is confident of winning on its own,” the ruling party MLA said in her press conference. She also said that the proposal of Badgujar's joining the party was never discussed on the local level.

This strong opposition to Badgujar's possible entry in the BJP has exposed the fault lines within the Nashik BJP.

-PTI



Members of the tri-services team that carried out the 'Samudra Pradakshina', an all-women sailing expedition from Mumbai to Seychelles and back, during the team's flagging-in ceremony, in Mumbai on Wednesday.

Pic: Bhushan Koyande

## ITIs to have lecture series on Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj

By Correspondent

**Mumbai:** A lecture series on Panch Parivartan vision, being propagated by the RSS as part of the centenary initiatives of the organization, will be organized across all 1,097 ITIs in the state to mark the Shivrajyabhishek Din (Coronation day of Shivaji Maharaj), minister for Skill development Mangal Prabhat Lodha announced here at a press conference on Wednesday.

The minister also said that Six new-age ITI courses too will be launched in the upcoming academic year that would feature drones, 3D technology and Artificial intelligence (AI).

"On the occasion of Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj's Rajyabhishek Divas, the Department of Skill Development will organize a state-wide lecture series across all ITIs (Industrial Training Institutes) starting June 6. The aim is to instill a spirit of patriotism, inspire environmen-

tal awareness, and connect students with the glorious legacy of India," the minister said.

The lecture series will be inaugurated via a video message by Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis. He shall also roll out six advanced new courses in ITIs starting from the upcoming academic year on June 6, Lodha added.

Under the framework of department's new Public-Private Partnership (PPP) policy, six futuristic courses will be introduced this academic year viz. Solar Technician, Electric Vehicle Technician, Drone Technology, Artificial Intelligence, Industrial Robotics, and 3D Technology, the minister said.

With over 1.2 lakh students enrolled in ITIs across Maharashtra, the initiative aims to deliver world-class training and open doors to global employment opportunities. "These new programs will empower our youth with the skills needed for the

modern world," Lodha concluded.

"Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj not only established Hindavi Swarajya through his valor but also laid the foundations for good governance, social unity, public welfare, and the rule of law.

These values need to be deeply rooted in today's generation. That is why this lecture series is being organized," the minister said.

Awareness on family values, social harmony, environmental protection, civic duties and Indigenous Thinking is the core of Panch Parivartan, which will form the core focus areas of the lecture series, the minister said adding that, these themes are essential for responsible citizenship since they promote lawfulness, national prosperity, social unity, and environmental sustainability. Family awareness fosters peace and dialogue within households.

## Drive Against Plastic Cloth bag vending machine at secretariat

**Mumbai:** The state government is planning to set up a cloth bag vending machine at Mantralaya (state secretariat) here in its drive against single-use plastics ahead of the World Environment Day on Thursday, an official said. All departments at the secretariat have been asked to collect and deposit the single-use plastic items at their offices as part of the drive, he said.

The state Environment and Climate Change Department is planning to install the cloth bag vending machine at the secretariat on Thursday as a demonstration for daily visitors, the official said.

It issued an order on Tuesday, asking all the departments to deposit the single-use plastic items in their offices at the Trimurti location in the Mantralaya.

The environment department has already installed cloth bag vending machines at prominent locations, including the Shreeamant Dagdusheth Halwai Ganapati Temple in Pune and a temple at Parli Vajjanath in Beed district.

## Japan's Consul General meets Ajit Pawar

**Mumbai:** Japan's Consul General Yagi Koji met the state's Deputy Chief Minister Ajit Pawar on Wednesday and discussed ways to resolve issues faced by Japanese companies in Pune and across the state, an official statement said.

The discussion also covered strengthening cooperation in the socio-cultural sector, besides industry and economy, said the statement from Pawar's office. Koji met Pawar at the Sahyadri Guest House in south Mumbai.

"India and Japan are natural allies and share a unique spiritual and cultural bond. Japan has played a significant role in India's industrial development and infrastructure creation," it said.

Japan has made substantial industrial investments in India, with over 300 Japanese companies operating in Maharashtra, including over 50 in and around Pune, said the statement.

"Addressing the concerns of these companies and creating an industry-friendly environment is the responsibility of the government," Pawar said. Special focus was also

given to enhancing social and cultural cooperation, he said.

The Maharashtra government will prioritise solving issues faced by Japanese companies operating in Mumbai, Pune, and other regions of the state, said the statement.

"The government is committed to providing necessary infrastructure like good roads, adequate power, clean water, and a secure environment. Roads in Pune's industrial areas will be repaired," it said.

A total of Rs 80 crore has been sanctioned for a road from Sanaswadi to Pimple Jagtap in Pune district, the statement said. Land acquisition for the project is underway, and roadwork will begin after the monsoon, it said.

Topics like Miyawaki gardens, CSR (corporate social responsibility) funds, JICA (Japan International Cooperation Agency), STPs (sewage treatment plants), and flood control were also discussed during the meeting, the statement said.

A meeting will be held in Pune with senior officials of Japanese companies to discuss their concerns.

## Pandharpur Temple 3,600 devotees now allowed

**Mumbai:** The daily capacity of visitors at the famous Vitthal Rukmini temple in Pandharpur town of Solapur district has been increased from 1,200 to 3,600, its management said on Wednesday.

The new arrangement was implemented two days ago, the temple darshan samiti's chief officer Rajendra Shelke said.

Earlier, 1,200 persons used to take darshan (offer prayers) in six slots. We have now increased the capacity to 3,600 persons. This arrangement has already come into effect in the last two days," he said.

There is no charge for offering prayers at the temple, Shelke said.

"It is free. If someone asks for money for darshan, point out to us," he said, appealing to devotees to remain alert and report any irregularity.

More details about the prayer facilities are available on the temple's official website, Shelke said.

The Vitthal Rukmini temple is one of the most revered pilgrimage sites in the state, drawing nearly two crore devotees annually, including during the two major wari pilgrimages.



CM Devendra Fadnavis with President of Paraguay Santiago Peña in Mumbai.

## Man burns to death

**Bhandara:** Smoking bidi (hand-rolled thin cigarettes) is considered injurious to health, but it turned fatal for a 65-year-old man in Bhandara district when an ignited bidi triggered a fire and engulfed him.

The man died after his clothes caught fire while he was smoking a bidi in his home in Manegaon village under Lakshmi taluka of the district in Vidarbha on Tuesday, police said on Wednesday.

-PTI

## Veteran tribal leader to address RSS volunteers

**Nagpur:** Veteran tribal leader Arvind Netam, who was a cabinet minister in the governments of Indira Gandhi and PV Narasimha Rao, will be the chief guest at the ceremony of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh's volunteer training camp in Nagpur on Thursday.

The invitation to the 83-year-old tribal leader has raised some eyebrows in political circles given the role his political party had played during the 2023 polls in swinging crucial tribal votes in Chhattisgarh.

The 25-day training camp - 'Karyakarta Vikas Varg - Dwitiya', is currently underway at the Dr Hedgewar Smriti Mandir at Nagpur, with 840 volunteers from across the country participating.

During the function, RSS chief Mohan Bhagwat will address the participants at the event which marks the completion of the training period for 'swayamsevak' (volunteers).

Former President Pranab Mukherjee had attended the concluding ceremony in 2018, drawing criticism from some sections of the Congress



party. The presence of Netam, a prominent voice on tribal issues, is heightened by his political background and influence, particularly in Chhattisgarh's Bastar region.

This invitation comes six months after Netam had met the RSS chief in Raipur to discuss tribal concerns.

The former Union Minister, who hails from Bastar, had quit the Congress party before the 2023 Assembly elections and floated the Hamar Raj party, carved out of the Sarva Adivasi Samaj (SAS)- an umbrella group of tribal organisations.

According to political analysts, Hamar Raj affected Congress's performance in at least two assembly constituencies in the 2023 assembly elections, and the Kanker parliamentary seat during the Lok Sabha polls.

-PTI

## CM to open Mumbai-Nagpur expressway final stretch

**Mumbai:** The state's Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis will inaugurate the final 76km stretch of the Samruddhi Mahamarg (Igatpuri-Amane) on Thursday, completing the 701-km Mumbai -Nagpur expressway and reducing travel time from 17-18 hours to just eight.

Fadnavis will inaugurate the fourth and final phase of the 701km Mumbai-Nagpur expressway on June 5, said Maharashtra State Road Development Corporation (MSRDC) on Wednesday.

The state-owned corporation said once the final 76km stretch between Igatpuri in Nashik district and Amane in Thane district (part of Mumbai metropolitan region) opens for traffic, the journey between the two cities can be completed in just eight hours.

"Previously, the journey from Nagpur to Mumbai via the old route would take 17 to 18 hours. With this new greenfield expressway, the same distance (between Nagpur and Amane in Thane dis-



trict) can be covered in eight hours," a MSRDC release said.

Currently, 625km of the expressway is operational, and nearly two crore vehi-

cles have utilised it so far. The maximum speed limit on the expressway is 100 km/h in ghat sections and 120 km/h on flat terrain, it said.

Besides Fadnavis, Deputy Chief Ministers Eknath Shinde and Ajit Pawar will attend the inauguration function at Igatpuri, around 140km from Mumbai. A newly-constructed creek bridge in Thane will also inaugurate via video conferencing on the occasion.

The six-lane expressway, officially called Hindu Hridayasamrat Balasaheb Thackeray Maharashtra Samruddhi Mahamarg, traverses 392 villages in 26 talukas across 10 districts in five revenue divisions.

Once the final phase of the expressway opens for traffic, pilgrims travelling from the Thane-Mumbai region to the temple town of Shirdi in Ahilyanagar district, will benefit from a faster and more convenient route, MSRDC said.

Additionally, farmers from Shirdi, Ahilyanagar, Sinnar and Igatpuri (in Nashik district) will be able to transport their agricultural produce to and from the Mumbai Metropolitan Region efficiently and in less time, said the corporation.

## QUOTE OF THE DAY

"Many states in the country have chosen only two languages from Class 1, discarding mandatory Hindi to uphold their linguistic identity. I expect our government to display the same pride and protect the identity of our language."

Raj Thackeray,  
Chief, MNS



# 17 years post-26/11, survivor gets flat

By Quaid Najmi

**Mumbai:** Nearly 17 years after the 26/11, 2008 Mumbai terror attacks and a five-year-long legal battle, Devika Natwarlal Rotawan – who took a bullet in her right leg – has a reason to smile.

Following a Bombay High Court order (Feb. 28), she has been finally allotted a flat promised to her years ago – when as a 9-year-old girl she was shot from an AK-47 fired by one of the two terrorists creating mayhem at the Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj Terminus (CSMT).

That harrowing night at around 9.50 pm, she was waiting for a train to go to her brother's home in Pune, along with her father Natwarlal and another brother Jayesh, but within minutes their lives changed forever.

Later, the daring Devika underwent a series of minor and major surgeries to set her leg right, enable her to walk normally and resume her studies which she completed till BA.

During the trial of Ajmal Amir Kasab, the sole terrorist caught alive at Chowpaty, she fearlessly identified him and provided stunning first-person witness accounts of the horrific extremist strikes that shook the world for over 60 hours.

The prime prosecution eyewitness in the 2008 Mumbai terror attacks, it was the plucky girl's telling testimony that helped nail Kasab, he was convicted and secretly hanged on Nov 21, 2012 in Pune's Yerawada Central Jail.



Devika N. Rotawan with her father and brother.

## Devika's legal struggles for a house

The star survivor of Mumbai 26/11 terror hits was assured of a house allotment in Mumbai in a government scheme years ago, but it never materialised, forcing her to move the Bombay HC in 2020. Two unsuccessful attempts later, she tipped the scales in the third try and after stern observation of the HC that the state government finally bowed and assured an allotment within 6 months in March 2024. The court directed the housing department – which had earlier rejected her plea - to treat the matter with 'human sensitivity' as it was 'an exceptional and genuine case' meriting special attention.

Meanwhile, Devika encountered immense hardships, financial challenges as all family resources were gobbled up for her treatment and education, while the promised house never came despite frantic communication with mul-

tipale government departments.

Dejected, she filed a public interest litigation that was first fought by New Delhi-based Adv. Ut-sav Bains and in the second stage by well-known actress-cum-lawyer Ku-

nickaa Lal-Sadanand.

"After a long ordeal and directions by Justice G. S. Kulkarni and Justice Firdosh P. Pooniwalla, the Maharashtra government has allotted her a small 1-BHK flat in a public housing scheme in Andheri west. The Rotawans are likely to move in a week," Adv. Kunickaa told *The Perfect Voice*.

Devika said that for the past few years, they've been living in a rented shanty in Bandra west, her father and brother are suffering from serious health problems and she is still unemployed.

"My brother is down with hernia, and my dad also suffers from a serious illness. We are living in abject poverty with little or

Last year, she was allotted a flat in an incomplete government project beset with other problems so it was cancelled, but a couple of months back, a fresh allotment was made. "The new house is undergoing finishing touches and we plan to shift there on an auspicious day next week," gushed Devika, who was granted a compensation of over Rs 13-lakhs plus most medical treatments free till now. Incidentally, even the HC had appreciated the housing department for doing "real justice" to Devika considering her long years of suffering after the terror bullet brought her normal life crashing down in November 2008.

no help, but fear eviction from the slum due to pending rentals.

Now, with the new home, we hope to start life afresh after 17 years' pains," a weary but elated Devika told *The Perfect Voice*.

## Fire destroys six scrap godowns

**Thane:** Six scrap godowns were gutted after a fire broke out at a cluster of warehouses in Maharashtra's Thane district, officials said on Wednesday.

No person was injured in the incident, they said.

The blaze erupted at 8.53 pm on Tuesday in a godown at the complex located at Chowdhari Compound on Khardi Road in Diva and quickly spread to five other warehouses, all owned by different persons, Thane Municipal Corporation's disaster management cell chief Yasin Tadvai said.

After being alerted, three fire engines were rushed to the spot. Personnel from Daighar police station and the regional disaster management cell also reached the site.

The fire was brought under control by 1.30 am on Wednesday, Tadvai said, adding that six godowns were completely gutted.

## Fire erupts in e-bus

**Mumbai:** A fire broke out in an electric bus operated by the Navi Mumbai Municipal Transport (NMMT) in Mumbai's Andheri area on Wednesday evening, officials said.

All passengers were safely evacuated after the incident, which occurred when the bus at Marol bus depot on MIDC Road, they said. Citing preliminary information, an official said that an electric bus of NMMT plying on the Route 144, between Airoli in Navi Mumbai and Andheri in Mumbai, caught fire around 6 pm. Two fire engines of the Mumbai fire brigade were rushed to the spot, and the blaze was doused within a few minutes, he said.



Kids walk through tonnes of plastic waste near Badhwar Park, in Mumbai on Wednesday.

Pic: Bhushan Koyande

# Konkan Railway may run Ro-Ro service to ferry cars

**Mumbai:** The Konkan Railway will explore the possibility of running a special roll-on/roll-off (Ro-Ro) train service for transporting cars during the upcoming Ganapati festival, if there is sufficient public demand, a top official said.

It will be possible to operate such a service if there are at least 40 cars to be transported at a time, Konkan Railway Corporation Limited's Chairman and Managing Director Santosh Kumar Jha told reporters at the KRCL headquarters at Belapur in Navi Mumbai on Tuesday.

Asked why the KR does not transport passenger cars by its pioneering Ro-Ro services during the Ganapati festival, Jha said they will have to make changes for ferrying cars on wagons.

The Konkan Railway's Ro-Ro service, which allows vehicles to be transported along with their drivers, has traditionally been used for trucks.

"I promise you that this

time in Ganpati I will announce a special train (Ro-Ro)," Jha said.

The official said he did not know people would want to transport their expensive cars 750 km away.

It takes 24 to 26 hours to reach Mangaluru (in Karnataka) by Ro-Ro from here and for that one has to buy a second-class ticket from the driver.

Highlighting that KR is not a loss-making corporation, Jha said it generated a net profit of Rs 301 crore in 2023-24. As per unpublished reports, the corporation is expected to register a profit of Rs 140-150 crore in the last financial year.

"The Konkan Railway was always in profit, barring two years of COVID-19," Jha said, adding the KR is generating profits from the operations and execution of projects.

The corporation got projects valued at Rs 3,150 crore through tendering processes in the last 15 months and is already ex-

cuting works of Rs 4,087 crore, the official said.

"About Rs 7,200 crore of work orders are already in my hand and this year, we have targeted to get Rs 15,000 crore of orders. I have full faith that we will achieve this target," Jha said. The KR has planned to spend Rs 125 crore for various passengers amenities, including platform extension, construction of FOBs (foot overbridges) and providing retiring rooms, at railway stations in the next three years, he said.

The Public Works Department of Maharashtra has spent Rs 99 crore for the development of 11 stations on the KR network. Now, the MIDC is spending Rs 39 crore on Ratnagiri station alone for providing facilities, he said.

"You will see a full facelift of the Ratnagiri station before this year-end," the official said.

Also, the KR has sent a proposal to the Railway Board for the restoration of eight halts.

## U-17 Singles

# Risha Parab storms into quarters

By Correspondent

**Mumbai:** Number one seed Risha Parab stormed into the girls' U-17 singles quarter-finals, whereas top two seeds Ajay Meena and Harshit Mahimkar brooked no opposition as they smoothly sailed into the men's singles quarter-finals of the CCI- GMBA Yonex Sunrise District Badminton Championship.

Risha and second seed Thea Sheth scored easy victories in their girls' U-17 singles pre-quarter-final matches. Risha scored an authoritative win over Neha Vicharay coasting to a quick 21-2 and 21-9 win, while Thea got the better of Swara Pote, scripting a 21-6, 21-15 victory to advance to the quarter-finals.

In men's singles, the number one seed Meena encountered some resistance from home challenger Jawad Shaikh in the first game, but he managed to come out trumps, recording a 21-18 and 21-13 victory in a round-16 encounter at the CCI badminton courts.

Second seed Mahimkar was in complete control against unseeded Kshitij Shinde and romped to a



straight-game 21-8 and 21-12 verdict in another pre-quarter-final match.

**Results - Women's singles (round 16):** Thea Sheth bt Sanaya Anklesari a 21-8, 21-7; Anisha Mirchandani bt Yugandhara Dhapre 21-15, 21-7; Natasha Daswani bt Gour-ree Athle 21-2, 21-6.

**Men's singles (round 16):** 1-Ajay Meena Jawad Shaikh 21-18, 21-13; Kanishq Govardhan Gurram bt Mishil Shah 21-17, 9-21, 21-10; 3-Piyush Kamble bt Vedant Sawant 21-10, 21-10; Nigel D'Sa bt Sohail Sherif 21-5, 21-4; Jaswinder Singh bt Siddhesh Raut 21-17, 21-6; 4-Ruturaj Rathod bt Arnav Bhagat 21-8, 21-11; Daras Nadar bt Raghavenda Chati 22-20, 21-11; 2-Harshit Mahimkar bt Kshitij Shinde 21-8, 21-12.

## Rs 6.89 lakh ganja seized

**Thane:** Police have seized 34 kg of ganja valued at Rs 6.89 lakh from a taxi in Thane district and arrested four persons in this connection, officials said on Wednesday.

Acting on a tip-off, the police intercepted the taxi carrying three persons at Mahajanwadi in Mira Gaothan area on May 29.

"A thorough search of the vehicle led to the recovery of 34.484 kg of ganja," Mira Bhayander-Vasai Virar Police's Assistant Commissioner of Police, Dr Vijaykumar Marathe said.

The seized contraband is estimated to be valued at Rs 6,89,680 in the illegal market, according to police.

The three taxi occupants, including its driver, all hailing from neighbouring Mumbai, were arrested. The police also seized Rs 7,500 cash from the accused and impounded the vehicle, the official said.

During the investigation, the police on Tuesday arrested another person, a resident of Kamothe in Navi Mumbai, who allegedly supplied the contraband to the other accused, he said.

-PTI



A commuter crosses a road amid rainfall, in Mumbai on Wednesday.

Pic: PTI

# Damania appears before ACB

**Mumbai:** Social activist Anjali Damania on Wednesday appeared before the Anti-Corruption Bureau (ACB) and gave detail about a Rs 341 crore 'scam' in the agriculture department when it was headed by NCP leader and former Maharashtra cabinet minister Dhananjay Munde.

Damania had earlier filed a corruption complaint against Munde and appeared before the anti-graft agency for enquiry in connection with that.

The activist, who reached the ACB headquarters in Worli at around 11.30 am, was enquired by officials of

the anti-corruption agency about her complaint against Munde for more than four hours, an official said.

During the questioning, Damania explained the Rs 341 crore 'scam' in the agriculture department when it was headed by Munde (July 2023-November 2024) and submitted relevant papers to back her allegations.

When contacted by PTI, Damania said "Today I explained the entire scam in detail and gave them (ACB) all the papers."

The activist informed that she will record her

statement on Tuesday (June 10).

The ACB wanted to get more information about the corruption allegations and sent a letter to Damania on Monday, asking her to appear before them with documents related to the complaint against Munde.

The NCP leader, who was the Food, Civil Supplies and Consumer Protection Minister in the Mahayuti 2.0 government, resigned from the cabinet in March after his close aide was arrested for the murder of a village sarpanch in his home district Beed in November last year.

# Three Ambernath cops transferred

By Dr.Abhilash Dawre

**Ambernath:** In a swift and significant move following an exposé by The Perfect Voice on May 24, three police personnel from Ambernath Police Station (West) have been temporarily transferred to the Ulhasnagar Police Control Room. The action comes after the trio was caught attending a high-profile IPL match at Mumbai's Wankhede Stadium during official duty hours without authorization.

The officers in question are constables Sagar Munde, Anil Thombre and head constable Dattatraya Vishe. They were spotted in the VIP stands during the Mumbai Indians vs Delhi Capitals match. Shockingly, they had neither secured prior permission from senior officials nor maintained any official documentation for their absence, raising serious concerns about procedural discipline within the police force.

Adding further weight to the controversy, Prafull Thorat has alleged that the



expensive tickets in the VIP section were not personally purchased by the officers but may have been provided by parties involved in illegal betting operations. Thorat has also demanded an inquiry into the personal financial assets of the three officers, claiming that they possess disproportionate wealth compared to their official income.

During preliminary inquiries, Crime Branch Inspector Kishor Shinde, who was present at the police station during the time of the incident, stated that he had given the personnel verbal permission to leave. However, he failed to provide any written record or official communication supporting this claim.

Assistant Commissioner of Police (ACP) Shailesh Kale confirmed that an internal investigation is underway.



## QUOTE OF THE DAY

“Why should there be a (cry) to save this or save that. You celebrate the festival. I am also an environmentalist. But everyone (wants) to save water or colour. This is not the government's job. The job of the government is to save farmers who are committing suicide.”

Aaditya Thackeray, Leader, Shiv Sena (UBT)



# Mumbai Metro to go green

**Mumbai:** As the world prepares to celebrate Environment Day, the Maha Mumbai Metro Operation Corporation Ltd. (MMMOCL) has partnered with Honda Power Pack Energy India Pvt. Ltd., to install E:swap battery swapping stations across Mumbai's extensive metro and monorail network.

Under this green initiative, 25 Metro stations and 6 Monorail stations will be equipped with Honda's advanced battery swapping technology, making Mumbai one of the first metropolitan cities in India to integrate EV battery infrastructure with its mass transit ecosystem.

This collaboration is the first major rollout under MMOCL's Electric Vehicle (EV) Policy, which promotes clean energy solutions and smart last-mile connectivity. The policy was approved under the chairmanship of Dr. Sanjay Mukherjee, IAS, Commissioner of MMRDA and Chairman of Maha Mumbai Metro, in the 29th Board Meeting of MMOCL. Honda has committed to deploying its E:swap system, which allows electric two- and three-wheeler users to exchange their depleted Honda Mobile Power Pack e: battery for a fully charged one in under two minutes.



E:swap battery swapping stations will be installed at the following locations:

1) Metro Line 7 (Red Line):

Gundavali, Mogra, Jogeshwari East, Goregaon East, Aarey, Dindoshi, Kurla, Akurli, Poisar, Devipada, Rashtriya Udyan

2) Metro Line 2A (Yellow Line):

Dahisar East, Anand Nagar, Kandarpada, Eksar, Borivali West, Shimpoli, Kandivali West, Dahanukarwadi, Malad West, Lower Malad, Bangur Nagar, Oshiwara, Lower Oshiwara, Andheri West

3) Monorail Stations:

Sant Gadge Maharaj Chowk, Mint Colony, Naigaon, Wadala, Fertilizer Township, Chembur

All installations will adhere to strict safety, technical, and environmental standards, ensuring smooth access and high usability for daily EV users, including delivery agents and fleet operators. CM Devendra Fadnis, said, "Our government is committed to accelerating electric mobility across Maharashtra."



# CM Siddaramaiah announces 10 lakh aid for victims’ kin



**Bengaluru:** Karnataka Chief Minister Siddaramaiah said 11 persons died while 33 were injured due to the stampede near the Chinnaswamy Stadium where a large number of people had gathered to participate in RCB’s victory celebrations.

The Karnataka CM announced Rs 10 lakh aid for victims’ families and ordered a magisterial inquiry into the stampede-like situation. He visited the hospital where the injured are being treated.

Among the injured, one person is reported to be in critical condition. The injured have been admitted to Bowring and Vydehi hospitals, with some suffering head injuries being transferred to NIMHANS for specialised care.

The incident occurred as vast crowds gathered to celebrate the team’s historic triumph.

**What the CM said?**

Confirming 11 deaths in the Bengaluru stampede, Congress leader and Karnataka CM said, “This was a major tragedy. People have died in a stampede. Eleven lives have been lost and 33 others are seriously injured. Around 14 people have taken treatment at the outpatient facility.



I visited the hospital. Such an incident should never have happened, and the government deeply regrets it.”

“The turnout was far beyond what we anticipated. In front of Vidhana Soudha, nearly one lakh people had gathered, but there were no incidents there. However, at Chinnaswamy Stadium, there were casualties. No one, neither the cricket association nor the government, expected this, as the stadium has a seating capacity of about 35,000. We assumed only a slightly larger crowd would show up. But almost two to three lakh people gathered,” CM Siddaramaiah added.



“Most of the deceased are young. The government will provide a compensation of Rs 10 lakh to the families of those who lost their lives.”

“A magisterial enquiry has been ordered. Following this probe, action will be taken against whoever responsible. But this incident was unexpected. Such a crowd was not expected,” the Karnataka CM said.

“I do not want to play politics in this case. I don’t want to play politics. That is why, even though there was an unexpected crowd, we have ordered a magisterial probe. I don’t want to defend the incident. I don’t want to play politics. Let us see the magisterial report. I will give 15 days’ time for this report.”

“Such incidents happened in many places; I am not going to defend it by comparing them and saying that it happened here and there.. 50-60 people died in Kumbh Mela. I did not criticise. If the Congress criticises, then that is a different matter. Did I or the Karnataka government criticise?” he asked.

Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar also expressed his sorrow on social media, urging fans to prioritise safety above all else.

-PTI

## Eight snakes rescued from house

**Meerut (UP):** Two days after the residents of Samouli village in Meerut district killed 52 snakes that crawled out of the courtyard of a farmer’s house, forest officials rescued eight snakes from the same house under the Daurala police station limits, officials said on Wednesday.

According to the forest department, the non-venomous snakes were safely removed by a rescue team after they were found at the residence of Mahfooz Saifi on Tuesday night.

Divisional Forest Officer (DFO) Rajesh Kumar told PTI on Wednesday that the rescued snakes appeared to be of non-venomous species.

“It is likely that the snakes laid eggs in the house earlier, which are now hatching in phases,” Kumar said.

Aditya Tiwari, a herpetologist who runs an NGO, said the snakes likely belonged to the checkered keelback species, a water snake. “This species is non-venomous, and a female can lay up to 40-50 eggs at a time,” he said.

The recurring incidents have triggered panic in the village, with locals demanding a permanent solution to the issue.

The forest department has urged residents not to harm snakes and to report such sightings to the authorities immediately.

Officials also reminded people that killing snakes is a punishable offence under the Wildlife Protection Act, and strict action will be taken against the violators.

On Sunday, the village witnessed a startling sight when more than 100 snakes crawled out of the courtyard of Saifi’s house, triggering panic in the area.



## Wild elephant raids grocery store in Thailand

**Bangkok:** A hungry wild elephant caused havoc in a grocery store in Thailand on Monday when he strolled in from a nearby national park and helped himself to food on the shelves.

Videos of the incident showed the huge male elephant, known as Plai Biang Lek, briefly stopping in front of the shop, located next to a main road near the Khao Yai National Park in northeastern Thailand, before ducking his whole body inside.

The elephant stopped in front of the shop’s counter, calmly snatching and chomping snacks, and did not flinch as the national park workers tried to shoo him away.

The elephant later backed out of the shop still holding a bag of snacks with his trunk. He left little

damage behind, except mud tracks on the floor and the ceiling of the shop.

In a video posted on social media, Kamploy Kakaew, the shop owner, appeared amused as she described the moment the elephant rifled her shop. She said he ate about nine bags of sweet rice crackers, a sandwich and some dried bananas she had bought that morning.

Kamploy said the elephant left without hurting anyone after getting his snacks.

Danai Sookkanthachai, a volunteer park worker familiar with the elephant, said Plai Biang Lek, who is about 30 years old, is a familiar sight in the area and has been known to enter people’s houses in search of food. This was the first time he had seen him going into a grocery store.

“After he left the shop, he went on to open a bedroom window of another house,” he told The Associated Press.

Danai said wild elephants in the Khao Yai National Park area have been coming out of the woods to ransack people’s kitchens for many years, but this year he has started seeing them going into more random places to find food.

There were an estimated 4,000 wild elephants in Thailand in 2024, according to the Department of National Parks, Wildlife and Plant Conservation. As farmers push into forests for agriculture, elephants have been forced to venture out of their shrinking habitats in search of food, leading to confrontations that can turn deadly.

-AP

## Uttarakhand govt issues Covid advisory

**Dehradun:** Amid the rising number of Covid cases in several states, the Uttarakhand government on Wednesday issued an advisory asking the district administrations to strengthen the monitoring system and ensure availability of oxygen and essential medicines in hospitals.

However, it said the COVID-19 situation is completely normal in the state at present.

Detailed guidelines regarding Covid has been issued in accordance with the instructions of Chief Minister Pushkar Singh Dhami and Health Minister Dhan Singh Rawat, Health Secretary R Rajesh Kumar said in a statement.

Though the situation is normal, a special advisory has been issued for heightened vigilance against potential risks, he said.

The state has reported 16 Covid cases this year, of which six are active cases. No death due to the viral infection has been reported in the state, Kumar said.

Only minor symptoms are being found in the infected and they are recovering at home with normal

**Gujarat logs 119 new COVID-19 cases**

Ahmedabad: As many as 119 new COVID-19 cases were detected in Gujarat, taking the active tally to 508, while no fresh death linked to the infection was reported, said the state health department on Wednesday.

The total count of active COVID-19 cases stood at 508 with the registration of 119 new infections during the last 24 hours. Of these, 18 patients are hospitalised, while 490 others are receiving treatment in home isolation, said a department release. No new death linked to the infection was reported during this period, it said.

The department said 72 patients have been discharged so far following recovery from the viral infection, whose cases have spiked in the last few weeks.

So far, one death has been reported due to COVID-19 in Gujarat after a fresh wave has hit the country.

The Ahmedabad Municipal Corporation has confirmed an 18-year-old woman succumbed to the infection at civic-run LG Hospital on Monday. According to the health department, all the coronavirus cases emerging in Gujarat are of JN.1, LF.7, LF.7.9 and XF.6 variants of the Omicron family, which cause mild fever and cough. There was no need to panic as COVID-19 cases usually see a “rising trend” every 6 or 8 months, it added in the release.



People during Mahesh Navami celebration, at Jagdalpur in Bastar district on Wednesday.

Pic: PTI

## Army officer goes missing

**Sagar (MP):** An Army officer posted in Sagar town of Madhya Pradesh went missing after leaving his residence for a morning walk two days ago, a police officer said Wednesday.

The missing officer, Lieutenant Colonel Pradeep Kumar Nigam, is a resident of Gwalior and currently posted at Mahar Regiment Centre (MRC) in

Sagar, he said.

He went out for his regular walk at around 6.30 am on Monday, but did not return home, police said.

Additional Superintendent of Police Lokesh Sinha told PTI that Army personnel first searched for Lieutenant Colonel Nigam and when they did not find him, lodged a missing person’s complaint at the Can-

tonment police station.

An FIR has been registered and further investigation was on, he said.

“Police and Army teams are searching for him. CCTV footage is being scanned to get clues,” Sinha informed. The Army officer’s family members are being questioned as part of the investigation, he added.

-PTI

## Visitors dine at 140-year-old police station

By DMUKHIM

**Sohra (Meghalaya):** A 140-year-old police station in Meghalaya’s Sohra has undergone a transformation into a trendy cafe, offering delectable and lip-smacking food to visitors at the world’s wettest place.

Established in 1885, the Sohra police station’s erstwhile building is the oldest such facility in Meghalaya, and it had been a dreaded detention centre during the British rule.

But now, ‘Sohra 1885’, or as the cafe is known, has

become a hotspot for foodies and tourists. It offers a unique blend of history and hospitality, as the eatery allows visitors to have their favourite food in lockups turned into a dining area.

The profit made from the establishment is being given for police welfare.

All credit goes to the rank and file of the Meghalaya Police, who supported an idea pitched by East Khasi Hills Superintendent of Police Vivek Syiem when he was a DSP in the area.



“I always wanted to do something with the heritage police station. There are not many such buildings left in the state that have so much of history,”

he told PTI.

“I pitched this idea when I was a DSP,” he said, adding that he knew all along that this heritage site would attract a lot of

visitors.

Soon after, the government started the process of constructing a new police station building to accommodate more personnel, the process of monetising the heritage police station also began.

“Monetisation meant extra income for the force and especially for police welfare activities,” Syiem said, adding that two years ago a formal bidding process for the cafe began to finalise a partner for running the show.

The new partner, a

young entrepreneur, proposed designs to match the heritage building and aptly named the cafe ‘Sohra 1885’.

Nafi Nongrum, the business partner, refurbished the entire building using the British-era items from the old police station.

“We have converted the lockups into a dining area. The visitors are enjoying the ambience,” she said.

The SP said the business partner has done a great job in restoring the old building, leaving the walls and floors as they were.

## Student found dead in hostel room

**New Delhi:** A 25-year-old PhD student at the Indian Institute of Technology-Delhi was found dead inside his hostel room on the campus on Wednesday, police said.

According to the police, the student’s body bore no visible injury marks. However, vomit was found on the floor near the bed, suggesting possible medical complications.

The body has been sent to the Safdarjung Hospital for post-mortem and the exact cause for the death will be clarified after the report comes, they said.

“The incident came to light after a PCR call was received at the Kishangarh police station, claiming a student, hailing from Chandigarh, was not responding to repeated knocks on the door of his hostel room that was locked from inside,” a senior officer said. A team reached the spot and with the help of fire officials, they broke open the door.

“The student was found lying unconscious on the bed. He was declared dead on the spot by doctors present on the campus,” the officer said.

A preliminary inquiry revealed that the student was last seen two days ago



having dinner. As his prolonged absence raised concern among the fellow students, they informed the campus security staff, who alerted the police.

The police said the room was otherwise undisturbed, and there were no signs of forced entry, struggle, or self-harm. Electronic devices found in the room have been seized and will be examined for any relevant data.

A forensic team has been called to the scene to collect evidence and conduct a detailed examination of the room, the officer said. IIT-Delhi has expressed sorrow over the demise of the student. In a statement, the institution said, “IIT Delhi deeply mourns the sad and untimely demise of a second-year PhD student. His body was found in the hostel room today.”

“In this hour of grief, the institute is with the bereaved family and providing all support to them. Delhi Police are investigating the tragic incident,” it said.

-PTI

### QUOTE OF THE DAY

“Large numbers of students planning to go to the US in 2025 may never get to see their aspirations fulfilled. President Trump has made his intentions clear. China has reacted strongly regarding Chinese students. But not surprisingly, our PM and EAM have kept totally quiet.”



Jairam Ramesh, GS, Congress



# Govt reaches out to political parties on Justice Varma’s removal

**New Delhi:** Union Parliamentary Affairs Minister Kiren Rijiju on Wednesday underlined the government’s resolve to take all political parties on board in moving an impeachment motion against Justice Yashwant Varma, saying corruption in the judiciary cannot be approached through a “political prism”.

He said the government wants the exercise aimed at axing Justice Varma, embroiled in a case of alleged corruption and indicted by a Supreme Court-appointed committee, a “collaborative effort”.

Rijiju told reporters here that he has already initiated discussions with all political parties to bring the motion in Parliament’s Monsoon session, starting from July 21, against the Allahabad High Court judge.

He said the government wants all parties to “jointly” move the motion to remove Justice Varma.

Rijiju said he will reach out to smaller parties, while all major parties have already been informed about the plan to bring a motion of impeachment against Justice Varma.

“The government feels that the matter related to corruption is not one political party’s agenda. It is a stand of all parties to fight against the menace of corruption, whether it is the judiciary or any other space,” he said.

The minister underlined that the government would like to take all political parties on board on the issue as corruption in the judiciary cannot be approached through a “political prism”.

He said most parties will revert after discussing the issue internally.



Yashwant Varma

To a query, Rijiju said the decision on whether the motion will be brought in the Lok Sabha or the Rajya Sabha will be taken based on the business of each House.

According to the Judges (Inquiry) Act of 1968, once a motion to remove a judge is admitted in any of the Houses, the speaker or the chairman, as the case may be, will constitute a three-member committee to investigate the grounds on which the removal (or, in popular term, impeachment) has been sought.

The committee consists of the chief justice of India (CJI) or a Supreme Court judge, the chief justice of one of the 25 high courts and a “distinguished jurist”.

Rijiju said the present case is “slightly different” as an in-house committee formed by then CJI Sanjiv Khanna has already submitted its report.

“So what is to be done in this matter, we will take a call,” he said.

The minister said the process has to be followed, but how to “integrate the inquiry already conducted” needs to be decided.

“As per the rule, a committee has

to be constituted and then the committee has to submit a report and the report will be tabled in the House and discussions will start to impeach. Here, a committee has already been constituted, not by Parliament. But it cannot be brushed aside” as it was constituted by the CJI, he said.

Responding to questions that a committee has to be mandatorily formed under the Judges (Inquiry) Act, Rijiju said the speaker will take a decision in this regard.

He said reconciling the report of the in-house panel and the one under law is a “secondary matter”. The primary objective is to bring the impeachment motion.

Rijiju hoped that the removal proceedings will be passed in the two Houses in the Monsoon session beginning July 21 and ending August 12. A fire incident at Justice Varma’s residence in the national capital in March, when he was a judge at the Delhi High Court, had led to the discovery of several burnt sacks of cash at the outhouse.

Though the judge claimed ignorance about the cash, the Supreme Court-appointed committee indicted him after speaking to a number of witnesses and recording his statement.

The then CJI Khanna is believed to have prodded him to resign but Justice Varma dug in his heels. The apex court has since transferred him to his parent cadre, the Allahabad High Court. Justice Khanna had written to the president and the PM, recommending the impeachment motion, which is the procedure for axing members of the higher judiciary from service. -PTI

## Punjab-based YouTuber held

**Chandigarh:** A Punjab-based YouTuber who maintained close contact with Haryana-based influencer Jyoti Malhotra has been arrested, with police on Wednesday saying it has unearthed an espionage network linked to him.

Jasbir Singh, a resident of Village Mahlan in Rupnagar district, who operates a YouTube channel ‘Jaan Mahal’, was found to be associated with a Pakistani Intelligence Operative (PIO), Punjab Director General of Police Gaurav Yadav said.

He was also in close contact with Malhotra who was earlier arrested by Haryana Police on charges of espionage.

“Jasbir Singh, who operates a YouTube channel called ‘Jaan Mahal’, has been found associated with PIO Shakir alias Jutt Randhawa, part of a terror-backed espionage network,” he said in a post on X. He also maintained contact with Ehsan-ur-Rahim alias Danish, a Pakistani national who was expelled as an official of the Pakistan High Commission, Yadav posted.

“Investigations have revealed that Jasbir attended the Pakistan National Day event in Delhi on Danish’s invitation, where he met Pakistani Army officials and vloggers. He travelled to Pakistan on three occasions (2020, 2021, 2024), and his electronic devices contained multiple Pakistan-based numbers, now under detailed forensic scrutiny,” he added.

After Malhotra’s arrest, Singh attempted to erase all traces of his communications with the PIOs to avoid detection.



People gather at the accident site after a truck carrying cement overturned on a van killing at least nine members of a family, in Thandla, Jhabua district on Wednesday. Pic: PTI

## MHA asks states, UTs to help poor prisoners

**New Delhi:** The Ministry of Home Affairs has asked all the states and union territories to provide financial assistance from a Central fund to poor prisoners who are unable to secure bail or release from prison due to non-payment of fine on account of financial constraints.

In a communication, the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) has conveyed to all the states and union territories to avail the funds made available by it from where they can draw an appropriate amount to provide benefits to the eligible prisoners.

Funds to the states and UTs are provided through the Central Nodal Agency (CNA). The National Crime Records Bureau has been designated as the CNA for this scheme.

“As you are aware, the Ministry of Home Affairs had introduced the ‘Support to Poor Prisoners Scheme’ in May, 2023, with the objective of providing financial assistance to states and UTs for extending relief to poor prisoners

who are unable to secure bail or release from prison due to non-payment of fine on account of financial constraints,” the communication said.

However, the MHA said, despite repeated follow-up, funds have remained unutilised as many states and UTs have not identified the eligible prisoners and have not provided the benefit of the scheme to them.

While a few states and UTs have utilised the funds, the overall implementation of the scheme by them has not been very encouraging, it said.

The MHA has already issued guidelines and a standard operating procedure (SOP) for the implementation of the scheme.

As part of the guidelines, states and UTs were advised to constitute an ‘empowered committee’ in each district and an ‘oversight committee’ at the state headquarters level.

According to the guidelines, these committees are responsible for sanctioning financial aid to the eligible prisoners.

The MHA said that during the several conferences held with the states and UTs to review the implementation of the scheme, its importance was consistently emphasised, highlighting its potential to bring relief to the poor prisoners who remain incarcerated due to financial constraints.

“It may be appreciated that effective implementation of the scheme can not only help mitigate the problems faced by the poor prisoners, but also contribute towards reducing overcrowding in prisons.

“The states and UTs are, therefore, requested to make concerted efforts in identifying the eligible prisoners as per the guidelines of the scheme and hold regular meetings of the empowered committees in each district for providing relief to the poor prisoners,” the MHA said.

According to the India Justice Report 2025 released recently, the national average occupancy rate in jails is of more than 131 per cent.

## Assam flood situation grim



**Guwahati:** The flood situation in Assam remained very critical on Wednesday as continuous rain led to a rise in water levels in many parts of the state and inundation in new areas, officials said.

Seven rivers, including the Brahmaputra, were flowing above the danger level, even as the Regional Meteorological Centre (RMC) in Guwahati predicted heavy to very heavy rainfall at isolated places in the state.

Dhubri, South Salmara-Mankachar, Goalpara and Kokrajhar are likely to witness thunderstorms with lightning and gusty wind with a speed of 30-40 kmph, it added.

A report by the Assam State Disaster Manage-

ment Authority (ASDMA) on Tuesday night said that six more people lost their lives in Hailakandi, Sribhumi, Morigaon, Cachar, Sonitpur and Tinsukia districts, and around 6.5 lakh people were affected by the deluge across 21 districts.

The total number of people losing their lives in this year’s floods and landslides has increased to 17. “Heavy rain is taking place in several lower Assam districts since early morning. Many places in Barpeta, Bongaigaon, Nalbari, Goalpara and Baksa have been affected,” an ASDMA official said.

Altogether 6,33,114 people in 69 revenue circles and 1,506 villages in 21 districts remained affected by floods.

The worst-hit district is Sribhumi with 2,31,536 people hit by the deluge, followed by Nagaon with 99,819 flood-hit population and Cachar with 89,344.

Altogether, 223 relief camps are operational, providing shelter to 39,746 displaced people, while another 288 relief distribution centres are also functional. Seven rivers were flowing above the danger level, including the Kakhal overtopping its highest flood level at Matizuri in Hailakandi district. The Brahmaputra river was also flowing above the danger level at several locations.

Road, railway and ferry services have been disrupted at various places across the state. -PTI

## Musk’s father visits Ayodhya’s Ram temple

**Ayodhya (UP):** Errol Musk, father of tech billionaire Elon Musk, visited the Ram temple in Ayodhya on Wednesday afternoon, officials said.

Errol was accompanied by his daughter Alexandra Musk, during the visit to the temple town. The brief itinerary included a visit to the Ram temple followed by a stop at the Hanuman-garhi temple nearby, a police official said.

“Errol Musk is scheduled to visit Ayodhya in the afternoon,” Ayodhya Commissioner Gaurav Dayal told PTI earlier.

“There is already a three-layered high-level security cover in place in Ayodhya, which includes round-the-clock deployment of high-tech anti-drone systems capable of detecting and neutralising unauthorised aerial activity,” a police officer said.

He added that security arrangements in and around the temple area include CCTV surveillance, regular checking of visitors, and deployment of specially trained personnel. -PTI

## Tribals oppose ramp construction near sacred site

### JHARKHAND BANDH

**Ranchi:** Various organisations are observing a Jharkhand bandh on Wednesday to protest against the construction of a ramp, part of a flyover, near Sarna Sthal, a sacred tribal religious site in Ranchi, police said.

Protesters blocked the Ranchi-Daltonganj Road near Biju Para this morning and staged a demonstration as part of the bandh.

Elaborate security arrangements have been made across Jharkhand, especially in the capital Ranchi, police said.

Several organisations took out a torchlight procession here on Tuesday evening, demanding the immediate dismantling of the newly constructed ramp in Siram Toli, claiming that the structure obstructs access to their religious site and could impact its sanctity due to traffic movements.

Their other demands include the protection of religious sites of the ST community in the state,



implementation of the PESA Act and removal of encroachment on tribal land.

The construction of the 2.34-km-long elevated road, which includes a 132-metre stretch over a railway line, will connect Siram Toli to Mecon and is aimed at easing traffic movement in the area.

Tribal men and women gathered at the Jaipal Singh Munda Stadium here and took out the procession on June 3, alleging that the government was ignoring their concerns and sentiments.

They argued that the ramp would disrupt access to the site when thousands gather during religious festivals like Sarhul. The administration has urged protestors not to disrupt normal traffic. The Rs 340-crore elevated road project was launched in August 2022. Earlier on March 22, an 18-hour Ranchi bandh was called, impacting normal life in the capital. During the bandh in March, agitators entered into scuffles with the police in various parts of the city, including in Hinoo and Argora areas, while roads in Harmu, Kanke, Hinoo, Kokar-Lalpur, Kantatoli and other localities

were blocked by them with makeshift bamboo barricades.

The Ranchi-Lohardaga Road was also blocked near Titla Chowk in Ranchi, and the public transportation was severely affected, with city buses and motorised and battery-operated auto-rickshaws not plying on the roads.

Mobile app-based taxi services were also scarce, leaving passengers in a lurch. Travellers had also faced inconvenience, as limited transport options made it difficult for them to reach railway stations or the airport here. -PTI

### QUOTE OF THE DAY

“Narendra Modi can be the PM but the country is not the prime minister. One can be the PM, the servant of the country, but India is known by different names like ‘Jambudweep’, Hindustan, Bharat, India, and not Narendra Modi, nor can it ever be known by that name.”



Pawan Khara, Head, Media and Publicity Department, Cong

## Night safari on cards for Delhi Zoo revamp

By Neha Mishra

**New Delhi:** People will soon be able to enjoy night safaris and explore both the Delhi Zoo and Purana Qila with a single combo ticket as part of a major revamp aimed at transforming the zoo experience.

The night safari plan is part of Phase III of the zoo’s redevelopment, however, its implementation is entirely dependent on the layout and space availability under Phase II, an official told PTI.

The idea is still under exploration in Delhi. Officials further clarified that a night safari requires significant space to recre-

ate an immersive experience.

“If we are unable to create the required setting for a night safari due to space constraints, we may not move forward with it,” the official said.

He added that if there is not enough room, the zoo may repurpose internal areas or even scale down the concept.

“Only after the layout is completed and the space is fixed, will we have a clear idea about whether the night safari and features like the aquarium -- also planned for Phase III -- can be implemented,” the official said.

These additions are dependent on the final layout of Phase II, as



more space will be required for a night safari.

Meanwhile, plans are also being explored for the Purana Qila to have common parking and shared services with the zoo.

Combo ticketing is also under consideration, in which a single ticket would allow visitors to explore both Purana Qila and the National Zoological Park.

According to officials, the modernisation and beautification of the National Zoological Park, which includes a complete redevelopment of both its inner and outer zones, is a highly ambitious plan.

The official said the project will be executed in phases, with Phase I and Phase II proceeding simultaneously.

Most of the components of these phases have already been finalised. Internally, two key priorities have been set: animal welfare and creating a unique visitor experience.

Talking about the plan, the official noted that the Detailed Pro-

ject Report (DPR) stage tends to take time due to the need for multiple approvals and layout finalization.

However, once that stage is completed, the implementation process usually speeds up. The financial planning is also in a stage of progress.

The work related to infrastructure improvements and upgrading Mataru Road is set to begin soon, as the project has reached its final planning stages.

“Things are moving in the right direction. Now that the key issues have been identified, the work is expected to progress smoothly,” the official said.



# India calls for WTO action on non-tariff barriers in Paris

By Rajesh Rai

**Paris:** India has called for action to curb non-tariff barriers, address trade distortions caused by non-market economies, and restore a strong dispute settlement mechanism at the WTO, Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal said on Wednesday.

The minister also pitched for strengthening the current consensus-based approach at the World Trade Organisation (WTO), the special and differential treatment given to less developed countries and developing countries, and bringing back focus on issues that have already been finalised and mandated at previous ministerial meetings.

"India made a strong pitch for addressing non-tariff barriers that certain countries use to deprive others of market access, take necessary action against non-market economies, ensure that we have a strong dispute settlement mechanism at the WTO so that finality can be brought and discipline can be maintained," Goyal told reporters here.

The minister made these remarks in a meeting of about 25 ministers of WTO member countries, including Australia, Singapore, France and Nigeria. WTO Director General Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala also participated in the meeting.

This mini-ministerial informal gathering was



called by Australia ahead of the 14th ministerial conference, scheduled in Cameroon in March next year. It was held on the margins of the OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) Ministerial Council Meeting here. The WTO deals with the global rules of trade between nations. Its main function is to ensure that trade flows as smoothly, predictably and freely as possible. It is a Geneva-based 166-member body.

Since 2009, the WTO's dispute settlement mechanism has not been functioning properly as the US has stalled appointments of members in the appellate body. On earlier occasions, India has pressed for a two-tier dispute resolution system at the WTO.

"All in all, the shared concerns of all the ministers were placed before the gathering today, and we have all resolved to collectively work to strengthen the working of the WTO, to ensure the core principles are respected and work to-

wards global good and global growth in trade," he said.

He added that it was agreed upon by the member nations to make an effort to bring back the mojo into the organisation as all countries recognise the importance of multilateralism.

The other tracks which came up for discussion include resolving agri issues, including finding a permanent solution to the issues of public stockholding for food grains.

"There is the track on finding solutions to address the concerns of over-fishing and indiscriminate fishing that is leading to depletion of fish stocks, there are concerns about several JSIs (joint statement initiatives) (or) plurilaterals, which some countries believe should be brought within the multilateral framework," he said.

On the China-led proposal for an investment facilitation pact, he said, issues that have been man-

dated at the WTO should get priority and should be the first issues to be resolved.

Issues going beyond trade (like this proposal) should not be brought into it as it would create further differences between member countries, he added. India is against this proposal.

Whether any member raised the issue of MPIA (multi party interim appeal arbitration arrangement), the minister said only one or two members spoke about that.

"But there does not seem to be very much consensus or any traction to that idea. I have not heard of any cases resolved through MPIA," he said.

The MPIA is being pushed by certain members. It is an alternative mechanism to resolve WTO disputes that are appealed by a country in the absence of a functional WTO Appellate Body.

Whether the WTO is facing an existential crisis, he said that one should not jump to the conclusion that an existential crisis has been created.

"Challenges will come and situations will arise, we have to address such challenges, face these situations and within the ambit of the WTO framework," he said, adding "the WTO now is about 30 years old, what we need to do is work with an open mind and unlock possibilities".

-PTI

## Markets rebound in early trade

**Mumbai:** Benchmark stock indices Sensex and Nifty rebounded in early trade on Wednesday after three days of decline tracking a rally in global markets.

The 30-share BSE Sensex climbed 230.17 points to 80,967.68 in early trade. The NSE Nifty went up by 70.25 points to 24,612.75.

From the Sensex firms, Bharti Airtel, Eternal, IndusInd Bank, Maruti, Tata Motors and Bajaj Finance were the major gainers.

However, Tata Consultancy Services, UltraTech Cement, Titan and ICICI Bank were among the laggards. In Asian markets, South Korea's Kospi, Japan's Nikkei 225 index, Shanghai's SSE Composite index and Hong Kong's Hang Seng were trading significantly higher. US markets ended in the positive territory on Tuesday.

"The strong fundamental factors that will support the market are India's robust and improving macros and sustained flows into mutual funds, particularly the SIP inflows which are steady and growing. This reflects the coming of age of the Indian retail investor.

An important takeaway from the Q4 results is the outperformance of the midcaps relative to large-caps and small-caps," VK Vijayakumar, Chief Investment Strategist, Geojit Investments Limited, said.

Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) offloaded equities worth Rs 2,853.83 crore on Tuesday, according to exchange data.

Global oil benchmark Brent crude declined 0.32 per cent to USD 65.42 a barrel.

-PTI



Goats being sold at a market ahead of the Eid-ul-Adha festival, in New Delhi on Wednesday. Pic: PTI

## Indian Post to serve MSME

By Abhijit Mulye

**Mumbai:** The Indian Post has graduated from delivering letter from door to door to helping the Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSME) of the country in actively reaching out to their international customers. While on one hand the Indian Post has started services like International Tracked Packets and International Business Parcels, on the other hand they have even entered into agreement with the initiatives of Commerce Ministry like the Federation of Indian Export Organization (FIEO).

Since most of the export related activities are concentrated in the Maharashtra circle of the Indian Post, the Chief Post Master General of this circle Amitabh Singh aims at making the Indian Post the most trusted and easy to

work with export logistics partner of the Indian enterprises for their global outreach.

"Indian Post is metamorphosing itself into an able partner for MSMEs for their logistical needs related to international trade and commerce. For that the Indian Post has updated itself with the needs of international exporters and is preparing to cater to every need of theirs," Singh said as he addressed a group of MSME exporters on Tuesday.

"This is part of our efforts to understand the dynamics of international trade and commerce and gauge the logistics related needs of the exporters like end-to-end tracking, facilities related to customs and global connectivity," he added.

The seminar on Tuesday was also attended by joint

director of FIEO and additional director general of foreign trade (DGFT) among other high-ranking officials from the union ministry of commerce and industries apart from the MSME representatives. They were appraised of various export-related services like the Express Mail Service, which delivers parcels up to 35 kg to 70 countries, International Track Packet services which carry smaller packets up to 5 kg to 46 countries across the globe and International Air Parcel services that deliver parcels up to 20 kg to 135 countries across the globe.

Most of these services are being used by the smaller MSMEs who want to avoid the complicated procedures related to exporting goods and are seeking updated services at competitive costs, Singh said.

## US, Europe trade negotiators discuss tariffs

**Paris:** Europe and the United States are meeting in Paris to negotiate a settlement of a tense tariff spat with global economic ramifications between two global economic powerhouses.

The European Union's top trade negotiator, Maros Sefcovic, met Wednesday with his American counterpart, US Trade Representative Jamie Green, on the sidelines of a meeting of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development.

"We're advancing in the right direction at pace — and staying in close contact to maintain the momentum," Sefcovic posted on social media platform X alongside a photo of him shaking hands with Greer.

Brussels and Washington are unlikely to reach a substantive trade agreement in Paris. The issues dividing them are too difficult to resolve quickly.

President Donald Trump regularly fumes about America's persistent trade deficit with the European Union, which was a record \$161 billion last year, according to the US Commerce Department.

Trump blames the gap



between what the US sells and what it buys from Europe on unfair trade practices and often singles out for criticism the EU's 10 per cent tax on imported cars.

The EU has offered the US a "zero for zero" deal in which both sides end tariffs on industrial goods, including autos. Trump has rejected that idea, but EU officials say it's still on the table.

The EU could buy more liquefied natural gas and defence items from the US, and lower duties on cars, but it isn't likely to budge on calls to scrap the value added tax, which is akin to a sales tax, or open up the EU to American beef.

"We still have a few weeks to have this discussion and negotiation," French trade minister Laurent Saint-Martin said in Paris on Wednesday ahead of the OECD meeting. "If the discussion and negotiation do not succeed,

Europe is capable of having countermeasures on American products and services as well."

Greta Peisch, who was general counsel for the US trade representative in the Biden administration, said the zero-for-zero proposal could provide a way to make progress if the Trump administration "is looking for a reason not to impose tariffs on the EU".

But Peisch, now a partner at the Wiley Rein law firm, wondered: "How motivated is the US to come to a deal with the EU?" Trump, after all, has longstanding grievances complaints about EU trade practices. One target of his ire is the value-added tax, similar to US state sales taxes.

Trump and his advisers consider VATs unfair protectionism because they are levied on US products. But VATs are set at a national level, not by the EU, and apply to domestic and imported products alike, so they have not traditionally been considered a trade barrier. There is little chance governments will overhaul their tax systems to appease Trump.

-AP

## Solar Energy Maruti Suzuki to invest Rs 925 cr

**New Delhi:** Maruti Suzuki India on Wednesday said it plans to invest over Rs 925 crore to expand its captive solar capacity to 319 MWp by FY2030-31.

The car market leader announced the expansion of its solar capacity by 30MWp with two new projects.

The company commissioned a 20MWp solar power project at its new facility in Kharkhoda, Haryana, and added another 10MWp solar capacity to its Manesar facility.

With these additions, the company's solar capacity across its locations has enhanced from 49MWp to 79MWp in the last one year.

"Aligned with our parent company, Suzuki Motor Corporation's Environment Vision 2050 and the Government of India's focus on renewable energy, we are systematically enhancing the use of renewable energy in our operations," MSI MD and CEO Hisashi Takeuchi stated.

By FY2030-31, Maruti Suzuki plans to reach 319MWp of solar capacity, backed by an investment of over Rs 925 crore, he added.

## RBI's monetary policy panel starts deliberations

**Mumbai:** The Reserve Bank's rate-setting panel started its three-day brainstorming on monetary policy as expectations are high of a 25 bps or even a jumbo 50 bps rate cut to fuel economic growth amid uncertainties created by Trump's tariff moves.

The decision of the Monetary Policy Committee (MPC), headed by Reserve Bank Governor Sanjay Malhotra, will be announced on Friday.

The RBI reduced the key interest rate (repo) by 25 bps each in February and April, bringing it to 6 per cent. This could be the third back-to-back reduction in the short-term benchmark lending rate.

In response to the 50-bps cut in the policy repo rate since February 2025, most of the banks have reduced their repo-linked external benchmark-based lending rates (EBLRs) and marginal cost of funds-based lending rate (MCLR).

Experts are of the view that the RBI may reduce the repo rate by 25 bps on Friday and another similar cut in the next policy. However, an SBI research expects the central bank to go



in for a "jumbo" rate cut of 50 bps in June itself. CareEdge Ratings said falling inflation will give the RBI the flexibility to prioritise growth amidst external headwinds.

While growth momentum has improved, challenges like uneven consumption recovery, muted private capex growth, and subdued manufacturing growth remain. CPI inflation is expected to stay comfortable in 2025-26, it said.

"This opens room for further monetary policy easing. We expect the RBI MPC to cut the policy rate by another 50 bps in FY26 (including 25 bps in June), with chances of a deeper rate cut cycle if growth falters," it said.

Deepak Aggarwal, Co-founder and Co-CEO of Moneybox Finance said that with inflation expected to remain below the RBI's 4 per cent target and growth holding steady, the

upcoming MPC meeting presents an encouraging window for a calibrated rate cut.

"A lower interest rate regime, supported by targeted liquidity measures, can meaningfully strengthen credit flow to MSMEs and NBFCs, especially those serving rural and semi-urban regions," Aggarwal said.

Raoul Kapoor, Co-CEO of Andromeda Sales and Distribution, said there are strong indications and widespread expectations that the RBI will implement a third round of rate cut later this week. Should another 25 bps rate cut occur, it would bring the cumulative rate reduction in the calendar year 2025 to a notable 75 basis points.

"The easing of rates not only provides immediate financial relief but also stimulates consumer spending and investment, potentially bolstering overall economic growth. As a result, both existing and potential borrowers can look forward to a more favourable borrowing landscape in the coming months," Kapoor said.

-PTI

## Indian services get boost

**New Delhi:** The Indian services growth broadly steadied in May and was underpinned by healthy demand conditions, new client wins and greater staffing capacity, a monthly report said on Wednesday.

The seasonally adjusted HSBC India Services PMI Business Activity Index was at 58.8 in May, marginally up from April's 58.7 and signaled another sharp rate of expansion.

In the Purchasing Managers' Index (PMI) parlance, a print above 50 means expansion, while a score below 50 denotes contraction.

"India registered a 58.8 services PMI in May 2025, broadly in line with the steady readings from the recent months. Strong international demand continued to fuel services activity, as evidenced by the new export business index's uptick from April," said Pranjal Bhandari, Chief India Economist at HSBC.

New orders rose at a sharp pace largely driven by advertising, demand strength and repeat orders from existing clients.

## Australia's lowest paid workers get 3.5 pc hike

By John Buchanan, University of Sydney

**Sydney:** A week ago, the Australian Financial Review released this year's "Rich List". It reported the number of billionaires in Australia increased from 150 to 166 between 2024 and 2025.

A very different story is happening at the other end of the market. On Tuesday, the Fair Work Commission awarded the lowest paid 20 per cent of wage earners a 3.5 per cent increase as a result of its annual

review.

The commission acknowledged that even with this increase, our lowest paid employees will not be earning as much in real terms as they did before the post-COVID inflationary surge of 2021-22.

### A meagre increase

In Australia it has long been accepted that — all things being equal — wages should move with both prices and productivity.

Adjusting them for inflation ensures their real value is maintained. Ad-



justing them for productivity means employees share in rising prosperity associated with society becoming more productive over time. This "prices plus productivity" model of wage rises is, however, subject to economic circumstances.

In recent times, the key circumstance of concern has been inflation.

Depending on how it is measured it peaked at between 6.5 per cent and 9.6 per cent in 2022-23.

### Controlling inflation

Interest rates were increased to tame the inflation dragon. And all these agencies issued dire warnings about the threat of long-term inflationary pressure if wages were adjusted to maintain lower and middle income earners' living standards.

In its last three decisions, the Fair Work Commission accommodated this narrative. Since July 2021, it ensured that wages for the lowest paid 20 per cent of employees did not keep up with inflation. Unsurprisingly, real wages for award-dependent employees fell.

Because inflation is currently running at about 2.4 per cent, the 3.5 per cent increase marks a modest 1 per cent real wage gain for a worker on or close to the entry level manufacturing tradesperson rates.

### Silver linings?

It is always a judgement call as to what is the appropriate scale of any wage increase.

Given low paid workers were not the source of recent inflationary pressure, it is reasonable to claim now is the time to reverse the recent trends of cutting their real wages.

Whether the increase had to be so modest is something the commission has indicated it is open to considering in future hearings.

-The conversation

### QUOTE OF THE DAY

"The domestic market traded in a narrow range with a mildly positive bias, supported by favourable global cues. Investors are now focused on the RBI policy meeting, with expectations of a rate cut and inflation forecast."



Vinod Nair, Head of Research, Geojit Investments Ltd



South Korea Gets New President

# Lee Jae-myung vows to pursue talks with North; bolster ties with US

**Seoul (South Korea):** South Korea's new President Lee Jae-myung vowed on Wednesday to restart dormant talks with North Korea and bolster a trilateral partnership with the US and Japan, as he laid out key policy goals for his single, five-year term.

Lee, who rose from childhood poverty to become South Korea's leading liberal politician vowing to fight inequality and corruption, formally began his term earlier Wednesday, hours after winning a snap election that was triggered in April by the removal of then-President Yoon Suk Yeol over his ill-fated imposition of martial law late last year.

In his inaugural address at the National Assembly, Lee said that his government will deal with North Korean nuclear threats and its potential military aggressions with "strong deterrence" based on the solid South Korea-US military alliance. But he said he would "open a communication channel with North Korea and establish peace on the Korean Peninsula through talks and cooperation."

He said he will pursue pragmatic diplomacy with neighbouring countries and boost trilateral Seoul-Washington-Tokyo cooperation based on the robust South Korea-US alliance.

"Through pragmatic diplomacy based on national interests, we will turn the



South Korea's newly elected President Lee Jae-myung, center left, and his wife Kim Hea Kyung leave their house in Incheon, South Korea on Wednesday. PIC: AP/PTI

crisis posed by the major shift in global economic and security landscapes into an opportunity to maximise our national interests," Lee said.

Challenges ahead

It was unclear whether Lee's election would cause any major, immediate shift in South Korea's foreign policy. Lee, previously accused by critics of tilting towards China and North Korea and away from the US and Japan, has recently repeatedly stressed South Korea's alliance with the US as the foundation of its foreign policy and avoided any contentious remarks that would raise questions on his views on the US and Japan.

"We'll have to now see if the pressures of office will cause Lee Jae-myung to govern from the center — at least when it comes to

matters of national security and the alliance with the United States," said Ankit Panda, an expert with the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.

The toughest external challenges awaiting Lee are US President Donald Trump's tariff policy and North Korea's expanding military partnerships with Russia. But experts earlier said whoever becomes president cannot do much to secure major progress in South Korea's favour on

those issues.

During his inauguration speech, Lee did not directly mention trade issues with the US.

Allies react

The US and Japan said they congratulated Lee's election and expressed their commitments to developing three-way cooperation.

Japanese Prime Minister Shigeru Ishiba said he wants to hold summit talks with Lee "as early as possible," saying he hopes to further promote bilateral ties,

PM Modi congratulates Lee

New Delhi: Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Wednesday congratulated Lee Jae-myung on his election as president of South Korea. He said on X, "Congratulations to Mr Lee Jae-myung on being elected as the President of the Republic of Korea (ROK). Look forward to working together to further expand and strengthen the India-ROK Special Strategic Partnership."

both public and commercial. The US State Department said that Seoul and Washington share "an iron-clad commitment" to the alliance grounded in their mutual defense treaty, shared values and deep economic ties.

It is unclear how North Korea would react to Lee's speech, as it has shunned any talks with South Korea since 2019.

Political divide

Lee also called for unity to address the country's stark political divide deepened after Yoon's martial law debacle, saying that he will "answer the people's solemn call to let hope bloom over deep and painful wounds."

Lee still promised a thorough investigation into the circumstances surrounding Yoon's martial law imposition, describing it as a "rebellion that seized people's sovereignty with arms."

Lee faces five trials on corruption and other allegations, but experts say those trials will likely stop during his term because the South Korean constitution gives a sitting president immunity from most criminal prosecutions.

Lee also reiterated his campaign vows to reduce inequality and pledged to address the imbalance between the greater Seoul capital area and less developed regions.

-AP



Pope Leo XIV waves as he arrives for his weekly general audience in St. Peter's Square at The Vatican on Wednesday. Pic: PTI

## Pakistan to chair Taliban Sanctions Committee of UNSC

**United Nations:** Pakistan will chair the Taliban Sanctions Committee of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) in 2025 and serve as vice-chair of the Counter-Terrorism Committee of the 15-nation U.N. body. According to a list of chairs of the subsidiary bodies of the UNSC, Denmark will chair the 1267 ISIL and Al-Qaida Sanctions Committee of the UNSC, while Russia and Sierra Leone will be vice-chairs for 2025.

Algeria will chair the 1373 Counter-Terrorism Committee, while France, Pakistan and Russia will be vice-chairs.

Pakistan will chair the 1988 Taliban Sanctions Committee that imposes an assets freeze, a travel ban and an arms embargo on individuals, groups, undertakings and entities associated with the Taliban in constituting a threat to the peace, stability and security of Afghanistan. Guyana and Russia will be vice-chairs of the Taliban Sanctions Committee.

Pakistan will also be co-chair of the Informal Work-

ing Groups on Documentation and on the General UNSC Sanctions Issues.



Pakistan is a non-permanent member of the 15-nation Security Council for the 2025-26 term. The sanctions committees of the Council comprise all 15 members of the Security Council and make its decisions by consensus.

India was chair of the UNSC Counter-terrorism Committee for 2022 during its 2021-22 tenure in the Council as a non-permanent member. India has consistently reminded the international community that Pakistan is host to the world's largest number of U.N.-proscribed terrorists and entities.

Al-Qaeda leader Osama

bin Laden was hiding in Pakistan's Abbottabad for years and was killed in an operation by the U.S. Navy Seals in May 2011. China,

France, Russia, the U.K. and the U.S. are the five permanent members of the UNSC while Algeria, Denmark, Greece, Guyana, Pakistan, Panama, South Korea, Sierra Leone, Slovenia and Somalia are currently in the Council as non-permanent members.

In elections held on Tuesday (June 3, 2025), five new non-permanent members of the UNSC were chosen by secret ballot for a 2-year term starting on January 1, 2026, until December 31, 2027. These are Bahrain, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Liberia, Latvia and Colombia. -PTI

## UN Security Council to vote on Gaza ceasefire resolution

**United Nations:** The UN Security Council scheduled a vote Wednesday on a resolution which demands "an immediate, unconditional and permanent ceasefire in Gaza respected by all parties." UN diplomats said the United States is likely to veto it.

The resolution, drafted by the council's 10 elected members who serve two-year terms, reiterates its demand for the release of all hostages held by Hamas and other groups following their October 7, 2023 surprise attack in southern Israel.

Calling the humanitarian situation in Gaza "catastrophic," the proposed resolution also demands "the immediate and unconditional lifting of all restrictions on the entry of humanitarian aid into Gaza and its safe and unhindered distribution at scale, including by the UN and humanitarian partners."

The vote, scheduled for late Wednesday afternoon, comes amid near-daily shootings following the establishment by an Israeli and US-backed foundation of aid distribution points inside Israeli military zones, a system it says is

designed to circumvent Hamas.

The United Nations has rejected the new system, saying it doesn't address Gaza's mounting hunger crisis, allows Israel to use aid as a weapon, and doesn't comply with the humanitarian principles of neutrality, impartiality and independence.

The draft resolution demands the restoration of all essential humanitarian services in line with those principles, international humanitarian law and UN Security Council resolutions.

Several UN diplomats from different countries, speaking on condition of anonymity Tuesday because discussions have been private, said they expect the United States to veto the resolution.

The US Mission to the United Nations said it had no comment on the draft resolution at this time. Israel's UN Mission did not respond to a request for comment on the draft.

Gaza's roughly 2 million people are almost completely reliant on international aid because Israel's offensive has destroyed nearly all of Gaza's food

production capabilities. Israel imposed a blockade on supplies into Gaza on March 2, and limited aid began to enter again late last month after pressure from allies and warnings of famine.

UN spokesman Stephane Dujarric said Tuesday that the needs in Gaza are enormous, and what's getting into Gaza from the UN "is still just a trickle." Since the complete blockade was partly lifted, he said, just over 620 truckloads have made it from Israel to the Palestinian side of the Kerem Shalom crossing, and only about 370 truckloads — mainly with flour, food and medical and nutrition items — have gotten closer to people in need, with some looted including by armed gangs.

"The unimpeded entry of humanitarian assistance at scale must be restored immediately," Dujarric said. "The UN must be allowed to work in safety and in security under conditions of full respect for humanitarian principles."

Since October 7, 2023, the Security Council has voted on 14 Gaza-related resolutions and approved four.

-AP



Members of the all-party delegation led by Congress MP Shashi Tharoor upon their arrival in Washington D.C. Pic: AP/PTI

## Girl gets humanitarian parole in US

**Los Angeles:** A 4-year-old Mexican girl who receives lifesaving medical care from a Southern California hospital was granted permission to remain in the country weeks after federal authorities said she could be deported, her family's attorneys said Tuesday.

The US Department of Homeland Security granted the girl and her mother humanitarian parole for one year so she can continue to receive the treatment she has been getting since arriving at the US-Mexico border in 2023, according to a copy of a letter received by Rebecca Brown, an attorney for the family.

The decision came after the family said they were notified in April and May

that their humanitarian parole was being revoked and they would be subject to potential deportation.

The Trump administration has been pushing to dismantle policies from President Joe Biden's administration that granted temporary legal status for certain migrants and allowed them to live legally in the US, generally for two years.

The girl was taken to a hospital upon arriving at the US-Mexico border with her mother in 2023 and released once she was stable enough.

She receives intravenous nutrition through a special backpack for short bowel syndrome, which prevents her from being able to take

in and process nutrients on her own, and lawyers said the treatment she receives is necessary at this stage for her to survive and isn't available in Mexico.

Humanitarian parole, which doesn't put migrants on a path to US citizenship, was widely used during the Biden administration.

In Mexico, the girl was largely confined to a hospital because of her medical condition, according to her mother, Deysi Vargas.

After joining a program at Children's Hospital Los Angeles, she can now receive treatment at home in Bakersfield, California, and go to the park and store like other children, lawyers said.

-AP

## Trump revokes emergency abortions

**Washington:** The Trump administration announced on Tuesday that it would revoke guidance to the nation's hospitals that directed them to provide emergency abortions for women when they are necessary to stabilise their medical condition.

That guidance was issued to hospitals in 2022, weeks after the US Supreme Court upended national abortion rights in the US. It was an effort by the Biden administration to preserve abortion access for extreme cases in which women were experiencing medical emergencies and needed an abortion to prevent organ loss or severe haemorrhaging, among other serious complications.

The Biden administration had argued that hospitals — including ones in states with near-total bans — needed to provide emergency abortions under the Emergency Medical Treatment and Active Labor Act. That law requires emergency rooms that receive Medicare dollars to provide an exam and stabilising treatment for all patients. Nearly all emergency rooms in the US rely on Medicare funds.

-AP

The Trump administration announced on Tuesday that it would no longer enforce that policy.

"The Trump Administration would rather women die in emergency rooms than receive life-saving abortions," Nancy Northup, president and CEO of the Center for Reproductive Rights, said in a statement. "In pulling back guidance, this administration is feeding the fear and confusion that already exists at hospitals in every state where abortion is banned. Hospitals need more guidance, not less, to stop them from turning away patients experiencing pregnancy crises."

Anti-abortion advocates, meanwhile, praised the announcement. Marjorie Dannenfelser, president of SBA Pro-Life America, said that the Biden-era policy had been a way to expand abortion access in states where it was banned.

An Associated Press investigation last year found that, even with the Biden administration's guidance, dozens of pregnant women were being turned away from emergency rooms, including some who needed emergency abortions.

### QUOTE OF THE DAY

"If we had 100 nuclear power plants while not having enrichment, they are not usable for us. If we do not have enrichment, then we should extend our hand (begging) to the US."

Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, Supreme Leader, Iran



## Cubans devise ingenious ideas to endure power cuts

By Andrea Rodriguez

**Havana (Cuba):** For Marilyn Alvarez and her family, like countless other Cubans, the question is no longer if the power will go out, but when — forcing them to implement ingenious alternatives to sustain daily life as the island undergoes its most severe energy crisis in decades.

Since December, when the government stopped supplying their cooking gas, the family had relied on an electric burner — until persistent blackouts

made that solution impractical.

"The blackouts are quite severe and, with gas in short supply, I have to be running around to get food on time," said Alvarez, a 50-year-old cosmetologist living with her husband and two teenage daughters in the populous Bahía neighborhood in Havana.

But what happens when even the electricity is gone — a reality for several days a month and often for hours each day? That's when the family's ingenuity truly kicks in: with no gas and no

power, they turn to their charcoal stove.

Leisure time also requires creative solutions. Alvarez's husband, Ángel Rodríguez, an auto mechanic, found a way for the family to catch up on their beloved telenovelas even during blackouts. He ingeniously assembled a television using an old laptop screen and an electric motorcycle battery.

"It doesn't last very long," Rodríguez said. "But it's good enough for my family to watch TV or have some entertainment."



Electricity cuts, a problem for months, have intensified in recent weeks due to persistent fuel shortages at power plants and aging infrastructure. With summer's rising demand approaching and no apparent solution in sight, families face a grim outlook.

"We do our best," Alvarez said.

Cuban President Miguel

Díaz-Canel recently acknowledged that power outages are among one of his government's biggest challenges.

In the last eight months alone, Cuba has experienced four total blackouts, plunging the entire island into darkness.

Highlighting the nation's severe energy deficit, Díaz-Canel said last week that while electricity demand soared from 2,580 megawatts in March to 3,050 in May, availability barely increased, rising only from 1,790 megawatts in March

to around 1,900 these days.

In the meantime, Cubans must continue to find ways to navigate the crisis.

In the outskirts of Havana, 45-year-old blacksmith Edinecor Vázquez is busier than ever, serving a growing clientele of less affluent families.

Vázquez makes charcoal stoves from metal scraps that he sells for around USD 18 — the equivalent of a Cuban state worker's monthly salary — but he says he offers discounts to low-income families.

-AP



EDITORIAL

Tribal Calculus

The Maharashtra government’s decision to carve out a dedicated State Tribal Commission (STC), separate from the existing combined Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes body, may seem long overdue. After all, the Centre has maintained distinct commissions for these two historically disadvantaged communities for years. The question is not whether this move was justified - it almost certainly is. The more pressing question is: why now?

The official explanation is bureaucratic symmetry. Since New Delhi has had separate commissions for SCs and STs, Mumbai ought to mirror the model. Yet this belated alignment comes not in a vacuum but against the backdrop of renewed and intense anti-Maoist operations across the volatile tri-junction of Maharashtra, Chhattisgarh and Telangana - a region where tribal discontent has often proven fertile ground for insurgency.

Over the past fortnight, security forces have killed at least 30 Maoists in this region, including top commanders and cadres, in a string of violent encounters. Surrenders, too, are on the rise. Besides intense operations in Chhattisgarh, Maharashtra’s Gadchiroli district, long a flashpoint, saw another bloodbath when four Maoists were recently gunned down and a fresh stockpile of arms and Naxal literature recovered. The point is to assume that the creation of the STC against this backdrop is entirely unrelated would seem naive.

This is not to suggest the commission is a counter-insurgency tool in disguise. Rather, it is an attempt, however belated, to project the optics of inclusion, institution-building, and constitutional fidelity in a region where the state’s presence has too often been synonymous with the gun barrel. Tribal discontent in central India is rarely about ideology and primarily about land, displacement and the absence of genuine representation. In this context, the establishment of a commission devoted to Scheduled Tribes could serve both as a pressure valve and a political signal.

The move also reflects the growing political clout of tribal legislators in Maharashtra, given there are 25 in the state assembly and four in the Lok Sabha. These numbers are no longer electorally negligible. In recent years, tribal legislators have grown more vocal. This commission is, in part, the Mahayuti’s response to that appeal and also an effort to pre-empt further alienation of a voting bloc that helps swing seats in an increasingly competitive political landscape. That said, what tribal communities need is not another layer of bureaucracy but consistent implementation of the Forest Rights Act, targeted health and education services and a halt to exploitative displacement. The state’s track record on these counts remains patchy at best.

Furthermore, will this commission have investigative powers? Will its recommendations be binding? Or will it be another advisory body mired in red tape and underfunded in practice, like many of its predecessors?

Still, the Devendra Fadnavis-led Mahayuti government appears keen to show the permanence of governance in the state’s tribal pockets. Whether tribal communities see this as a genuine gesture or yet another arm’s-length sop will depend not on cabinet resolutions but on results.

Beyond Plastic: Reimagining Our Stewardship on World Environment Day



By  
Dr. Kishore Paknikar

Every year on June 5, World Environment Day invites the global community to reflect on the condition of our planet and on our own role in shaping it. Since 1972, this United Nations-led observance has evolved into the largest international platform for environmental advocacy, sparking initiatives and dialogues across continents. This year, hosted by the Republic of Korea, the spotlight falls on one of the most persistent environmental threats of our age: plastic pollution.

Plastic is everywhere. It has reshaped industries, revolutionised packaging, transformed healthcare and made modern life more convenient. But this convenience has come at a staggering ecological cost. Plastics, especially single-use items, are now embedded in every corner of the Earth - from the ocean floor to mountain peaks, from agricultural soils to human lungs. Over 11 million tonnes of plastic waste enter aquatic ecosystems each year. Microplastics, often invisible to the eye, have been detected in blood samples, placental tissue, breast milk and even clouds.

This is not just a litter problem. Plastics are deeply entwined with fossil fuels. Nearly all conventional plastics are derived from petrochemicals, and their production, distribution and degradation generate significant greenhouse gas emissions. One tonne of virgin plastic can result in nearly six tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub>-equivalent emissions over its life-cycle. Open burning of plastic waste - still widespread across parts of Asia and Africa - releases toxic fumes, endangers human health and contributes to atmospheric warming. In soils, plastic residues alter microbial communities and hinder nutrient cycling. In oceans, plastics entangle marine life, damage coral reefs and leach chemicals that travel up the food chain. All this results in massive ecological disruption.

India offers both a cautionary tale and a source for solutions. With over 1.4 billion people and rapidly growing urban centres, India generates around 26,000 tonnes of plastic waste each day. Though regulatory frameworks such as the Plastic Waste Management Rules (2016) and the Single-Use Plastics Ban (2022) mark important steps, implementation remains inconsistent. Estimates suggest that only a small amount of plastic waste is effectively recycled with much of the rest ending up in landfills, rivers or unregulated dumpsites. And yet, India is also home to remarkable innovations and grassroots movements that can inspire global models.

Consider the work of Professor Rajagopalan Vasudevan in Tamil Nadu, who pioneered the use of shredded plastic in road construction. These plastic-bitumen roads are more durable, cost-effective and weather-resistant. In Mumbai’s Dharavi, local women’s cooperatives transform waste plastic into decorative and utilitarian items, thus simultaneously reducing landfill burden and supporting livelihoods. Pune’s ecobrick movement, where citizens compress plastic waste into PET bottles to create modular building blocks, shows how ordinary people can engineer extraordinary solutions. These examples underscore the potential of decentralised,



community-led innovation in tackling global challenges.

But innovation must be supported by systems. India’s emerging circular economy vision holds promise. Digital platforms like Recykal are transforming how producers meet their Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) obligations by enabling end-to-end tracking of plastic waste across states. Deposit-refund mechanisms, already piloted in states like Uttarakhand, are restoring value to waste materials and encouraging responsible consumer behaviour. What is crucial now is to scale these efforts.

Addressing plastic pollution also demands moral clarity. The burden of mismanaged plastic does not fall equally. Marginalised communities, coastal populations and informal waste workers bear the brunt of exposure to toxic waste. India’s estimated five million waste pickers - many of them women and children - play a vital role in recycling, yet remain socially invisible and economically insecure. Any transition to cleaner alternatives must be just and inclusive.

Urbanisation intensifies the challenge. Cities like Delhi, Bengaluru and Mumbai generate vast quantities of plastic waste daily. Municipal authorities must move beyond ad hoc clean-up drives and build integrated waste management systems that prioritise segregation at source, decentralised composting, material recovery and clear accountability frameworks.

More than just bad habits, plastic pollution exposes flawed ideas of limitless growth and throwaway consumption. For years, development followed a linear path of extract, use, discard by ignoring ecological limits. That model has reached its breaking point. World Environment Day calls for a shift: from material accumulation to sustainability, equity and justice for future generations.

From global plastic treaty talks to local circular solutions, the momentum is building but it needs resolve. Citizens must shun single-use plastics, industries must design sustainably and policymakers must choose long-term planetary health over short-term gains.

As someone who has had the privilege of working at the interface of science, technology, and policy for decades, I believe that change often begins quietly - in classrooms, in homes, in local governments. It builds through networks of trust, through evidence-based dialogue and through the courage to challenge unsustainable norms.

Let this World Environment Day not be an annual ritual of regret but a renewed commitment to regeneration. The plastic crisis is not insurmountable; it is a design flaw, a policy gap and above all, a cultural habit. All of these can be changed. What we need is not another reminder but a collective decision to act.

The Earth is not a landfill. It is a living trust passed on to us by past generations, and entrusted to us by those yet to be born. We owe it far more than clever slogans or selective bans. We owe it our stewardship.

(The author is the former Director, Agharkar Research Institute, Pune, Visiting Professor IIT Bombay and Chair, Water Technology Initiative, Department of Science & Technology, Government of India. Views personal)

GLOBAL WATCH

Red Card in Warsaw



In a dramatic result, Karol Nawrocki, a nationalist historian backed by the right-wing Law and Justice party (PiS), narrowly won Poland’s presidential election. With 50.89 percent of the vote, Nawrocki edged past Rafał Trzaskowski, the liberal mayor of Warsaw and the government’s candidate, in a stunning reversal that has thrown Prime Minister Donald Tusk’s fragile reformist coalition into a defensive crouch. What should have been a consolidation of Poland’s liberal revival has become a moment of reckoning. Observers say the results could stall Tusk’s ambitious pro-European agenda and plunge the country into renewed political trench warfare.

Though largely ceremonial, the presidency in Poland carries a potent veto power. As in France’s Fifth Republic, cohabitation between president and parliament can either yield pragmatic compromise or deadlock. For the past 18 months, Tusk’s coalition had navigated a tense cohabitation with outgoing president Andrzej Duda, himself a PiS loyalist. Trzaskowski’s defeat means that Duda’s political clone will now continue to wield the veto pen, an impediment Tusk can ill afford as he tries to reverse a decade’s worth of democratic backsliding.

Nawrocki, 42, a former head of the Institute of National Remembrance, campaigned on an unabashedly nationalist and Eurosceptic platform. His past, replete with property scandals and allegations of orchestrated street fights, only seemed to burnish his appeal among conservative voters disillusioned with what they perceive as an out-

of-touch liberal elite. His win was celebrated not only in PiS circles but also across the Atlantic as US President Donald Trump hailed him as a “winner” on Truth Social, highlighting Nawrocki’s ‘spiritual’ affinity to Trump.

The scale of the challenge facing Tusk is immense. His coalition came to power pledging to restore the independence of courts, liberalise abortion laws and mend ties with Brussels. With Nawrocki in the presidential palace, most of that programme risks being torpedoed by veto. Overriding a presidential veto requires a 60 percent supermajority in parliament, something Tusk does not have and is unlikely to gain.

The stakes extend well beyond Poland. As Europe grapples with war in Ukraine, tensions with China, and uncertainty in Washington, the cohesion of the European Union is being tested. Poland, long a linchpin of NATO’s eastern flank and a frontline state in the response to Russia, has been drifting into the Eurosceptic camp. Nawrocki’s election signals a likely deepening of ties with Viktor Orbán’s Hungary and other anti-Brussels regimes, further complicating EU unity on matters ranging from migration to judicial reform.

This latest phase of Poland’s political saga is the culmination of a broader historical struggle between two visions of the nation. One is cosmopolitan and liberal, aligned with Brussels and anchored in a post-

Cold War consensus of European integration. The other is nationalist and revisionist, drawing from Poland’s romanticised past, wary of foreign influence, and obsessed with sovereignty. The Law and Justice party, which ruled Poland from 2015 until late 2023, embodies the latter. It used its years in power to pack the courts, politicise the media and wage a culture war over ‘traditional’ values - all in the name of defending Polish identity.

The 2023 parliamentary elections were supposed to mark a turning point. Tusk’s victory was hailed in Western capitals as the beginning of a democratic renaissance. But as this week’s presidential vote reminds us, political inertia in Poland is hard to overcome.

Poland now enters a period of uneasy cohabitation, where the president and parliament pull in opposite directions. With a hostile head of state, a bitter and organised opposition, and mounting external pressures, Tusk’s government must now govern by negotiation and not ambition.

Poland’s modern history is a pendulum swing between openness and isolation, between liberal reform and conservative backlash. Nawrocki’s win is not the end of Tusk’s experiment, but it is a blow. What remains to be seen is whether Poland, and by extension the European Union, can find a path through the resulting stalemate or whether the past, once again, will get in the way of the future.

STATES WATCH

A High-Altitude Compromise

When Ladakh was cleaved from the former state of Jammu & Kashmir on August 5, 2019 and made into a Union Territory without a legislature, many locals greeted the change with suspicion. The region, strategically perched between China and Pakistan and culturally distinct from the rest of India, was promised prosperity, development and preservation of its identity. Instead, what followed were years of administrative stasis, mounting local frustration and a growing chorus of protest demanding constitutional safeguards.

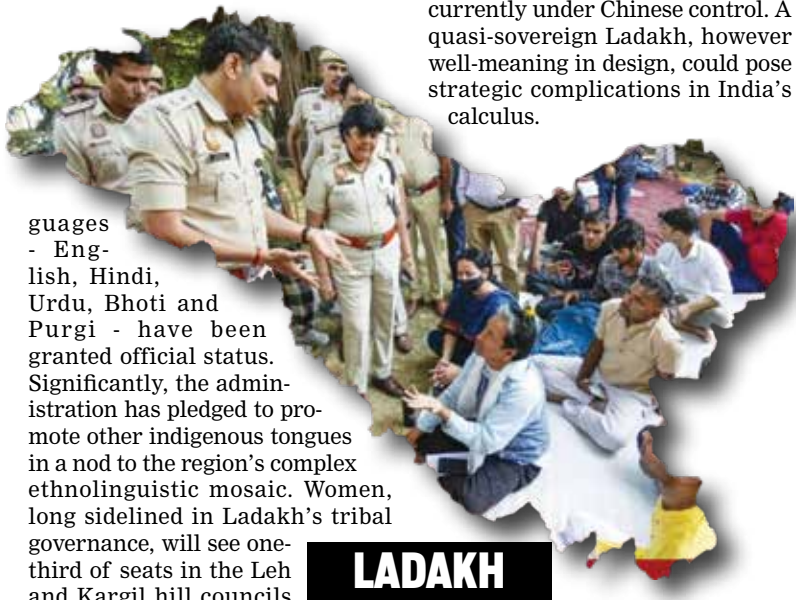
Now, nearly six years later, the Indian government has finally moved to address some of these concerns by issuing a sweeping set of regulations that touch nearly every nerve of Ladakh’s demand for self-preservation. The new rules, which follow a series of marathon negotiations between Union home ministry officials and Ladakhi civil society groups, represent the most comprehensive restructuring of Ladakh’s administrative framework since its formation as a Union Territory.

The most eye-catching provision is an 85 percent reservation for local residents in government employment. The rules mimic, almost word for word, the 2020 domicile law introduced in Jammu & Kashmir. To qualify as a Ladakhi domicile, one must prove 15 years of continuous residence since October 31, 2019 (the day Ladakh became a UT), or demonstrate seven years of study and appearance in key school examinations in Ladakh. Children of central government officials serving in the UT for at least a decade are also included.

On the cultural front, five languages - English, Hindi, Urdu, Bhoti and Purgi - have been granted official status. Significantly, the administration has pledged to promote other indigenous tongues in a nod to the region’s complex ethnolinguistic mosaic. Women, long sidelined in Ladakh’s tribal governance, will see one-third of seats in the Leh and Kargil hill councils reserved for them.

These measures come in the wake of intense pressure. Ladakh’s post-2019 experience has been anything but tranquil. Public services stagnated, unemployment soared and Ladakhi voices grew louder. The Apex Body Leh and the Kargil Democratic Alliance - coalitions of trade unions, political parties, and religious leaders - galvanised widespread protests in Delhi and across Ladakh. Last year, the region was paralysed by a 66-day hunger strike and general shutdown spearheaded by climate activist Sonam Wangchuk. The protests demanded statehood, a separate Lok Sabha constituency, and inclusion under the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution - an instrument that provides significant autonomy to tribal regions through legislative and executive councils.

What Delhi has now offered is a halfway house. The reservation and domicile regulations may quell anxieties over demographic dilution and job loss, but they fall short of the Sixth Schedule’s promise of self-rule. That omission is deliberate. Delhi remains wary of granting tribal autonomy to a sparsely populated, geopolitically sensitive region that borders a restive Xinjiang and the disputed Aksai Chin plateau,



currently under Chinese control. A quasi-sovereign Ladakh, however well-meaning in design, could pose strategic complications in India’s calculus.

The Centre’s approach to Ladakh mirrors its evolving Kashmir policy: centralisation first, followed by calibrated devolution to douse local unrest. In Jammu & Kashmir, this took the form of new land and job laws, coupled with curbs on dissent. In Ladakh, the absence of a legislative assembly has meant that civil society groups, rather than political parties, have become the primary interlocutors.

The new rules are not insignificant. For the youth of Ladakh, who have faced a recruitment freeze since 2019, the promise of job security is a lifeline. For tribal communities, the recognition of languages and women’s representation in hill councils signals a revival of cultural pride. But the deeper question of self-governance remains unresolved.

The Himalayas are no strangers to compromise. From the semi-autonomous hill councils in Darjeeling to the Sixth Schedule enclaves of the Northeast, India’s federal experiment has often relied on bespoke arrangements to balance local identity with national integrity. Ladakh, with its altitude and aspiration, now joins this uneasy league. The view from the top may be spectacular but the political terrain remains perilous.





**KALEIDOSCOPE**

1. Women of the Maheshwari community carry 'kalash' filled with River Ganga water to offer to Baba Kashi Vishwanath during a procession on the occasion of Mahesh Navami, in Varanasi.
2. 70-year-old woman Mahadei carries drinking water in pots during summer at Negi Guda village in Bastar district on Tuesday.
3. Farmers protest against the Punjab Government over a village land allotment dispute, demanding a resolution in Patiala on Wednesday.
4. An artist makes a live painting during the IPL final match between Royal Challengers Bengaluru and Punjab Kings in Ahmedabad on Tuesday.
5. Tibetan spiritual leader the Dalai Lama leaves after the end of a 'Long Life Prayer' offered to him at the Tsuglagkhang Temple in McLeodganj, Dharamshala on Wednesday.

All Pictures: PTI, AP

BEYOND NUMBERS

A Surplus of Strength



By  
Amey Chitale

In the month of May 2025, India witnessed key economic milestones. The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) approved a record Rs. 2.69 trillion surplus transfer to the government while strengthening provisions for future risks. Its annual report, released on 29th May 2025, provides insights into India's economic outlook, underscoring RBI's financial strength and the economy's resilience.

RBI's assets are divided into two key departments, namely the Banking Department, which manages government accounts, public debt, and banking services, and the Issue Department, which oversees currency issuance, supply regulation, and security. In FY 2024-25, the RBI's balance sheet expanded by 8.2 percent, reaching an unprecedented level of Rs. 76.25 lakh crores. Of this total, 52 percent of the assets belonged to the Banking Department, with the remaining assets allocated to the Issue Department.

The total balance sheet expansion was driven by a 52.09 percent rise in gold reserves to Rs. 6.68 lakh crores, alongside a 14.2 percent increase in domestic investments, mainly in government securities, reaching Rs. 15.59 lakh crores. Foreign investments saw only a modest uptick of 1.7 percent, totalling Rs. 48.83 lakh crores. With gold reserves now accounting for 9 percent of total assets, up from 7 percent in FY 2024, the RBI has strengthened its hedge against currency fluctuations amid geopolitical uncertainties and U.S. dollar volatility.

Domestic government securities now

India's central bank delivers record profits and resilience while its global peers struggle to stay afloat.



account for 18.7 percent of total assets, enhancing the RBI's ability to manage liquidity through open market operations. This has helped absorb excess foreign portfolio inflows while maintaining stable bond yields. Foreign currency assets increased marginally by 1.7 percent, reflecting a cautious stance on global debt markets. The RBI's forex reserves stand at approximately US\$654.27 billion, covering 11 months of imports. While 65 percent remains dollar-denominated, holdings in euros (12 percent), yen (7 percent), and SDRs (6 percent) provide diversification against potential sanctions or dollar liquidity issues. A US\$48 billion net forward book (7.3 percent of reserves) adds a buffer against speculative currency attacks, ensuring liquidity during balance-of-payments pressures.

Additionally, to minimize mark-to-market losses amid rising global interest rates, the RBI has prioritized short-duration U.S. Treasuries, with 60 percent of its forex reserves invested in instruments maturing within three years.

The liability side saw a 6 percent rise in currency circulation, reaching Rs. 36.89 crores from Rs. 34.78 crores. With the phased withdrawal of Rs. 2000 notes, 98.2 percent had been returned by March 25. The Rs. 500 note now accounts for 86 percent of total circulation value, enhancing transaction efficiency. Despite the increase in currency circulation, its share relative to the balance sheet has declined by 1 percent.

The revaluation account, now Rs. 12.4 lakh crore or 16.3 percent of liabilities, cushions mark-to-market volatility without affecting the surplus, which is based solely on realized gains.

RBI's total income rose by 22.77 percent to Rs. 3.38 lakh crores, up from Rs. 2.76 lakh crores in the previous year.

This growth was driven by higher U.S. Treasury yields (4.8 percent vs. 3.2 percent in FY 2024) and strategic forex swaps during rupee appreciation in Q3 FY 2025, contributing Rs. 34,000 crore. Active forex interventions stabilized the Rupee-US\$ exchange rate, reducing currency risk in international trade.

The RBI's record Rs. 2.69 lakh crore transfer (0.8 percent of GDP) created fiscal room for infrastructure without deepening the deficit. Meanwhile, a surge in gold reserves has helped buffer dollar volatility, but with a gold-to-forex ratio still below the global average and 64 percent of non-gold assets exposed, the RBI remains vulnerable to a dual shock in gold and dollar markets.

The RBI's performance stands out remarkably compared to major central banks across developed economies. With an asset growth of 8.2 percent, RBI leads the pack, surpassing the European Central Bank (ECB), the US Federal Reserve (Fed), Bank of Japan (BoJ), Bank of England (BoE), Reserve Bank of Australia (RBA) and Bank of Canada (BoC) - none of which witnessed positive asset growth. RBI also reported the highest net income among these institutions, reaching US\$ 31.5 billion, significantly ahead of the BoJ's US\$ 15.7 billion. In contrast, the Fed and BoE posted substantial losses of US\$ 77.5 billion and US\$ 40.5 billion, respectively.

The RBI holds the strongest risk buffer among major central banks, far surpassing peers like the Fed and BoE. Its blend of record profits, operational independence and agile policymaking has cemented its reputation for resilience and macroeconomic stewardship.

(The author is a Chartered Accountant with a leading company in Mumbai. Views personal.)

EXPLAINER

What to know about Hajj 2025

Muslims from around the world are in the Saudi city of Mecca for the Hajj, one of the Five Pillars of Islam. In the coming days, people will immerse themselves in religious rituals and acts of worship that originated more than 1,400 years ago.

They also have to contend with excess heat and other earthly factors, like a ban on children under the age of 12 and a crackdown on unauthorised entry.

Here's what to know about this year's Hajj:

Beating the heat

Last year's pilgrims struggled through burning sun and suffocating hot weather, with the mercury hitting 47 degrees Celsius (117 degrees Fahrenheit). More than 1,300 people died.

This year, Saudi authorities are advising caution in direct sunlight, telling pilgrims to avoid going out during the day and uncovering their heads, except for rituals, unless necessary.

An official safety kit emphasizes the importance of light-coloured clothing and umbrellas. It also has details on recognising and treating the symptoms of dehydration and heat exhaustion.

But it is tough to avoid the heat and crowds when the Hajj is outdoors. It is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for many, elevating the personal stakes further, and temperatures in Mecca are already 41 degrees Celsius (about 106 Fahrenheit).

Although the desert kingdom spends billions of dollars on crowd control and cooling, the volume of pilgrims and climatic conditions make it difficult to guarantee people's safety.

Ban on kids under 12

Saudi Arabia has banned children under 12 from this year's Hajj — one of the biggest policy changes in recent years.

Riyadh reportedly introduced the ban as a precautionary measure to ensure children's safety during the pilgrimage,

which could be a dangerous environment for them because of the huge crowds.

Children are exempt from doing the Hajj and are not required to fulfill other Islamic obligations, like prayer and fasting, until they reach puberty.

But that does not stop some parents from wanting to take their children to experience the Hajj and see the holiest site in Islam, the Kaaba, the black, cube-shaped structure that is the focal point for daily prayers.

There is no official age breakdown for pilgrims, but most are between 35 and 64.

Lowering the cost

The price of a Hajj ranges from \$4,000 to \$20,000, depending on the length of the stay, level of comfort, and country of departure. Depreciating currencies, high inflation, and tax hikes in Saudi Arabia also have an impact on how much Muslims end up paying.

The countries that typically send the most pilgrims are developing nations. Some have trimmed the price of government-backed Hajj programs to make them more affordable. But this step is not always enough.

Farid Ahmed Majumder, secretary general of the Hajj Agencies Association of Bangladesh, said the country was allowed to send some 1.27 million pilgrims this year but failed to meet this quota, mainly because of higher costs.

Pakistan has reduced the price of the state-run Hajj programme. It has also debuted a flexible payment system.

Farmer and small business owner Zaheer Ahmad said he did not have enough money to pay for his Hajj upfront, 1.2 million rupees or about \$4,255.

He paid in three installments, applying for the Hajj in December with an advance and finishing his payments in February. "Otherwise, I might not have been able to go for Hajj at all," he said.

In Saudi Arabia, which has also introduced flexible payments, domestic pilgrims pay 20 per cent within 72 hours of booking, another 40 per cent during Ramadan and the final 40 per cent the following month.

**Managing overcrowding**

Although the Hajj is a once-in-a-lifetime obligation, people do not want to wait a lifetime to fulfill it. But the Hajj has limited capacity, countries have set quotas, and there is only one time each year to do it. Patience really is a virtue and everything needs to align: availability, health and finances.

Muslim-majority countries like Indonesia and Malaysia have decades-long waiting lists for the Hajj. Indonesia has 5.4 million people awaiting their turn, with the number increasing each year.

While there is nothing to stop people from performing the Hajj more than once, some governments believe this practice deprives others of the opportunity, especially in countries where demand is high.

India has a ban on "repeaters" and excludes applications from anyone who has previously performed the pilgrimage through the national Hajj committee, although there are exceptions from those accompanying certain categories of people like the elderly.

With a restricted supply of Hajj spaces, it is inevitable that people will try to find ways to get to the holy city and stay there.

In April, to curb unauthorised Hajj pilgrimages and control inbound travel, Saudi Arabia suspended the issue of short-term visas for 14 countries: India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Egypt, Indonesia, Iraq, Nigeria, Jordan, Algeria, Sudan, Ethiopia, Tunisia, Yemen and Morocco.



# 'It's right up there but still five notches below Test cricket'



**Ahmedabad:** It's right up there with the "best moments" of his storied career but Virat Kohli would still rank the IPL trophy, won after 18 years of toil, five notches below his Test achievements as he believes the longest format is the one that earns a player respect.

The 36-year-old, who retired from Tests last month, won the IPL for the first time when his franchise Royal Challengers Bengaluru edged past Punjab Kings by six runs in the season finale on Tuesday night.

"You know, this moment is right up there with the best moments I've had in my career. But it still marks five levels under Test cricket," an emotionally overwhelmed Kohli told the tournament



broadcaster.

"That's how much I value Test cricket. And that's how much I love Test cricket," he added.

Considered the biggest promoter of the red-ball cricket in the past decade, Kohli urged youngsters to respect Test cricket and chase greatness in that format for a lasting legacy.

"So I would just urge the youngsters coming through, to treat that format with respect. Because

if you perform in Test cricket, you walk around anywhere in the world, people look you in the eye and shake your hand and say, 'well done, you played the game really well'.

"So if you want to earn respect in world cricket all over, take up Test cricket, give your heart and soul to it," added Kohli, whose Test career yielded 9,230 runs in 123 appearances.

Kohli was seen hugging and celebrating with former teammates A B de Villiers and Chris Gayle, both of whom left the franchise without winning the coveted trophy. He walked into the dressing room with de Villiers and joyously declared that the heartbreak corner no longer existed in it.

"Finally, that's the heartbreak corner no more. It is very difficult to explain man. I am just re-

lieved," he said with his franchise captain Rajat Patidar looking on.

"(It's a) full bunch of match winners, people stepping up at different stages and putting their hand up to get the job done for the team. I am just happy I could do it with RCB.

"These guys are a different mindset," he added.

### Tears of joy, relief

Kohli was not as composed when the moment of triumph hit him in the team dugout.

After Josh Hazlewood had bowled his second delivery of the 20th over, an emotionally choked Kohli kissed the Motera turf and later stated that he had given his "youth, prime and experience" to the team.

"I've tried to win it every season, gave it everything

### Kohli deserves it more than anyone else: Patidar

**Ahmedabad:** After 18 years of hurt and disappointment, when newly-crowned IPL champions Royal Challengers Bengaluru skipper Rajat Patidar got a chance to say "Ee Sala Cup Namdu" (this year the cup is ours), the fans roared. But when he said that "Virat Kohli deserved it more than anyone else", the cheers were deafening as the legend grinned from ear to ear.

"It is really special for me, for Virat Kohli,

and all the fans. Those who have supported for years, they all deserve it. It's a great opportunity for me and a great learning for me to captain Kohli, he deserves it more than anyone else," Patidar said after the final here on Tuesday. Patidar felt that 190 was a par score on a strip which was on the slower side. He praised Player of the Match Krunal Pandya for his 2/17 that became the game-changer.

I have," the modern great said, articulating his thoughts quite clearly despite the heavy emotions.

Commentator Matthew Hayden asked him where he would place his first IPL Trophy in the list of

achievements that includes the ODI World Cup, the T20 World Cup and Champions Trophy

recently.

"Well, it's right up there, if I have to be honest. As I said, I've given everything that I had for the last 18 years. I've stayed loyal to this team, no matter what. I've had moments where I thought otherwise, but I stuck to this team. I stood behind them, they stood behind me.

"And I always dreamt of winning it with them. And this is far more special than winning it with anyone else because my heart is with Bangalore, my soul is with Bangalore." -PTI

### RCB adamant to get a good bowling attack: Flower

By Devarchit Varma

Acquiring a lethal bowling attack in the mega auction and picking players with experience were "huge first steps" in Royal Challengers Bengaluru's march to their maiden IPL title, said head coach Andy Flower.

RCB defeated Punjab Kings by six runs in the final here on Tuesday to end their long wait in the 18th edition of the tournament, and Flower said it all began with the franchise making the right moves in the auction last year.

"The auction is a huge first step that you've got to try and get as right as possible and (as a) part of (team director) Mo's (Mo Bobat) philosophy right up front, was to distribute the value a little more equitably rather than spending too much on big-name batsmen who are, of course, very fine players," Flower told the media after RCB's title win.

"The importance of a good bowling attack was acknowledged absolutely adamantly right at the start before the auction and we worked towards that."

The win also helped batting great Virat Kohli fulfil his dream of winning an IPL title.

"I know after the first day of the auction, we were coping a little bit of flak. People thought that we were investing our money rather than spending it. But it meant that there was some really good value to be had on the second day," the former Zimbabwe captain said.

Flower counted the players RCB added to their roster during

the auction in November at Jeddah, Saudi Arabia.

"We had the money to then spend on that value. We got guys like Bhuvu (Bhuvneshwar Kumar), Krunal (Pandya), Tim David, Romario Shepherd on that second day so that was really important," he said.

"Suyash Sharma has done really well for us — our little leg spinner. I thought he has handled himself really well through the season.

"Krunal is a big match player and a great competitor and that spell today (Tuesday) was the major difference between the teams," said Flower of Pandya, who returned match-winning figures of 4-0-17-2.

Flower said having players with experience of competing in big matches also came in handy for RCB.

"We talked about that yesterday when we were in our planning meetings and earlier this evening in the huddle before the game started. We had a good group of experienced cricketers in our team," he said.

"Guys like, obviously, Virat (Kohli), (Josh) Hazlewood, Krunal Pandya, a big part of their recruitment was their experience. Hazlewood has played in World Cup finals before. He has played in big matches and big tournaments, as has Virat. "Krunal, this is his fourth IPL win so it was crucial recruiting them in the first place. The auction is a huge step in the right direction if you can get it right," Flower added.

He said the total of 190/9 wasn't a huge score but they trusted their bowling attack to deliver on the night.

### Spain beat England 2-1

**Barcelona:** World champion Spain beat European champion England 2-1 in the UEFA Women's Nations League in their last competitive game before the Lionesses defend their title next month.

Spain substitute Cláudia Pina turned the game around by scoring twice within minutes of coming on in the second half on Tuesday after England led thanks to Alessia Russo's goal in the 22nd.

Barcelona forward Pina struck in the 60th and 70th minutes at Espanyol's stadium to ensure Spain topped their Nations League group despite losing 1-0 to England at Wembley Stadium in February.

"The second half, they started really quick," England coach Sarina Wiegman said.

"They pressed even higher. We had some trouble to get out of the press and keep the ball."

Spain, which also beat England in the 2023 Women's World Cup final, advances to the semifinals in October. The draw is made Friday and will involve defending champion Spain, France, Germany and Sweden. -AP

### Nakamura defeats Gukesh

**Stavanger:** American GrandMaster Hikaru Nakamura broke world champion D Gukesh's run of classical wins by comprehensively beating the Indian to earn three full points even as Arjun Erigaisi roared back to contention with victory over Fabiano Caruana in Norway Chess 2025.

India's Erigaisi trapped his opponent Caruana in a time scramble in the eighth round of the prestigious tournament on Tuesday. World No. 2 and former Norway Chess champion Nakamura pressed home the early advantage he got with the white pieces to dominate his 19-year-old opponent and score a "very smooth" victory and take revenge for his Round 3 loss to the Indian.

Gukesh, who had regained his mojo after a disappointing start to the tournament when he beat world No.1 Magnus Carlsen and Erigaisi in Round 6 and 7 respectively, was cornered by Nakamura, who didn't give his opponent an inch during the course of the nearly four-hour-long contest.

With two more rounds to go, Gukesh was tied for third place with Nakamu-



ra on 11.5 points, while American GM Caruana, despite the loss to Erigaisi, was in the lead with 12.5 points. Carlsen, who lost to China's Wei Yi in the Armageddon tie-break, was second with 12 points, while Erigaisi was fifth with 10.5 points.

"It was a very smooth game, I'm very happy with it. It looks very good," said Nakamura after the win. The 37-year-old Nakamura, winner of the 2023 edition of Norway Chess in which Gukesh finished third, said that the reigning world champion was uncomfortable with the pawn structure, which probably resulted in him coming under time pressure and giving an easy win to the American.

"I'm not sure what happened, whether Gukesh just didn't know this bish-

op g6 move, or what exactly it was, but it was very clear to me that, based on the long think, he didn't like the pawn structure at all," said Nakamura, who at 15 years of age had become the youngest American GM.

### Humpty regains lead

Two-time world rapid champion, India's Koneru Humpy wrested back the lead with two rounds to go, beating Spanish International Master Sara Khadem in the day's only classical win.

Humpty, on 13.5 points, was one point ahead of reigning world champion China's Ju Wenjun. Ju's six-match winning streak was broken by R. Vaishali - who is fifth on 9.5 points - in the Armageddon tie-break.

-PTI

### French Open Musetti beats Tiafoe

**Paris:** Lorenzo Musetti used his sleek one-handed backhand and sprint-thenslide court coverage to reach his first semifinal at the French Open, and second at a Grand Slam tournament, by beating Frances Tiafoe 6-2 4-6 7-5 6-2 in the same stadium where he won a bronze medal at last year's Olympics.

When the match ended on Tuesday, Musetti, a 23-year-old Italian, rolled up his green shirt's right sleeve and flexed his biceps. No. 8 seed Musetti and No. 1 Jannik Sinner — who faces unseeded Alexander Bublik in the quarterfinals Wednesday — gave Italy two male quarterfinalists at Roland Garros for the first time since 1973.

Tiafoe hadn't dropped a set on the way to the quarterfinals. But he wasn't up to the task against Musetti, a semifinalist at Wimbledon in 2024. Tiafoe missed all eight first serves in his initial service game and sent a backhand wide to give Musetti a 2-0 lead. Tiafoe looked at his coach, David Witt, and complained about the wind.

-AP

### European US Kids Golf Champs Danish leads successful Indian campaign

**London:** Chandigarh's Danish Verma led a successful Indian campaign at the US Kids Golf European Championships this week, winning the boys U-13 title at the iconic Royal Musselburgh Golf Club in Scotland.



The Indians claimed one gold medal, one silver, two bronze and another Top-10 finish.

Verma was one of numerous Indians to make it to the podium as Nihal Cheema finished runner-up in the boys 8 years. Ahana Shah in the girls 9 years and Naaysha Sinha was third in the girls 8 division were also among medals.

Most of the Indian medalists have finished on the podium in other events in the recent past.

For both Danish and Ni-

hal, their careers have been shaped by coach Jesse Grewal.

Danish, who also won the US Kids Thailand Championships, has been consistent. He shot rounds of 70-72-69 and his final round 69 was bogey free.

The Longniddry Golf Club proved a happy hunting ground for some of the Indian youngsters.

Nihal Cheema with rounds of 35-38-34 and a total of 106 lost narrowly to Rinto Oake of Japan (35-35) who totalled 105.

Naaysha Sinha of Noida shot rounds of 41-35-41 in the three nine-hole rounds at Longniddry Golf Club, where Brianna Yang of Great Britain won the girl 8 title. In girls 9 section, Ahana Shah who carded 37-37-39 in her three rounds was runner-up as Jay Kang of the US won.

Danish was also picked for the Red Team for the European Van Horn team competition and in his match, where he teamed up with Luke Lapone of the US, they tied it with Zach Gammon of France and Caleb Pickett of UK of the Blue Team.

### Ponting praises Kohli

By Devarchit Varma

**Ahmedabad:** An emotional Virat Kohli dropping to his knees in tears showed how much he yearned for the IPL title over the last 18 years and how much winning the tournament means to players, concluded Punjab Kings' head coach Ricky Ponting.

Kohli got emotional towards the end of the IPL final here on Tuesday in which his team Royal Challengers Bengaluru defeated Punjab Kings by six runs to lift their first ever trophy since the tournament's inaugural edition in 2008.

"You can see in his eyes in that last over, he was shedding a tear, that's what it means to players, that's what it means to everyone," Ponting told the media after the final," Ponting stated.

"Chennai (Super Kings) have won it a few times, Mumbai (Indians) have won it a few times, but it's not an easy tournament to win — it is as simple as that — and you have to think long and hard about that. It's not easy to win this thing," he added.

-PTI

## MUMBAI INTERNATIONAL CHESS Tournament to start from June 16

By Correspondent

**Mumbai:** The Aurionpro Mumbai International Grandmaster Chess Tournament is back after a five-year sabbatical.

It is scheduled from 16th to 24th June at the prestigious World Trade Centre, Mumbai.

Organised by the Indian Chess School, the tournament features an International Open Grandmasters Chess event and an Under-13 tournament, touted as the highest prize money tournament in the World for juniors.

This tournament has been the brainchild of Praful Zaveri, founder of Indian Chess School and is sponsored by Aurionpro Solutions Limited.



Sagar Shah, Pravin Thipsay, Praful Zaveri, Sachin Salian, Ninad Kelkar, Aakruti Bagwe at the launch of the Aurionpro Mumbai International Chess Tournament 2025.

The Grandmaster Open has attracted entries from 19 countries

with 19 GMs already registered. This tournament is a good hunting ground

for those aspiring to complete their title requirements by garnering

norms and even for those seeking fresh norms. Players can also enhance their rating strengths with fine performances without pinching their pockets in playing overseas events, said Zaveri.

This junior event has attracted 70 children from six countries, which include one (woman international master) Oshini from Sri Lanka and five Indian age-group national champions, Aansh Nerurkar, Avirat Chahan, Madhavendra Sharma, Samuel Stephen, Vairaj Sogerwal and Saranya Devi.

Young chess players from across India and abroad will be competing in four age categories: Under-7, Under-9, Under-11, and Under-13.

National champions will receive free entry and accommodation, while

national school champions will get free entry, making the tournament accessible to the country's brightest emerging talent.

Reigning World Champion, 19-year-old, GM Dommaraju Gukesh was the winner here in 2018 and GM Raunak Sadhwani ranked 50th in the World in the recently released July FIDE Ratings had won the inaugural edition in 2016.

GM Pranav Venkatesh after winning the 2nd edition in 2017 is the reigning World junior Champion.

Other prominent players who played in these events from 2016 to 2020 and made their mark in international chess include World number 3 GM Arjun Erigaisi, GM Aditya Mittal, GM Leon Mendonca and IM Divya Deshmukh.