



Spotlight on Rohit, Pant as Mumbai Indians take on Lucknow Super Giants

India Thailand support free open inclusive rules-based order in Indo-Pacific: PM Modi

"Anupam Kher sir will always be my Guru...": Neil Nitin Mukesh



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51,958 power outages over 5 hours in AAP tenure, claims Ashish Sood



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Waqf board turned land mafia, but 'Mafiagiri' won't be tolerated in UP: CM Adityanath

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Waqf board turned land mafia, but 'Mafiagiri' won't be tolerated in UP: CM Adityanath

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**MARKET**

SENSEX	NIIFTY
76024.51	23165.70
-1,390.41	-353.65
GOLD	SILVER
90,588.00	99,437.00
468.00	-628.00

**WEATHER**

Sunrise	6:11 AM
Sunset	6:40 PM
Moonrise	8:43 AM
Moonset	11:25 PM
Today's Prediction	
Maximum	36°C
Minimum	21°C
Tomorrow's Prediction	
Maximum	38°C
Minimum	21°C

## Trump slaps 26% reciprocal tariffs on India, 34% on China

The proposed US policy of raising tariffs is the 'regulatory arbitrage' crutch that the US is offering its businesses. It is the laziest form of arbitrage.

India is already negotiating a bilateral trade agreement with the US. The two countries are aiming to finalise the first phase of the pact by fall (September-October) of this year.

Washington  
US President Donald Trump announced a 26 per cent "discounted reciprocal tariff" on India, half of the 52 per cent levies imposed by India on American goods, as he described India as "very, very tough."  
"This is Liberation Day, a day we've been waiting for a long time. 2nd April 2025 will forever be remembered as the day American industry was reborn, the day America's destiny was reclaimed, and the day we began to make America wealthy again, going to make it wealthy, good, and healthy," Trump said on Wednesday in remarks from the Rose Garden at the White House as he announced the closely watched reciprocal tariffs on countries that impose levies on American goods.



iffs they charge on US products, saying, "For decades, our country has been looted, pillaged, raped and plundered by nations near and far, both friend and foe alike. American steelworkers, auto workers, farmers, and skilled craftsmen.

They really suffered gravely. They watched in anguish as foreign leaders stole our jobs. Foreign cheaters ransacked our factories, and foreign scavengers tore apart our once-beautiful American dream."

long remarks on a cold Wednesday late afternoon in the Rose Garden, Trump listed various countries from around the world and the tariffs they charge on US products, saying, "For decades, our country has been looted, pillaged,

raped and plundered by nations near and far, both friend and foe alike. American steelworkers, auto workers, farmers, and skilled craftsmen. They really suffered gravely. They watched in anguish as foreign leaders stole our jobs. Foreign cheaters ransacked our factories, and foreign scavengers tore apart our once-beautiful American dream."

Let me offer just a few examples of the vicious attacks our workers have faced for so many years. The United States charges other countries only a

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## JKAS transfers: LG-Omar clash looms as CM calls meet



Srinagar  
A showdown is looming between Jammu and Kashmir Lt Governor Manoj Sinha and the nearly six-month-old government over the transfer of bureaucrats and other issues, prompting Chief Minister Omar Abdullah to convene on Friday an urgent meeting of MLAs belonging to the ruling National Conference and supporting parties.

transfer of 48 bureaucrats belonging to the Jammu and Kashmir Administrative Service (JKAS) by the L-G two days ago led to the latest flashpoint between the Raj Bhavan and the Abdullah government which regards the transfers as violative of the legal and administrative framework under the Jammu and Kashmir Reorganisation Act.

Such orders undermine the functioning and authority of the elected government, Abdullah asserted in the letter. Agency

## Will empower Muslim women: Govt tables Waqf Bill in Rajya Sabha

New Delhi  
Union Minority Affairs Minister Kiren Rijiju on Thursday rejected the opposition's allegations that the rights of Muslims were being snatched away.



While tabling the Waqf (Amendment) Bill, 2025 in the Rajya Sabha, he also clarified that the "inclusive" legislation aims to empower Muslim women and protect the rights of all Muslim sects.

Some of the opposition MPs in the Upper House were wearing black as a mark of protest against the bill.

The Lok Sabha passed the bill with a 288-232 vote in the early hours of Thursday after over 12 hours of debate.

## Blow for Mamata as SC cancels appointment of 25,753 teachers

New Delhi  
In a major blow to the West Bengal government, the Supreme Court on Thursday invalidated the appointment of 25,753 teachers and staffers in the state-run and aided schools, calling the entire selection process "vitiated and tainted".



A bench comprising Chief Justice of India (CJI) Sanjay Kumar and Justice Sanjay Kumar upheld a Calcutta High Court verdict of April 22, 2024, annulling the appointments and said the tainted candidates should refund their "salaries/payments received".

have denied the selection process beyond repair and partial redemption. The credibility and legitimacy of the selection are denuded," said the 41-page judgement authored by the CJI.

**HIGHLIGHT**

The top court gave relief to such employees who were not in the category of tainted candidates and had previously worked in other state departments or with autonomous bodies.

ments were the result of fraud, this amounts to cheating. Therefore, we see no justification to alter this direction."

## US tariffs: India not in a hurry, to follow wait and watch approach

New Delhi  
India will wait and watch the situation emanating from the imposition of additional import duties by the US on the global trade and not take any action in a hurry as America may itself face problems from its domestic industry, government sources said.

The official said there are both challenges and opportunities for India as many of its competitor countries in exports, such as China, Vietnam, Bangladesh, Cambodia and Thailand, face higher duties.



not rush to conclusion that this is it for the future. We need to see what is there in store on their side," one of the

sources said. The duties announced by the US are aimed at cutting down its trade deficit and boost manu-

facturing. On the 27 percent duty on India, they added that only 6-7 sectors like shrimp and carpet could face challenges from the steep taxes, but majority of other sectors like pharma and electronics would get opportunities to increase shipments as competitor nations would face higher duties than India.

As per rough calculations, about 25 per cent of India's exports have got exemptions from taxes and the rest have "mixed scenarios". Agency

## Stalin to challenge Waqf Bill in SC, gets AIADMK support



protest. The CM, who came to the Assembly wearing a black badge to protest against the passing of the Bill, said adopting

the amendment at 2 am 'at the behest of a few allies' despite the opposition of the majority parties in India, "is an attack on the structure of the Constitution."

"This is an act that disturbs religious harmony. To highlight this, we are participating in today's Assembly proceedings wearing black badges," the chief minister told the House. "I would like to inform you that a case will be filed in the Supreme Court on behalf of the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) against this controversial amendment. Agency





# Delhi Assembly to install 500 kVA solar capacity will save Rs 15 lakh per month: Speaker Gupta

**New Delhi**  
Delhi Assembly is targeting to set up 500 kVA capacity solar panels in 100 days to save a monthly electricity bill of Rs 15 lakh, Speaker Vijender Gupta said on Thursday.

Addressing a press conference a day after the conclusion of the budget session, Gupta said that the Assembly will promote solar energy to send a message to the people to adopt it and ensure zero bills against electricity consumption.

"The Assembly needs around 600 KW of power and it has two solar plants with 100 KW capacity each. The installed solar power



capacity will be increased to fulfill our energy needs fully with solar power," Gupta said.

"The solar panels will be

installed on the roof and vacant open spaces at the Assembly, he said.

He said the Assembly has also targeted to go paperless

before the monsoon session under the National e-Vidhan Application (NeVA) project. A media desk will be set up and equipped with

25 computers, an internet connection, and printers.

Gupta said that in the 40 days of the formation of the new government in Delhi, two sessions were held and properly concluded.

"The seven-day budget session was conducted for a record 27.56 hours. Gupta said that the budget tabled on March 25 was discussed for 7.13 minutes by 36 members, including those from Opposition AAP.

The only calling attention motion accepted in the session was from the Opposition, he said.

"The motion was moved to discuss power cuts.

"It's, however, surprising that despite being on the Assembly premises,

they did not attend the discussion on their motion. I want to ask the Opposition why (they) did not attend the discussion while lying that they were stopped from speaking on the issue of power cuts," the Speaker said.

He said the Opposition will have to answer about this in the next session. Gupta asserted that "politically motivated" disruptions by the Opposition were "sternly" dealt with as the last option during the budget session.

In a first, one day of the session was fixed for private members resolutions. A record 98 matters were raised under the special mention rule, the Speaker

said.

Eight reports of the Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) on the performance of the previous Delhi government were also tabled in the House, but the Opposition did not take part in the discussions, he said.

Resolution under Rule 107 was also passed in the session, disposing of over 300 matters taken up by committees of the previous Assembly that were carried forward to the newly constituted eighth Assembly, he said.

Celebration of the Hindu New Year for the first time in the Assembly was yet another achievement, he asserted.

## New Delhi station stamped Shunted DRM gets new posting in Patiala

**New Delhi**  
Sukhwinder Singh, who was removed as the divisional railway manager from Delhi Division after a stampede at the New Delhi Railway Station, has been transferred to Patiala Locomotive Works.

Sukhwinder Singh "on being relieved from the post of DRM/DLL, should be transferred to PLW (Patiala Locomotive Works) and posted in the cadre", according to an order of the Railway Board dated April 1. The Railway Ministry had shunted out five officials earlier on March 4 in four separate orders following the stampede on February 15 that killed 18 passengers at the New Delhi Railway Station.

Four officials, including Singh, have got fresh postings in different departments and divisions in the Railways.

Mahesh Yadav, who was removed as the station director, has been reassigned as the deputy chief operation manager (DyCOM) for Freight Operations Information System (FOIS) at the Northern Railway Headquarter in New Delhi.

Anand Mohan, the second official shunted out from the position of senior divisional commercial manager (Sr DCM) for passenger services (PS) in the Delhi Division, has been posted as the deputy chief operation manager of coaching (DyCOM Cg) at the Northern Railway Headquarter in New Delhi.

Mahesh Chand Saini, posted as assistant security commissioner of Railway Protection Force at the New Delhi Railway Station, was sent to Kota soon after his removal order.

Vikram Singh Rana, who was removed from the post of additional divisional railway manager (ADRM), is yet to get a fresh posting.

The officials said these positions are considered "punishment postings" as they do not have any significant role or authority over rail operations.

## DMRC to operate and maintain three corridors of Chennai metro

**New Delhi**  
The Delhi Metro Rail Corporation has been awarded a contract by Chennai Metro Rail Limited (CMRL) to operate and maintain three corridors of its Phase-II project, a statement issued on Thursday said.

The Delhi Metro Rail Corporation (DMRC) will oversee day-to-day operations across the three corridors, which span 116.1 km and include 112 stations.

This includes the management of six double-decker stations, the Operation Control Centre (OCC), depot control centre, station operations, train services and the maintenance of both trains and metro infrastructure, the statement said.

The first section of Chennai Metro Phase-II is expected to become operational by December 2025, with full completion scheduled in phases by December 2028, it stated.

The contract covers Corridor-3 (Madhavaram Milk Colony to Siruseri SIPCOT-II - Indigo Line), Corridor-4 (Lighthouse to Poonamallee Bypass - Orange Line) and Corridor-5 (Madhavaram Milk Colony to Sholinganallur - Red Line) along with maintenance depots at Madhavaram, Poonamallee and Semmancheri, it read.

The agreement will remain in effect for 12 years, starting from the commercial operation date of the final stage of Phase II, the DMRC said in the statement.

A formal kick-off meeting was held earlier on Wednesday at the CMRL's headquarters in Chennai.

The meeting was attended by DMRC Managing Director Vikas Kumar, Director (Operations and Services) Amit Kumar Jain and other senior officials, it added.

## Healthy Liver, Healthy Life" session takes place at Adarsh Auditorium, Delhi police



Ajeet Kumar Noida

CEO Lokesh M. of the Noida Authority launched Ten Truck Mounted Anti Smog Gun Machines and one HOMOSEP ROBOT Sewer Clean Machine.

The machines were funded by the National Clean Air Program and provided by HCL Foundation through CSR funds.

Each anti-smog truck can hold seven thousand liters of water and includes sprinklers on the sides and front, with an anti-smog gun at the back for spraying up to thirty meters to reduce air pollution.

Additionally, there are pressure gun pipes for various cleaning tasks.

The HOMOSEP ROBOT will clean sewer main holes safely, addressing clogged drains more efficiently. Each anti-smog truck costs forty-five lakhs.

It attracted senior Delhi Police officers, PFWS team leaders, and police family members, with over 430 attendees present and many joining remotely through social media.

Each anti-smog truck can hold seven thousand liters of water and includes sprinklers on the sides and front, with an anti-smog gun at the back for spraying up to thirty meters to reduce air pollution.

# AHP Rolls Out the Red Carpet for Hospitality & Tourism Excellence

**New Delhi**

The Association of Hospitality Professionals (AHP) hosted the curtain raiser for its prestigious 'AHP Hospitality & Tourism Awards', marking the beginning of an elevated version of this much-anticipated celebration of excellence in the hospitality and tourism industry. Held at The Surya, Sampan Terrace, New Friends Colony, New Delhi, the event was an evening of inspiration, gratitude, and strategic industry advancements.

The distinguished gathering brought together leading figures from the hospitality and tourism sectors, including hoteliers, restaurateurs, travel professionals, and hospitality aspirants, reinforcing AHP's commitment to recognizing and celebrating outstanding achievements within the industry. A few notable attendees included Mr. Gresh Bindra, Vice President of The Surya, Vice President of The Arora, Vice President of The Park Hotel & Resorts; Mr. Amit Lohani,



President of the Forum of Food Importers; Mr. Naseer Abdullah, Indian Veteran Actor; and Mr. Saumitra Chaturvedi, General Manager of Novotel City Centre, among others. The Surya, as the hospitality partner, played a key role in curating an exceptional experience for the attendees.

"The event highlighted the inspiring journey of AHP, tracing its evolution as a leading voice for hospitality professionals. It also witnessed the launch of the AHP Platinum Card in India, a landmark initiative designed to offer exclusive

privileges and benefits to AHP members, further strengthening professional networks and industry collaborations. The evening included a heartfelt gratitude commemoration, dedicated to honoring industry leaders, mentors, and professionals who have made exceptional contributions to the field of hospitality and tourism.

Ms. Devipshita Gautam, Founder and General Secretary of AHP, expressed her gratitude for this new chapter in AHP's journey. She said, "This occasion marks a significant milestone for AHP as we take

forward our AHP Hospitality & Tourism Awards to new heights. This initiative not only recognizes the dedication and excellence of hospitality professionals but also strengthens the industry's role in driving economic growth and employment. The launch of the AHP Platinum Card is a testament to our commitment to offering unparalleled opportunities to our members. We look forward to an exciting future filled with innovation, collaboration, and excellence in hospitality."

The Association of Hospitality Professionals, a registered nonprofit organization under the Act of 1860, continues to uphold its mission of enhancing the industry's image and fostering industry-wide collaboration. With a vast membership encompassing hotels, restaurants, airlines, hospitality aspirants, suppliers, trainers, consultants, and allied associations, AHP remains at the forefront of industry advocacy and professional growth.

## AAP MP Meet Hayer raised concerns about procurement of crops in the Parliament

**Staff Reporter New Delhi**  
During the zero hour in Parliament, Gurmeet Singh Meet Hayer, MP from the Aam Aadmi Party representing Sangrur, raised concerns about the procurement of crops.

He called for the commission rate for Arhtiyas (Commission Agents) on wheat and paddy to be reduced to two and a half percent of the Minimum Support Price (MSP), which was the rate before 2019-20. He emphasized the need for this change due to rising inflation and the protests by Arhtiyas,

which have affected crop procurement in Punjab.

Meet Hayer also urged for an increase in "spe-



Meet Hayer also urged for an increase in "spe-

cials" for Punjab to help speed up the lifting of paddy from storage facilities. He highlighted that previously, paddy was collected from Punjab by March or April, but now, six months later, the situation remains unresolved.

This delay has worsened storage problems, causing significant financial losses for farmers. He pointed out that many sheller owners are struggling as a result, with some forced to close their businesses.

He stressed the importance of a quick solution to ensure a smoother procurement season.

MCD to set up night market near Salingarh Fort vendors to operate daily

**New Delhi**  
The Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD) plans to set up a night market near the Salingarh Fort next month, allowing street vendors to sell food daily from 6 pm to 10 pm.

The market will not have any permanent structures, ensuring that vendors bring their carts during designated hours and remove them afterward.

"Vendors will bring their carts, sell during specific hours, and take them back. There will be no permanent construction at the site," an MCD official said.

## PMO trying to remote control elected Rekha Gupta govt : Delhi Congress

**Staff Reporter New Delhi**  
Delhi Pradesh Congress Committee president Dhandev Yadav here on Thursday alleged that the PMO was trying to remote control the elected Rekha Gupta government through a high level committee. At the direction of the Prime Minister, a high level committee has been formed to co-ordinate with various departments to monitor the functioning of the Gupta government, which shows that the BJP's Central leadership have little faith in the elected government to run an efficient

and development driven government, he added.

Yadav said that the fact that deputy chief minister Parvish Verma, who has been made the chairman of the apex committee constituted by the PMO, was an indirect attempt to weaken the authority of CM Gupta.

He said that the elevation of Parvish Verma was an attempt to make him "Super CM" which will only create chaos and confusion in the government to no different from the earlier, corrupt AAP government, which only indulged

in blame games to cover up its failures.

Yadav said that when the Congress was in power both in Delhi and at the Centre, the Central leadership never imposed its will on the Sheila Dikshit government, as it allowed the Delhi government to carry out unprecedented development works with full freedom by giving the necessary approvals including the Delhi metro, without needless restrictions in the government, which enabled a seamless functioning of the Central and Delhi governments with full coordination and cooperation.

Over 100 seized vehicles gutted in fire at Delhi Police' Nehru Place yard

## Over 100 seized vehicles gutted in fire at Delhi Police' Nehru Place yard

**New Delhi**  
Over 100 vehicles seized by the Delhi Traffic Police were gutted in a fire that broke out in a police malkhana (yard) in Delhi's Nehru Place on Thursday afternoon, police sources said.

An FIR has also been registered in the matter to probe if there was any foul play involved, he said.

A call was received at 2:02 pm regarding the fire in Nehru Place, an official of the Delhi Fire Services said.

Initially, the DFS had said that fire was in about

50 vehicles including two wheelers, three wheelers and cars in malkhana in open area.

However, with the cooling process still ongoing, sources in the police said that it has been estimated that over 100 vehicles were gutted in fire.

"Initially we had rushed six fire tenders to the spot and it has been reported that some case properties have also been burnt," he said.

The source further said that more than 100 vehicles were gutted in the fire that has now been doused.

"It took more than three hours to douse the flames completely. The matter was immediately informed to the police for further investigation. Though cooling operations are underway," said the official of the DFS.

Sources said that the yard belongs to Delhi Traffic Police and officials from the traffic headquarters soon rushed to the spot to check the number of affected vehicles.

Sources in the Delhi Traffic Police said that reports indicate that a large number of two-wheelers

and four-wheelers, including accidental vehicles, that were seized by the traffic police were stored in this yard.

As soon as the fire erupted, thick plumes of smoke spread across the area, visible from a distance. The blaze was so intense that it rapidly engulfed several vehicles.

No compensation for damages will be provided in cases of burnt vehicles and only insurance money can be claimed, if any, a senior police officer said.

The cause of the fire is yet to be ascertained.



are pressure gun pipes for various cleaning tasks. The HOMOSEP ROBOT will clean sewer main holes

safely, addressing clogged drains more efficiently. Each anti-smog truck costs forty-five lakhs.

Punjab Will rebuild farmers' agitation says SKM Non-Political leader Dalawal

# Punjab CM vows to restore pristine glory of the state

Chandigarh: Punjab farmer leader Jagjit Singh Dalawal on Thursday said farmers will rebuild their agitation, accusing the AAP government in the state of "betraying" them by evicting the protesters from Shambhu and Khanauri border points in a police crackdown.

Dalawal is a senior leader of the joint forum of the Samyukt Kisan Morcha (SKM) (Non-Political) and the Kisan Mazdoor Morcha (KMM). He is on an indefinite hunger strike since November 26 last year to press the Centre to accept their demands including a legal guarantee to provide Minimum Support Price (MSP) for crops.

Dalawal started taking medical aid at the Khanauri protest site after the Centre invited the farmer leaders for talks in January but he did not end his fast. He was discharged from a private hospital in Patiala on Thursday. He later went to his native village in the Faridkot district.

Speaking to reporters in Patiala, he said it has never happened that on one side, meetings are taking place with the government and on the other side, farmers were detained by the police after the meeting.

"The government which betrayed us may uproot the agitation but not my heart. Our effort is to rebuild this agitation. The two forums will sit together and discuss how to take it across the country," said Dalawal.

On the Punjab police action against farmers, Dalawal said the state government not only "backstabbed" the agitation but also "backstabbed" the people of Punjab as this fight was for saving the state's water.

Dalawal reiterated that his indefinite fast would continue till the farmers' demands including a legal guarantee to MSP for crops were met.

The farmer leader said following the Punjab Police's action against farmers on March 19, he had refused to take water and medical aid till the detained farmers were released.

Ludhiana: Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Singh Mann on Thursday asserted that after three years of clearing the mess left by previous regimes, his government is now focused on restoring the state's pristine glory.

Addressing a gathering at the inauguration of the World Skill Campus of Excellence in Ludhiana, comprising the newly renovated Industrial Training Institute (ITI) and the Multi Skill Development Centre (MSDC), Mann criticized past governments for their regressive policies that hindered the state's progress. He stated that his administration has prioritized holistic development and the prosperity of Punjab's people since assuming office.

The Chief Minister highlighted that his government has fulfilled almost all guarantees made to the public, even exceeding some of them. He took a swipe at the BJP-led NDA government for frequently in-



creasing toll rates, whereas his government has shut down 17 toll plazas across Punjab.

Mann lamented that out of 153 blocks in Punjab, water levels in 117 had depleted to a critical level due to past negligence. However, he noted that his government has revived 15,947 water courses, ensuring water reaches even the re-

motest villages. He also emphasized that Punjab now provides free electricity to 90% of households and has acquired a power plant from a private firm to ensure surplus power. The plant has been named after Sri Guru Aman Dass Ji, the third Sikh Guru.

The Chief Minister stated that Punjab maintains communal harmony and a conducive industrial environment, attracting investments worth Rs 97,000 crore in the past three years. Major companies such as Tata Steel and Sanatan Textiles have chosen Punjab as their investment hub due to its robust infrastructure and skilled workforce. He stressed that his government aims to create job opportunities

for the state's youth, steering them away from drug abuse, with 55,000 government jobs already provided. Mann asserted that the drug mafia, previously protected by past governments, is now facing a full-scale crackdown. His administration has seized properties of drug peddlers and encouraged public participation in the fight against drugs by launching a WhatsApp helpline (9779100200) for anonymous tip-offs. Calling the youth of Punjab highly capable, Mann said the new Skill Campus of Excellence will serve as a launchpad for their success. Spanning 20 acres, the campus has a capacity to train and place over 3,000 students in high-tech courses such as Robotic Welding, 3D Printing, and CNC Machining. He acknowledged Rajya Sabha Member Dr. Vikramjit Singh Sahney's contribution of Rs 2 crore from MPLAD funds and Rs 70 lakh personally for upgrading ITI Ludhiana.

## Haryana to launch 200 new 'Atal Canteens' by August

Komal Ramola Chandigarh: The Haryana government will set up 200 new Atal Shramik Kisan Canteens by August, an official statement said on Thursday.

The BJP, in its manifesto for last year's Assembly polls, announced to establish 600 subsidised canteens in the state. At present, 175 such canteens are operational.

Chief Minister Nayab Singh Saini will inaugurate the new canteens on Independence Day, taking the total number to 375, it said.

In the Atal Canteens, farmers and labourers are provided fresh and hygienic food in a 'thali' for just Rs 10, the statement said. The canteens are managed by members of Women Self Help Groups (SHGs), thereby promoting women's empowerment.

Saini directed officials to identify locations for the canteens. He also asked the Haryana State Industrial and Infrastructure Development Corporation to

establish subsidised food canteens in all its industrial estates across the state, ensuring that labourers have access to nutritious food at affordable rates.

The chief minister proposed that the infrastructure for the canteens could be developed through the corporate social responsibility initiatives of companies.

He also directed the Haryana State Agricultural Marketing Board and the Labour Department to identify additional locations in 'mandis' and construction sites for the establishment of such canteens while expanding their scope.

Saini sought the establishment of a dedicated portal for the subsidised canteens operating in the state, ensuring that information about them is accessible at the click of a button.

He asked the Haryana State Rural Livelihood Mission to prepare a standardised menu that also includes food items made from millets for the canteens.

## Haryana launches crackdown on drug smugglers

Chandigarh: Haryana Police has launched a crackdown on drug smugglers in one of its "most resolute" anti-drug operations till date, an official statement said here on Thursday.

A live, dynamic list of 860 notorious drug smugglers, each with three or more Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances Act cases in the past decade has been circulated to all field units across the state.

This action, led by the Haryana State Narcotics Control Bureau (HSNCB), reflects a pivot from general enforcement to focused, data-driven disruption of drug trafficking networks, it said.

"The time for general strategies is over," said DGP, O P Singh, Head of HSNCB.

"We have identified the core of the problem - repeat offenders who thrive on bail, trial delays, and inconsistent follow-up. This live list is a signal: if you're on it, the state is watching," Singh said.

Of the 860 identified traffickers, 730 are currently out of jail, and 381 are flagged as 'active', continuing to operate supply lines and influ-



ence peddling networks. An additional 130 are behind bars, and 468 have been marked 'inactive'. Eleven offenders have died in the past 10 years.

The live list, which is being continuously updated by police headquarters, includes district-wise tracking of each smuggler's legal status, activity level, and action history. Field officers have been ordered to treat it as an operational tool, not a static document.

Sirsa, Fatehabad, and Yamunanagar top the list in terms of smugglers concentration, with Sirsa alone accounting for 117 traffickers, including 106 outside jail.

"These districts have long been vulnerable corridors," said a senior HSNCB official. "Now, they are ground zero for targeted enforcement."

The orders sent to field units are unambiguous and aggressive, the official said.

To further streamline enforcement, all districts have been mandated to register on the e-tribunal portal's centralised digital platform for filing financial investigation and conviction reports. This step ensures legal timelines are met under the NDPS Act and builds digital traceability for every confiscation case, he said.

Citizens have been urged to report any drug-related activity on the anti-drug helpline and other designated numbers. Weekly reviews at district and range levels are already underway, and officers have been advised that non-action will be treated as dereliction of duty, the statement said.

## Police force being equipped with best infrastructure facilities: Punjab CM

Phillaur (Punjab): Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Singh Mann on Thursday said his government is equipping the state police force with the best infrastructure facilities and modernising it on scientific lines to enable it to tackle the law and order situation effectively.

He was addressing a gathering in Phillaur in Jalandhar after flagging off 139 new vehicles for police stations across the state.

Mann said this is contrary to earlier trends when the new vehicles were given to the top officers instead of those at the grassroots level.

Mann said the station house officers (SHOs) are the real face of the police force as they are directly connected with people and have a huge responsibility of maintaining law and order.

Being a border state, a number of forces inimical to the state have been chalking out nefarious designs to disturb the hard-earned peace of the state but the Punjab Police has always foiled such attempts, he noted.

To further overcome major challenges faced by the state, it was imperative that the police



force was updated according to advanced requirements in the field of investigation, science and technology, he said.

Mann expressed the hope that the Punjab Police would uphold the glorious legacy of serving people with utmost professional commitment.

The chief minister said 70 per cent of the drugs are smuggled from Pakistan via drones and are subsequently supplied

in the state. The state government has joined hands with the Border Security Force (BSF) by launching anti-drone technology to check the movement of drones.

Due to concerted efforts of the state government, drug smuggling has reduced drastically as a report of BSF has indicated a decline in cross-border consignments due to strict enforcement, he said.

## Chief Secretary Anand Bardhan reviews Rail development projects in the state

Pawan Lalchand Dehradun: Chief Secretary Anand Bardhan held a high-level meeting to assess the development of railway facilities in the state. During the meeting, he directed the Transport Department to provide a comprehensive update on the status of all proposed railway projects and to submit a detailed report highlighting the obstacles and challenges faced in the ongoing rail projects.



Additionally, he instructed officials to present the current status of the upgrade of railway stations across the state, including the Dehradun railway station. Emphasizing the significance of railway infrastructure in the state, Chief Secretary Bardhan underscored the necessity of effective co-

ordination between the state government, the Ministry of Railways, Rail Vikas Nigam Limited (RVNL), and other relevant institutions to ensure the seamless execution of proposed and operational railway projects. He stated that the expansion and enhancement of the railway network were critical for connecting

the state's remote and inaccessible hilly areas, thereby fostering industrial, economic, and social development. Moreover, he highlighted that strengthening railway infrastructure would ensure the smooth movement of devotees throughout the year to the world-famous pilgrimage sites and strategic locations.

During the meeting, the Transport Department provided a detailed briefing on the status of the railway projects in the state. As per the department's report, there are a total of five railway projects under consideration, of which three are in the proposal stage, while two projects, including the Rishikesh-Karn-

pravag railway line, are currently in operation.

Among the proposed projects, the Gan-gotri-Yamunotri Rail Project spans a total distance of 121.76 km and comprises ten stations.

The survey work for this project has been completed, and the Detailed Project Report (DPR) has been submitted to the Railway Board, awaiting approval. Similarly, the Tanakpur-Bageshwar Rail Project, covering a distance of 170.70 km with twelve stations, has also completed its survey work, and its DPR has been forwarded to the Railway Board for approval. Meanwhile, the Dehradun-Saharanpur Rail Project, which spans 92.60 km and includes eight stations, is still in the survey stage.

## Punjab Guv begins 'padyatra' calls on people to uproot out drug menace

Dera Baba Nanak (Pb): Punjab Governor Gulab Chand Kataria on Thursday gave a clarion call to all people to come forward to uproot the drug menace from the state, saying drugs have no place in the land of 'Guru Sahiban', prophets and warriors.

Kataria began his six-day 'padyatra' (foot march) against the drug menace. His 'padyatra' started from the Kartarpur Sahib corridor in Gurdaspur and it will culminate in Amritsar.

Addressing a gathering, the governor said the brave Punjab people who always gave a befitting reply to invasions, would also achieve victory against drugs.

He said that drugs are a social evil and that support of every section of society would be solicited for its eradication. Kataria said the land of Punjab is a symbol of



protecting the religion and the culture and it has made huge sacrifices against tyranny and oppression. Recalling the message against the height of barbarism given by the two younger sons of tenth Sikh master Guru Gobind Singh—who were bricked alive in the wall at Sirhind, the Governor said that even today when a person goes to the place the eyes always turn moist.

He also said the valiant Punjabis born on such a great land must oppose the conspiracies by the outside forces to weaken them physically and

extend all support in the fight initiated by the government to root out drugs from the sacred soil of Punjab. Reminding the Punjab people of their immense-great legacy, Kataria said apart from guarding the frontiers when the Americans refused to help with foodgrains, then it was Punjab that filled the granaries of the country.

Now when the state is facing the challenge posed by drugs, then we must once again rise up to end this scourge in the form of a people's movement, he said.

# "New initiative to curb corruption and bring transparency"

• **Waqf Amendment Bill 2024: A revolutionary step towards transparency and accountability**



By Priyanka Saurabh

Disputes and allegations related to Waqf properties in India have long been a topic of discussion. Lacks of acres of land in the country come under the Waqf Board, which aims to use the properties for religious and social welfare works. However, over time it has been observed that the management of Waqf properties has not been completely transparent, and allegations of irregularities, corruption, and arbitrariness have surfaced in many cases.

The Waqf Amendment Bill 2024, recently passed in the Lok Sabha, is expected to increase transparency in the management of Waqf properties and provide relief to common citizens, especially tenants who have been living in these properties for years or are facing legal disputes related to them.

Disputes and problems related to Waqf properties

The Waqf Amendment Bill 2024, passed in the Lok Sabha, aims to increase transparency and accountability in the management of Waqf properties. Lacks of acres of land come under the Waqf Board in India, but over the years there have been allegations of misuse, corruption, and arbitrariness. This bill will help in curbing the arbitrariness of Waqf Boards, ensuring proper use of properties, and resolving legal disputes.

In India, Waqf properties are managed under the Waqf Act 1995. Waqf boards formed under this law were given enormous powers to control the properties under their control. However, this management has led to many controversies due to lack of transparency and arbitrary decisions. The legal powers that Waqf boards have about their functioning in



many places. According to reports, in many cases, Waqf board officials have taken decisions such as arbitrarily leasing out properties, evicting tenants, and selling properties without due process. Thousands of tenants have been living in these properties for decades. But many times, Waqf boards do not provide legal protection to old tenants but tried to evict them from the properties. In such cases, many families had to engage in legal battles, and in some cases, forced evictions were also seen. There have been complaints of large-scale corruption in the purchase, sale, and lease of Waqf properties. Several reports suggest that Waqf properties were sold at prices much below market value or handed over to political and business stakeholders without due process.

**Waqf Amendment Bill 2024: What are the key changes?**

The Waqf Amendment Bill 2024 passed in the Lok Sabha, aims to make the management of Waqf properties transparent and accountable. It has been provided in this bill that monitoring of the functioning of the Waqf Board and government intervention will be increased so that misuse of properties can be prevented.

Under the amendment, old tenants will be given more legal protection so that they do not have to face forced eviction. New monitoring agencies will be created to bring transparency to

the lease, sale, or transfer of Waqf properties. Apart from this, digital recording of all deals and transparent auditing will be arranged. It is proposed to create a special tribunal to settle legal disputes related to Waqf properties. This will lead to quick resolution of cases, and common citizens will not have to wander in the courts for a long time.

**Possible impact of the amendment bill**

The implementation of the Waqf Amendment Bill 2024 will help resolve disputes related to Waqf properties in India and increase transparency. This amendment will ensure that there is no rigging in the management of Waqf properties and all transactions are made public. Under the new law, old tenants will get protection, and the process of their eviction will be brought within the legal ambit. The new monitoring and audit

mechanism will prevent scams related to Waqf properties. Disputes related to Waqf properties can be resolved quickly through tribunals.

mechanism will prevent scams related to Waqf properties. Disputes related to Waqf properties can be resolved quickly through tribunals.

**Potential Challenges**

However, there may be some challenge in the effective implementation of this bill; some Waqf boards may oppose this amendment, as it may impact their power and autonomy. It may take time to effectively implement the monitoring and auditing mechanism. There is a possibility that some groups may challenge this amendment in court, which may delay its implementation.

The Waqf Amendment Bill 2024 is a big step towards making the management of Waqf properties in India transparent and equitable. If this law is implemented effectively, it will not only ensure the right use of Waqf properties but will also curb corruption.

However, it will be important to see how this law is implemented in practice and what kind of monitoring the government does on it. If all the provisions are implemented properly, then this bill will be able to give a new direction to the administration of Waqf properties.

(Priyanka Saurabh, Research Scholar in Political Science)

## Breaking Time Sudoku

What to do

Fill in the grid so that every row, every column, and every 3x3 box contains the digit 1 to 9. Every puzzle has only correct solution.

6				1				
	3			4			8	6
8	5					9		
	8			7			2	
	1	3	2		4	8	6	
4			1				3	
		7					5	8
1	2			8			7	
			4					1

## Solution, Sudoku

2	1	5	9	6	4	7	8	3
8	9	7	3	2	1	5	6	4
3	6	4	7	8	5	1	9	2
9	4	1	2	5	6	3	7	8
6	7	8	1	4	3	2	5	9
5	3	2	8	7	9	4	1	6
7	2	9	4	1	8	6	3	5
1	5	3	6	9	2	8	4	7
4	8	6	5	3	7	9	2	1

## THE WISDOM TREE BY SUVEEN KUMAR

### REFELCTION

Everything clearly reflects, it reflects when you are loved, it reflects when you are unloved, it reflects when you are relaxed, it reflects when you are disturbed, it reflects when you think of someone and blush, it reflects when someone waits for you and your rush, a mere reflection of love sweaters everything around you and a bare reflection of love poisons everything around you, eyes with kindness, mouth with sweetness, skin with softness and thoughts with greatness, stay desirable, don't let anything come in you that you don't want the world to see, because everything that is in there will reflect, everything throws some signals that are felt by everyone around you, reflection doubles your power when it brings you inside and out and it halves your power when it brings you outside.

life is easy when you and your reflection are on the same page, life is difficult when you are your reflections don't really talk to each other and life is death when your own reflection is your enemy, clean yourself every day as you get yourself dirty everyday, nourish yourself every day as you fight a battle everyday, cherish yourself everyday as you remain with yourself everyday, adjust with yourself everyday as you change yourself everyday, hold yourself everyday as you let fall yourself everyday, save yourself everyday as you spend yourself everyday, praise yourself everyday as you insult yourself everyday, celebrate yourself every day as you find yourself everyday.



**Moral: Be so clean in life that you can feel proud of your reflection.**

# Freedom of authorship versus editorial policy: New dimensions to the debate



By Dr Satyavan Saurabh

There has been a long-standing debate in the literary publishing world about whether an author should have the freedom to send his works to more than one magazine. While editors are free to publish or not publish any work, and no time limit is imposed on them, why should not an author have the right to send his work to as many places as he wants? This question has become even more relevant in today's digital age, where the speed of dissemination of information and content has become extremely fast.

Editors usually want unique and original works to maintain the exclusivity of their magazine. On the other hand, writers should have the freedom to send their works to as many places as possible, especially since editors have the right to accept or reject works without any deadline. In the world of literature and publishing, both editors and writers have an important role to play. If transparency and balance are maintained, it will be beneficial for both, and the purpose of literature—the dissemination of ideas—will be fully realized.

will accept only those works that have not been published elsewhere before.

**Freedom of the Author: Rights and Limits**

From the point of view of the authors, this policy sometimes seems unfair. When the editor has the freedom to choose the best material for his magazine, the author should also have the right to increase the chances of publication by sending his work to as many places as possible.

**Delay in publication**

Sometimes editors hold on to articles for months and eventually reject them. This wastes the author's valuable time, and their work remains unpublished for a long time. Many authors wait for months or years just to submit their work to a magazine, but if it is finally rejected, their options are limited.

**Different readerships**

Every magazine has its own readership. If a work is published in many places, it can be beneficial for the author as his work reaches more and more readers. It has also been observed that different magazines focus on different topics so that the author's work can reach the right readers on different platforms.

**Author's rights**  
Just as the editor has

the freedom to choose the best works for his magazine, similarly the writer should also have the freedom to send his work wherever he wants. If the editor has the right to reject the work at any time, then the writer should also have the right to get more opportunities by sending his work to different platforms.

**Changing rules in the digital age**

In today's digital age, where there are plenty of blogs, online magazines, and social media platforms, this debate has taken on a new form. While earlier writers had to struggle to get published in print magazines, now they can publish their works on various online platforms.

**New possibilities of online publishing**

Now many online magazines and blogs are providing platforms where writers can publish their works without any restrictions. This is not only giving more freedom to the writers but also increasing the availability of content for the readers.

**Content syndication and cross-platform publishing**

Many big media houses and digital publishing groups are now adopting the process of "content syndication," where the same content is republished on different platforms. This gives writers an opportunity to reach more viewership and readers.

**The need for solutions and balance**

The solution to this debate lies in establishing a balance. Some possible solutions can be found by taking into account the concerns of both sides:

**Transparent editorial policy**

If a journal wishes to publish only original works, it should clearly state this rule and also specify the time frame in which a decision will be made. This will give authors clarity on how long they should keep their work in reserve for a journal.

**Allow shared publishing**

Some journals may adopt a policy that they will accept works that have previously reached a limited readership but not a wider one. This may be a middle ground, protecting the interests of both authors and editors.

**Editing and republishing facilities**

If a work has been published earlier, it should be allowed to be republished after slightly modifying and updating it. This will not only maintain the exclusivity of the magazines but will also give the authors an opportunity to present their works again.

In the world of literature and publishing, the contribution of both authors and editors is important. On

one hand, editors have the responsibility to provide new and original content to their readers, and on the other hand, the rights of authors must also be protected. If a healthy and transparent system is developed, it will be beneficial for both parties. Ultimately, the purpose of literature is to spread ideas and expand knowledge, and there should be no room for unnecessary restrictions in it.

**Is a perfect balance possible?**

The answer to this question is not easy, but this debate can encourage transparency and dialogue in the literary community. If journals respect authors' rights and authors understand and act in accordance with editorial policies, a better publishing culture can be created.

(Dr. Satyavan Saurabh, Poet, freelance journalist and columnist, radio and TV panelist)

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# Congress made Muslim women second grade citizens during its rule: JP Nadda

New Delhi

Leader of the House in the Rajya Sabha JP Nadda on Thursday accused the Congress of making Muslim women second-grade citizens during its rule at the Centre.



Participating in a debate on the Waqf (Amendment) Bill in the Upper House of Parliament, the BJP leader said the Narendra Modi government brought Muslim women into the mainstream by banning the practice of triple talaq.

"You made the Indian Muslim ladies second-grade citizens," Nadda said, referring to the Congress party and added, "It was only in India where Muslim women were not brought into the mainstream."

While triple talaq was banned in Muslim countries such as Egypt, Sudan, Bangladesh, and Syria several years ago, the Congress-led UPA government did nothing for Muslim women while it was in power for a decade.

"We believe in real service, not lip service. Today cross of Muslim sisters have the right to live with dignity.

Who did it? Isn't the decision a historic one? It is a historic decision and none other than Prime Minister Modi has done it," Nadda said.

"I stand in support of the (Waqf) Bill as its sole purpose is to bring reforms in managing the Waqf properties," Nadda said emphasising that the current amendment in the Bill tries to fix accountability.

The Lok Sabha passed the Bill in the early hours of Thursday, and the Rajya Sabha is currently discussing it.

Nadda asserted that the Waqf (Amendment) Bill is in

the nation's interest and the opposition is trying to derail and divert the issue.

Drawing a comparison between the Joint Parliamentary Committees constituted to suggest amendments, Nadda said the current government formed a 31-member committee while the UPA had a 13-member JPC.

Similarly, he said, 284 stakeholders participated in the debate this time, while only 18 debated during the UPA's dispensation. This shows that Modi is moving the country forward on the basis of democratic principles.

According to Nadda, Muslim countries like Turkey, Malaysia, and Saudi Arabia among others made different laws to bring Waqf properties under state control so that they could be utilised for the welfare and development of the community.

He said digitisation and geo-mapping of Waqf properties were started years ago in some of these countries to stop its misuse.

"When these countries are digitising Waqf properties and making them accountable, then what is the problem if it is being done in India?" Nadda asked the Op-

position.

He said the government has tried to ensure with the amendment that the Waqf properties should be in the right hands and used for the benefit of Muslims.

"From 1932 to 2013, Waqf had 18 lakh hectares of land and from 2013 to 2025, 21 lakh hectares of land were added to the Waqf properties," Nadda said, adding that the government has no intention to take over these properties but wants to stop their misuse.

He referred to several provisions of the Waqf (Amendment) Act, 2013 to highlight how it violates various constitutional provisions such as equality before the law, and the right to fair trial among others and said that the current amendment removes these anomalies.

"The Bill transfers the power from the Waqf to a collector to ascertain whether a particular piece of land should be given to Waqf or not. The basic aim of the Bill is to bring transparency and accountability and ensure both with strict regulation," Nadda said.

Highlighting the misuse of the current Waqf Act, Nad-

da said several government properties including lakes and temple lands were declared as Waqf properties.

"In 2006, there were 4.9 lakh Waqf properties and they have increased to 8.7 lakh, however, the total income, which was Rs 163 crore in 2013, has only increased to Rs 166 crore after 2013," Nadda said, adding that even the CAG report raised serious questions on the misuse of Waqf properties.

Before Nadda, Congress MP Sarfaraz Ahmed and Shiv Sena (UBT) MP Sanjay Raut spoke against the Bill and questioned the government's intent.

Ahmed said the government has been in power for 11 years but instead of talking about education and jobs for Muslims, it is amending the Waqf Act.

"Why is the government so worried about poor Muslims? Even Muhammad Ali Jinnah did not show so much concern for poor Muslims," Raut said, accusing the NDA of diverting attention from US President Trump's announcement of 26 per cent reciprocal tariffs on India.

## Nithari killings: No sanctity to word 'peremptorily' says anguished SC



New Delhi

There is no sanctity to the word "peremptorily", an anguished Supreme Court said on Thursday after the CBI and the Uttar Pradesh government sought time to argue their appeals challenging the acquittal of Surentra Koli in the 2006 Nithari serial killings case.

A bench of Justices B R Gavai and Augustine George Masih noted that in its last order passed on March 25, the apex court had said, "Peremptorily, list these matters on April 3 (high up on the board)."

As the matter came up for hearing, the counsel appearing for one of the victims' father, who has challenged Koli's acquittal, said they needed some time to argue the case.

"You should have made that request on the earlier date when the matter was fixed. It is causing inconvenience to counsel coming from outstation," Justice Gavai said.

Koli's counsel said the only evidence against him was a confessional statement made after 60 days of police custody in which he was tortured.

He said the Allahabad High Court's decision acquitting Koli on October 16, 2023 referred to a systematic organ trade.

The bench expressed its displeasure and said though nine senior lawyers had appeared in the matter on the last date for the petitioners, not even one was ready to argue today.

"It is apparent that the time period specified in Rule 21 was coinciding with the time period specified for the validity of the panel. Further, WBSSC did not maintain the mirror copies of the candidates having lower rank were preferred over those having higher rank, (ii) out of panel appointments, that is, candidates who are not in the panel of shortlisted candidates have been recommended and appointed, (iii) candidates who were not recommended by WBSSC were appointed by the Board, and (iv) manipulation of the OMR scores".

However, it said, there was a discrepancy in both the number of candidates and their corresponding percentages where such irregularities were identified.

The bench said as the recruitment process was ongoing even after the one-year validity period of the panel, there was no justification for the destruction of the OMR sheets.

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Justice Gavai said, "There is no sanctity to the word peremptorily."

The bench posted the matter for hearing on April 29.

The apex court had last year agreed to examine separate pleas, including those filed by the CBI and the Uttar Pradesh government, challenging the high court's decision acquitting Koli.

One of the pleas in the top court was filed by the father of one of the victims challenging the high court's verdict.

Moninder Singh Pandher and his domestic help Koli were accused of rape and murder of people, mostly children from their neighbourhood in Nithari in Uttar Pradesh.

Koli was awarded death penalty on September 28, 2010 by the trial court.

The high court acquitted Pandher and Koli in the death penalty case and said the prosecution had failed to prove their guilt "beyond reasonable doubt" and called it a "hotbed up" investigation.

Reversing the death sentence given to Koli in 12 cases and Pandher in two cases, the high court said the probe was "nothing short of a betrayal of public trust by responsible agencies".

The high court allowed multiple appeals filed by Koli and Pandher, who challenged the death sentence awarded by a CBI court in Ghaziabad.

A total of 19 cases were lodged against the duo in 2007, and the CBI filed closure reports in three cases due to lack of evidence.

Koli was acquitted in three of the 16 remaining cases and his death sentence in one case was commuted to life.

The killings came to light with the discovery of the skeletal remains of eight children from a drain behind Pandher's house at Nithari in Noida, bordering the national capital, on December 29, 2006.

Further digging and searches of drains in the area around the house led to more skeletal remains. Most of these remains were those of children and young women who went missing in the area.

The CBI took over the case within 10 days of the crime and its search resulted in the recovery of more human remains.

## Oppn walks out, demands justice for Christian priests in MP

New Delhi

Opposition members, led by the Congress, staged a walkout from the Lok Sabha on Thursday in protest against an alleged attack on Catholic priests in Madhya Pradesh's Jabalpur district.

Soon after the House met for the day, the opposition members sought to raise the issue. Some of them came to the aisle raising slogans and demanded a discussion on the issue.

Speaker Om Birla did not allow a discussion on the matter and after raising slogans, the opposition members walked out of the House.

Congress members later held a protest in the Parliament complex against the reported attack on two priests, demanding justice for the victims and safety for Christians.

"Two Christian priests were brutally attacked by

the VHP (activists) in Jabalpur on Tuesday," Congress MP K C Venugopal told reporters.

"The way the government and the BJP-Sangh Parivar are attacking minorities, this is just another example of that," he charged, adding, "Wherever they are getting a chance, they are attacking churches."

Venugopal claimed that similar incidents took place earlier in Chhattisgarh and Jharkhand.

In a post on X, the Congress leader slammed the BJP-led Centre and alleged that the "attack" on the Christian priests in Jabalpur was a reflection of the "ruling regime's agenda" of spreading hatred and dividing people on religious lines.

"It's just another day in Modified India," the All India Congress Committee (AICC) general secretary in-charge organisation said.

## SC raps WB school service commission says intentionally covered up lapses

New Delhi

The Supreme Court on Thursday pulled up the West Bengal School Service Commission (WBSSC) saying it "intentionally" covered up the lapses and irregularities in the appointment of 25,753 teachers and staffers in state-run and state-aided schools.

The scathing remarks came from a bench of Chief Justice Sanjay Kumar and Justice Sanjay Kumar in its judgement by which it annulled the appointment of 25,753 teachers and staffers.

Authoring the judgement, the CJ said despite the factual background and the credible evidence indicating irregularities in the WBSSC, it initially did try to cover up the lapses and irregularities.

The CJ went on, "The cover up itself has made the verification and ascertainment more difficult or rather impossible given the scale of camouflage and dressing up done at each stage. We are convinced that the entire selection process was intentionally compromised due to the irregularities involved."

The top court upheld the Calcutta High Court's findings on irregularities in the selection process on 17 counts.

The high court said OMR sheets were destroyed without the scanned mirror images being preserved on the commission's server.

Appointments higher than the declared vacancies were given with respect to all four categories and to persons who were not even in the panel, it added.

The high court said candidates who submitted blank



OMR sheets were appointed aside from those selected after the expiry of the panel of candidates through SLST-2016.

The top court, in its verdict, noted that the WBSSC was candid enough to admit "0" rank jumping, that is, to say candidates having lower rank were preferred over those having higher rank, (ii) out of panel appointments, that is, candidates who are not in the panel of shortlisted candidates have been recommended and appointed, (iii) candidates who were not recommended by WBSSC were appointed by the Board, and (iv) manipulation of the OMR scores".

However, it said, there was a discrepancy in both the number of candidates and their corresponding percentages where such irregularities were identified.

The bench said as the recruitment process was ongoing even after the one-year validity period of the panel, there was no justification for the destruction of the OMR sheets.

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## Jal Shakti minister launches new digital platforms for water management and transparency

New Delhi

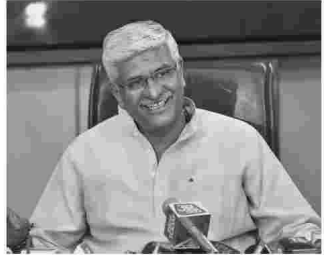
Union Jal Shakti Minister C.R. Paati on Thursday launched three key digital initiatives aimed at improving water resource management, accessibility and transparency.

The initiatives include a revamped website for the Department of Water Resources, a Web-based Reservoir Storage Monitoring System (RSMS) portal and a Water Resource Census application and portal.

Speaking at the launch event, Paati emphasized the government's commitment to digital transformation in water governance.

"These platforms will enhance efficiency, transparency and accessibility, aligning with the Prime Minister's vision of a harmonized digital identity for government services," he said.

The ministry's newly redesigned website has been developed using the Digital Brand Identity Manual (DBIM) framework, making it one of the first gov-



ernment platforms to fully comply with the latest Guidelines for Indian Government Websites (GIGW) 3.0.

The upgrade ensures a uniform user experience across government websites, enhanced accessibility for people with disabilities, and improved security features, the Jal Shakti Ministry said in a statement.

Other key features include faster load times, a centralized content management system and a mobile-friendly design, making it easier for citizens to ac-

cess government services even in remote areas, it said.

To streamline water storage monitoring, the minister also launched the RSMS portal, which will automate data analysis for 161 major reservoirs across India.

The Central Water Commission (CWC), which monitors reservoir storage, will now generate its weekly storage bulletins digitally, eliminating the need for manual data processing, the statement said.

The RSMS portal will allow citizens to check reservoir storage levels at the national, state and individual reservoir levels, providing real-time data that can be downloaded, according to the statement.

This information is crucial for decision-makers in agriculture, power generation, disaster management and drinking water supply, it said.

"Live storage data is vital for ensuring water security. This system will help prioritize water use and mitigate the impact of extreme weather conditions, which are becoming more frequent due to climate change," Paati said.

The Water Resource Census application and portal will facilitate data collection for multiple national-level

water resource surveys, including the 7th Minor Irrigation Census, 2nd Census of Water Bodies, 1st Census of Springs, and the 1st Census of Major and Medium Irrigation Projects, the ministry said.

For the first time, a 100% digital, paperless system will be used to collect data via mobile applications, with geotagging and satellite-based validation ensuring accuracy. The reference period for the census will be the 2023-24 agricultural year, the statement said.

The census aims to build a comprehensive database for irrigation planning, water budgeting and policy-making. By integrating reverse GIS technology and pre-populated past census data, the process is expected to be faster and more reliable.

These digital initiatives reflect the ministry's broader push toward modernizing India's water governance system, ensuring efficient water resource planning, better crisis management and increased public access to critical data, the statement said.

## Centre working to restore peace in Manipur at the earliest: Amit Shah

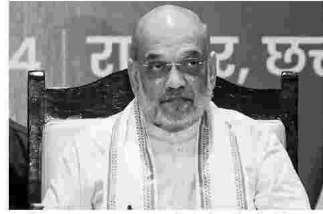
New Delhi

Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Thursday moved a statutory resolution in the Lok Sabha for the approval of the imposition of President's rule in Manipur stating that the Centre is working to restore peace in the northeastern state at the earliest.

Introducing the resolution in the lower house, the Minister said that ethnic violence in the state broke out due to a decision by the Manipur High Court regarding a reservation-related dispute. He said the violence is a result of the interpretation of the high court's decision.

Shah informed the house that there has been no violence in Manipur for nearly four months, from December to March, and the provisions for food, medicines, and medical facilities have been ensured in the camps.

He also said that online arrangements for technical and medical education have been made and for primary education, classes have been set up inside the camps, where arrangements for their studies have been



made.

The Minister said there should not be any violence and no violence should be linked to any political party. Attacking the Congress-led Opposition for criticising the BJP, he said it is trying to portray a picture as if this is the first violence in Manipur and our government has failed.

Mentioning three major instances of violence spanning - 10 years, three years, and six months - which had occurred during the rule of the previous government, he claimed that after these incidents of violence, no one from the then government, including the home minister, visited the region.

Countering the Opposi-

tion's allegation that the government ignored the violence in Manipur, Shah informed the house that on the very day the high court's order was issued, companies of security forces were dispatched to the region via Air Force planes.

He emphasised that everyone shares the same concern on this matter.

Shah also appealed to all members not to politicise the issue as the government was making every possible effort to restore peace in Manipur.

He said the government wants peace to be restored in Manipur as soon as possible, along with rehabilitation efforts and healing the wounds of the affected people.

Bundelkhand poised for a new era of development under CM Yogi's leadership

Lucknow:

Renowned for its valiant history, Bundelkhand is now on the path to creating a new legacy of development under the visionary leadership of Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath. Once infamous for recurring droughts, the region is transforming into a symbol of greenery, thanks to numerous irrigation projects and the Khet Talab Yojana, which has facilitated the construction of farm ponds to enhance water conservation.

Beyond agriculture, Bundelkhand is also making rapid strides in industrial progress, setting new benchmarks for economic growth. With a strong focus on infrastructure and sustainable development, the region is poised to emerge as a hub of prosperity in the coming years.

It includes seven districts—Chitrakoot, Banda, Jhansi, Jalaun, Hamirpur, Mahoba, and Lalitpur—covering around 69,000 square kilometers and making up 10% of Uttar Pradesh's total area. The region has great potential for growing pulses and oils, which is why the government has launched the Dalhan Gram Yojana to promote their cultivation. Additionally, the government is focusing on natural farming across Bundelkhand as part of its Mission Mode initiative.

Faced with frequent droughts, Bundelkhand currently contributes only 5.5% to the state's agricultural output. To bridge this gap, the government is expanding irrigation facilities to improve water availability for farming.

Further, under the Uttar Pradesh Growth and Rural Enterprise Ecosystem Strengthening (UP-AGREES) project, supported by the World Bank, all districts of Bundelkhand will benefit from a Rs 4,000 crore investment over six years.

The International Rice Research Institute (IRRI) in Varanasi, a branch of the Manila-based IRRI, Philippines, is also partnering in this initiative. The project aims to promote cluster farming, strengthen digital and financial infrastructure, and provide intensive training to farmers.

## Waqf board turned land mafia, but 'Mafiagiri' won't be tolerated in UP: CM Adityanath

**C**hief Minister Yogi Adityanath on Thursday strongly criticized the Waqf Board, accusing it of turning into a mafia-like organization. He alleged that during the preparations for Mahakumbh, the Waqf Board had claimed ownership of land meant for the event. However, he assured that Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Home Minister Amit Shah had intervened to put an end to such arbitrary actions. CM Yogi made these remarks while addressing a gathering at Shringverpur in Prayagraj on the occasion of the birth anniversary of Lord Nishad Raj Guha, a close friend of Lord Shri Ram. He stated that a significant law related to the Waqf Board had already been passed in the Lok Sabha and would soon be approved by the Rajya Sabha, ensuring that the board remained focused on welfare activities. He reiterated that mafia activities would not be tolerated in Uttar Pradesh, emphasizing that the state had already been freed from them.

During his visit, the Chief Minister inau-



gured an exhibition highlighting stories related to Lord Ram and King Nishad under the 'One District-One Product' (ODOP) scheme. He also inaugurated and laid the foundation stone for 181 development projects worth Rs 579 crore in Prayagraj. Paying homage to Lord Ram and Nishad Raj, CM Yogi visited Nishad Raj Park, calling it a grand symbol of their legendary friendship. He recounted how Lord Ram had once set foot on the sacred land, emphasizing the historical significance of the site.

The Chief Minister also announced plans

to develop Shringverpur as a spiritual and tourism hub. He revealed that river ghats would be constructed and beautified at the spot where Lord Ram had rested. Additionally, he announced the renovation of the Maharishi Shringi and Mata Shanta temples, along with the establishment of a Sanskrit school and an electricity research center. He instructed officials to ensure proper maintenance of Nishad Raj Park and enhance facilities for devotees.

As part of the state's welfare initiatives, CM Yogi introduced multiple schemes for the up-

liftment of the Nishad community. Under the Nishad Raj Boat Subsidy Scheme, Rs 3.20 crore was distributed to 1,100 boatmen, while Rs 20 crore was allocated to 1,400 fish farmers through the Matsya Sampada Yojana. Additionally, loans worth Rs 138 crore were disbursed under the Kisan Credit Card scheme. He assured that financial aid was reaching beneficiaries directly, bypassing middlemen, under the 'double-engine government' led by the BJP.

A heartwarming moment during the event was when a young boy dressed as Lord Ram re-

**CM Yogi Adityanath reiterated that mafia activities would not be tolerated in Uttar Pradesh, emphasizing that the state had already been freed from them.**

cited a Shiva Stuti. CM Yogi, visibly impressed, gifted him chocolates and praised his talent, stating that such brilliance would help carry forward the country's heritage.

Highlighting the success of Mahakumbh 2025, CM Yogi remarked that Prayagraj had gained a new global identity. He pointed out that over 66 crore devotees had participated in the grand event, solidifying the city's spiritual and cultural significance. He noted that Prayagraj no longer needed an introduction as a city near Varanasi but had established itself as a major spiritual destination. He further described Prayagraj as a place of great confluence, from the sacred rivers Ganga, Yamuna, and Saraswati to the historic friendship between Lord Ram and Nishad Raj.

## UP Govt to enhance facilities in Old Age homes

Lucknow, April 3:

The Uttar Pradesh government, under Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, is set to enhance facilities in old age homes across all 75 districts, ensuring a dignified and secure life for senior citizens. These homes will now offer improved free accommodation, meals, medical care, and entertainment for elderly residents.

Under the Ayushman Bharat scheme, elderly residents will receive top-tier healthcare services. Additionally, a new initiative aims to tap into their professional and business experience, offering financial incentives in return. Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath believes this approach will foster self-reliance and add value to their lives.

Each government-run old age home accommodates up to 150 residents and operates under a Public-Private Partnership (PPP) model in collaboration with NGOs. This model has proven effective in improving the quality of life for elderly citizens who lack family support or caregivers.

To ensure transparency and accountability, a face-recognition

system has been implemented, guaranteeing that every resident receives the services they are entitled to. In addition, the elderly are provided with old-age pensions to support their financial independence. The government has also introduced religious pilgrimage trips to offer mental peace and spiritual fulfillment.

In a notable effort during the recent Mahakumbh, the government facilitated the participation of over 1,500 elderly citizens by setting up temporary old age homes at the event site. A medical camp, Shrahan Kumbh, was also organized, ensuring comprehensive health check-ups for senior citizens.

Acknowledging the legal and family disputes many elderly face, the Yogi government has appointed 216 reconciliation officers at the tehsil level to address grievances and ensure justice. Furthermore, an implementation committee, led by the District Magistrate, has been established in each district to oversee the efficient management of old-age homes and ensure continuous service improvements.

## Law is necessary to protect Waqf lands, must be implemented strictly: Ghulam Nabi Azad



Arif Saeed Khan:

Former Chief Minister of Jammu and Kashmir, Ghulam Nabi Azad, has underscored the necessity of strict implementation of the Waqf law to safeguard Waqf lands. During his visit to the town of Bugrasi in Bulandshahr on Thursday, Azad stressed the importance of enforcing the Waqf Bill, which has already been passed, to ensure that these lands are protected and used in accordance with their intended purpose.

Azad's visit to Bugrasi was to extend his condolences to the family of former chairman Arif Saeed Khan. The family recently suffered a tragic loss when Arif Saeed Khan's brother,

Shadab Khan, passed away while undergoing medical treatment in Delhi. Azad spent nearly an hour with the grieving family, offering his sympathies and support during their time of mourning. Several family members, including Shuaib Khan, Suhail Khan, Shahab Khan, Hilal Khan, Shekhu Khan, and Moon Khan, were present during the visit.

While addressing journalists, Azad emphasized that the implementation of the Waqf law is essential to protect properties dedicated to religious and charitable causes. He pointed out that the law is particularly significant for the welfare of underprivileged

Muslims, as it ensures that Waqf properties are utilized for their rightful beneficiaries.

When questioned about the issue of offering Namaz on roads, Azad provided a candid response. He acknowledged that the population is steadily increasing, which sometimes leads to a shortage of space for religious gatherings. However, he maintained that roads are meant for public transportation and should not be used for prayers. He noted that while Namaz takes only about half an hour, it is important to consider the convenience of all citizens. His remarks were aimed at promoting a balanced approach that respects

## Jairam Thakur criticizes Himachal govt at Mandi Rally

Rajan Panchhi

Mandi:

Leader of Opposition Jairam Thakur launched a scathing attack on the Sukhu government, accusing it of systematically shutting down institutions and obstructing development projects across the state. Addressing a public meeting at Thachi in Saraj Assembly constituency, Thakur alleged that the present government is focused solely on closing institutions and halting their budgets rather than fulfilling its promises.

He criticized the state government for failing to deliver on its guarantees and misleading the public. "The government keeps claiming that all guarantees are being fulfilled, but in reality, not a single one has been implemented effectively across the state. When questioned, the government has no answers and resorts to making false allegations and irrelevant statements," he remarked.

Highlighting the



widespread dissatisfaction among the people, Thakur stated that wherever he visits, he encounters stories of the government's failures. "The government has not only shut down various institutions but also feels no hesitation in closing schools and hospitals, directly impacting the lives of common people. The government that came to power promising jobs is now taking pride in snatching employment opportunities," he added.

He also slammed the Chief Minister for labeling welfare schemes as freebies. "We provided 125 units of free electricity and water, and implemented schemes like Ayushman, Sahara, Shagun, Ujwala, Kanyadaan, Beri Hai Anmol, Swavalamban, Jan Manch, and Social Security Pension. These were not handouts but essential welfare measures aimed at improving people's lives and providing medical care and

social security is the responsibility of any welfare government," he asserted.

Accusing the current administration of misplaced priorities, Thakur claimed that the Sukhu government is more focused on minor matters, like monitoring food stalls instead of addressing public concerns. "This government is continuously locking institutions meant for development and public welfare. It is time to teach them a lesson, and for that, we need the support of the people," he urged.

During his visit to the region, Thakur also met local residents and party workers at Balichowki. Additionally, he visited village Gurani to offer condolences to the family of Anjana Thakur, who recently passed away.

The event witnessed the presence of party officials, workers, and local residents, all expressing their discontent with the current government's policies.

## Shoes-Techology exhibition in Agra sets foundation for 450 Crores business in footwear components

Rajesh Tomar & Akash Jain

The 58th edition of the 'Shoe-Tech Agra' exhibition concluded with remarkable success, setting the stage for a business worth approximately 450 crore INR in the footwear components sector. Over the course of two days, a total of 5247 visitors, including 2470 trade visitors, actively participated in the exhibition, highlighting the growing interest and importance of technological advancements in the footwear industry.

The event, which focused on creativity in footwear components, technological development, and innovative research, showcased India's significant progress in the sector. Speaking at the exhibition, Puran



Dawar, President of the Agra Footwear Manufacturers & Exporters Chamber (AFMEC), emphasized how the Indian market, once heavily dependent on imports, is now rapidly becoming self-sufficient. He stated, "Today, the changes happening in the Indian footwear industry with technological development and creativity are not only changing the

Indian market's dynamics, but they are also a big step towards our self-reliance. All components used in shoes are now available in India. Events like Shoe-Tech are becoming the champions of this industrial revolution."

Deepak Manchanda, General Secretary of the Indian Footwear Components Manufacturers Association (IFCOMA),

shared exhibition statistics with the media and underscored the economic impact of the event. "In this two-day exhibition, the foundation for a business worth 450 crore in footwear components has been laid, which is certainly an indicator of India's progress in this trade," he said.

Throughout the event, visitors continued to ar-

rive from morning till late evening, demonstrating the keen interest of industry professionals, factory owners, and aspiring entrepreneurs. The exhibition became a hub for industry networking, with business representatives and emerging entrepreneurs seizing the opportunity to engage with the latest trends and innovations.

Sharad Kant Verma, Executive Director of IFCOMA, expressed excitement over the business opportunities created during the event. He remarked, "Events like this do not directly lead to purchases, but business agreements are certainly bringing forth big figures. We are excited that in two days, the foundation for a business worth approx-

imately 450 crore was laid at Shoe-Tech Agra, which is undoubtedly an indicator of the growing speed of the footwear components sector in India."

Opinder Singh Lovely, President of the Agra Shoe Manufacturers Association (ASMA), also lauded the event's role in fostering industrial growth. "Such events give a new boom to the business. Shoe-Tech Agra has provided an opportunity to update oneself with the latest footwear components and technologies under one roof. This event provides an opportunity to meet one another. Events like this should be regularly held for the footwear industry as they play a key role in giving new dimensions to the business," he stated.

## MP Chahar urges renaming of Delhi Roads named after Mughal rulers

Rajesh Taunmar / Akash Jain

AGRA:

In a significant move advocating for the recognition of India's historical warriors, Fatehpur Sikri MP and National President of BJP Kisan Morcha, Rajkumar Chahar, raised an issue of public importance in the Lok Sabha. He urged the Speaker and the government to rename roads in Delhi's Lutyens' Zone, which are currently named after Mughal rulers, and instead honor India's brave historical figures.

MP Chahar pointed out that prominent roads in the capital, including those named after Babur, Taghlab, Akbar, Humayun, and Dara Shikoh, were designated during the Congress era. He argued that these names do not reflect India's indigenous history and suggested that the government take steps to rename them after legendary In-



dian warriors who played a pivotal role in the country's history.

Among the historical figures MP Chahar proposed as replacements were Maharana Sangra, Prithviraj Chauhan, Guru Gobind Singh, Maharaja Surajmal, Gokula Jai, Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj, and Hemu Vikramaditya. According to Chahar, these leaders symbolized courage, resilience, and the struggle against foreign invaders, making their recognition essential for future generations.



Head of Myanmar's military government visits Thailand in rare overseas trip

**Bangkok:**  
The head of Myanmar's military government arrived in Thailand on Thursday for a regional summit, making a rare international trip as his country recovers from a devastating earthquake that killed thousands.

Senior General Min Aung Hlaing has been stunned by much of the West for overthrowing the democratically elected government of Aung San Suu Kyi and subsequent brutal repression. He has not been allowed to participate in meetings of other regional organisations, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), since the army seized power in February 2021 and began violently suppressing opposition.

He is one of several regional leaders visiting Bangkok for a three-day summit of nations in the Bay of Bengal region.

It was Min Aung Hlaing's first visit to a country other than his government's main supporters and backers — China, Russia and Belarus — since he attended a regional meeting in Indonesia in 2021.

Agreements have also been made for cooperation in MSME, handloom, and handicraft, he noted.

Modi asserted that Thailand holds a special place in India's 'Act East' Policy and the Indo-Pacific vision.

"Today, we have decided to elevate our relations to the level of a Strategic Partnership. Discussions were also held on establishing a 'Strategic Dialogue'

## India Thailand support free open inclusive rules-based order in Indo-Pacific: PM Modi

**Bangkok:**  
India and Thailand on Thursday decided to elevate their relations to the level of a strategic partnership with Prime Minister Narendra Modi asserting that both the countries support a free, open, inclusive, and rules-based order in Indo-Pacific, and believe in a policy of development, not expansionism.

Modi made the remarks at a joint press event with his Thai counterpart Paetongtarn Shinawatra after holding delegation-level talks during which they held extensive discussions on various areas of bilateral cooperation.

"We have emphasized cooperation in the fields of tourism, culture, and education between India's northeastern states and Thailand. We discussed enhancing mutual trade, investment, and exchanges between businesses," Modi said about his talks with Shinawatra.

Agreements have also



been made for cooperation in MSME, handloom, and handicraft, he noted.

Modi asserted that Thailand holds a special place in India's 'Act East' Policy and the Indo-Pacific vision.

"Today, we have decided to elevate our relations to the level of a Strategic Partnership. Discussions were also held on establishing a 'Strategic Dialogue'

between security agencies," Modi said.

He said India fully supports ASEAN unity and ASEAN Centrality.

"In the Indo-Pacific, we both support a free, open, inclusive, and rules-based order. We believe in the policy of vikaasvaad, not vistaarvaad (development-ism, not expansionism)," Modi said.

"I am grateful to the Thai government for issuing a special postage stamp based on the 18th-century 'Ramayana' mural paintings on the occasion of my visit," he said.

Modi said Prime Minister Shinawatra presented him with the Tripitaka.

"On behalf of the Buddha-land India, I accepted it with folded hands," he added.

The centuries-old relationship between In-

**"We have emphasized cooperation in the fields of tourism, culture, and education between India's northeastern states and Thailand. We discussed enhancing mutual trade, investment, and exchanges between businesses," Modi said about his talks with Shinawatra.**

dia and Thailand is tied to their deep cultural and spiritual threads, he said.

The spread of Buddhism has connected our people at every level, Modi said.

"There has been an exchange of scholars from Ayutthaya to Nalanda. The tale of the Ramayana is deeply woven into Thai folk life," he said.

"And, the influence of Sanskrit-Pali is still reflected in the languages and traditions today," he said.

## 'Dark clouds' on Pakistan will 'soon evaporate': Imran Khan

**Lahore:**  
Pakistan's jailed former prime minister Imran Khan has expressed optimism about his release saying he will spend next Eid with the masses as he asserted that the "dark clouds" overshadowing the country will "soon evaporate".

The Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) supremo has been incarcerated since August 2023 and is currently held in Rawalpindi's high-security Adiala jail.

A post on the 72-year-old Khan's X account on Wednesday said "I have complete faith in Allah Almighty that the dark clouds overshadowing Pakistan will soon evaporate and our struggle will bear fruit."

"I am certain that God will grant me success and I will celebrate the next Eid with my people," Khan said.

Khan said the "peon government" was determined to keep him

imprisoned as they were obsessed with clinging to power.

"They (military-backed Shehbaz Sharif-led government) know that the day I walk out of prison, their illegitimate rule will crumble. That is why they are relentlessly trying to break me," he said.

Khan said that he was denied political meetings, suggesting that the country's powerful military establishment fears that his party will announce its plan of action, which would threaten their grip on power.

The former prime minister said he wasn't allowed to speak to his children in England by phone on Eid, claiming that he has only talked to them twice in the past seven months. "Now, once again, I am being denied contact with them for several weeks. I was supposed to speak to my children on Eid, but even that was not allowed," he added.

## Israeli strikes on Gaza overnight leaves more than 50 Palestinians dead

**Deir al-Balah (Gaza Strip):**

Overnight strikes by Israel killed at least 55 people across the Gaza Strip, hospital officials said Thursday, a day after senior government officials said Israel would seize large areas of Gaza and establish a new security corridor across the Palestinian territory.

Israel has vowed to escalate the nearly 18-month war with Hamas until the militant group returns dozens of



remaining hostages, disarm and leaves the territory. Israel has imposed a month-long halt on all imports of food, fuel and humanitarian aid that

has left civilians facing acute shortages as supplies dwindle.

Officials in Khan Yunis, in the southern part of the strip, said the bod-

ies of 14 people had been taken to Nasser Hospital — nine of them from the same family. The dead included five children and four women. The bodies of another 19 people, including five children aged between 1 and 7 years and a pregnant woman, were taken to the European hospital near Khan Yunis, hospital officials said.

In Gaza City, 21 bodies were taken to Alhi hospital, including those of seven children.

The attacks came as the Israeli military said an

independent body would investigate a March 23 operation in which its forces opened fire on ambulances in Gaza. It said it investigates allegations of wrongdoing by its forces and holds them accountable. Rights groups say such investigations are often lacking and that soldiers are rarely punished.

The military said the probe would be led by an expert fact-finding body "responsible for examining exceptional incidents" during the war.

Separately, the military

ordered the residents of several areas — Shujaiya, Jadda, Turkmen and eastern Zeytoon — to evacuate on Thursday, adding that the army "will work with extreme force in your area". It said people should move to shelters west of Gaza City.

On Wednesday, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu announced Israel was establishing a new security corridor across the Gaza Strip to pressure Hamas, suggesting it would cut off the southern city of Rafah, which

Israel has ordered evacuated, from the rest of the Palestinian territory.

Netanyahu referred to the new axis as the Morag corridor, using the name of a Jewish settlement that once stood between Rafah and Khan Yunis, suggesting it would run between the two southern cities. He said it would be "a second Philadelphia corridor" referring to the Gaza side of the border with Egypt further south, which has been under Israeli control since last May.

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## BUSINESS

### Poonam Gupta Appointed RBI Deputy Governor

**Mumbai:**  
The government has appointed Poonam Gupta, Director General of NCAER, as Deputy Governor of RBI, the central bank said in a statement on Thursday.

The appointment is for a period of three years from the date of joining the post or until further orders, whichever is earlier, it said.

The post of the Deputy Governor of RBI fell vacant after M D Patra demitted office in January. He was member of the Monetary Policy Committee (MPC).

With appointment of Gupta, now all four posts of deputy governors have been filled.

The first bi-monthly MPC meeting of the current financial year is scheduled for April 7-9.

Currently, Gupta is the Director general of National Council of Applied Economic Research (NCAER), India's largest economic policy think

tank.

She is also a member of the Economic Advisory Council to the Prime Minister and Convener of the Advisory Council to the 16th Finance Commission. She joined NCAER in 2021 after working at senior positions for nearly two decades at the IMF and World Bank in Washington DC.

Gupta taught at the Delhi School of Economics, University of Maryland (USA) and as a visiting faculty at ISI, Delhi. She has also been the RBI Chair Professor at NIPFP and a Professor at ICRIER, the decision to impose additional 27 per cent import duty on Indian goods from April 9 this year.

"Discussions are ongoing between Indian and US trade teams for the expeditious conclusion of a mutually beneficial, multi-sectoral BTA...We remain in touch with the Trump administration on these issues

## India, US Expedite Talks for Bilateral Trade Agreement

**New Delhi:**  
Both India and the US want to expedite the negotiations for the proposed bilateral trade agreement (BTA) as the two countries are looking at promoting two-way commerce, an official statement said on Thursday.

Both the countries have decided to hold sector-specific talks from this month to finalise the structure of the agreement.

The keenness to expedite the talks came in the backdrop of the USA's decision to impose additional 27 per cent import duty on Indian goods from April 9 this year.

"Discussions are ongoing between Indian and US trade teams for the expeditious conclusion of a mutually beneficial, multi-sectoral BTA...We remain in touch with the Trump administration on these issues



and expect to take them forward in the coming days," the commerce ministry said.

Through the agreement, the two countries are looking to increase market access for their goods, cut tariff and non-tariff barriers and deepen supply chain integration.

A team of US officials, headed by Assistant US Trade Representative for South and Central Asia Brendan Lynch,

was here last month to finalise the contours and terms of reference of the proposed pact, aimed at more than doubling the bilateral trade to USD 500 billion by 2030 from the current USD 191 billion.

Though the two sides have set a deadline to conclude the first phase of the agreement by fall (September-October) of this year, the complex nature of negotiations for a trade pact may

extend the process for years.

A government official said India was the only country where the Trump-administration had sent its team for trade talks.

The official expressed hope that India would be able to navigate the additional 27 per cent import duty announced by the US from April 9.

"With the BTA in the pipeline, we are in a zone that we should not

be overly worried from these tariffs," the official added.

When asked if issues like rules of origin are to be part of the pact, the official said the BTA will have elements like any other trade agreement.

"We have been progressing well," the official added.

In a trade pact, two countries either significantly reduce or eliminate customs duties on the maximum number of goods traded between them. They also ease norms to promote trade in services and boost investments.

While the US has demanded duty concessions in sectors like certain industrial goods, automobiles, wines, petrochemical products, dairy, agriculture items such as apples, tree nuts, and alfalfa hay; India may look at duty cuts for labour-intensive sectors like textiles.

### FPI Investment Limits in G-Sec Unchanged for FY26: RBI

**Mumbai:**  
The RBI on Thursday said the limits for FPI investment in government securities (g-sec), state government securities (SGSs) and corporate bonds will remain unchanged at 6 per cent, 2 per cent, and 15 per cent, respectively, of the outstanding stocks of securities for 2025-26.

As hitherto, all investments by eligible investors in the "specified securities" will be reckoned under the Fully Accessible Route (FAR), said an RBI circular on 'Limits for investment in debt and sale of Credit Default Swaps by Foreign Portfolio Investors (FPIs)'. The allocation of incremental changes in the g-sec limit (in absolute terms) over the two sub-categories -- 'General' and 'Long-term' -- will be retained at 50:50 for 2025-26, it said.

Also, the entire increase in limits for SGSs (in absolute terms) has been added to the 'General' sub-category of SGSs, the circular said.

The RBI further said the aggregate limit of the notional amount of credit default swaps sold by FPIs will be 5 per cent of the outstanding stock of corporate bonds.

Accordingly, an additional limit of Rs 2,93,612 crore is set for 2025-26, the RBI said.

## No Funds Released for Battery Storage in FY25: Govt

**New Delhi:**  
No amount was released under the Viability Gap Funding (VGF) Scheme for Battery Energy Storage Systems in FY25 as none of the projects achieved financial closure. Parliament was informed on Thursday.

In September 2023, the Union Cabinet approved the Viability Gap Funding (VGF) Scheme for Battery Energy Storage Systems (BESS) to support the development of BESS.

"As per scheme guidelines, 10 per cent



of VGF is to be disbursed after financial

closure. Since none of the projects could

achieve financial closure, no expenditure

was incurred under the scheme during 2024-25," Minister of State for Power Shripad Naik said in a reply to Lok Sabha.

He also said a budgetary provision of Rs 96 crore was made for 1,000 MWh (mega watt hour) BESS in 2024-25, assuming 10 per cent disbursement upon financial closure.

However, with falling BESS costs, the VGF amount reduced from Rs 96 lakh per MWh (estimated in 2023-24) to Rs 46 lakh

per MWh or 30 per cent of capital cost, whichever is lower.

As a result, the budgetary allocation was revised from Rs 96 crore to Rs 46 crore.

Fund disbursement under the VGF scheme occurs in five tranches -- 10 per cent upon financial closure of the project, 45 per cent upon achieving the commercial operation date (COD), and 15 per cent per year over the next three years from the COD.

With the decline in battery prices, the

scheme capacity has been increased from 4,000 MWh to 13,200 MWh while staying within the approved budgetary allocation of Rs 3,760 crore.

Central Electricity Authority (CEA) is responsible for monitoring the scheme, while the Ministry of Power oversees the scheme, to ensure timely completion and efficient fund utilisation.

The National Electricity Plan 2023 estimates that 236 GWh BESS would be required by 2031-32.

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# Cricket

## Spotlight on Rohit, Pant as Mumbai Indians take on Lucknow Super Giants

**Lucknow**  
Two stalwarts of Indian cricket — Rohit Sharma and Rishabh Pant — will be hoping to overcome their lean patch when Mumbai Indians face Lucknow Super Giants in a clash between two struggling teams in the Indian Premier League here on Friday.

Five-time champions Mumbai Indians have not really clicked so far this season, with just two points from three games.

India captain Rohit's form with the bat has put the MI team management in a tight spot. The same is for LSG skipper Pant whose extended dry run is not helping matters for the home side.

With both the teams almost identically placed with a solitary win each in three games, the contest could boil down to who exploits the conditions better on the day.

Given that the curators haven't been providing tailor-made pitches to the home sides — something that has caused frustration of the coaches and players in some franchises — the team that gets a head-start with the bat or ball in the power play overs could call the shots.

The prolonged absence of MI pace spearhead Jasprit Bumrah due to injury and the management maintaining a stoic silence on his return is only adding to the frustration of the Hardik Pandya-led side.

MI, though, found success in the handy pace of young left-armers Ashwini Kumar, who single-handedly



demolished defending champions Kolkata Knight Riders with excellent figures of 4/24 in three overs in their win at home on March 31.

It would be premature to pass a judgement about his pedigree but in the 23-year-old Punjab pacer, MI have got a glimmer of hope. Making his IPL debut for MI after playing only four T20 matches on the domestic circuit, he dismissed established names like Ajinkya Rahane, Manish Pandey, Rinku Singh and Anirudh Russell to become the first Indian to take four wickets on IPL de-

but.

IPL has, time and again, given a platform for young players to excel but few have been able to do that consistently. Mayank Yadav, after bedazzling everyone with his searing pace, just faded away. MI would be hoping Ashwani is not a one-match wonder.

With MI finally giving a commanding performance against KKR at the Wankhede, it was South African keeper-batter Ryan Rickelton, who guided them to victory in the chase of a sub-par total. Rohit and Mr 360 de-

grees Suryakumar Yadav will have big roles to play in a side that doesn't really bat deep but has an array of slow and fast bowlers who can deliver.

Lucknow Super Giants, placed sixth behind MI, have not really hit their strides following their demoralising one-wicket defeat to Delhi Capitals in the IPL opener at Visakhapatnam.

While West Indies' Nicholas Pooran has been in sublime form and is leading the scoring charts with 189 runs from three games, including two half-centuries, his exploits have not rubbed



Poor death bowling and lack of support for Root cost England, says Jos Buttler

Suryakumar is not going anywhere from Mumbai: MCA

Mumbai

The Mumbai Cricket Association (MCA) on Thursday refuted reports that Suryakumar Yadav was planning a switch to Goa for the upcoming Ranji Trophy season along with some of his teammates, saying that India's T20 skipper was committed to representing the state.

Young Mumbai opener Yashasvi Jaiswal has already announced his switch to Goa from Mumbai due to alleged differences with senior players of the Ranji side.

However the official transfer will only happen when BCCI opens its inter-state transfer window.

A media report had claimed on Wednesday that Suryakumar could leave the Mumbai Ranji side, led by Ajinkya Rahane.

Suryakumar had, in fact, himself rubbished the report on his 'X' handle.

"The Mumbai Cricket Association (MCA) is aware of rumours circulating on social media regarding Surya Kumar Yadav's alleged decision to move players to Goa instead of playing for Mumbai," MCA secretary Abhay Hadap said in a statement.

"MCA officials have spoken with Surya this morning, and can confirm that these rumours are completely baseless and untrue. Surya Kumar Yadav remains committed for Mumbai and takes immense pride in playing for Mumbai."

"We urge everyone to refrain from spreading misinformation and to support our players as they continue to contribute to Mumbai Cricket Association," Hadap said.

Sai Kishore's innovative streak turns him a formidable foe to batters

Bengaluru

R Sai Kishore bowled just three balls to Krunal Pandya but that small passage spread across 13th and 15th over of Royal Challengers Bengaluru's innings revealed the big strides the Gujarat Titans spinner has taken as a T20 bowler.

In the second ball of the 15th over, Sai Kishore bowled a back-of-the-length delivery that elicited a true return catch from a clueless Krunal.

It required a second viewing to realise that Sai Kishore had delivered a carrom ball — an unusual entity in a left-arm spinner's world.

But not really for Sai Kishore as he always chases something novel to stay ahead of the curve.

His bowling is an extension of his life where he is a seeker — of his spiritual inner self, new places and people and fresh experiences.

True to that trait, the 28-year-old has been practicing the carrom ball over the last few seasons but it was the first time he unleashed it in a real match.

"To be relevant in T20 cricket, you have to keep evolving. I have been practicing it for the last 3-4 years, but have not bowled it anywhere.

"I was confident to bowl it in the IPL and went with my instinct. It is like a carrom ball, so I get more dip on it," he told the host broadcaster.

Former India opener Akash Chopra validated that point while speaking to ESPNcricinfo.

"Off-spinners tend to do that very often, because they are turning the ball into the right-handers, so they need that carrom ball. Very few left-arm spinners do that. Sai Kishore is one of those guys."

"There are many captains who are averse to the idea of a left-arm spinner bowling to a left-hander. If you have that carrom ball, then they might just be a bit more encouraged," said Chopra.

Sai Kishore's GT and Tamil Nadu teammate B Sai Sudharsan have seen from close quarters the effort the left-arm spinner has put in to improve his craft even when he had to sit in the shadows of Rashid Khan and Noor Ahmad in the previous IPL seasons.

"Off the field, I can tell you the amount of effort he puts, the amount of preparation he does in terms of tactical advantages. I feel that is making him a bit ahead of other bowlers."

PCB chairman Mohsin Naqvi appointed as ACC president

Dubai

Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) chairman Mohsin Naqvi has been appointed as the president of the Asian Cricket Council (ACC), announced the governing body of cricket in the continent on Thursday.

ACC on Thursday issued a statement announcing the same that he will be assuming the role with an immediate effect.

"Mr. Mohsin Naqvi has assumed charge as the new President of the Asian Cricket Council (ACC). Naqvi, who has served as the Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) Chairman since February 2024 will assume this prestigious role on 3rd April, 2025. His appointment ushers in a new chapter of leadership for Asian cricket," said the ACC's statement.

Speaking on being appointed as ACC President, Naqvi referred to Asia as the "heartland of world cricket."

"I am deeply honoured to assume the presidency of the Asian Cricket Council. Asia remains the heartland of world cricket, and I am committed to working with all member boards to accelerate the game's growth and global influence. Together, we will unlock new opportunities, foster greater collaboration, and take Asian cricket to unprecedented heights. I also extend my sincere thanks to the outgoing ACC President for his leadership and con-

tributions to the ACC during his tenure.

Naqvi succeeds Shammi Silva, President of Sri Lanka Cricket (SLC). Reflecting on the transition, Silva shared his appreciation for the ACC community.

"It has been a privilege to serve as President of the Asian Cricket Council. The steadfast commitment of our member boards working together has been pivotal in elevating ACC's stature across the region. I extend my gratitude to my predecessor, Jay Shah, Chairman of the ICC, under whose leadership the ACC reached significant milestones -- including securing the highest-ever value for the ACC Asia Cup commercial rights, introducing a new pathway events structure, and paving the way for the continued development of cricket in Asia. As I step down, I have full confidence that under Naqvi's capable leadership, the ACC will continue its remarkable journey and thrive," said Silva.

Exposure to difficult conditions helped evolution of my T20 batting: Sai Sudharsan

Bengaluru

Opener B Sai Sudharsan fell exposure to 'difficult conditions' during his current stint with IPL side Gujarat Titans has contributed immensely to him evolving as a T20 batter.

Sudharsan played a fine innings of 49 against Royal Challengers Bengaluru in GT's eight-wicket win here on Wednesday night.

"It's my fourth year (in the IPL), so I feel it has given me a lot of experience. I got exposed to a few difficult conditions. I got exposed to a lot of fast bowling in the nets with GT," Sudharsan said in the post-match press meet.

"I feel the most important thing which has helped my evolution or the way I've improved my T20 batting is the game-time I get here and the practice time I get here with the Titans, with the bowlers, all quality international bowlers," he added.

Sudharsan now sits on the second place in the run-marks' chart with 186 runs. The left-hander has made those



contributions to the ACC during his tenure.

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runs at an average of 62 and at a strike rate of 159.

"So, I feel that has helped me even from the nets. I would say, I got exposed to a lot of things, a lot of difficult conditions.

"I've learnt a lot in these three years. I feel it has helped me understand the game better and the basics of the game as well," he said.

RCB head coach Andy Flower said losing four wickets in the first seven overs made it tough for his side.

Pretty embarrassed at dropping Salt, so was determined to score some runs, says Buttler

Bengaluru

Gujarat Titans senior batter Jos Buttler admitted that he was "embarrassed" at dropping Royal Challengers Bengaluru opener Phil Salt while keeping in their IPL match here, but he was able to make amends, using the long handle to help his side to an eight-wicket win.

Buttler struck and imperious 73 not out off just 39 balls, with his innings marked by creativity and sustained aggression, as GT chased down the target of 170 in 17.5 overs on Wednesday.

"I don't know, pretty embarrassed. We know Salt is a dangerous player. I barely got a glove on it and it hit me in the chest, so was determined to score some runs," said the England stalwart after the match.

Buttler dropped a regulation catch off the bowling of Mohammed Siraj in the first over after RCB were sent in to bat. Salt charged down the track, looking to slap the ball through the off-side but it took the edge and went through to Buttler who, however, barely got a glove to it.

GT captain Shubman Gill and Siraj were celebrating even before the ball had reached the keeper, only for Buttler to spill it.

"As a team, we did not field well... fielded poorly. Had we fielded better, myself included, we would have chased less. Nice win and well deserved. But re-



ally enjoyed it. Felt the bowlers did a fantastic job," said the 34-year-old England great.

The Englishman was slightly jittery to begin with but once he found the right gears, he was unstoppable, fetching those thunderous shots off the shelf regularly.

Buttler, who gave up the England white-ball captaincy after their Champions Trophy exit, said he was motivated by "a few months of pretty un-

enjoyable cricket".

"I tried to play with freedom and intent — had a few months of unenjoyable cricket, trying to give my best and excited to be here."

"There was a bit in the wicket, so the two openers played sensibly to take the sting out of that and set up the chase."

"We have got a lot of bases covered — fantastic seam-bowling unit, the spinners and a fantastic batting unit as well."

GT pacer Kagiso Rabada returns home due to personal reasons

Ahmedabad

Gujarat Titans (GT) pacer Kagiso Rabada has returned home to South Africa from the ongoing Indian Premier League (IPL) due to personal reasons.

GT issued a statement about Rabada's return back home on Thursday. The Proteas pace veteran was a part of GT's first two IPL 2025 matches against Punjab Kings (PBKS) and Mumbai Indians (MI), taking one wicket each in expensive four-over spells of 1/41 and 1/42 respectively.

"Gujarat Titans pacer Kagiso Rabada has returned to South Africa from the ongoing season of the TATA IPL due to some personal reasons. The South Africa international was a part of Gujarat Titans' first two matches of the TATA IPL 2025. Kagiso Rabada has returned to South Africa to deal with an important personal matter," the statement said.

Kagiso formed a fiery pace attack for GT alongside compatriot Gerald Coetzee, Mohammed Siraj, Prashidh Kr-

ishna and veteran Ishant Sharma. In 222 T20s, Rabada has taken 278 wickets at an average of 23.33 with best figures of 4/21 and an economy rate of 8.02. With 566 wickets in 241 international matches, he is an all-format veteran for his previous IPL.

In their previous T20 clash, GT defeated Royal Challengers Bengaluru (RCB) at M Chinnaswamy Stadium in Bengaluru (RCB) on Wednesday. Siraj (3/19) and Sai Kishore (2/22) were top bowlers as fine contributions from Liam Livingstone (54), Jitesh Sharma (33) and Tim David (32) powered RCB to 169/8 after being reduced to 42/4. GT chased down the total comfortably as Sai Sudharsan (49), Jos Buttler (73\*) and Sherane Rutherford (30\*) played explosive knocks, winning the match with eight wickets in hand.

With two wins in three matches, GT is now at the fourth spot in the points table. Their next clash will be against Sunrisers Hyderabad (SRH) on April 6 at Hyderabad.



## AFI makes it mandatory for athletes to take part in at least one event before Fed Cup

New Delhi  
Athletics Federation of India (AFI) has made it mandatory for athletes to compete in at least one regional competition or country-wide one-day event like the Grand Prix to be eligible for participation in the Federation Cup, the first national championship of the season 2025.

This is being done to ensure that athletes come prepared or show consistency as the Indian team for the Asian Championships to be held in Korea from May 27-31 will be picked on the basis of performance at the Federation Cup, which will be organised in Kochi, Kerala from April 21-24.

However, the athletes who are sent abroad by AFI for training, like double Olympic medalist javelin thrower Neeraj Chopra, will be exempted from this regulation.

To participate in this competition (Federation Cup), athletes must achieve the qualification entry standards in events directly organised by the AFI in the year 2025," the AFI said in a circular.

"It is mandatory for athletes to participate in at least one regional competition (Indian Open Athletics Meet Punjab, Gujarat, Jharkhand, Tamil Nadu) or 4th Indian Open Throws/4th Indian Open Jumps/6th Indian Open 400m/Indian Grand Prix in 2025.

"Please note that only performances achieved in the year 2025 will be considered and no old performances will be



accepted," the circular issued on Tuesday added.

It's, though, not new for AFI to set entry standards for major events like the Federation Cup, National Inter-State Championships and National Open Championships.

In the domestic calendar, the AFI has introduced eight Indian Open Meetings this season in different parts of the country to give more exposure to athletes near their native places. One such one-day event was held on April 1 in Sangrur, Punjab, while three more will take place before the Federation Cup - at Nadiad in Gujarat on April 5, in Ranchi on April 10 and in Chennai on April 15. "All units and athletes were informed

(about this) three months ago and the same is on the website since last three months. This was only a reminder circular," AFI spokesperson and former president Adile Sumarivalla said.

"Athletes are asking for more competition and then shying away," he added.

On many occasions in the past, athletes would just turn up for major events like the Federation Cup or National Inter-State Championships as they serve as qualifying events for Asian Championships or World Championships or Olympics, and later they fail to perform at these international events. "We want to stop this kind of things. The athletes should show that they have come prepared and they should

show consistency," an AFI official said. Whether Neeraj will compete in domestic event not yet known.

Chopra, who is currently training in Turkey, surprisingly competed in the Federation Cup last year in Bhubaneswar but it is still not yet known whether he will take part in a domestic event this year.

When he won the men's javelin gold in the 2024 Federation Cup, he was taking part in a domestic competition for the first time since the 2021 edition.

"Whether Neeraj will compete in a domestic event this year is not yet confirmed," the AFI official said.

It was announced in January that India will host a star-studded global javelin competition in May with Chopra in the tournament's organising team.

The event has received endorsement from World Athletics president Sebastian Coe, but since then there is no update on the date and venue of the event.

If the javelin event in India is not held in the first part of next month, the 27-year-old Chopra is likely to begin his season at the Doha Diamond League on May 16. He is unlikely to take part in the Asian Championships as his main goal this year will be to defend his title at the World Championships to be held in Tokyo from September 13-21.

The National Inter-State Championships to be held in Chennai from August 20-24 will be the last qualifying event for the Indian athletes to qualify for the World Championships.

## World Boxing Cup: Manish, Hitesh, Abhinash cruise into semifinals



New Delhi  
India's Manish Rathore, Hitesh and Abhinash Jamwal registered commanding victories to storm into the semi-finals of their respective weight categories in the World Boxing Cup Brazil 2025 on Wednesday.

In the 65 kg category, Jamwal tamed Germany's Denis Bril with a unanimous decision while Hitesh defeated Italy's Gabriele Guidi Rontani in a similar manner in the 70kg category.

In the 55kg category, Rathore

was up against Australia's Paris Olympian Yusuf Chothia and the Indian national champion was up for the challenge.

Both the boxers kept things tight in all three rounds with Rathore emerging victorious as three judges ruled in his favour while two gave equal points.

In the semifinals, Rathore will face Nursultan Altynbek of Kazakhstan, Hitesh will take on Makaan Traore while Jamwal will look to overcome Gianluigi Malanga of Italy.

## 17-year old Kriish Tyagi gears up for Junior Grand Slams

Bengaluru  
Kriish Tyagi is on the brink of a defining year in his young career. India's number one ranked junior tennis star has been steadily making strides across both junior and senior circuits.

Tyagi, 17, is now preparing for a crucial stretch of tournaments, including the Junior Grand Slams, that could shape his future in the sport.

Most recently, he was in action at the ongoing SM Krishna Memorial Open in his hometown of Bengaluru, where he lost to SD Prajwal Dev in the opening round. However, the teenager is far from disheartened.

Reflecting on the match, he highlighted the adjustment to conditions as a challenge. "It's always nice to play at home but I'm coming from Ahmedabad, where the conditions were different. When I played today, I felt like the balls were flying out even when it was raining. In Ahmedabad, it wasn't the same, and I think the altitude change had an effect."

He also admitted that he struggled to find his rhythm early on. "I felt like he started very well, and I wasn't into the game as much as he was. I didn't start that well, I was very rough in the beginning."

Before the SM Krishna Memorial Open, Tyagi made an impressive run at the ITF M25 Ahmedabad Open, where he progressed to the semifinals but lost to eventual champion Aryan Shah. His deep run at the tournament reaffirmed his ability to compete at a higher level.

Discussing the transition between junior and senior circuits, he noted the key difference. "In the important moments, senior players perform much better. They serve better, return better, and know what to play when. I feel that in a match, the crucial points make the difference. If you can convert them to your side, the match is yours."

Looking ahead, Tyagi has a packed schedule featuring some of the biggest junior tournaments. "I go to Malaysia for a few junior tournaments, spending two weeks there. Then, I have one week in Thailand for JBI, and after that, I head to the French Open Junior Grand Slam. Then I'll play Wimbledon and the US Open."

Having already played at the Australian Open this year, he feels prepared for the challenge of competing in the Junior Grand Slams. "It was very hard, but I feel that playing a Junior Grand Slam and competing in other top-grade junior tournaments is the same. Let's say you play a guy in a tournament in Malaysia, and then you face him again in a Grand Slam. You already know his game and what he does."

## Pfeiffer, Raman to make coaching debuts in Ultimate Table Tennis



New Delhi  
German specialist Chris Pfeiffer, who has coached Aachanta Sharath Kamal, along with S Raman are the prominent names set to make their coaching debuts in season 6 of the Ultimate Table Tennis (UTT) scheduled in Ahmedabad from May 29 to June 15.

Along with the duo, veteran trainers Pavel Rehorek and Julien Girard, former India No. 1 Jubin Kumar will also be present as coaches in the dug-out of various franchises.

Pfeiffer is the head coach of Sharath Kamal Academy since 2022 and will mentor the Ahmedabad SG Pipers. Subramanian will join fellow debutant Girard in Dabang Delhi TTC set-up and comes in with extensive experience of coaching Indian team during the 2022 Commonwealth Games.

Teams & Coaches Ahmedabad SG Pipers: Somnath Ghosh; Chris Pfeiffer (Germany); Jaipur Patriots: Sachin Shetty; Pavel Rehorek (Czech Re-

public) PBG Pune Jaguars: Subhajit Saha; Vesna Ojstersek (Slovenia) Goa Challengers: Parag Agrawal; Elena Timina (Netherlands) Dabang Delhi TTC: Raman Subramanian; Julien Girard (France) U Mumbai TT: Jay Modak; John Murphy (Ireland) Kolkata ThunderBlades: Jubin Kumar; Tobias Berger (Sweden) Chennai Lions: Soumyadeep Roy; Jorg Bitzigeo (Germany).

## Olympic medalist PR Sreejesh leads Player Development Workshop for Pro Kabaddi Stars

New Delhi  
Mashal Sports, the organisation behind the Pro Kabaddi League, successfully conducted the 'PKL Level Up' Player Development Workshop designed to elevate kabaddi players beyond their performances on the mat.

This initiative represented a significant milestone in professional kabaddi, bringing together industry experts to provide players with key life skills, personal branding, and professional growth opportunities. The workshop was a testament to the league's commitment to nurturing its athletes and ensuring that they excel both professionally and personally.

The event featured an exceptional lineup of speakers including Olympic bronze medalist PR Sreejesh, Alpi Chaudhari from Meta India, prominent content creator Deepak Pareek, Neha



Mathur Rastogi, CEO and founder of WordsWork Communications Consulting, a leading company for Sports media relations in India, and Dr. Chaitanya Sridhar, a renowned Sports and Depth Psychologist from the Inspire Institute of Sport (IIS-JSW Sports).

## Hockey India Senior Men National Championship under new format begins on Apr 4 in Jhansi

Jhansi  
Thirty teams will compete in three divisions in the 15th Hockey India Senior Men National Championship to be held here from April 4-15.

This will be the first time the men's tournament, to be held at the Major Dhyani Chand Hockey Stadium, is being played in the new three-division format. The Senior Women National Championship was played in the same new format in March.

The domestic competition, which will now also feature promotion and relegation battles, has been divided into three divisions - A, B and C.

The Division A will be the highest one as the teams in it will fight for the championship title. Division B will have teams competing for promotion to Division A next season while in Division C, the teams will fight for a spot in Division B for the next edition.

The Division B and C matches are scheduled to begin on April 4 while the Division A matches will commence on April 8.

Division A has the top-12 teams in India, including defending champions Odisha and runners-up Haryana, based on their overall performances in the tournament over the years.

Other teams in Division A, which will have four pools, are Punjab, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Jharkhand, Uttar Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Bengal, Hockey, Karnataka and Puducherry.

Each team will play every opponent once in their respective pools. This will be the only division featuring a knockout stage as the top-



two teams from each pool will advance to the quarterfinals, scheduled for April 12.

The semifinals will be played on April 13, and the final and 3rd/4th place match on April 15. The bottom two teams from Division A will be relegated to Division B for the next edition.

In Division B, 10 teams will compete for promotion to Division A. The teams are divided into two pools. Pool A has Chandigarh, Goa, Telangana, Andhra Pradesh, Uttarakhand, while Delhi, Mizoram, Dadra & Nagar Haveli and Daman & Diu, Kerala, Assam are in Pool B.

The top two teams from Division B will earn promotion to Division A for the next season, while the bottom two will be relegated to Division C.

In Division C, the eight teams will compete for promotion to Division B. The teams are divided into two pools. Rajasthan, Arunachal, Jammu & Kashmir, Tripura are in Pool

A while Pool B comprises Chhattisgarh, Himachal, Bihar and Gujarat.

The top two teams in Division C will secure promotion to Division B. The points system in all three divisions is the same. Each team will be awarded three points for a win, one point for a draw, and no points for a loss.

In Division A, the league stage will be followed by the knockout rounds, while Divisions B and C will conclude with final standings determined by points won in the pool matches.

Commenting on the tournament, Hockey India president Dilip Tirkey said, "The new format worked out really well during the senior women national championship and we are looking forward to see how it unfolds this time as well."

"With promotion and relegation at stake, I expect to see teams give it their all on the pitch and play some exceptional hockey."

Sharing his thoughts on becoming better athletes, PR Sreejesh said, "When you win, people remember you, but the real growth comes from matches we don't win. That's where we learn what to do differently next time. The ultimate truth in sports is simple: never give up. After every failure comes regret, but whoever persists more, whoever works harder on improvement, is the one who ultimately succeeds."

"But life isn't just about what happens during matches - your activities off the field matter too. How you conduct yourself with family, how you present yourself on social media, and what values you demonstrate in everyday life -- all of this builds your identity as an athlete," he added during his session.

The Indian hockey legend also

stressed the importance of teamwork, saying, "Teamwork is essential - one person's mistake impacts the entire team, which is why mutual understanding becomes crucial. What happens on the ground stays there; after the match ends, we're friends again because respect forms the foundation of sportsmanship."

Chaitanya Sridhar, who has over 20 years of experience mentoring elite athletes including Olympic medalists, made history as the first woman Sports Psychologist in the IPL with Royal Challengers Bengaluru. She emphasized the importance of mental fitness for athletes. "With sports careers being relatively short, maintaining mental fitness and dealing with high-pressure situations is crucial. It was valuable to hear the players reflect during our interactive sessions."

'Family Guy', 'Bob's Burgers' get four-season renewals at Fox



**Washington**  
**D** Fox has decided to keep its most popular animated shows on air for the rest of the decade, reported The Hollywood Reporter.

The network has renewed 'The Simpsons', 'Family Guy', and 'Bob's Burgers' for four more seasons. It also confirmed that American Dad! will return to Fox in 2025-26 with a four-season renewal.

As per the publication, these renewals mean that all four shows will continue until at least 2028-29.

The Simpsons, which is already the longest-running scripted TV show, will reach its 40th season. It could even get close to 900 episodes by the end of this new deal. Family Guy will go up to its 27th season, while Bob's Burgers will continue until its 19th season. American Dad! will now have seasons 20 to 23 under Fox's banner.

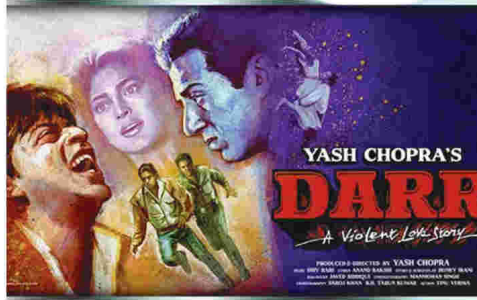
American Dad! originally aired on Fox for nine seasons before moving to TBS in 2014. After running for another decade there, the show is now returning to Fox.

Shah Rukh Khan's 'Darr' re-releasing this Friday

**Mumbai**  
**L**ove watching Bollywood superstar Shah Rukh Khan in negative roles? There's great news for SRK's fans as one of his remarkable films, 'Darr', is re-releasing in theatres this Friday.

Sharing the update, production banner Yash Raj Films (YRF) took to Instagram and wrote, "Experience this iconic tale on the big screen again! #Darr re-releasing in cinemas tomorrow. Book your tickets now! (Link in bio) @prcinemas\_official @inoxmovies @cinopolisindia."

SRK played the role of a murderous stalker in 'Darr', which also starred Juhi Chawla and Sunny Deol. The film's story revolved around Rahul (SRK) who is obsessively in love with his classmate Kiran (Juhi Chawla) and stalks her to her doorstep. And what follows is a cycle of distress, heartbreak, and fights, which lead to Rahul's



death. It's been more than three decades and the film is remembered to date. Nobody can ever forget SRK's "I Love You K.K.K.. Kiran!" dialogue. In Netflix's docu-series 'The Romantics', SRK took a stroll down memory lane and shared how he perfected his stammering dialogue "K k k.. Kiran". SRK said, "I had a classmate who had a stammer and then we did some little

study, some BBC documentary where they talked about that people's minds become aware to one sound, and it's like a sharp current. So, you can't say the word because you become aware of a sound. Let's make him aware of the woman he loves the most, her name. So, I only stammer on the word Kiran. It was just for that one word because he's so aware of her." "I had some really fan-

tastically stupid ideas, like I remember once going to Adi and saying, can I make this phone call hanging upside down? Adi said 'Dad won't allow that.' Sometimes he would come and tell me that listen I think dad is not going to take a close up of this. I think you did very well. So, you suggest, if I do it, he'll turn me down. So, we were like the filters who kind of help each other with Yash Ji," he added.



'Panchayat' makers announce Season 4 as series clocks 5 years

**Mumbai**  
**T**he much-loved web series 'Panchayat' turns 5 today. The show, which first premiered on Prime Video on April 3, 2020, has won the hearts of viewers ever since its release.

Now, as the series marks its 5th anniversary, fans have received the news they were eagerly waiting for: 'Panchayat Season 4', which is set to release on July 2 of this year.

Prime Video, on Thursday, took to its Instagram account to share a promotional video featuring actors Jitendra Kumar, Jia Manek, and internet sensation Darshan Magdum. Panchayat Season 4, produced under the banner of



The Viral Fever (TVF), is created by Deepak Kumar Mishra, written by Chandan Kumar, and directed by Deepak Kumar Mishra and Akshat Vijaywargiya. The series stars Jitendra Kumar in the lead as the en-

dearing Sachivji, alongside an ensemble cast including Raghubir Yadav, Neena Gupta, Sanvikaa, Chandan Roy, Faisal Malik, Durgesh Kumar, Sunita Rajwar, and Pankaj Jha in pivotal roles. In Panchayat Season 3,

the story delves deeper into village politics and corruption, focusing on elections and the struggles of the villagers, particularly the lack of a proper road. The season also explores themes of grief, community, and unity.

Vir Das announces his book 'The Outsider- A Memoir for Misfits'

**Mumbai**  
**A**ctor-comedian Vir Das has announced that he is coming out with his memoir, 'The Outsider- A Memoir for Misfits'.

He took to social media to unveil the cover of his upcoming book, which he said has been in the works over the past two years. "I WROTE A BOOK!!!!!! For ALL The Outsiders! I hope you'll preorder and share. For some reason, I have seen more of the world, and been let into more worlds, than anyone I know. Laughter has truly saved my life. I hope to show you how funny and beautiful this world is. It hits shelves soon, but you can order it NOW in my profile. @simonand-schuster @simonelement @harpercollins This amazing music is Meraki by @du-alistinqury." Vir shared on Instagram.



The memoir, according to his publishers, "is set to take a deep dive into his many phases of life highlighting that the comedy world isn't the only place where he's always felt like an outsider." In the book, amongst many incidents highlighted Vir recounts a memorable moment when, stranded on a pier in Cozumel, Mexico, with his cruise ship sailing away due to visa issues, he

realized that being an outsider isn't just something he experiences—"it's who he is." Reflecting on his globe-trotting life, Vir said, "I've had a strange life that took me across the world more than anyone I know. I don't know how one ends up being the Indian kid in Nigeria, the African kid in boarding school, the boarding school kid in Delhi Public School, the Delhi kid in Galesburg,

Illinois, the Chicago guy in Alabama, the America-return in Mumbai, the Bollywood guy in comedy, the stand-up comedy guy in Bollywood, the Bollywood guy in Indie Music, and the Indian in American comedy. All I know is, when you are blessed enough to step into all those worlds, you write a book about it. I hope to take you across the world through the eyes of a fortunate fool."

Noemie Merlant recalls working in 'Emanuelle'



**Los Angeles**  
**A**fter its theatrical run, 'Emanuelle' is now all set to be out on OTT.

The film, which stars Noemie Merlant, Naomi Watts and Will Sharpe, will premiere on April 11 exclusively on Lionsgate Play.

Ahead of the digital premiere, Noemie took a stroll down memory lane and recalled working in the film. "I didn't know Emanuelle at all, neither the book nor the film. All I knew was the buzz that had surrounded the film when it was released. I only learned two days before meeting Audrey that she was looking for her Emmanuelle and that she had thought of me. I was very flattered. When I read the script, I was caught up in this intimate journey," she said, as per a press note. "I had the feeling of going on an inner journey since it resembled my own somewhat, that's to say the journey of a woman who tries to connect to her body, to reconnect, period, as if ultimately she'd never really been able to connect to herself, to her pleasure.

"Anupam Kher sir will always be my Guru...": Neil Nitin Mukesh

**Mumbai**  
**N**eil Nitin Mukesh has come a long way in his career. In a journey spanning over 18 years, he has proved his mettle time and again with his acting prowess, especially in projects such as 'Johnny Gaddaar', 'New York', and 'Jaal' among others. Credits also go to his "Guru" and veteran actor Anupam Kher for making Neil learn valuable aspects of acting. His training at Kher's acting school, 'Actor Prepares', gave him a solid foundation in acting techniques.

On Thursday, Neil, son of renowned playback singer Nitin Mukesh and grandson of legendary singer Mukesh, rechristened his memories spent at 'Actor Prepares', where he was enrolled as a student alongside Hrithik Roshan, Abhishek Bachchan, Uday Chopra, and Jugal Hansraj.

"Doing Surya Namaskar, walking a little...": Kareena Kapoor Khan

**Mumbai**  
**W**hile many actresses have gone under the knife to enhance their looks, Bollywood star Kareena Kapoor Khan prefers to stay away from cosmetic surgeries.

At a launch event for nutritionist Rutuja Diwekar's book 'The Commonsense Diet', in Mumbai, Kareena emphasised ageing gracefully and naturally rather than relying on skin treatments such as botox.

"Age is just a number. My only thing is I always want to be fit to take on whatever old age brings. I want to be able to do what I have to do whether it has to go to sets at 70, 75. I want to keep working until 85, all my life. I want to be able to bend to pick up my grandchildren. I want to be able to do things and not be



dependent on someone or a stick," Kareena said.

"For that, I have to eat right, and have mobility to work out. It's not about the way I look, it's about the way I feel and that's what for me, aging and life is. I'm embracing it but I'm taking all these particular things, like eating ghee, eating khichdi, doing a little bit of weight training for muscle strength, walking a little, my Surya Namaskars,

doing my little work on my own rather than skin treatments and botox," she added. Meanwhile, on the professional front, Kareena recently captivated the audience with her appearance at the gala celebrating 25 years of Lakme Fashion Week. Reflecting on her fashion journey, she recalled walking the ramp at different stages of her life, from her size-zero days to her pregnancy with son Taimur.

Reese Witherspoon announces 'Legally Blonde' prequel 'Elle', check out first look

**Washington**  
**F**ans of 'Legally Blonde' have exciting news to celebrate! Reese Witherspoon has shared the first look at Lexi Minnetree as Elle Woods in Elle, a new prequel series coming to Amazon Prime Video.

Witherspoon, who played Elle Woods in the original films, took to Instagram to make the announcement. "Harvard was hard. High school was harder. Our new



series, Elle, is now in production! Couldn't be more excited to introduce you all to

@leximinetree as Elle Woods," read her Instagram post.

According to Variety, the show will take viewers back to Elle Woods' high school days, giving fans a glimpse of the experiences that shaped her into the confident and determined woman fans loved in Legally Blonde. Meanwhile, shooting for the series has just begun, reported Variety.

Lexi Minnetree, who is often seen in small roles such as in

'Law & Order: SVU' and 'The Murdaugh Murders', is set to take on her first lead role as young Elle Woods. The cast also includes Tom Everett Scott as Elle's father and June Diane Raphael as her mother.

Laura Kittrell and Caroline Dries serve as co-showrunners, with Witherspoon also involved as an executive producer. The series is produced by Amazon MGM and Witherspoon's company, Hello Sunshine.