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**IN BRIFS**

**SC COLLEGIUM APPROVES APPOINTMENT OF NINE ADVOCATES AS PATNA HC JUDGES**

Patna (TSIT) The Supreme Court Collegium, headed by the Chief Justice of India, Justice Surya Kant, has cleared the names of nine advocates for appointment as judges of the Patna High Court, the highest number ever recommended at one time in its history. With these appointments, the court's strength will increase from 38 to 47 judges. Justice Surya Kant headed the meeting of the Supreme Court Collegium held on February 26, 2026, in which the proposal for the appointment of nine judges to the Patna High Court was approved. The advocates whose names have been cleared for appointment are Md. Nadim Seraj, Ranjan Kumar Jha, Kumar Manish, Sanjeev Kumar, Girijish Kumar, Alok Kumar, Raj Kumar, Rana Vikram Singh, and Vikash Kumar. The appointments will take effect after the central government processes the recommendations and issues the warrants of appointment.

**DELHI GOVT TO AUDIT PRIVATE SCHOOLS FINANCES OVER ALLEGATIONS**

New Delhi: The Delhi government has decided to appoint specialised audit teams to carry out a comprehensive inspection of financial records of private schools, following repeated complaints from parents over alleged financial irregularities and excessive fee collection. The Directorate of Education (DoE) will hire three project management units to conduct detailed audits of private unaided recognised schools across the capital, the education department said. Each project management unit will consist of 10 chartered accountants and the total cost of the audit exercise has been estimated at Rs 6.3 crore, it said, adding that the decision was taken after the department received several complaints alleging financial malpractice and overcharging by private schools. It further mentioned that routine inspections ordered on individual complaints were not sufficient to uncover deeper irregularities, making a detailed examination of financial statements necessary.



**CM Revanth meets 6 surrendered maoist leaders at Secretariat**

Hyderabad TSIT BUREAU:

Chief Minister Revanth Reddy on Friday met six surrendered senior Maoist leaders at the Telangana Secretariat and reviewed measures related to their rehabilitation and reintegration into mainstream society. The surrendered leaders who called on the Chief Minister were Tippiri Tirupati (@Dev Ji), Malla Rajireddy (@Sangram),

Pulluri Prasad Rao (@Chandranna), Pothula Kalpana (@Sujata), Bade Chokka Rao (@Damodar), and Noone Narsimha Reddy (@Ganganna). During the interaction, discussions were understood to have focused on rehabilitation support, livelihood opportunities, and the State government's initiatives aimed at ensuring a peaceful transition for those who have renounced extremism.

Senior officials present at the meeting included Government Advisor K. Keshava Rao, Advisor Vem Narendar Reddy, Chief Secretary K. Ramakrishna Rao, DGP Shivadhar Reddy, ADG (Intelligence) Vijay Kumar, and SIB IG Sumathi. The meeting reflects the Telangana government's continued emphasis on peace-building efforts and structured rehabilitation policies for surrendered cadres.

**Bihar Speaker asks govt to review demand for strict anti-conversion law after Assembly debate**

Patna (TSIT) Following demands for a strict anti-conversion law over the issue of religious conversion, which echoed strongly in the Bihar Assembly, the Speaker Prem Kumar, in his ruling today, directed the government to review the matter in light of the suggestions given by members and take appropriate action.

Intervening in the situation that erupted following vociferous demands for a strict anti-religious conversion law by several members of the house, the Speaker asked the government to review the issue and take appropriate action. He assured the house, saying that the government would certainly consider the suggestions and added that he has given a ruling for a review and for framing a strict law if necessary.

The issue of religious conversion echoed strongly in the Bihar Assembly. During the pre-lunch sitting, several members demanded the



enactment of a stringent anti-conversion law in the state on the lines of other states.

Raising the issue through his call for attention, member Virendra Kumar said that stringent laws against religious conversion are already in force in several states. He stated that under such laws, there is a provision of imprisonment for conversions carried out through fraud or child marriage, and that such offences are non-bailable. He said these laws are primarily

aimed at preventing forced religious conversions in the name of marriage.

He alleged that due to religious conversions, there has been an abnormal increase in the Muslim and Christian population in Bihar. Claiming that more than 5,000 churches have been established in the state, he said that while the national growth rate of Christians is around 15.23 percent, the growth rate in Bihar is much higher. There has been an unexpected rise in the Muslim population, too, in Bihar.

He further alleged that in several districts, conversions are being carried out in the name of marriage, child marriage and inducements by Christian missionaries and Islamic clerics. According to him, girls belonging to SC, ST, EBC, OBC, and general categories are being targeted. Referring to strict anti-conversion laws in 11 states, he demanded that Bihar enact a similar law.

**'THEY CONSPIRED TO DESTROY AAP', KEJRIWAL ATTACKS BJP, CENTRE AFTER CLEAN CHIT; THROWS FRESH POLL CHALLENGE**

New Delhi (TSIT): Former Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal, in his first presser after getting a clean chit in the 'Liquorgate' case, launched a frontal attack at the BJP, Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Home Minister Amit Shah, accusing them of hatching a conspiracy to annihilate the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP). He also demanded that the duo apologise to the people of Delhi for implicating him and AAP leaders in a false case, and dared the Centre to conduct fresh Assembly elections to "gauge the public mood and wrath".

Kejriwal, flanked by close aides and top AAP functionaries including Manish Sisodia, Sanjay Singh and others, also thanked the judges and legal fraternity for upholding the rule of law and "showing grit in times of extreme adversities." He informed the press that his party will soon move higher courts to challenge the ED case against him, as this doesn't hold water in light of the CBI case getting dismissed by the Rouse Avenue court. The AAP chief, addressing the media at the party's



office, said that he, Sisodia and other AAP leaders were framed in a false, fabricated and entirely bogus case, which didn't stand legal scrutiny and hence fell flat at the trial stage itself.

"The court said that there wasn't sufficient evidence and material to begin a trial in the case. In its 600-page order, the Court stated that in no uncertain terms, there can't be any trial as there is no sufficient substance and ground for taking it forward," he told media persons. Launching a scathing attack at the Centre, he said that it was Prime Minister

Narendra Modi and Home Minister Amit Shah who hatched this conspiracy to annihilate and destroy AAP.

"This was the most sinister and wicked conspiracy by them to throw us out of power," he stated, while accusing the Centre of using central agencies like CBI and ED to harass them for the past four years. The AAP leader, swearing by his high standards of honesty and integrity, said that he didn't earn anything in life other than respect, and he was maliciously targeted by the BJP for political advantage.

**BRS lost power due to arrogance of its leaders: Kavitha**

Hyderabad, Nov 27 (TSIT): Telangana Jagruthi president K. Kavitha said on Friday that BRS lost the elections because of the arrogance of its leaders and the party's failure to keep its promises. She was reacting to her brother and Bharat Rashtra Samithi (BRS) working president K. T. Rama Rao's post after she was acquitted by a Delhi court in the Delhi excise policy case. "Am I the reason for the loss?" asked



Kavitha while interacting with the media. She said that the reason for the defeat of BRS was its failure to give jobs and houses as promised, and also giving tickets again to the 'looters'. "Most importantly, your arrogant approach led to the party's defeat," said the daughter of BRS president and former chief minister K. Chandrasekhar Rao (KCR). "You are living in denial, my brother; accept the fact. To do politics, you need courage. In politics, you must also accept defeat. Understand what happened during the election. Take steps accordingly," she said.

**CM Revanth reviews core urban region, pushes sanitation tech & food safety reforms**

Hyderabad (TSIT): Telangana Chief Minister A. Revanth Reddy on Friday chaired a high-level review meeting on the Core Urban Region (CURE) and issued key directives focusing on sanitation, public health, and technology-driven civic management.

Emphasising cleanliness and mosquito control, the Chief Minister instructed municipal authorities to intensify public awareness campaigns to ensure garbage is disposed of only at designated locations. He stressed the use of technology to improve efficiency and ensure timely completion of civic works.

As part of smart monitoring measures, he directed that all street lights in the Core Urban Region be assigned unique identification numbers and integrated with a central dashboard for real-time supervision, enabling immediate detection and rectification of faults. Under the CURE framework, the CM called for stronger food safety regulations, proposing installation of CCTV



cameras in hotel kitchens linked to the Command Control Centre. He also instructed frequent inspections and the establishment of a dedicated monitoring wing. Additionally, he suggested introducing a rating and certification system for hotels based on hygiene and safety standards.

To strengthen fire safety, he called for deployment of advanced equipment. Addressing urban flooding and water conservation, he proposed setting up rainwater harvesting wells at major traffic junctions on a pilot basis before city-wide expansion. Senior officials from municipal administration, urban development, and allied departments attended the review meeting.

**Afghan armed forces strike Pak 'nuclear facility,' military base near Abbottabad, amid escalating clashes**

New Delhi/Kabul (TSIT) Afghan armed forces struck a "nuclear facility" and a military base in the Kakul village near Abbottabad in Pakistan's Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, Russian news agency TASS reported. It said "hundreds of dead and injured" have been taken to a hospital in Islamabad.



Faizabad city in Islamabad, the army cantonment in Nowshera, the military colony in Jamrud, and targets in Abbottabad.

"These operations were successfully carried out, hitting key military sites, centres, and installations of the Pakistani

army," the Ministry said. The statement noted that the strikes were in retaliation for Pakistan's aerial incursions over Kabul, Kandahar, and Paktia the previous night. Afghanistan government spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid said a special circle in Pakistan has launched a mission to destabilise the region following the recent escalation of conflict between the two countries. Speaking at a press conference in Kandahar province on Friday, Mujahid said Afghan air forces had precisely targeted Pakistani military centres. He said Pakistan consistently attempts to fabricate pretexts for war and links its internal issues to Afghanistan.

Mujahid further stated that Pakistani aircraft are still patrolling Afghanistan's airspace.

Following retaliatory attacks by Afghan forces on Pakistani military facilities across the Durand Line, Pakistan carried out airstrikes on targets in three Afghan provinces, including Kabul, Kandahar, and Paktia. He described the Afghan operation as retaliation for Pakistan's previous attacks in Nangarhar and Paktika earlier this week.

Pakistan's Defence Minister Khawaja Asif described the situation as an "all-out confrontation" and warned that Pakistan's patience had "reached its limit."

**India, Bhutan deepen ties on trans-boundary rivers and hydropower cooperation**

New Delhi (TSIT) India and Bhutan have reaffirmed their commitment to deepening cooperation on trans-boundary rivers, hydropower development, and flood management during a high-level visit by an Indian delegation to the Himalayan kingdom from February 24-27.

The delegation was led by the Secretary, Department of Water Resources, River Development & Ganga Rejuvenation, Ministry of Jal Shakti, and included officials from the state governments of Assam and West Bengal, as well as representatives of WAPCOS Limited.

The visit focused on advancing collaboration on shared river systems and reviewing



the progress of the P u n a t s a n g c h u - I Hydroelectric Project, which is being implemented in Bhutan in partnership with the Government of India. During the Secretary-level bilateral meeting held on February 25, both sides reviewed existing

cooperation mechanisms on flood management and forecasting. Discussions centred on modernising Bhutan's hydro-meteorological observation network on trans-border rivers and strengthening real-time data-sharing systems for flood forecasting.

## Amit Shah reviews internal security in Bihar's Seemanchal region

**PATNA:** Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Friday held a meeting with top Bihar government officials in Purnea district to review internal security in the strategically located Seemanchal region, before winding up his three-day state tour.

Those present at the meeting included Union Minister of State for Home Nityanand Rai and Bihar Deputy Chief Minister Samrat Choudhary, besides the state's Chief Secretary Pratay Amrit and Director General of Police Vinay Kumar.

Snapshots of the high-level meeting, held at a hotel in Purnea, were shared on X by Choudhary, who holds the Home portfolio in the Nitish Kumar government



in Bihar.

"A meeting is scheduled with the honourable Home Minister, who is expected to brief officials of all the departments concerned on effective management of borders and putting a check on activities like smuggling and narcotics," the DGP had told reporters ahead of

Shah's visit. Shah had kicked off his tour on February 25, when he chaired a meeting of the Land Ports Authority of India, a statutory body functioning under the Ministry of Home Affairs, which is responsible for creating, upgrading, maintaining and managing border infra-

structure in the country. On Thursday, he visited Araria, where he dedicated to the nation a couple of border outposts and launched projects worth Rs 175 crore of the Sashstra Seema Bal. He also asserted that "driving out every infiltrator from the country is the top priority of the Narendra Modi government".

The home minister had noted that states like Bihar, Jharkhand and West Bengal had become vulnerable to "demographic changes" caused by unchecked infiltration.

The former BJP president had also expressed confidence that his party would win the upcoming assembly polls in West Bengal and flush out infiltrators from

the state, which, incidentally, has a sizeable minority population.

Shah had also thanked the people of Bihar, where "we fought the assembly polls a few months ago on the issue of infiltration", for giving a resounding mandate to the BJP-led NDA. He had vowed to make the Seemanchal region "free from infiltrators", and ordered the removal of "all encroachments within 10 kilometres of the border with Nepal".

Besides Nepal, Seemanchal shares borders with West Bengal and is seen as a "gateway" to the strategically important Siliguri Corridor, which is colloquially referred to as the "Chicken's Neck".

## Navy targets 200 plus ships by 2035: Chief of Naval Staff Dinesh K Tripathi

**CHENNAI:** The Indian Navy aims to transform into a 200-plus ship maritime force by 2035 and plans to induct 15 additional vessels in 2026, Chief of the Naval Staff Admiral Dinesh K Tripathi said here on Friday.

Speaking after commissioning the INS Anjadip at the Chennai Port here, he said the Navy's long term vision is to achieve complete self-reliance in ship-building at component level and evolve into a fully Aatmanirbhar force by 2047.

"The operational footprint of the Navy extends across the Indian Ocean Region and beyond with Naval units persistently

forward-deployed on surveillance, anti-piracy and coordinated patrols, reflecting sustained reach and credible operational depth," he said.

Noting that the concept of Aatmanirbharta has progressed from 'Make in India' to 'Trust in India', he said, "We have embraced Aatmanirbharta not only as a strategic imperative but also as an investment towards future assurance."

Highlighting the ongoing shipbuilding efforts, Admiral Tripathi said all 50 ships presently on order are being built in Indian shipyards. "As we look to become 200 plus ship navy by 2035, our aim is to take Aatmanir-

bharta to component level and build a fully Aatmanirbhar force by 2047," he said. The maritime force is adopting a clear approach towards building credible capability across the spectrum of operations, address evolving threat perceptions on both Western and Eastern seaboard, he said.

"Within broader design, during the year 2025, the Indian Navy commissioned 12 warships and one submarine. This momentum continues with plans to induct about 15 more ships in 2026, setting an unprecedented benchmark and marking the highest rate of induction in our history," he said.

## 8 cheetahs from Africa to arrive at MP's Kuno National Park on Saturday

**SHEOPUR:** Eight more cheetahs will be airlifted from Africa and brought to Kuno National Park (KNP) in Madhya Pradesh on Saturday morning, an official said on Friday.

Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister Mohan Yadav and Union Environment, Forest and Climate Change Minister Bhubender Yadav will release the big cats into enclosures readied at the park under the ongoing cheetah revival programme in India via intercontinental translocations, he added.

The batch from Botswana, comprising six females and two males, will fly to Gwalior between 9 pm and 10 pm on an Indian Air Force aircraft, Cheetah Project Director Uttam Sharma told PTI.

From Gwalior, two IAF helicopters will transport the cheetahs to Kuno National Park, where they are expected to arrive between 9 am and 10 am on Saturday. The flight duration from Botswana to Gwalior will be around nine to 10 hours, he said.

This will be the third batch of

cheetahs arriving from Africa, following earlier introductions from Namibia and South Africa, he added.

With this, the number of cheetahs in India will rise to 46. Sharma said enclosures have been prepared at the park, where the cheetahs will remain in quarantine for about a month.

The park has five helipads to facilitate their safe landing, he added.

Like the last time, the IAF will assist the cheetah revival programme by bringing them from Africa, just as it did when transporting the cursorial animal from SA in February 2023, Sharma said.

Earlier, eight cheetahs were brought from Namibia to Gwalior on a private jet in September 2022, after which IAF helicopters transported them to the park, he said.

"The arrival of more cheetahs will strengthen India's cheetah revival programme. With the support of the central government, we aim to increase the population to 50 as soon as pos-

sible," Sharma said.

Three big cats were later relocated to Gandhi Sagar Wildlife Sanctuary, while 35 remain at Kuno National Park, he said.

According to officials, endangered animals are not kept in a single habitat due to the risk of disease outbreaks that can wipe out their entire population at one go.

The cheetah, the world's fastest land animal, became extinct in India nearly seven decades ago. Last year, India saw the birth of 12 cubs, though six, including three cubs, did not survive. This year, between February 7 and February 18, eight cubs were born in two litters.

In all, 39 cubs have been born at KNP since 2023, of which 27 have survived. Namibia-born Jwala and Aasha, South Africa-born Gaminii, Veera and Nirva, and India-born Mukhi have all produced litters at KNP, officials said.

Three cheetahs have been moved to Gandhi Sagar Wildlife Sanctuary in Mandsaur district, while 35 remain at KNP, they added.

## Judiciary is supreme, we must accept court's verdict: Hazare on Kejriwal's discharge in excise case

**PUNE:** Social activist Anna Hazare on Friday welcomed the discharge of AAP leader Arvind Kejriwal in the excise policy case, saying the court's verdict must be accepted as judiciary is supreme.

The anti-corruption crusader also advised Kejriwal to work for society and the country and not to think of himself or about his party. On his critical comments made against Kejriwal in the past concerning the excise policy case, he said the court had not delivered any verdict at that time.

A court in the national capital on Friday discharged former Delhi chief minister Kejriwal, his deputy Manish Sisodia and 21 others from the politically-charged liquor-policy case, and pulled up the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI), saying it did not find any "overarching conspiracy or criminal intent" in the policy. Kejriwal, arrested on March 21, 2024, by the Enforcement Directorate in the excise policy case and later by the CBI, which was probing the corruption charges, had been released on bail after spending 155 days in jail.

"Our country runs on the judic-



riary. The judicial system is the supreme system in the country. Ours is a big country comprising several political parties, castes, creeds and religions, and still it is running properly because of the judicial system," Hazare told reporters at his native village Ralegan Siddhi in Maharashtra's Ahilyanagar district. In the absence of a strong judiciary, criminal elements would gain upper hand and there would be a riot-like situation in the country, he said.

"Whatever I had said about Arvind Kejriwal regarding his involve-

ment in the case was before any decision had come from the judiciary. At that time, the allegations were in the air. Now the judiciary has given its verdict that he had no role in the (wrongdoing). We have to accept the verdict," he said.

"Now the court has given its decision. In our democracy, we must respect the judiciary," he added, in response to his past critical comments about the former Delhi CM. Hazare also described Kejriwal and former Delhi deputy chief minister Manish Sisodia as his "karyakartas" (volunteers/activists).

"He was my karyakarta. He and Manish Sisodia were my karyakartas," he said.

When asked what piece of advice he would like to give to Kejriwal now, Hazare said, "Work for society and the country. Do not think about the self or the party."

Hazare, Kejriwal and Sisodia had emerged as the key faces of the 2011 'India Against Corruption' movement, which demanded the enactment of a strong Jan Lokpal Bill. The movement shook the Congress-led UPA government of that time.

Kejriwal later formed the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) and went on to win Delhi elections. Hazare, however, disassociated himself after the movement took a political turn.

Following Kejriwal's arrest in the case in March 2024, Hazare had criticised him, saying it was ironic that the one who was part of the Jan Lokpal movement, was held in a corruption case. He had also accused Kejriwal of betraying the trust of crores of countrymen and ried that political ambitions destroyed the 2011 anti-corruption movement.

## AI should enhance human creativity: Siddaramaiah

**BENGALURU:** Karnataka Chief Minister Siddaramaiah on Friday said Artificial Intelligence must remain a tool to enhance human creativity and not replace artists, stressing ethical use, protection of intellectual property and fair compensation in the AVGC-XR sector.

He also called upon industry leaders to invest in original content, educational institutions to modernise curricula, young creators to dream fearlessly and global partners to collaborate with Karnataka.

Speaking after inaugurating the seventh edition of Bengaluru GAFX - Games, Animation and Visual Effects Conference, themed "Evolution Reloaded", here, he said Karnataka's commitment to the AVGC-XR sector was not recent or reactive, asserting, "We have been pioneers." Siddaramaiah recalled that in 2017, Karnataka became the first state in India to implement a dedicated (Animation, Visual Effects, Gaming, Comics) AVGC policy.



"That decision was driven by foresight, recognising that content creation would become as powerful as code creation," he said.

"Today, GAFX represents the next great frontier. The Games, Animation and Visual Effects sector is no longer a small creative industry. In the era of digital revolution, immersive media, streaming platforms, e-sports, and extended reality, GAFX is shaping how humanity experiences stories, culture, edu-

cation and even governance," he said.

The CM said the government is implementing its third AVGC-XR Policy for 2024-2029, reflecting sustained commitment to the sector.

"Our AVGC-XR Policy has provided incentives, infrastructure support, skill-building initiatives, incubation systems, and institutional collaboration to nurture this ecosystem," he said. On Artificial Intelligence, Siddaramaiah said it is trans-

forming content pipelines and enhancing productivity, but cautioned that it must remain a tool and not a substitute for human imagination. "Technology should amplify human potential, not erase it. The soul of storytelling is human emotion, something no algorithm can replicate in its fullness," he said.

Calling for ethical usage of AI, he said, "Respect for intellectual property, data privacy, fair compensation, and skill upgradation must be central."

Emphasising expansion beyond Bengaluru, Siddaramaiah said digital creative clusters are being promoted in Mysuru, Mangaluru, Hubballi-Dharwad, Kalaburagi and other emerging cities.

"We want the next great game designer or VFX innovator to emerge not only from the capital, but from every district of Karnataka," he said. The CM said Karnataka should be known not only as the Silicon Valley of India but also as the "Creative Capital" of the Digital World.

## All land ownership issues to be resolved in coming years: Himanta

**GUWAHATI:** Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Friday asserted that all land ownership and documents-related issues of eligible people will be resolved in the coming years, as he launched the distribution of land pattas (ownership documents) under 'Mission Basundhara 3.0' from Deuri Beel in Dhemaji district. The 'Mission Basundhara' scheme includes services like land mutation, updating of land records and delivery of these services to the people at their homes through online mode without them coming to government offices.

Sarma also initiated the land settlement process in previously unsurveyed (NC) villages where surveys have been completed under the SVAMITVA (Survey of Villages and Mapping with Improved Technology in Village Areas), a central sector

scheme towards establishing clear ownership rights in rural areas.

Further, under the Forest Rights Act, 2006, forest land rights were granted to 538 individuals residing in the Subansiri and Jadhah Reserved Forests in the CM's event, according to an official release. Speaking on the occasion, Sarma said that 1,06,905 beneficiaries across the state have received land pattas on Friday, of which 44,700 are from Dhemaji district. He said that Dhemaji has been chosen to host the central distribution programme in view of the large number of beneficiaries in the district. About 80 per cent of land-related issues have been resolved in the past five years, and the remaining cases, estimated at 2-3 lakh will be resolved in the coming years so that indigenous people do not suffer due to land disputes, Sarma claimed. Asserting that

land pattas have been granted only to Indian citizens, Sarma said no 'Bangladeshi national' will be allowed to occupy land in Assam.

Referring to tea garden workers, he said that Prime Minister Narendra Modi will formally launch the distribution of land pattas to them in the garden lines on March 13. Highlighting the background of Mission Basundhara and the SVAMITVA scheme, the CM maintained that previous governments had not prioritised systematic distribution of land pattas in Assam. He claimed that land records in the state were often disorganised, leaving many people unable to obtain legal land ownership despite repeated attempts. In the absence of proper documentation, many faced difficulties in availing bank loans, while others exploited the situation to illegally occupy land. Sarma said that upon forming the gov-

ernment five years ago, the first phase of the Mission Basundhara was launched to systematically address land-related issues. Assam has 78,000 square kilometres of land, and resolving all land issues within a short span is not feasible. However, once the process begins, it will eventually reach completion, he added.

In 2021, Mission Basundhara 1.0 was introduced to resolve issues such as conversion of annual patta land to periodic patta, correction of errors in land records, and reclassification of land categories. Around 5.82 lakh families benefited under this phase. Mission Basundhara 2.0 focused on granting land rights to indigenous people residing for generations on government land, benefiting 2.29 lakh families, 85 per cent of whom belonged to Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, and OBC communities.

## Holi bonfire in Braj to be held on March 2 due to lunar eclipse

**MATHURA:** Holika Dahan and Holi worship in the Braj region will be observed on March 2 instead of March 3 this year due to a lunar eclipse falling on Phalgun Purnima, or the last full moon day of the Hindu lunar year, local scholars and organisers said. However, Dhulendi, the festival of colours, will be celebrated on March 4, corresponding to Chaitra Krishna Pratipada, or the first day of the new Hindu month.

There has been confusion across the country regarding the date of Holika Dahan this year. In Braj, however, most prominent scholars and astrologers have agreed that since a lunar eclipse will occur on March 3, the auspicious time for Holika Dahan falls on March 2.

Founder and general secretary of a leading Holi festival organising committee in Mathura, Madan Mohan Srivastava, said that according to Mahamandaleshwar

Karshni Gurusharananand Swami of Shri Karshni Uda-sin Ashram, the eclipse will last till 6.47 pm on March 3, after which the Pratipada tithi (first day of the lunar fortnight) will commence.

"As Holika Dahan cannot be performed during Pratipada, it will be observed on March 2. The festival of colours will be celebrated on March 4," Srivastava said.

He noted that earlier it was believed that, as in most years, Holika Dahan would take place on Phalgun Purnima on March 3. Astrologer Kameshwar Nath Chaturvedi also said that due to the lunar eclipse, the auspicious time for Holika Dahan is on March 2 at around 7.30 pm.

He explained that by the time the eclipse ends on March 3, the Purnima tithi would have concluded and Pratipada would begin, and as per scriptures, Holika Dahan is not performed during Pratipada.

## Jammu Media Delegation visits IOCL refinery, Amul Dairy in Gujarat

**AHMEDABAD:** As part of the ongoing media tour organised by the Press Information Bureau, Jammu led by Director Neha Jalali, the visiting media delegation toured the Indian Oil Corporation Limited (IOCL) Refinery and the Amul Dairy in Gujarat.

At the IOCL Refinery, officials briefed the delegation on the refinery's operational capacity, refining processes, and its role in meeting the country's energy requirements. They were made aware of the overall functioning of IOCL, its development over the years and its diversification into other products.

Executive Director and Refinery Head, Sh. Biplob Biswas informed that the IOCL is one of the largest refineries in the country, playing an essential role in meeting the nation's growing energy requirements. He informed that in addition to conventional petroleum products, the refinery man-

ufactures Linear Alkyl Benzene (LAB), a key raw material used in the production of new-age detergents. It also caters to the requirements of the paint and adhesive industries, thereby supporting diverse sectors of the economy.

The team also visited the Acrylic Oxo Alcohol Plant at Dumad, which produces value-added products such as Butyl Acrylate and n-Butanol. Sh. Biswas informed that this 5,894 crore project was inaugurated by the Prime Minister Narendra Modi in September 2025. The plant utilises refinery by-product propylene to manufacture high-value petrochemicals, thereby reducing the country's dependence on imports for paints, coatings, adhesives and textile applications marking a significant milestone in India's journey towards petrochemical self-reliance.

Highlighting the ongoing transformation in the energy sector, Executive Director



(Core Group), Shri Sunil Kumar Sinha stated that IOCL is aligning its strategies with emerging priorities such as renewables and decarbonisation. He said that the corporation is diversifying into niche and specialty products to meet evolving industrial demands and future-ready applications.

Officials informed that the Petrochemical and Lube Integration Project (LuPech) at Gujarat Refinery, with an estimated investment of Rs 17,825 crore has increased the refinery's nameplate capacity from the current 13.7

MMTPA to 18 MMTPA. It was further informed that Gujarat Refinery is already producing BS-VI compliant fuels, XP-100 premium petrol, Ethanol Blended Motor Spirit, and low-sulphur MARPOL-compliant marine fuel. General Manager (Technical Services), Shri K. Subhash, and General Manager (Human Resources), Ms. Vibha Kumar, also interacted with the media persons and apprised them of the key functions and specialised roles pertaining to their respective domains.

Commissioned in 1966, Gujarat Refinery is Indian Oil's flagship refinery, playing a catalytic role in Gujarat's industrial growth. With a current capacity of 18 MMTPA Gujarat Refinery is the largest refinery of Indian Oil Corporation Limited and accounts for nearly 32 per cent of the corporation's total refining capacity. The media delegation later visited Amul Dairy, Anand, the flagship unit of the Gujarat Cooperative Milk Marketing Federation (GCMMF). Senior Manager, Sh. Amarjeet Singh informed that the federation procures nearly 11 billion litres of milk annually from about 3.6 million farmers adding that the Anand dairy alone has a processing capacity that places it among the world's largest, with an overall handling capacity of nearly 50 million litres per day, ranking it among the top daily milk processors globally. Around 0.8 million farmers are associated through 1,278 village cooperative societies connected

to the Anand union, he said. The delegation was apprised that during the financial year 2024-25, milk procurement stood at approximately 1.75 billion kilograms, with a turnover of about 1.63 billion US dollars. The integrated model of procurement, processing, value addition and nationwide marketing has enabled sustained rural income generation, strengthened women's participation in dairy activities, and contributed significantly to the agricultural economy of Gujarat and the country.

The delegation was briefed on milk processing, value addition, quality control mechanisms, and the wide range of dairy products manufactured and marketed under the Amul brand. The visit provided the media persons with firsthand insights into Gujarat's industrial and cooperative sectors, highlighting their contribution to economic growth, rural development, and employment generation.

## No Need to Lobby for Me in Delhi: D.K. Shivakumar



Bengaluru : Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar today said there was no need for anyone to go to Delhi to lobby for him. Speaking to reporters at a city hotel and then at Palace Grounds, he said, "I appeal to everyone not to go to Delhi to lobby for me. If you have personal requests or aspiring for Cabinet positions, you can go to Delhi. But you don't need to go to Delhi to bat for me." He was replying to questions on rumours about some MLAs and ministers planning to visit Delhi in his support.

is natural for newcomers to aspire to become ministers. Parameashwar, H K Patil, Mahadevappa and Siddaramaiah and I became ministers at a very young age. We are all old now, the newcomers are expressing their desire to become ministers. I will bring this to the attention of the party leaders in Delhi." Justice served

Replying to a question on Vinay Kulkarni getting bail, he said, "There is a limit to harassment. Yediyurappa government had handed over the case to the CBI. He was barred from entering his own constituency. He was barred from seeking votes, but we respected the court orders. The court has noticed all this and has given him bail. I have been watching this case, this is a victory for him, his family and the people of his constituency. I have also gone through harassment. I pray to God to give strength to Vinay Kulkarni to deal with this and thank the Court for giving justice."

Asked about Cabinet decision on filling up vacant positions, he said,

Not a show of strength Asked if the meeting of

## Mass Cleanliness Drive Covers 5.6 km in Bengaluru Central City

Bengaluru Central City Corporation Commissioner Rajendra Cholan stated that, with priority given to urban cleanliness and public health protection, special mass cleanliness drives and black spot removal operations have been successfully carried out in various areas across the six Assembly constituencies under the Central City Corporation jurisdiction.

He said that locations with significant waste accumulation across the city were identified, and along with routine cleaning operations, continuous special cleaning activities are being undertaken to provide citizens with a clean, healthy, and accessible environment.

Details of Mass Cleaning Operations:

1. Chamarajpet Constituency:

Cleaning operations were carried out in the Sangam Circle and Padarayanapura Road areas.

2. Chickpet Constituency:

Special cleaning was conducted in Ward-118 H. Siddiah Road, adjoining roads, and streets in the Chickpet division under the Kempegowdanagar subdivision.

3. Gandhinagar Constituency:

Cleaning work was undertaken in front of K.C. General Hospital, Anjaneya Temple Road 2nd Cross, and the road in front of Rajashankar Kulla

Park.

4. Shantinagar Constituency: Cleaning operations were conducted in A.K. Colony, Domlur Ward subdivision, and surrounding areas of the Shantinagar division.

5. Shivajinagar Constituency:

Intensive cleaning was carried out around Russell Market and Chandini Chowk roads.

6. C.V. Raman Nagar Constituency:

Cleaning work was undertaken on Murugeshpalya Church Street and Syndicate Bank Road in the Konena Agrahara area.

These operations were organized under the guidance of \*Daljit Kumar, Additional Commissioner (Development), Bengaluru Central City Corporation\*. Cleaning work covering a total stretch of 5.6 km was completed, and with the help of 7 JCB machines and 35 tractors, 55 loads of roadside waste were cleared, resulting in the complete elimination of 20 black spots.

Approximately 108 PKs and other sanitation personnel actively participated in this drive. Officials from various departments—including Executive Engineers, DGMS, AGMs, Assistant Executive Engineers, and staff from the Forest and Horticulture departments—also took part in the mass cleanliness and foot-path encroachment clearance operations.

## Stadium Construction for Commission Greed, Congress Government Trying to Shut Down KSIC: Opposition Leader R. Ashok

Mysore : The stadium is being built on the factory land purely out of greed for commissions and to shut down KSIC. If this project is not dropped, the BJP will launch a massive people's movement called Save Mysore Silk, warned Opposition Leader R. Ashok.



Speaking at a press conference, he said he visited the Karnataka Silk Industries Corporation (KSIC) as part of the Save Mysore Silk campaign. This organisation's silk has received a GI tag and is a matter of pride for the Mysore and Chamarajanagar region. Maharaja Nalwadi Krishnaraja Wodeyar went to England, saw silk sarees there, brought machines from Switzerland and started the industry here. He established this unit so that silk farmers here would benefit, Ashok said. There are around 400 workers in the central factory at Channapatna. The yarn-spinning factory at T. Narasipur is spread over 13 acres, out of which 6 acres have already been transferred to the Sports Department.

In Channapatna, 1,400 sarees are produced in a month

and they sell out in a single day. The same saree is offered to the presiding deity of the state, Goddess Chamundeshwari. That is why this saree is used for weddings and other auspicious occasions. It therefore carries both sanctity and tradition, he explained. The organisation is profitable

This year KSIC has earned a profit of 96 crore. Instead of using this money for the improvement of the corporation, it has been handed over to BESCOM. Officials spent 1.40 crore on foreign trips under the pretext of developing the corporation. There is ten times more market demand than supply. Around 2,000 people have jobs here. This is not a loss-making or closing institution—it is a highly profitable organisation. Yet the

plan is to build a stadium on the very land of this profitable unit. There is absolutely no need to construct the stadium on this particular land. The factory has boilers that generate high temperatures and foul smells. That is why trees have been grown around the factory premises to reduce the temperature and maintain ecological balance. If the stadium is built, 430 trees will have to be cut down. Even after the stadium is built, the boilers will remain right next to it. No permission will be granted to conduct sports activities there because of the heat and pollution. If any mishap occurs, who will take responsibility? The quality of the silk is superior because of the availability of pure water in this area. Yet they have decided to build a stadium in this very location, he said. Congress people have already bagged the contract for 12 crore and are exerting pressure to implement the project. A stadium requires a minimum of 12 acres. The yarn-spinning mill belonging to a senior Congress leader is located very close to this site. If KSIC is shut down, demand for his private mill will increase.

## COMMITTED TO PROVIDING 7 HOURS OF DAYTIME POWER TO FARMERS: ENERGY MINISTER K.J. GEORGE

Bengaluru : Energy Minister K.J. George said, The government is committed to providing uninterrupted 7 hours of daytime electricity to agricultural pump sets, and work to solarise agricultural feeders under the KUSUM-C scheme is being expedited.

Speaking after meeting party leaders and workers and receiving grievances at the KPCC office, Energy Minister KJ George said: "Under the KUSUM-C scheme, we are solarising substations that supply power to agriculture with a target of generating 2,500 MW of solar power, ensuring 7 hours of daytime electricity for farmers. Under the KUSUM-B scheme, we are providing solar pump sets with the highest subsidy in the country — up to 80%. This is a revolutionary step by the Energy Department for the agriculture sector."

"The Energy Department is making a significant con-



tribution to the state's progress by supplying electricity to the people and farmers. Under the Gruha Jyothi scheme, up to 200 units of free electricity are being provided to domestic con-

sumers, benefiting 1.65 crore families. The department is utilising available opportunities to work for the welfare of the people, especially farmers," Energy Minister said.

income. Unfortunately, out of the 4 lakh crore tax contributed by our state, the Centre returns only 60,000 crore. The Central government is obstructing the

state's development," the Minister alleged.

BJP's Patriotism is Hollow Jawaharlal Nehru, though born into privilege, had stood with Mahatma Gandhi and endured imprisonment for the nation's freedom. He claimed that BJP leaders neither went to jail nor fought for the country's independence. The Congress party's sacrifices, he said, are the reason India is progressing today. He accused the BJP of limiting itself to cutting ribbons, delivering election-time speeches, and promoting what he termed empty patriotism. During the Minister's visit to the KPCC office, Congress Bengaluru North Division President Nandakumar, KPCC Media Secretary Deepak Thimmayya, and leaders and workers from Sarvagnanagar Assembly constituency were present.

## Arrest of Youth Congress National President Uday Bhanu Chib Condemnable – Dr. Anand Kumar

Bengaluru : The arrest of Youth Congress National President Uday Bhanu Chib by the Central Government is condemnable, said Dr. Anand Kumar, National Coordinator of the AICC SC Department and Maharashtra In-charge. He stated that the arrest is a serious attack on democracy and freedom of speech, and demanded that Chib be released immediately.

He expressed concern that Youth Congress leaders were arrested for holding a democratic protest at the India Impact Summit in Delhi. "We strongly condemn the arrest of eight persons, including the National President. In a democratic country, freedom of expression and political activities are constitutional rights. Arresting a young leader in such circumstances is against democratic values," he said. In a statement, Dr. Anand Kumar noted that the Youth Congress has been actively working as the voice of the youth of the country on various social and public issues. Arresting leaders merely for expressing dissent reflects the repressive policies of the government. He pointed out that BJP



leaders had earlier staged protests during the Commonwealth Games, but neither the Central nor State governments had arrested them at that time. However, using the protest at the AI Summit as a pretext to unlawfully arrest the Youth Congress National President is deeply distressing, he added.

Political differences should be addressed through lawful debate and discussion. Actions such as arrests create fear among the public and appear to be part of political vendetta. Therefore, we urge the Central Government to immediately release the arrested National President and uphold democratic values. Otherwise, we will be compelled to launch an intense nationwide agitation, he warned.

## University of Canberra celebrates hat-trick year of UC Cricket Challenge in India



Bengaluru : The University of Canberra's (UC) Cricket Challenge is back for a hat-trick year, marking the tournament's third consecutive edition and reinforcing the University's long-term commitment to strengthening its India-Australia engagement through sport, education and youth development.

Delivered in partnership with Cricket ACT, the governing body for cricket in the Australian Capital Territory, the UC Cricket Challenge has steadily evolved into a distinctive international platform that integrates competitive school-level cricket with academic exposure,

cultural exchange and future-ready education pathways.

Since the tournament's inception, promising young cricketers from schools across India have enjoyed unique opportunities to engage with Australia's sport-led education ecosystem while competing at a high-performance level.

Talking about the unique initiative, Mr Andrew Barr, MLA, Chief Minister, Australian Capital Territory, Australia, said, "The University of Canberra Cricket Challenge represents exactly what Canberra stands for – innovation, opportunity and partnership. This program strengthens our interna-

tional education relationships, opens new pathways for young athletes, and showcases Canberra as a global destination where talent is nurtured both on the field and in the classroom. We are proud to support an initiative that builds futures, deepens global connects and reflects the very best of our community."

The UC Cricket Challenge is the realisation of the shared vision between UC and Cricket ACT to nurture emerging talent and create meaningful 'study and play' pathways that allow students to pursue sporting excellence alongside academic ambition. The initiative

reflects UC's broader focus on employability, industry integration and real-world learning.

Building on the success of the previous two editions, the 2026 UC Cricket Challenge will feature inter-school T10 matches in Bengaluru, complemented by a range of engagement activities designed to expose students to international education opportunities, high-performance sporting environments and cross-cultural learning experiences. Further details regarding dates, venues, participating schools and programme elements will be announced in due course.

## Approximately 640 Divyangjans to Receive Artificial Limbs and Calipers on March 1

Bangalore : In view of the growing need for accessible rehabilitation services for Divyangjans in South India, Udaipur-based Narayan Seva Sansthan, in collaboration with its CSR partners General Motors, TTP Technologies, and ACI Worldwide, is organizing a Free Narayan Limb & Caliper Fitment Camp along with a Donor Felicitation Ceremony on Sunday, March 1, in Bengaluru.

During press conference, Mr. Vinod Jain, Bengaluru President and Spokesperson, addressed members of the media in the presence of Mr. Khubi Lal Menaria, Head of the Bengaluru Ashram, on behalf of Narayan Seva Sansthan. The camp will be held at Mahaveer Dharamshala No. 17, National High School Road, V.V. Puram, Basavanagudi, from 8:00 AM to 6:00 PM. The formal inauguration will take place at 11:00 AM.

Only pre-selected Divyangjans will benefit from this initiative. Approximately 640 Divyangjans will receive



artificial limbs and calipers during the camp, underscoring one of the largest such rehabilitation initiatives in the region. Around 550 beneficiaries will be fitted with advanced Narayan Limbs, while nearly 50 will be provided with calipers. All beneficiaries were selected during the Free Narayan Limb Measurement Camp organized by the institution on December 14.

Emphasizing the deeper purpose behind the initiative, Director, Ms. Palak Agarwal said, "The mission of Narayan Seva Sansthan extends beyond merely providing artificial limbs. Our goal is to

empower Divyangjans by making them self-reliant and integrating them into education, employment, and the social mainstream. Such camps not only facilitate rehabilitation but also offer an opportunity to live a life of dignity, enabling beneficiaries to contribute confidently to society." She further informed that expert doctors and a technical team will fit the modern, technologically advanced Narayan Limbs during the camp. In addition, beneficiaries will receive specialized training on walking, maintaining balance, and correctly using the assistive devices in their daily lives.

# EDITORIAL

## T20 World Cup: India's 'Aura' Is Cracked - And South Africa Can See It

Who would have imagined that with just over a week to go for the final of the men's T20 World Cup, we would have witnessed the three main Asian teams running into serious rough weather in subcontinental conditions and the main title favourite having to make room for another serious contender, who really means business?

But then that's T20 cricket for you. It will never be loyal and always be fickle. Just ask the Indian team who went into this World Cup, not just as the number one ranked T20i team in the world, not just because they were on a 17-match unbeaten streak in ICC tournaments, not just because they had a 26-3 win-loss ratio in T20is between the 2024 T20 World Cup final and the beginning of this one, but also as the absolutely overwhelming pre-tournament favourites in their own home conditions. And yet, as things stood before their Super Eights contest vs Zimbabwe, their road to the semi-finals had become quite the minefield. In fact, even after a big win in that game, which repaired their severely dented Net Run Rate, they are still not guaranteed a place in the final four. Their last match of this group, against a mercurial West Indies team, is a virtual quarter-final. The winner goes through to the last four. The loser will be eliminated. No second chances on offer here. And let's not forget that the fact that India are still in with a good chance to qualify is thanks largely to South Africa beating the West Indies. If that result went the other way, India could still have been knocked out even if they beat the Windies, on NRR.

### India Can Still Be Knocked Out

And that begs the question - did you expect the biggest title favourites and defending champions, playing largely in their own home conditions to still be waiting to see whether they qualify for the semis, at a time when England and South Africa have already booked their spots? There's no doubt that the Super Eights format is not a perfect one by any stretch of the imagination, but the fact of the matter is that India find themselves in a position where they could still be knocked out because of one very big loss and their inability to find a settled playing eleven with clearly defined player-roles, both before and after the group stage. And while the men in blue were searching for the clinical brand of T20i cricket that they had become synonymous with, the Proteas quietly, but very emphatically, established themselves as title favourites too. The way they dismantled the West Indies, chasing down a tricky 177-run target with nine wickets in hand, was honestly scary to watch.

Make no mistake about it, this World Cup is now not India's to lose. Just ask the incredibly talented and amazingly effective Arshdeep Singh, who recently became India's most successful bowler ever at the men's T20 World Cup (35\* wickets), going past Jasprit Bumrah (33\* wickets). The left-arm pacer openly thanked the South Africans and accepted the fact that the Proteas are favourites to take up one of the two spots in the final on March 8, saying, "Thanks to them (SA) for giving us the chance to decide our own fate...It was fun to watch their game. They played really well, and we'll try to beat them in the final."

India were the team to beat before the World Cup began. That crown now seems to have shifted to the heads of Aiden Markram and co.

### The Big Lesson Here

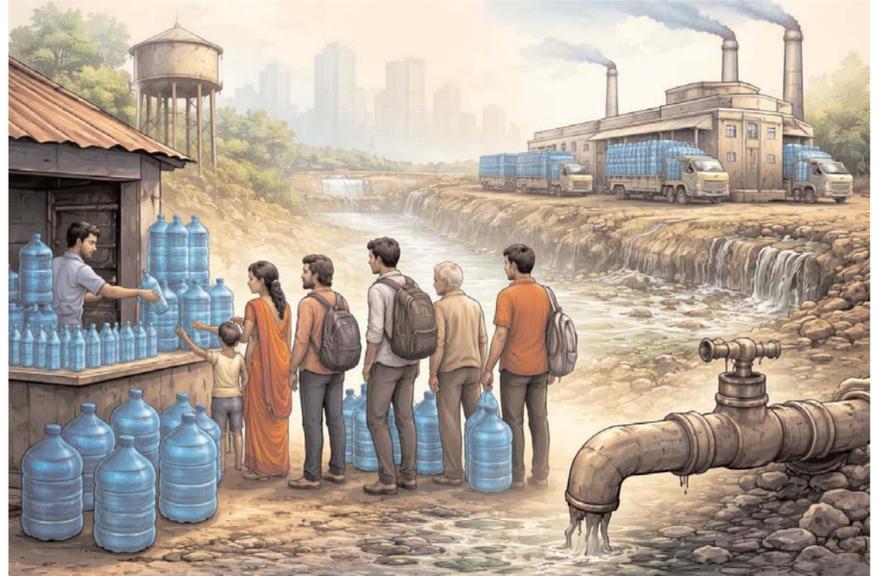
Whether India make the final four or not, whether they become the first team to successfully defend the T20 World Cup crown or not, when the inevitable post-tournament postmortem is conducted, the biggest lesson that will be staring them in the face is that there can always be a world of a difference between bilateral series and a World Cup. The pitches will be different, the opposition will be prepared differently and the format might or might not work in your favour.

# Bottled water india: A profound failure of public water governance

(The thirst for water in India is not only natural but also policy oriented.)

- Dr. Satyavan Saurabh

The growing reliance on bottled water in India is not just a story of changing consumer behavior, but also clearly points to deep-seated, multi-layered systemic problems in public water governance. Tap water, once considered a basic right for citizens and a state responsibility, is now becoming a symbol of distrust, insecurity, and inequality. From cities to towns and even rural areas, people are increasingly relying on plastic bottles for drinking. This trend not only increases the economic burden but also raises serious questions about the environment, social justice, and the concept of democratic governance. The water crisis in modern India is often attributed to lack of rainfall, climate change, or a growing population. While all of these factors are important, the root cause of the popularity of bottled water lies much deeper than this. The real problem is that citizens' trust in public water supply systems is steadily eroding. Doubts about the quality of tap water, lack of regular supply, and a lack of transparency have driven people to seek alternative sources. When the state fails to fulfill its basic responsibility, the market fills the void—often at a profit. The use of bottled water has rapidly increased in urban India. In metropolitan cities, it has almost become a way of life. Large jars and bottles are a common sight in offices, schools, hospitals, and even government offices. This situation is ironic, as these cities boast the most developed water infrastructure. If, despite such facilities, citizens cannot drink safe tap water, it is a clear evidence of administrative failure. Poor plumbing conditions, mixing of sewage and drinking water lines, and lack of regular testing—all these problems have been known for years, but solutions have remained incomplete. The situation in rural areas is different, yet equally worrying. Bottled water use is relatively low there, but as private companies expand their reach into rural markets, this dependence is also increasing. In



many areas, high levels of fluoride, arsenic, or iron in groundwater have led people to fear local water sources. State-provided community taps and hand pumps are often out of order or undrinkable. Therefore, those with the financial means purchase bottled water, while the poor are forced to drink contaminated water. This situation creates deep water inequality. The expansion of the bottled water industry raises many questions. While this industry promises "purity" and "safety," its regulation is severely flawed. It has often been found that even bottled water available on the market does not meet quality standards. Despite this, consumers consider it safer than tap water. This perception itself questions the credibility of public water institutions. If citizens do not trust the state-certified and controlled water supply system, it also threatens the credibility of democratic governance. From an environmental perspective, the reliance on bottled water is extremely destructive. Plastic bottles are turning into mountains of waste. Recycling rates are extremely low, and most plastic ends up in rivers, lakes, and oceans. Furthermore, bottled water production consumes enormous amounts

of water and energy. This means that an artificial solution is being offered by over-exploiting the very resource that is being talked about. This contradiction exposes the short-term thinking of policymakers. The problems of public water administration aren't just technical; they're also institutional and political. Departments responsible for water management often struggle with resource constraints, a lack of skilled manpower, and coordination. Furthermore, a basic service like water supply often lacks political priority. While election promises include large dams, river-linking projects, and smart cities, relatively little attention is paid to improving everyday water supply. As a result, small but significant problems remain unresolved for years. The growing trend of privatization is also exacerbating this crisis. When public systems are weak, private companies are brought forward as a solution. While this has increased efficiency in some cases, the benefits often accrue only to those who can pay. Market-based distribution of an essential resource like water is contrary to the principles of social justice. Bottled water is the most obvious example of this privatization,

where clean water becomes a consumer good rather than a fundamental right. The most worrying aspect of this entire situation is that dependence on bottled water is gradually becoming normalized. People are beginning to see it as a solution rather than a symptom of the problem. This reduces public pressure and weakens demands for administrative reform. When citizens themselves create alternative arrangements, the pressure on the state to be accountable decreases. This tacitly accepted failure could lead to even greater crises in the future. There is a need to re-establish water as a public good. This requires ensuring the quality and consistency of tap water, first and foremost. Transparent water testing, public availability of results, and effective grievance redressal systems can restore citizens' confidence. Furthermore, investment in water infrastructure—whether it's pipeline repair, sewage management, or modernization of water treatment plants—must be prioritized. Public awareness is also crucial. People must understand that bottled water is not a long-term solution. Consumer behavior can be changed by increasing awareness about the environmental and social costs.

## Discussion on corruption in the judiciary: A mirror of truth or an attack on the dignity of the institution?

- Dr. Priyanka Saurabh

The judiciary is the guardian pillar of India's democracy, protecting the Constitution and assuring justice to citizens. However, recently, the Supreme Court took a strong stance against the NCERT's Class 8 Social Science textbook, imposing a complete ban on its printing, distribution, and circulation. The chapter on "The Role of the Judiciary in Our Society" mentioned "corruption at various levels of the judiciary," the high backlog of cases, the shortage of judges, and statements by former Chief Justice B.R. Gavai. CJI Surya Kant termed this a "deep-rooted and deliberate conspiracy" to defame the judiciary and issued notices to the Ministry of Education and the NCERT Director, seeking their response.

The identity of the authors of the controversial chapter, their qualifications, and the minutes of the syllabus-framing meetings have been ordered. This incident not only raises questions about education policy but also raises a debate about the balance between institutional dignity, freedom of expression, and open discussion on corruption. Is such discussion in the school curriculum wrong? Or is it a means to alert society? The Indian Constitution provides for freedom of expression under Article 19(1), but Article 19(2) also provides reasonable restrictions, including contempt of court.

The Supreme Court's action falls under the scope of the Contempt of Courts Act, 1971, which makes material insulting the dignity of the judiciary punishable. The Court reasoned that the chapter was selective—prominently mentioning corruption in the judiciary, but not the legislature or the executive. Calling pending cases a "massive backlog" and challenging the shortage of judges undermined the institution. The reference to former CJI Gavai's statement was taken out of context and misleading. The Court called it a "deep-rooted conspiracy," suggesting it may not be a mere academic oversight but a deliberate attempt. The inclusion of such material in the recently revised curriculum by NCERT demonstrates the Ministry of Education's negligence.

The lack of transparency in the meetings of the Syllabus Expert Committee has raised questions—were the authors motivated by political bias? The court has assured a thorough investigation, which is welcome. Discussing corruption is essential for democracy. According to Transparency International, India's Corruption Perception Index was 40/100 in 2025, highlighting the challenges facing institutions, including the judiciary. The Supreme Court itself has made scathing comments on corruption, such as in the Brahmaputra Hostel case or the medical admission scam. Justice J.S. Verma

stated that "even one case of corruption in the judiciary tarnishes the entire institution." However, generalizing this in a school textbook is inappropriate. Children are 13-14 years old—give them factual knowledge, not biased perspectives. A chapter focusing on accountability, separation of powers, and reforms (such as fast-track courts and recruitment of judges) would have been useful. In its current form, it sows negativity, which could create distrust of the judiciary among the younger generation. In states like Haryana, where Panchayati Raj is strong, the local justice system is already struggling—such content will discourage rural children. It's natural to question the role of NCERT.

The New Education Policy 2020 aimed to simplify the curriculum and make it more Indian-centric, but this controversy is having the opposite effect. The ministry should mandate multi-lateral consultations—including academics, judicial experts, and parent organizations—in framing the syllabus. Verify the qualifications of authors—are they political science experts or general educators? The court also ordered the seizure of digital copies, which is challenging in the cyber age. However, this step was necessary because misinformation could go viral. Senior lawyers like Kapil Sibal and Abhishek Manu Singhvi described the findings in court as selec-

tive, which strengthens the debate. Now, if the investigation proves a conspiracy, those responsible will face contempt charges. This case calls for comprehensive reforms. To prevent corruption in the judiciary, strengthen the National Judicial Commission (NJC) to ensure transparent appointments of judges. Accelerate the e-court project to reduce the backlog of cases—currently over 50 million. Seek legislative consent to increase the number of judges. Address corruption in education as a chapter on ethics, not as an attack on a particular institution. Freedom of expression is important, but the dignity of the institution is paramount. The Supreme Court's intervention is in the right direction—it is a warning that education should not breed corruption. NCERT should revise the curriculum to ensure factual, balanced content. Governments should increase transparency—the syllabus process should be made public through RTI. The public should be aware, because a strong judiciary is a strong India. If the discussion on corruption leads to reform, it is welcome; otherwise, it is merely a conspiracy. A Supreme Court investigation will reveal the truth and strengthen the education system. Balance is the key to success in a democracy.

(Dr. Priyanka Saurabh, PhD (Political Science), is a poet and social thinker.)

## THE MANY FIRSTS IN INDIA'S NEW DEFENCE ACQUISITION POLICY

The draft Defence Acquisition Procedure (DAP) 2026, released earlier this month, attempts to restructure India's defence procurement framework amid technological flux and the country's evolving military aspirations. The document's release comes at a critical time, as India prioritises jointness and self-reliance in light of recent standoffs with China and Pakistan. As the DAP explicitly describes itself as "the navigation chart for the middle leg of India's journey to 2047," it appears to prioritise cross-linkages between acquisition, industrial policy, and export strategy. There is a visible shift in priorities from "Made in India" to "Owned by India," moving beyond licensed production toward genuine design capability and ownership of intellectual property. In addition, the document recognises that the challenge is not merely financial but also rooted in an outdated procurement system. It therefore introduces faster decision cycles through new, adaptive procedural frameworks, low-cost capital acquisition mechanisms, and long-term bulk procurement strategies. Notably, it integrates civil-military fusion, start-up innovation, and exports into the core acquisition process rather than treating them as marginal experiments. Ideating Indigenisation The conventional understanding of indigenisation appears to be evolving. Under the revised framework, what qualifies as indigenously designed (ID) requires that an Indian company not only manufacture



in India but also own the design documents, software source code, circuit layouts, and core architecture of the system. It must possess sole rights to produce, upgrade, and export the product without requiring foreign approval each time. Purchasing a foreign design licence no longer qualifies as "Indian design" unless full ownership is transferred. With extensive indigenisation as a priority, the Buy (Indian-IDDM) category receives significant emphasis. This category underscores ownership of design, source code, semiconductor layouts, and core system architecture, along with unconditional rights to manufacture, upgrade, and export. Additionally, ownership of all acquired intellectual property is to be classified as indigenous. Alongside Indigenous Design (ID), Indigenous Content (IC) norms have also been tightened. IC is now calculated against a "Calculated Base Contract Price," with detailed definitions specifying what constitutes foreign content from production to final delivery. Category-wise thresholds mandate at least 60 per cent overall IC in Buy

(Indian-IDDM), and at least 60 per cent IC in the manufacturing portion for Buy (Indian) and Buy (Global) & Manufacture in India. Even Buy (Global) is capped at up to 30 per cent IC and must be accompanied by a proposal for an indigenous Make or Design & Development pathway. Prioritising Timelines in a Rapid Technological Era In a rapidly evolving technological landscape where artificial intelligence, drones, space technologies, and cyber tools develop in cycles of 18-36 months-traditional procurement processes often take longer than a single technological cycle. DAP 2026 introduces structural reforms aimed at compressing timelines and better aligning acquisition cycles with technology cycles. Planning is anchored in a 10-year Integrated Capability Development Plan (ICDP) and a two-year rolling Annual Acquisition Plan (AAP), with formal integration of Technology Readiness Levels (TRLs) into early planning. TRLs 1-5 are explicitly linked to the Make and Design & Development categories; TRLs 5-9 correspond to Buy (Indian-IDDM); and TRLs 8-9 align with Buy

(Indian) & Manufacture in India and Buy (Global) & Manufacture in India. The Fast Track Procedure (FTP) is reoriented toward urgent procurement cases where standard timelines risk operational readiness, with preference given to equipment already in service or with proven performance abroad. The emphasis is on minimising trials and empowering committees with oversight authority rather than recreating the full acquisition cycle for emergent needs. Civil-Military Fusion for Streamlined Production DAP 2026's approach to civil-military fusion reflects one of its most significant strategic shifts. The Make categories are now explicitly linked to eventual procurement. Make-I projects involving high-risk, critical technologies may receive up to 70 per cent government funding for prototype development, capped at ₹400 crore per Development Agency, with provision for 100 per cent funding in select cases. Make-II and Make-III categories remain industry-funded, focusing on new development and import substitution, respectively. The innovation ecosystem surrounding Innovations for Defence Excellence (iDEX) and the Technology Development Fund (TDF) is treated with similar seriousness. When an iDEX or TDF prototype successfully passes trials, the sponsoring Service is required to place a Minimum Pilot Order Quantity that is meaningful in scale. Importantly, DAP 2026 acknowledges the growing relevance of dual-use and civilian technologies.

# Trade Breakthroughs and 16% Earnings CAGR Signal Nifty Upside to 27,958: PL Capital

Mumbai, February 2026: PL Capital, one of the most trusted financial services organisations in India, in its latest India Strategy Report stated that India's growth narrative is entering a decisive phase as policy clarity, landmark trade agreements and a sustained infrastructure push converge to lay the foundation for the next leg of expansion. The prolonged phase of market consolidation appears to be giving way to renewed optimism, with structural drivers firmly in place despite recent earnings recalibrations. Over the past nine months, the Nifty has traded within a narrow 5-6% band, reflecting a period of adjustment amid global geopolitical uncertainties, tariff disruptions and a 9-9.5% earnings per share (EPS) moderation for FY26 and FY27. However, early signs of revival are emerging. Corporate performance has remained resilient, with sales, EBITDA and profit after tax for the coverage universe growing 9.9%, 16.4% and 16.7% year-on-year respectively, even as EPS estimates were trimmed. While FY26 EPS growth is expected at a measured 3.8%, the medium-term earnings trajectory remains strong, with an estimated 16.3% CAGR over FY26-28, indicating that the current phase is more of a



reset than a reversal. On valuations, the Nifty currently trades at 19.1x one-year forward earnings, broadly aligned with its 15-year average. The base case assumes the index trading at 18.3x—reflecting a 5% discount to long-period averages—on December 2027 EPS of 1,525, translating into a 12-month target of 27,958. In a bullish scenario, a 20x multiple implies upside toward 30,497, while a conservative bear case suggests 26,486. A defining catalyst for the next growth cycle has been India's accelerated progress on trade diplomacy. The recently concluded India-EU Free Trade Agreement marks a historic breakthrough as the European Union, accounts for nearly 19% of India's exports. It represents a combined market of approximately USD 24 trillion, which will now offer India preferential access across 99% of tariff lines, covering 99.5% of trade value. Around 70.4% of tariff lines

representing ~90% of India's exports to the EU, will see immediate duty elimination. Labour-intensive sectors such as textiles and apparel, marine products, leather and footwear, gems and jewellery, chemicals, machinery and electrical equipment stand to benefit significantly. Textiles and apparel, which earlier faced duties of 8-12%, will now enjoy zero-tariff access, enhancing competitiveness against global peers. Marine exports, leather goods and gems—critical employment generators—are expected to see a meaningful demand boost. Beyond merchandise trade, the services component of the agreement opens new frontiers. IT and ITES firms gain improved market access and visa clarity, while financial services, professional services, telecom, education and digital trade benefit from regulatory alignment and cooperation frameworks. Importantly, collaboration in advanced semiconductors,

chip design and critical industrial electronics strengthens India's manufacturing ambitions. Mr. Amish Aggarwal, Director Research, Institutional Equities, PL Capital said, India is transitioning from a cyclical recovery phase to a structurally stronger growth trajectory. What differentiates this cycle is the depth of policy execution, rising private sector participation and the scale of opportunity emerging across manufacturing, digital infrastructure and domestic consumption. Markets may have paused, but the underlying economic engine continues to gain strength. As capital formation accelerates and productivity enhancements play out, we believe Indian equities are entering the early stages of a multi-year compounding cycle." Parallely, India's interim trade framework with the United States has removed a significant overhang for exporters. Following the imposi-

# Nissan Signals a Bold India Resurgence with the Launch of the All-New GRAVITE at Introductory Price of INR 5.65 Lakhs

Hyderabad, 27 February 2026: Nissan Motor India today announced the launch of the All-New Nissan GRAVITE at an attractive introductory price of INR 5.65 Lakhs. A bold and game-changing 7-seater MPV, the GRAVITE marks the beginning of a new chapter in Nissan's India journey. Inspired by India, Made in India, Made for India, the GRAVITE is the first product to roll out under Nissan Motor India's renewed product offensive — underlining the company's strengthened commitment and presence in India. The name "GRAVITE" draws inspiration from 1.4 billion Indians and the 19,000 vernaculars and rituals that shape the nation's diversity, the GRAVITE has been purpose-built to meet the evolving aspirations of Indian families. It combines space, versatility, comfort and everyday practicality with a commanding road presence. Thierry Sabbagh, Divisional Vice President and President, Middle East, KSA, CIS and India - Nissan and Infiniti, said, "India is central to Nissan's global ambitions. Our actions over the past year strengthening operations, expanding the network and embarking on a product offensive demonstrate our long-term commit-



ment to this market. The All-New Nissan GRAVITE is not just a product launch; it marks the beginning of a sustained growth phase for Nissan in India. With local manufacturing at our alliance partner facility in Chennai and a future-ready product roadmap, we are here to compete, grow and lead in the segments that matter." The all-new Nissan Gravite unveiled Tollywood actress Sunaina Badam along with Sirajuddin Babukhan MD Vibrant Mobility group and Ashok Kumar Reddy ASM South Sales. Saurabh Vatsa, Managing Director, Nissan Motor India, said: "The All-New Nissan GRAVITE is inspired by the diversity, scale and ambition of Indian families. Every detail from its modular seating to its commanding stance reflects how Indian customers live, travel and grow together. For us, GRAVITE is more than a product introduction. It is a promise that Nissan will continue to design, manufacture and invest in vehicles that truly resonate with India's mobility aspirations." Design and Inspiration The All-New Nissan GRAVITE establishes a distinct and confident identity aligned with Nissan's global design language. Its elevated proportions, muscular body lines, pronounced wheel arches and high ground clearance create a commanding road presence suited to diverse Indian driving conditions. The GRAVITE is the only vehicle in its segment to feature distinctive hood branding along with unique rear-door badging — a bold design expression that reinforces exclusivity and strong visual recall.

# State Level Bankers' Committee, Telangana State Bank of India, LHO, Bank Street, Koti, Hyderabad 48 th Quarterly Review Meeting for December 2025

State Level Bankers' Committee (SLBC), Telangana has convened its 48 th Quarterly Review meeting today i.e., on 27.02.2026, at Hotel marigold, Hyderabad and reviewed the performance of Banks in Telangana State, for the quarter ended December 2025. The meeting was attended by:

1. Sri Sandeep Kumar Sultania, IAS, Principal Secretary (Finance), Govt. of Telangana
2. Sri. K Surendra Mohan, IAS, APC and Secretary, Govt. of Telangana
3. Ms. Manasa Gangotri Kata, IRS, Director, DFS, Govt. of India
4. Ms. D Divya, IAS, CEO, SERP, Govt. of Telangana
5. Sri B Uday Bhaskar, CGM, NABARD, Hyderabad
6. Sri. M Gnana Suprabhat, General Manager, Reserve Bank of India, Hyderabad
7. Sri Sahadevan Radhakrishnan, CGM, SBI, Hyderabad Circle
8. Sri Satish Kumar, GM, SBI &amp; Convenor, SLBC, Telangana and senior Officials from the line departments of Govt of Telangana, Government of India, executives from member Banks in Telangana State and representatives of various Federations of



Agriculture and MSME etc., Sri Sahadevan Radhakrishnan, CGM, SBI, Hyderabad Circle presented the performance of the banks in Telangana State upto Q3 of the Financial Year 2025-26 as under: Total Deposits of the banks grew by Rs.61,073 crores and the total deposits were at Rs.9,01,503 crores. Total Advances with Banks grew by Rs.1,11,349 crores and the advances of all banks were at Rs.11,92,710 crores. CD ratio continues to be above 100 percent and it is increased from

130.18 % to 132.30% during the quarter. Banks have disbursed Short Term Production Loans amounting to Rs. 56,673 crores. Banks have disbursed Rs. 70,754 crores as Investment Credit to Agri. Allied, Agri. Infra and Agri. Ancillary activities achieving 93.34% of the annual targets. Banks have disbursed educational loans amounting to Rs. 435 Crores and Housing loans amounting to Rs. 4579 Crores under Priority Sector.

# ICICI PRUDENTIAL LIFE LAUNCHES DIVIDEND LEADERS 50 INDEX FUND FOR CUSTOMERS SEEKING STABILITY AND LONG-TERM WEALTH CREATION

Mumbai, February 27, 2026: ICICI Prudential Life Insurance has launched the Dividend Leaders 50 Index Fund under its Unit Linked Insurance Plans (ULIPs). The new fund will enable customers to build wealth over the long-term by investing in fundamentally strong stocks with a proven track record of consistent dividend payouts. Commenting on the launch, Mr. Manish Kumar, Chief Investment Officer, ICICI Prudential Life Insurance Company Limited, said, "The Dividend Leaders 50 Index Fund offers customers a disciplined and transparent way to participate in equity markets by investing in fundamentally sound companies with a consistent dividend track record. The fund's strategy is structured around four pillars which includes dividend payout-focused stock selection, quality checks aimed at stronger financials and stable cash flows, diversification across multiple sectors, and a transparent, rule-based and disciplined investment process with periodic review and rebalancing.



Importantly, this new fund will empower our customers to stay invested with confidence, knowing their portfolio is aligned with financially strong and time-tested companies. This launch is another step in our journey towards a disciplined, transparent, and high-quality investment opportunity for our ULIP customers while also getting a life cover." The fund follows the BSE 500 Dividend Leaders 50 Index, which tracks the performance of 50 companies selected from the broader BSE 500 universe that have consistently paid dividends over

the past 10 years. The index comprises 50 constituents and is rebalanced annually. Through the fund, we are giving our customers access to companies that have demonstrated financial strength and commitment to shareholders over time. Historically, the index fact-sheet presents annualised total returns of 33.63% over three years, 30.96% over five years and 20.40% over ten years, as of January 30, 2026, highlighting the long-term potential of a disciplined investment strategy. However, regulations may restrict the Company from

investing in all the stocks in line with their weights in the index from time to time. As a result, there could be a possible tracking error. The fund adopts a passive, index-mirroring approach, tracking the stocks in the index instead of picking stocks actively. The Dividend Leaders 50 Index Fund is available with some of the Company's popular ULIP products such as ICICI Pru Signature Assure, ICICI Pru SmartKid Assure, ICICI Pru Smart Insurance Plan Plus (SIP+) amongst other ULIP products available on www.iciciprulife.com.

# NOW STREAMING ON NETFLIX – ACCUSED, A PSYCHOLOGICAL DRAMA THAT QUESTIONS TRUTH, POWER AND PERCEPTION

Mumbai, 27th February 2026: The silence is unsettling. The truth is uncertain. And judgment arrives before answers. Accused is now streaming exclusively on Netflix. Directed by Anubhuti Kashyap and produced by Dharma Productions, Accused is a psychologically layered drama that places the audience inside the discomfort of accusation. At its centre is Dr. Geetika Sen (Konkona Sen Sharma), a celebrated gynaecologist whose life begins to unravel when allegations of sexual misconduct surface. As scrutiny intensifies and public opinion hardens, the fracture seeps into her most intimate space, her marriage to Meera (Pratibha Rannata). The film resists sensationalism, choosing instead to sit with ambiguity, vulnerability, and emotional unease. It asks not for verdicts, but for reflection. Speaking about the film's release,

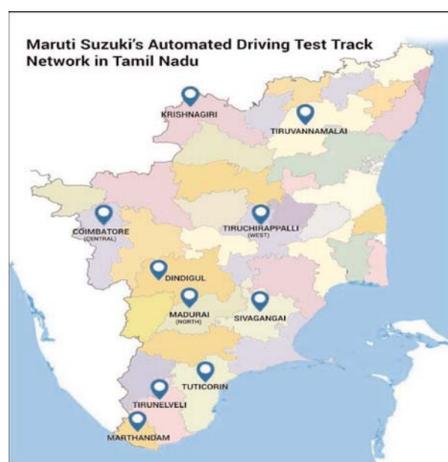


Konkona Sensharma shared, "Geetika is a woman used to control, of her work, her credibility, her space. What moved me was her internal collapse under scrutiny. I'm glad Netflix is bringing a story like this to audiences, one that trusts performance and silence over spectacle." Pratibha Rannata shared her excitement on the film releasing today, "Playing Meera meant living in that messy

space where you want to trust, but your heart isn't sure. I'm so glad Netflix tells these kinds of real, complicated stories about women." Told from the rarely explored perspective of the accused, Accused challenges audiences to examine their own biases and sit with uncertainty long after the credits roll. A story of power, perception and the cost of doubt is streaming now, only on Netflix.

# Maruti Suzuki expands its road safety efforts; adds 7 Automated Driving Test Tracks (ADTTs) in Tamil Nadu under its CSR initiative

Chennai 27 February 2026: Strengthening its road safety efforts, Maruti Suzuki India Limited ("Maruti Suzuki") in partnership with the Transport Department, Government of Tamil Nadu announced the commissioning of seven ADTTs in the State. The Hon'ble Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu, Thiru. M. K. Stalin inaugurated the ADTTs at Regional Transport Offices (RTOs) in Coimbatore (Central), Tiruvannamalai, Krishnagiri, Madurai (North), Sivagangai, Dindigul, and Tiruchirappalli (West) via video conferencing. The initiative is part of the Memorandum of Agreement ("MoA") signed between Maruti Suzuki and the Transport Department, Government of Tamil Nadu, to automate a total of ten driving test tracks across the State. Demonstrating strong



execution and commitment, the Company has automated all ten ADTTs within a record 150 days. The ADTTs at Tirunelveli, Tuticorin, and Marthandam will be operational shortly. Mr.

Rahul Bharti, Senior Executive Officer, Corporate Affairs, Maruti Suzuki India Limited, said, "As part of Maruti Suzuki's road safety initiatives implemented across multiple states, we

are partnering with the Government of Tamil Nadu to strengthen the driver licensing evaluation process through the deployment of 10 Automated Driving Test Tracks (ADTTs). Equipped with high-definition cameras and advanced analytics, these ADTTs enable a comprehensive, efficient, and transparent assessment process. It eliminates any human bias and ensures that only skilled drivers are awarded a license." He added, "According to data shared by the Ministry of Road Transport & Highways, India witnessed 1.77 lakh road accident deaths\* in 2024. Promoting disciplined driving practices and ensuring rigorous driver evaluation are vital to prevent road accidents and augment road safety across the country." The ADTTs are equipped with high-definition cameras,

RFID sensors, real-time analytics, and an integrated IT system to enable a technology-enabled, standardized, and objective driving license testing process. With zero human intervention, the ADTTs are aimed at making license testing more comprehensive, efficient, and transparent. The rigorous and standardized evaluation process is designed to assess candidates according to the Central Motor Vehicle Rules (CMVR). Test results are also generated automatically. The ADTTs in Coimbatore (Central), Tiruvannamalai, Krishnagiri, Madurai (North), Sivagangai, Dindigul, Tiruchirappalli (West), Tirunelveli, Tuticorin and Marthandam will serve driving license applicants of Two-Wheeler (TW) and Light Motor Vehicles (LMV).

# Pakistan defence minister says country in 'open war' with Afghanistan after strikes



Pakistan's defence minister has said the country is in "open war" with Afghanistan, after Islamabad launched airstrikes on Kabul as part of a wave of attacks across the country. "Our patience has now run out," said Khawaja Muhammad Asif following the attacks. The strikes came after the Afghan Taliban announced a major offensive against Pakistani military posts near the border on Thursday night. The latest attacks follow months of clashes between the two neighbouring nations, despite agreeing to a fragile ceasefire in October. Last year's negotiations failed to reach a broader agreement for a complete end to hostilities, with both sides blaming each other for not engaging seriously with talks. The Taliban said a "retaliatory operation" had been launched at around 20:00 local time (15:30 GMT) on Thursday. It said it had captured 19 Pakistani mili-

tary posts and two bases, adding that 55 Pakistani soldiers had been killed. The BBC has not been able to verify these claims. Pakistan quickly retaliated, saying the Taliban had "miscalculated and opened unprovoked fire on multiple locations" across the border in its north-western province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, which had been met with an "immediate and effective response" by

Islamabad's security forces. It then launched a series of bombing raids on Afghanistan in the early hours of Friday morning, striking targets in Kabul, Kandahar and Paktika in response to what they called "unprovoked Afghan attacks". All three cities are close to the shared Pakistani-Afghan mountainous border that spans 2,600 km (1,615 miles). Pakistan's military

spokesman Ahmed Sharif Chaudhry said it had hit 22 Afghan military targets and killed more than 200 Taliban fighters. At least 12 Pakistani soldiers had died, he added. But the Taliban's spokesman Mujahid said just 13 Taliban fighters had been killed and 22 others injured, while 13 civilians had been injured and an indeterminate number killed. The BBC has not been able to verify these

numbers. During these hostilities, both sides have claimed to have inflicted heavy losses on the other while suffering little damage to their own. In response to the strikes, Zabihullah Mujahid, the Afghan Taliban spokesman, published - then subsequently deleted - a post on X that the group had launched strikes early on Friday on Pakistani military positions in Kandahar and Helmand, two provinces in Afghanistan. The Afghan Taliban has said it carried out air strikes on several targets within Pakistan, on Friday morning. Sources in the Taliban government told the BBC these were with drones launched from Afghanistan. Pakistan's Information Minister Atta Tarar said its military thwarted Afghan drones targeting Swabi, Nowshera and Abbottabad, which is a military garrison city housing the army's military academy. Pakistan's Prime Minister

Shehbaz Sharif said his country's forces had "the full capability to crush any aggressive ambitions", vowing that there would be "no compromise" in defending their "beloved homeland". In Afghanistan, Taliban officials on Friday claimed Pakistani rockets hit a refugee camp in Nangarhar housing Afghan citizens recently arrived from Pakistan - and injured at least nine people. The BBC has not been able to verify this. Residents and local officials in the Afghan cities hit told BBC Afghan the situation appeared to have calmed down since the attacks, although people on both sides of the border remained on high alert. Pakistan's Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar has spoken to his Turkish counterpart Hakan Fidan, the ministry said, and "agreed to stay closely engaged on evolving developments" as they both stressed the "importance of peace and stability".

## Former US diplomat sentenced to life for abusing two girls in Burkina Faso



A United States citizen has been sentenced to life in prison after being convicted of sexually abusing two teenage girls while working at the US embassy in Burkina Faso. The US Department of Justice said 41-year-old Fode Sitafa Mara, from Maryland, was sentenced on Wednesday following a two-week trial in October 2025 in the state's federal District Court. A jury found him guilty of four counts of aggravated sexual abuse of a minor, as well as attempted coercion and enticement of a minor and attempted obstruction of justice. The prosecution was brought as

part of Project Safe Childhood, a nationwide initiative launched by the Justice Department in 2006 to combat child sexual exploitation. Prosecutors said the offences took place in 2022 and 2023 in Ouagadougou, the capital of Burkina Faso, where Mara was employed by the United States embassy. According to evidence presented in court, the abuse occurred at a residence leased for US diplomatic personnel. Because the property was reserved for official use, it fell under US jurisdiction, allowing American authorities to prosecute the case.

## Epstein tried to buy a palace in Morocco days before his arrest in 2019



Jeffrey Epstein tried to buy a multimillion-dollar palace in Morocco the day before his arrest in 2019, according to documents released by the US Department of Justice last month. Epstein had pursued acquiring Bin Ennakhil since 2011, but disputes with the seller over the price and purchase arrangement dragged on for years. The grand palace in the luxury Palmeraie neighbourhood of Marrakech has been described as an architectural masterpiece, built by 1,900 craftsmen and featuring ornate carvings and mosaics. Epstein signed a \$14.95m (£11m) wire transfer on 5 July 2019, the day before his arrest, following an agreement to buy the offshore company that owned the property for 18m (£13.3m). According to the released documents, the transfer was Epstein's last major financial transaction in the period before his arrest by US authorities on sex trafficking charges upon his return to New York. Three days after the arrest, Epstein's accountant Richard Kahn cancelled the wire transfer and the purchase was ultimately never

completed. Morocco has no extradition treaty with the US and local media has speculated that one of Epstein's motivations to purchase the property may have been to retreat to the country to avoid arrest, if new charges were brought against him. However, a former associate of Epstein, who preferred not to be named, said the transaction showed Epstein "had no clue" about his imminent arrest. They added that "it would make sense if he was thinking of a potential sanctuary where he could still live like a king". The released files, however, contain no reference to Epstein discussing the country as a possible refuge from US authorities. Epstein's connections to Morocco go back to at least the early 2000s, with Virginia Giuffre, one of his most prominent accusers, recounting in her memoir of being flown to Tangier by Epstein and Ghislaine Maxwell to inspect the interior design of a number of luxury properties. At the time, Epstein wanted to redesign parts of his island home in a Moroccan style.

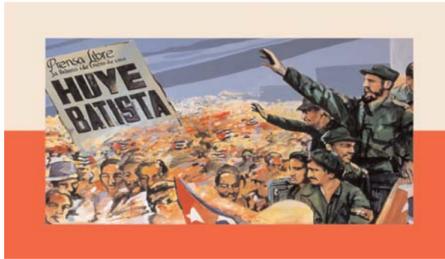
## AMERICAN CITIZEN AMONG THOSE KILLED IN CUBA BOAT SHOOTING, US OFFICIAL SAYS

At least one American citizen was shot dead and another injured by Cuban officials intercepting a speedboat off its coast on Wednesday, a US official has said. Border guards shot dead four people and injured the remaining six aboard the Florida-registered speedboat. Cuba accused the 10 people on the boat of planning "an infiltration with terrorist aims" and said they opened fire first. A third person was on a US K-1 visa-for fiancées of American citizens - the US official said. The boat's owner alleged the vessel had been stolen by an employee. US Secretary of State Marco Rubio had said Washington was investigating the "highly unusual" incident. Cuban authorities had said all 10 were Cuban

nationals residing in the US. They also identified an 11th person they said had been arrested and had confessed to being part of the alleged plot. The interior ministry said earlier that the speedboat had entered its territorial waters and was "one nautical mile off Cayo Falcones" on the country's northern coast when it was intercepted. It said the commander of the Cuban boat was injured in the fire-fight that ensued. The Cuban authorities added that most of the passengers on the US-registered boat had "prior records involving criminal and violent activity". Handguns, assault rifles and improvised explosive devices were recovered from the speedboat, along with other tactical gear.

## Why Trump means the Cuban Revolution faces its biggest threat yet

A sizeable exhibit in the Museum of the Revolution in Havana is dedicated to conditions in Cuba before the revolution took power in 1959. Inside the ornate former presidential palace, photographs and oral testimony detail the grinding poverty and ingrained corruption of the dictatorship of Cuba's then-military strongman, Fulgencio Batista. The enduring image is of a woman in a dirt-floored palm-leaf hut cooking with firewood. Similar pictures appear in state museums across the island from the Bay of Pigs to Birán, the birthplace of the father of the Cuban Revolution, Fidel Castro. The inference is clear: the revolutionaries



saved Cubans from the ignorance and hardship of life under a Washington-backed de facto leader and led them to dignity, education and true independence. Yet today, Lisandra Botey identifies more with the impoverished woman in the photograph than with the revolutionaries who liberated her country from Batista. "We're living

like that now, we're exactly like that", says housewife Lisandra outside her home in Havana, which is cobbled together with pieces of sheet metal and wood. "Every morning, we have to go down to the beach [in Havana] and look for firewood. Then we bring it home to cook breakfast with - because if we get power, it comes on

during school hours." Lisandra's nine-year-old daughter set off for school that morning with nothing in her stomach, she explains, tears pricking her eyes. Her husband, Brenei Hernández - a construction worker with next to no work - says they often have no idea where the next meal is coming from. "Every day is the same hunger, the same misery", he says, stirring a pot of white rice - so at the very least his daughter will come home from school to something hot to eat. With the Cuban economy in freefall since the coronavirus pandemic, no gas has been delivered to Brenei's flimsy home in a Havana suburb for months.

## DRONE JAMMED NEAR FRENCH AIRCRAFT CARRIER WAS PROBABLY RUSSIAN, SAYS SWEDEN

A drone jammed by the Swedish military after it was spotted near a French aircraft carrier docked in Malmo was "probably" Russian, Swedish defence minister Pal Jonson has said. The French military said the drone was spotted seven nautical miles (13km) from the Charles de Gaulle carrier, which has never visited Sweden before and is due to take part in Nato exercises in the region. Jonson told Sweden's public broadcaster SVT there was probably a "strong link" between the drone and a Russian naval vessel in Sweden's territorial waters in the Oresund



Strait, between Sweden and Denmark. It is not clear what happened to the drone but Jonson said the Russian ship sailed on to the Baltic Sea. Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said claims the drone was Russian were "absurd". For months Nato allies have reported

drone sightings close to military sites and airports, including a number of incidents in Denmark and the Baltic states. An investigation was launched in December after drones flew over the Île Longue naval base, which is home to France's nuclear ballistic sub-

marines off the Breton town of Brest. Both armed forces have played down the drone incident, and French General Staff spokesman Col Guillaume Vernet said it had demonstrated the "robustness" of the Swedish response, adding that it had no impact on the French mission. France's foreign minister was due in Sweden on Friday and the country's armed forces minister was due to board the Charles de Gaulle while it was docked in Malmo. It is not clear if their visits were related to Wednesday's drone incident.

## Spanish opposition calls for disgraced ex-monarch to return from exile



The leader of Spain's main opposition party has called for the disgraced former King Juan Carlos to return from self-imposed exile, due to the role he played in the transition to democracy nearly half a century ago. "I think it would be desirable that the king emeritus return to Spain," Alberto Núñez Feijóo, leader of the conservative People's Party (PP), posted on social media. "He himself has acknowledged undeniable mistakes in his past, but he who contributed to sustaining our democracy and our freedoms in a key moment should spend the last stage of his life with dignity in his own country," he added. Juan Carlos, who is 88, took the throne in 1975, following the death of his mentor, the dictator Francisco Franco. He helped steer the country towards becoming a parliamentary democracy and his actions were seen as instrumental in thwarting an attempted coup by pro-Franco forces in 1981, securing his popularity with many Spaniards for the decades to come. However, in 2014 he abdicated, two years after it had emerged he had been elephant hunting in Botswana with Corinna zu Sayn-

Wittgenstein-Sayn, who had been his mistress, during an economic crisis in Spain. Further scandals engulfed him after it emerged he had received a \$100m (£74m) payment from the late king of Saudi Arabia and had an offshore fund in Jersey. In August 2020, he left the country to live in the United Arab Emirates, where he has resided ever since. His son and heir, King Felipe, endorsed the move which has kept him out of the public eye, with the exception of occasional visits he has made to Spain for sailing regattas and other social events. This week, the government's declassification of around 150 documents related to the 1981 putsch attempt underscored Juan Carlos's actions during it, prompting Núñez Feijóo's call for his return. The PP has previously expressed a similar opinion about the former monarch. However, this appeal has been particularly bold and its timing has reopened the debate about Juan Carlos's future. The socialist-led government, which has been critical of Juan Carlos while supporting the monarchy as an institution, sought to keep its distance from the issue.

## At least 55 Ghanaians killed in Russia-Ukraine war

At least 55 Ghanaians have been killed fighting in the war in Ukraine, with two others currently held as prisoners of war, Ghana's foreign affairs minister says. On a trip to Kyiv, Samuel Okudzeto Ablakwa said that about 272 Ghanaians are believed to have been lured into the conflict since 2022, citing Ukrainian authorities. Ablakwa described the figures as "depressing and frightening," saying Ghana "cannot turn a blind eye to these heartbreaking statistics". He did not say whose side the Ghanaians had been fighting on but Ukraine's foreign minister said on Wednesday that more than 1,700 people from 36 countries in Africa had been recruited to fight for Russia. The 55

Ghanaians is the highest number of casualties from a single African country to have been officially confirmed in the Ukraine-Russia war. Local media in Cameroon have reported that 94 of its nationals have died in the conflict, but the authorities have not commented on these figures. Two South Africans and at least one Kenyan have died in the conflict. Ablakwa said the casualty figures were "not just numbers, they represent human lives, the hope of many Ghanaian families and our nation". He said the Ghanaian government was committed to "tracking and dismantling all dark web illegal recruitment schemes" as well as launching intensive public awareness campaigns to



prevent the country's youth from being drawn into the conflict. "This is not our war and we cannot allow our youth to become human shields for others," he added. On Thursday, a Kenyan national was charged over accusations he had lured young men to Russia with job opportunities, only for them to end up fighting in Ukraine. Festus Arasa Omwamba

denied the charges. A total of 1,000 Kenyans have been recruited to fight for Russia in its four-year war against Ukraine, said a report from Kenya's National Intelligence Service (NIS), released last week. Russia's embassy in Kenya has denied accusations that it was involved in recruiting people to fight in the war. However, it said that Russian law

allowed foreign nationals who are legally in the country to voluntarily enlist in the armed forces. On Wednesday, Ghana's foreign minister urged President Volodymyr Zelensky to release two Ghanaian prisoners of war captured fighting for Russia. "They are victims of manipulation, of disinformation, of misinformation, of criminal trafficking networks," he said. He thanked Ukraine for ensuring international law was respected in the handling of the detainees. "We have received reports that they are in good health," he said. "They have not been tortured. They have not suffered any inhumane treatment since they were captured." Ukrainian Foreign Minister Andriy

Sybyga said both sides discussed "frankly" about the possibility of returning the prisoners to Ghana. South Africa on Thursday said that two of its citizens had been killed in Ukraine, while another 15 had been repatriated over the past week. Two more remain in Russia getting treatment for "very severe" injuries, said Foreign Minister Ronald Lamola. Ukrainian officials have repeatedly warned that anyone fighting for Russia would be treated as an enemy combatant, and that the only safe route out was to surrender and be treated as a prisoner of war. Ukraine has also previously come in for criticism for trying to recruit foreign nationals, including Africans, to fight on its side.



## Cadillac and Audi - the same ambition but two very different projects

There are two new Formula 1 teams in 2026, representing two of the world's biggest car companies. They have the same ambition, but they are two very different projects. Audi has taken over the Sauber team to form the basis for its works assault on F1, marking parent company the Volkswagen Group's first foray into the highest level of the sport. US giant General Motors (GM) is also trying out F1 for the first time. It has joined forces with US sports conglomerate TWG to form a new team named after its luxury Cadillac brand. Both were tempted in by the engine rules introduced this year, believing the increased effect of the hybrid part of the engine was an important marketing point for their road-car portfolios. Both want to become world champions. Both realise they have some way to go before achieving that aim. Audi



has set themselves a target of being in a position to compete for that in five years' time. Cadillac have been less precise, but team principal Graeme Lowdon has made it clear they have "limitless ambitions". Let's take a look at where the two projects are at. Audi team principal Jonathan Wheatley, who joined from his former position of sporting director at Red

Bull last March, said at the team's launch this year: "We're not here to mess around. It's an ambitious project. We're humble. We know where we're starting from and we know where we want to go. "We want to make Audi the most successful F1 team in history. There are milestones on that journey and we are starting it today." No pressure, then. Audi won the Le

Mans 24 Hours 13 times in 18 years from 1999 to 2016. And in rallying they were famous for introducing four-wheel drive with the iconic Quattro in the early 1980s. They might not have taken part in F1 before, but they did compete in its fore-runner, the European grand prix championship, in the 1930s. In a battle with arch-rivals Mercedes, Auto Union won the title with

the great Bernd Rosemeyer in 1936, won five races against Mercedes' seven in 1937, while the legendary Tazio Nuvolari won races for them in 1938 and 1939 before the Second World War brought racing to a halt. Audi's entry this year rekindles that old rivalry with Mercedes, and battle lines have already been drawn in a pre-season row over the rules governing the engines' compression ratio. Audi are said to have been prime among those pushing for a rule change because of a fear Mercedes had found a way of exploiting a loophole to their advantage. Rivals on track with Mercedes, though, Audi are unlikely to be for a while. While Mercedes start the season as championship favourites, Audi have a lot of work to do to transform Sauber into a winning proposition. Following the announcement of Audi's entry in August 2022.

## 'DON'T KNOW WHAT FUSS WAS ABOUT' - CHAOTIC PALACE SEASON COULD END IN GLORY

Key players have gone, the manager is leaving and has criticised the club and upset fans - yet Crystal Palace's chaotic campaign could still end in European glory. It has been a wild 12 months for the Eagles, who have found themselves in the headlines on an almost daily basis. "I don't know what all the fuss was about," joked captain Dean Henderson shortly after they gained a 2-0 win over Bosnian side Zrinjski to seal a 3-1 aggregate victory and reach the last 16 of the Conference League. It has been an emotional rollercoaster for Palace supporters. In May they won their first major trophy, beating Manchester City to win the FA Cup, then added another three months later with a penalty shootout win over Liverpool to clinch the Community Shield. But winger Eberechi Eze left for Arsenal, skipper Marc Guehi nearly joined Liverpool, then moved to Manchester City five months later and top scorer



Jean-Philippe Mateta was on the verge of signing for AC Milan, only to fail a medical. Oliver Glasner, the most successful manager in the club's history, then announced in January he was leaving at the end of the season, before telling the club's board they had "abandoned" the squad. That appeared to be the end of his tenure, but he has stayed, though fans held up a banner on Sunday before the 1-0 win over Wolves saying he was "finished". Asked if he had assurance of his job

from his bosses, Glasner said "100%", adding: "There's so much noise, sometimes you really don't understand it. Maybe I gave some interviews that were not helpful and I have to admit that, but I'm always telling what I'm feeling, it's how I am. "We're in a very good position in the league and the Conference League and it is up to us to make a really great season of it." Palace are 13th in the Premier League, but 10 points clear of the relegation zone and only three away from eighth.

## GEORGIA VOLL SLAMS TON AS AUSTRALIA OUTCLASS INDIA TO CLINCH ODI SERIES WIN

Australia chased down a target of 252 in just 36.1 overs in the second ODI to clinch ODI series victory over India with a game to spare. Georgia Voll smashed 101 off 82 balls and Phoebe Litchfield slammed 80 off 62 to power Australia to victory. Earlier, India had managed to post 251/9 in 50 overs, with captain Harmanpreet Kaur (54 off 70) and Pratika Rawal (52 off 81) scoring half-centuries. Kashvee Gautam also shone, slamming 25 with the bat and taking two wickets with the ball. The win ensures victory for Australia captain Alyssa Healy in her final ODI series. Crucial encounter coming up - Well then, Australia Women have



turned the tables around and have taken a narrow 6-4 lead in this multi-format series. The third and final WODI now becomes very crucial, especially for India Women. The Aussies can ensure that they don't lose the series with a win in the next game, whereas India have to win if they want to

win the overall series. The 3rd WODI will be played right here in Hobart once again, at the Bellerive Oval on Sunday, the 1st of March. The game will begin at 9.20 am IST (3.50 am GMT), but you can tune in to our build up much sooner. Until then, take care and goodbye! The Australian

skipper - Alyssa Healy expresses her excitement over her team's clinical run-chase, praising the group's outstanding effort in restricting the opposition to a sub-par 250 on a favorable batting wicket. She highlights the importance of consistency in their performance and commends young stars Phoebe Litchfield and Georgia Voll for their match-winning partnership, noting that their success represents the promising future of Australian cricket. As the team maintains its focus on executing the fundamentals and sticking to their proven brand of cricket, Healy says that her side are confident and prepared for the upcoming match on Sunday.

## QAMRAN IQBAL'S UNBEATEN 94 PUTS J&K IN CONTROL VS KARNATAKA

Qamran Iqbal slammed an unbeaten 94 as Jammu and Kashmir's lead over Karnataka swelled to 477 runs at the close of play on Day 4 of the Ranji Trophy Final in Hubballi. Qamran and Sahil Lotra steered J&K to 186/4 at stumps after a top-order collapse. Playing in their first-ever final, J&K had already secured a decisive first-innings lead of 291. Pace spearhead Auqib Nabi added two wickets to his overnight tally of three as Karnataka were bowled out for 293 in response to J&K's first innings total of 584. One of Auqib's big wickets on Day 4 was veteran batter Mayank Agarwal, whose spectacular 160 was the only knock of note for Karnataka. See you tomorrow!



And that brings us to the close of play. The writing is clearly on the wall for a deflated Karnataka side, while Jammu & Kashmir are sitting comfortably on the brink of history, just waiting to get their hands on their maiden championship trophy. It feels like a mere formality now. Be

sure to tune in tomorrow at 9.30 am IST (4 am GMT) and early for build-up and all the final day's action as we officially crown the new champions. Until then, it's goodbye and cheers from the commentary box! One hand on the trophy! In the final session, the Karnataka team looked

tired, and their body language suggested they had accepted defeat. Their bowlers just went through the motions, bowling harmless deliveries outside the leg stump. Although Abdul Samad threw his wicket away by trying to play an unnecessary shot, J&K remained firmly in charge. By stumps, J&K's lead swelled to a towering 477 runs, with opener Qamran Iqbal anchoring the innings and remaining unbeaten on 94. Steady partnership frustrated Karnataka - After the Lunch break, Karnataka bowlers tried hard but failed to maintain their pressure. Qamran Iqbal and veteran Paras Dogra built a solid partnership to steady the innings.

## Gordon needs to stay 'fully focused' after Arsenal talk - Howe



Head coach Eddie Howe has urged Anthony Gordon to stay "fully focused" after the Newcastle United forward was linked with a move to Arsenal. Gordon is the latest key figure at the club to have been subject of reported interest elsewhere. This is despite the England international dismissing such talk as "a load of rubbish" in an interview with reporters just last week. Newcastle sold Alexander Isak to Liverpool for a British record £125m fee last summer - after the Swede went on strike - and Howe was asked how he could avoid a repeat of a similar saga. "I'm not sure there's a lot I can do about that," he said. "I've not seen the story, so it's news to me. "But we're mid-season, we're in the middle of some of the biggest games of his career, and who knows what's going to happen internationally with Anthony in the summer as well. "He's

not got time to look left or right. He's got to be fully focused on straight ahead and the next game, and trying to be as good as he can be." Gordon, Sandro Tonali and Tino Livramento are just some of the Newcastle players who have been touted with moves away in the media in recent months. But Howe said it comes with the territory. "It's your industry that is creating those stories," he added. "I'm slightly secluded from it. "If you don't read it you don't know who has been linked to who. Is it not just part of modern day football that everyone is just linked with moves these days, not just Newcastle players, but potentially a lot of other clubs have the same issues. "It's irrelevant really. It's how the players react to that. If they absorb it and it affects them, then, that's a negative. But I think our players are robust enough to ignore it."



Chelsea to face holders PSG in Champions League last 16

## T20 WORLD CUP SEMI-FINAL SCENARIO:

### India Could Have Surpassed West Indies' NRR If They Had Beaten Zimbabwe By This Margin

India were back to their best - and in ruthless style - at the T20 World Cup 2026. Abhishek Sharma rediscovered his form with a typically blazing fifty, and Hardik Pandya bludgeoned a half-century, powering India to a formidable 256 for four against Zimbabwe in their must-win Super Eight match in Chennai on Thursday. India ultimately won by 72 runs. It was India's highest-ever total in T20 World Cups and the overall highest in this ICC showpiece. But the story of the day was Abhishek (55, 30b, 4x4s, 4x6s). With such a high score, India could have surpassed the West Indies on Net Run Rate. A higher NRR would have helped India in case of No Result in their next match against West Indies.



Before the match, this is how the T20 World Cup 2026 Super Eight points table stood:

1. South Africa - 4 points, 2 matches, NRR +2.890
2. West Indies - 2 points, 2 matches, NRR +1.791
3. India - 0 points, 1 match, NRR -3.800
4. Zimbabwe - 0 points, 1 match, NRR -5.350

According to ESPNcricinfo, India would have surpassed

the West Indies' NRR with a win margin of 108 or more. It meant India had to restrict Zimbabwe below 148. However, Zimbabwe pulled off a valiant fight and finished on 184/6. Hence, India stayed at No. 3 in the points table.

Current T20 World Cup 2026 Super 8 Points Table

1. South Africa - 4 points, 2 matches, NRR +2.890
2. West Indies - 2 points, 2

matches, NRR +1.791

3. India - 2 points, 2 matches, NRR -0.100
4. Zimbabwe - 0 points, 2 matches, NRR -4.475

Abhishek Sharma and Hardik Pandya struck blazing half-centuries as India thrashed Zimbabwe by 72 runs in their must-win Super 8 match to keep their semifinal hopes alive in the T20 World Cup on Thursday. Abhishek smashed a brisk 30-ball 55 to provide early momentum, adding 48 runs for the opening wicket with Sanju Samson (24) after Zimbabwe opted to bowl. Ishan Kishan (38) and Suryakumar Yadav (33) chipped in with quickfire contributions before Pandya hammered an unbeaten 23-ball 50 at the death to power India to 256 for four, the highest total of this edition.

## The £37m cost of Man Utd's past two managerial changes



Manchester United have confirmed sacking Ruben Amorim could end up costing the club almost £16m. The Portuguese was dismissed on 5 January following his public attack on the club's hierarchy after a 1-1 draw at Leeds the previous day. The figure was released in a filing to the New York Stock Exchange on Thursday, a day after the club confirmed they had made a profit of £32.6m in their second-quarter results to 31 December 2025. Listed as an "event that occurred after the reporting period", United confirmed an amortised fee of £6.3m - which related to the cost of getting Amorim to Old Trafford from Sporting in November 2024 - had been written off and a "provision of £15.9m" would be made, representing the highest amount United could be liable to pay Amorim and his coaching staff. It is not explicitly

stated in the submission what would trigger the highest payment but sources with an understanding of the situation have said it relates to future employment. Amorim is yet to speak publicly about his time at United and sources close to the 41-year-old have said there is no immediate likelihood of that changing. The payment completes an expensive managerial experiment that ultimately ended badly. United confirmed in a similar filing on 27 November 2024 they were paying Sporting £11m to hire Amorim to replace Erik ten Hag, whose exit was costing £10.4m. It means the combined changes around Amorim could cost £37.3m. His 14-month stint in charge was the shortest reign of a permanent manager at Old Trafford since David Moyes was sacked just eight months into his tenure in 2014.

## Ustaad Glimpse Incoming: Hype About to Explode

The poster of Ustaad Bhagat Singh featuring Power Star Pawan Kalyan in a striking hat avatar has set social media ablaze. Within minutes of its release, the poster went viral, with fans and cinema lovers celebrating the electrifying look in a massive way. The overwhelming response once again proves the unmatched craze surrounding the film. From the very beginning, every piece of content released from Ustaad Bhagat Singh has received an extraordinary response. The teasers turned into a sensation, trending across platforms and creating unprecedented buzz. The songs 'Dekhlenge Saala' and 'AURA of Ustaad' have emerged as chartbusters, with Pawan Kalyan's swag and screen presence being widely celebrated. Each song has amplified the aura of the Power Star, striking a powerful chord with fans. The team is elated with the phenomenal reception and feels humbled by the love pouring in from all quarters. The latest poster has further amplified the hype, raising expectations to the next level. Taking this excitement a notch higher, the makers are now gearing up to release a power-packed 40-second glimpse from the film very soon. This special sneak peek is set to give audiences a taste of the film's scale, intensity, and mass appeal — promis-



ing to elevate the buzz even further. Directed by blockbuster filmmaker Harish Shankar, who is leaving no stone unturned to present Pawan Kalyan in a never-before-seen mass avatar, the film is shaping up to be a complete entertainer. Rockstar Devi Sri Prasad is at his absolute best, delivering electrifying music that perfectly complements the film's high-

voltage energy. With expectations soaring sky-high and the excitement building steadily, Ustaad Bhagat Singh is all set to redefine mass cinema once again. Ustaad Bhagat Singh is prestigiously being produced by Naveen Yerneni and Y.Ravi Shankar under Mythri Movie Makers and is slated for a grand release on March 26th.

## PRIYANKA CHOPRA FINALLY REVEALS WHY SHE LEFT BOLLYWOOD

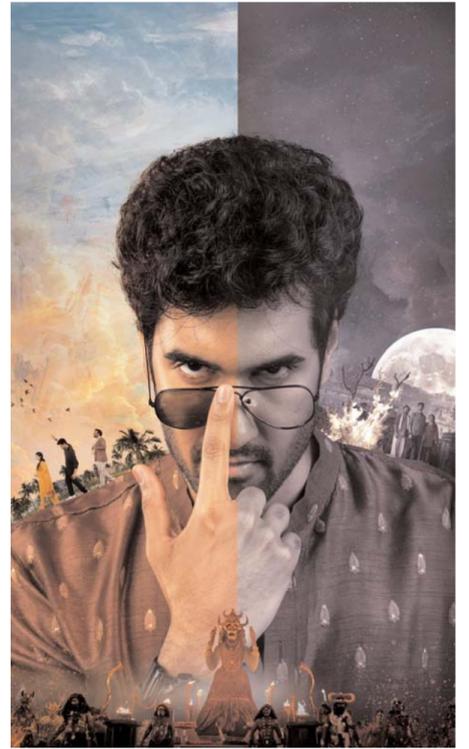


Hyderabad: Priyanka Chopra has always been known for her versatile career in Bollywood, but she has also found success beyond the Indian film industry. In a recent interview on Jay Shetty's podcast, she opened up about the phase when she felt "boxed in" within Bollywood and the tough decision to leave it behind. She revealed that she felt limited by the opportunities in Hindi cinema, stating that work was scarce and she did not see long-term growth there. The Turning Point

Priyanka explained how her six back-to-back flops became a turning point in her career. At that time, she felt emotionally, mentally, and physically drained and recognised that to survive, she had to make a change. "Surviving in the movie industry is tough for everyone; it is not an easy place. It is political, networky, it is about the moment, it is fleeting. I am pragmatic enough to recognise that everyone has their struggle because of their choices. I did feel like I was in a place where I was cornered, work was limited.

## The Madness of "Rakasa" Begins with Its Teaser on March 1 Ahead of a Grand Theatrical Arrival on April 3, 2026

Following the strong buzz surrounding its announcement, Rakasa now moves into its next phase. The film's official teaser will be unveiled on March 1, offering audiences their first glimpse into the world the makers have been shaping with clarity and intent. With its theatrical release locked for April 3, 2026, the countdown toward its arrival in cinemas officially begins. The teaser marks the formal start of the film's promotional journey. Designed to establish the tone and intensity of Rakasa without revealing its narrative core, it is expected to offer a focused glimpse into the film's visual and thematic space. The makers have approached this campaign with restraint, choosing to build engagement steadily rather than overexpose the material. Behind the scenes, Rakasa has progressed through a carefully structured creative process. From early script development to execution, the project has been mounted with a clear emphasis on tonal balance - blending horror, cinematic action, and comedy in a way that feels cohesive rather than fragmented. Director Manasa Sharma has shaped the film to move between intensity and levity, ensuring that the narrative carries both tension and entertainment in equal measure. Principal photography has been completed, and the film is currently in post-production, where the edit, background score, and sound design are being refined to preserve this balance while



strengthening its overall theatrical impact. The earlier title announcement glimpse established the film's imaginative space while deliberately holding back key story elements, allowing curiosity to build organically. The glimpse went on to cross 1.8 million views on YouTube, generating strong engagement across digital platforms and sparking conversation around the film's genre blend and scale. The sustained trac-

tion reinforced growing anticipation and expanded the film's visibility beyond domestic audiences. Rakasa features Sangeeth Shobhan and Nayan Sarika in the lead roles, with Sangeeth returning after the back-to-back success of MAD and MAD Square. They are supported by a notable ensemble including Vennela Kishore, Brahmani, Tanikella Bharani, Ashish Vidyarthi, and Getup Srinu.

## Worth Rs 16 crore? World's most expensive cake goes viral



Mumbai: In an industry where luxury often doubles as a status symbol, Indian celebrities are known to flaunt their wealth through extravagant homes, designer accessories and high-end automobiles. Among them, Bollywood actress Urvashi Rautela has carved out a distinct identity with her unapologetically lavish lifestyle and social media displays that rarely go unnoticed. From diamond-studded watches to making headlines as the first Indian actress to own a Rolls-Royce Cullinan, Urvashi has consistently turned heads with her purchases. Now, the actress is back in the spotlight for yet another opulent gesture, cutting what is being described as the world's most expensive birthday cake. Urvashi Rautela cuts 'world's most

expensive cake' Urvashi celebrated her 32nd birthday on February 25 with a grand bash, where she cut a seven-tier, diamond-studded cake reportedly worth Rs 16 crore. Videos and photos from the celebration flooded social media within minutes, quickly going viral and sparking widespread discussion about the staggering price tag attached to the cake. Fans and netizens alike dubbed it one of the most extravagant celebrity birthday moments in recent times. Her fondness for luxury is not new. Last year, Urvashi became the first Indian actress to purchase a Rolls-Royce Cullinan valued at around Rs 12 crore. More recently, she added another high-end vehicle to her garage, a green Mercedes-Benz G-Wagon reportedly worth Rs 5 crore.



## 'Mardaani's success proves female-led films also have an audience!': Rani Mukerji is thrilled as Mardaani hits the 50 crore milestone in India & 75 crore worldwide

Yash Raj Films' Mardaani 3 has taken the hugely acclaimed Mardaani franchise forward by delivering a solid hit at the box office. Mardaani 3 is already the highest grossing film of the Mardaani franchise and today, it hit another milestone as it crossed 50 crore at the India box office and 75 crore at the global box office! At a time when alpha-male characters are ruling the box office, Rani feels the success of Mardaani 3 is making a quiet but a powerful statement with incredible audience love. Rani says, "I'm deeply grateful that Mardaani 3 has connected with audiences in such a big way. At a time when the box office conversation is slightly centered around 'alpha male' characters, this success proves something very powerful - that female-led films also have an audience. I hope the industry has noticed this so that we have more

such films made." She adds, "Shivani Shivaji Roy was not written as a 'female version' of anything. She is simply a hero - defined by integrity, courage and empathy. She is equal to her male counterparts. The fact that audiences have embraced her story so strongly shows that people are ready for narratives where a woman leads not just emotionally, but commercially." Rani further says, "This milestone is much bigger than numbers. It sends a message to the industry that content with purpose, anchored by a strong female protagonist, can stand shoulder to shoulder with hero-driven films and it tells filmmakers that investing in female-led stories is not a risk - it's an opportunity." Rani feels success of female-led films is a necessity for Indian cinema. She says, "For me, Mardaani franchise's success marks expanding what heroism

looks like in Indian cinema. In terms of significance, such a success is a necessity for cinema because we have to make different films and definitely put a woman at the forefront of such cinema." With Mardaani 3, Rani has scored a hat-trick of hits with this franchise with all the films delivering success stories at the box office. Where courage is not about how loudly you roar but how consistently you stand your ground. Perhaps that's why she stands out. Perhaps that's why Shivani has resonated so much with people." With no competition till Dhurandhar 2 and Toxic release, Mardaani 3 will keep collecting at the box office in the days to come, spreading its hard-hitting message to the people of India. \*Mardaani 3 Collection Data: \* Fri - 4.00 Cr Sat - 6.00 Cr Sun - 7.25 Cr Mon - 2.40 Cr Tue - 2.70 Cr Wed - 2.20 Cr Thursday - 2 Cr 2nd Friday - 2.15 Cr 2nd Saturday - 3.85 Cr 2nd

Sunday - 4.55 Cr 2nd Monday - 1.30 Cr 2nd Tuesday - 1.60 Cr 2nd Wednesday - 1.10 Cr 2nd Thursday - 1.10 Cr 3rd Friday - 0.65 Cr 3rd Saturday - 1.75 Cr 3rd Sunday - 1.15 Cr (drop due to the huge event Match between India vs Pakistan) 3rd Monday - 0.45 Cr 3rd Tuesday - 0.55 Cr 3rd Wednesday - 0.40 Cr 3rd Thursday - 0.40 Cr 4th Friday - 0.35 Cr 4th Saturday - 0.60 Cr 4th Sunday - 0.65 Cr 4th Monday - 0.23 Cr 4th Tuesday - 0.28 Cr 4th Wednesday - 0.21 Cr 4th Thursday - 0.20 Cr 4th week Total - 2.52 Cr Grand Total - 50.07 Cr nett in India Worldwide Box Office (after 4 Weeks) India: 61.09 Cr GBOC (50.07 Cr NBOC) Overseas: 13.92 Cr GBOC (1.53 M) Total: 75.01 Cr Rani Mukerji has again delivered a solo theatrical success in her 30th year as a leading lady - a rare milestone that underlines her longevity and sustained box office credibility in the Indian film industry.

## Rocking Star Manchu Manoj Launches the Teaser of Horror Comedy Movie "Rukmini"

The teaser of the horror-comedy film "Rukmini", starring Niranjan, Greeshma Nethrika, Priya Jasper, and Deepthi Srirangam in lead roles, was officially launched by Rocking Star Manchu Manoj. The film is being produced under the G Cinema banner by Nelaballi Subrahmanyam Reddy and Katta Gangadhara Rao, with Mrs. Nelaballi Kumari presenting it. Directed by Simhachalam Gudupuri, the movie promises a fresh and unique horror-comedy storyline.

Speaking at the event, Manchu Manoj said, "The teaser of Rukmini looks fantastic. Niranjan is being introduced as a hero with this film, and I hope it brings him great success. From the teaser, the direction, DOP work, and music



all appear to be excellent. I wish the entire team huge success."

Hero Niranjan said, "I sincerely thank Manchu Manoj garu for launching our teaser. I am very happy that he appreciated it. I thank my director and producers for giving me the

opportunity to act as a hero in this film. Rukmini is a different horror-comedy that will surely entertain everyone."

Heroine Greeshma Nethrika said, "This is a film we are all working on with great passion. We need your support.

With your encouragement, we will continue to make many more good films. Thanks to Manchu Manoj garu for releasing our teaser and giving his best wishes." Heroine Priya Jasper said, "I thank Manchu Manoj garu for launching the teaser of Rukmini. We seek your love and support. We will soon come before you with our film."

Actor Vikhyath said, "I played an important role in this film. I believe this movie will bring me good recognition as an actor. Rukmini will scare you and make you laugh at the same time."

Actor Jayanth said, "We hope you all like the teaser. The strong content of this film will keep you engaged throughout."

## Ali Abbas Zafar: Ahaan Panday brings old-school honesty to his performances

