



03-02-2026  
Total pilgrims: 69,389  
Tonsures: 20,247  
Hundi Kanakulu: 3.72 Cr  
Waiting Compartments: 04

Approx. Darsan Time for Sarvadarshanam  
(with our SSD Tokens)... 6 H



## 'My Dream, My Future' youth aspirations portal launched by CM Stalin

CHENNAI: Chief Minister MK Stalin on Wednesday launched the website of En Kanavu En Ethirkalam (My dream, My future), a new initiative aimed at capturing and fulfilling the aspirations of the State's youth. The initiative is part of the ongoing Unga Kanava Solluga (UKS) survey.

## IN BRIEFS

Silver soars to hit near Rs 3L per kg, gold jumps to Rs 1.65L per 10g

New Delhi (TSIT): Precious metals extended their sharp rally for the second straight day in the national capital on Wednesday, February 4, with silver prices surging to Rs 2.98 lakh per kg and gold climbing to Rs 1.65 lakh per 10 grams. Firm global trends, a weak US dollar, which revived investor interest in precious metals after last week's steep sell-off, contributed to the surge, traders said. According to the All India Sarafa Association, silver soared by Rs 14,300, or 5.03 per cent, to Rs 2.98,300 per kilogram (inclusive of all taxes). The white metal closed at Rs 2.84,000 per kg in the previous session. Gold of 99.9 per cent purity also advanced sharply, gaining Rs 7,400, or 4.69 per cent, to Rs 1.65,100 per 10 grams (inclusive of all taxes), compared with Tuesday's close of Rs 1.57,700 per 10 grams. "Gold and silver extended their rebound on Wednesday, with gold prices rising over 3 per cent and touching around Rs 1.6 lakh per 10 g, while silver jumped as much as 6 per cent intra-day after a period of sharp volatility and correction," Gaurav Garg, Research Analyst at Lemon Markets Desk, said.

Govt deactivates 2.5 crore Aadhaar IDs of deceased to prevent fraud

New Delhi (TSIT): Over 2.5 crore Aadhaar numbers of deceased persons have been deactivated to prevent identity fraud. Union Minister of State for Electronics and Information Technology Jitin Prasada told the Parliament on Wednesday. Aadhaar is the world's largest biometric identity system with approximately 1.34 crores live Aadhaar holders. "As part of a nationwide clean-up effort to maintain the continued accuracy and integrity of the Aadhaar database, Unique Identification Authority of India (UIDAI) has deactivated more than 2.5 crore Aadhaar numbers of deceased persons till date," said Prasada. "In case of the death of a person, it is essential that his/her Aadhaar number is deactivated to prevent potential identity fraud, or unauthorized usage of such Aadhaar number for availing welfare benefits," he added. The State / UT mentioned in the address of an Aadhaar number holder in the Aadhaar database may vary from the State / UT where death was registered. Further, the Minister also informed of several measures taken to reduce the risk of identity fraud and ensure leak-proof delivery of benefits in the country.

## Rythu bharosa to be rolled out after municipal polls: CM Revanth



Hyderabad (TSIT Bureau): Telangana Chief Minister A. Revanth Reddy on Wednesday announced that financial assistance under the Rythu Bharosa scheme will be credited to farmers' bank accounts immediately after the conclusion of the municipal elections, with nearly Rs.9,000 crore set to be disbursed.

Addressing a public meeting after laying foundation stones for various development works in Miryalaguda, the Chief Minister said the Congress government has spent over Rs.1 lakh crore on farmer welfare in the last two years. He said procurement operations are continuing smoothly and that paddy farmers are receiving a Rs.500 bonus per quintal.



Rythu Bharosa funds worth nearly Rs.9,000 cr to be credited to farmers' accounts immediately after municipal elections.

**CM REVANTH**

Launching a sharp attack on the previous Bharat Rashtra Samithi (BRS) government, Revanth Reddy alleged misuse of power and resources during

the former regime. He challenged former Chief Minister K. Chandrashekhar Rao and his family to donate their farmhouses and media assets for public use and demanded an apology to the people of Telangana. He also alleged illegal phone surveillance of journalists, judges, film personalities, and political leaders during the BRS rule.

The Chief Minister stated that K. Jayashankar should be regarded as the "Father of Telangana" and praised Congress leader Sonia Gandhi for her role in granting statehood, saying she is revered by many as the driving force behind the formation of Telangana.

Revanth Reddy assured that all municipalities would be developed over the next eight years and announced that more Indiramma houses would be sanctioned in the 2026-27 Budget. He claimed that strong support from women voters in the municipal elections would lead to the defeat of BRS and BJP candidates.

Highlighting welfare initiatives, he said the government has issued new ration cards, is supplying fine rice to beneficiaries, providing 200 units of free electricity, waiving farm loans, extending zero-interest loans to women's self-help groups, and constructing Young India Integrated Schools.

Appealing to voters to support Congress candidates, the Chief Minister said the large turnout at the meeting reflected growing public support for the party.

## KTR demands probe into Revanth's alleged 'benami' firm



HYDERABAD (TSIT) : Bharat Rashtra Samithi (BRS) working president K.T. Rama Rao on Wednesday demanded an investigation into Telangana Chief Minister Revanth Reddy's alleged 'benami' company. Addressing a press conference, KTR claimed that KLSR functions as a front entity for the Chief Minister and claimed to have evidence to support his claims.

The BRS leader asserted that KLSR had been operating as a 'benami' company for Revanth Reddy from the very beginning. He said the Supreme Court recently issued notices to the Telangana government seeking clarification on large-scale financial transactions continuing in the company despite its insolvency proceedings, as well as allegations relating to attempts to influence judicial processes. KTR alleged that Revanth Reddy orches-

trated what he termed a political drama from Davos under the guise of forming a Special Investigation Team (SIT) in the alleged telephone-tapping case in order to divert public attention. He demanded that an immediate investigation be launched into the company and that all operations of the insolvent firm be halted until the probe is completed. He further called

for the company to be blacklisted and for all contracts allegedly secured without eligibility to be cancelled.

KTR said that enforcement agencies had carried out raids on KLSR in 2018 and that the media at the time had reported links between the company and Revanth Reddy, who was then the state Congress president. Despite the firm subsequently entering insolvency proceedings at the National Company Law Tribunal (NCLT), KTR alleged that the Chief Minister, after assuming office, facilitated the award of major government contracts to the company. He further stated that Income-Tax raids were conducted on relatives of Revanth Reddy on September 27, 2018, during which transactions between Sai Mourya Estates and KLSR were unearthed.

## WORLD | NEWS

## Leader Of South Africa's Second Largest Party To Step Down



## SPORTS | NEWS

## MS Dhoni Points Out India's Big Concern In T20 World Cup 2026: "Don't Want To Jinx"



the former regime. He challenged former Chief Minister K. Chandrashekhar Rao and his family to donate their farmhouses and media assets for public use and demanded an apology to the people of Telangana. He also alleged illegal phone surveillance of journalists, judges, film personalities, and political leaders during the BRS rule.

The Chief Minister stated that K. Jayashankar should be regarded as the "Father of Telangana" and praised Congress leader Sonia Gandhi for her role in granting statehood, saying she is revered by many as the driving force behind the formation of Telangana.

Revanth Reddy assured that all municipalities would be developed over the next eight years and announced that more Indiramma houses would be sanctioned in the 2026-27 Budget. He claimed that strong support from women voters in the municipal elections would lead to the defeat of BRS and BJP candidates.

Highlighting welfare initiatives, he said the government has issued new ration cards, is supplying fine rice to beneficiaries, providing 200 units of free electricity, waiving farm loans, extending zero-interest loans to women's self-help groups, and constructing Young India Integrated Schools.

Appealing to voters to support Congress candidates, the Chief Minister said the large turnout at the meeting reflected growing public support for the party.

## CM Naidu, DCM Pawan Kalyan discuss political situation



AMARAVATI (TSIT): Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister N. Chandrababu Naidu and Deputy Chief Minister Pawan Kalyan on Wednesday discussed the latest political developments in the state and the filling up of four vacancies in the Rajya Sabha.

The two leaders had a detailed discussion on various issues during two-and-a-half hours long meeting at the Chief Minister's official residence.

The marathon discussion between the two leaders assumed significance in the wake of the opposition YSR Congress Party stepping up its attack on the coalition government over various issues. The situation arising out of certain objectionable remarks by YSR Congress leaders against the Chief Minister and his son and minister Nara Lokesh, and the subsequent attacks by TDP supporters on the houses of two leaders, is also

believed to have come up for discussion.

As four Rajya Sabha seats are going to fall vacant soon, the Chief Minister and Deputy Chief Minister had a preliminary discussion on the seat sharing among the TDP, the Jana Sena and the BJP. The leaders of the Telugu Desam Party (TDP) and the Jana Sena are believed to have discussed issues relating to improving the coordination between the two alliance partners.

They feel that YSR Congress is trying to create differences between the cadres of the two parties at the grassroots level. The two leaders also discussed filling up of various nominated posts in government bodies.

Naidu and Pawan Kalyan reportedly agreed to chalk out a joint strategy to counter what they feel is the attempt by the opposition YSR Congress Party to instigate caste politics.

**7.1 million cancer cases worldwide preventable, tobacco biggest culprit: WHO**

New Delhi (TSIT): Up to four in 10 or 7.1 million cancer cases worldwide could be prevented, according to a new global analysis from the World Health Organization (WHO) and its International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC) on Wednesday. The study, released on World Cancer Day on February 4, identified tobacco as the leading preventable cause of cancer globally, responsible for 15 per cent of all new cancer cases. It also found, for the first time, that



nine cancer-causing infections are responsible for about 10 per cent of cancer cases. Other reasons include alcohol, high body mass index, physical inactivity, air pollution, and ultraviolet radiation. The analysis, based on data from 185 countries and 36 cancer types, estimated that 37 per cent of all new cancer cases in 2022, around 7.1 million cases, were linked to preventable causes. Three cancer types - lung, stomach and cervical cancer - accounted for nearly half of all preventable cancer cases in both men and women, globally.

Lung cancer was primarily linked to smoking and air pollution, stomach cancer was largely attributable to Helicobacter pylori infection, and cervical cancer was overwhelmingly caused by human papillomavirus (HPV). "This is the first global analysis to show how much cancer risk comes from causes we can prevent," said Dr Iibawi, WHO Team Lead for Cancer Control, and author of the study. "By examining patterns across countries and population groups, we can provide governments and individuals with more specific information to help prevent many cancer cases before they start," he added. The burden of preventable cancer was substantially higher in men than in women, with 45 per cent of new cancer cases in men compared with 30 per cent in women. In men, smoking accounted for an estimated 23 per cent of all new cancer cases, followed by infections at 9 per cent and alcohol at 4 per cent. Among women globally, infections accounted for 11 per cent of all new cancer cases, followed by smoking at 6 per cent and high body mass index at 3 per cent, the report said.

## President's rule revoked in Manipur hours before swearing-in of new CM

**Yumnam Khemchand to take oath as Chief Minister this evening; BJP expresses confidence in restoring peace, stability and governance in the state**

New Delhi (TSIT): Hours before the swearing-in ceremony of new Chief Minister in the North-Eastern state Manipur, President Droupadi Murmu on Wednesday revoked President's rule in the state.



4th day of February, 2026."

President's rule was imposed in the state last year on February 13, after prolonged political uncertainty and law and order challenges. According to BJP's Manipur unit, the swearing-in ceremony of Yumnam Khemchand as the Chief Minister is scheduled to take place on Wednesday evening at 6 pm at the Lok Bhawan.

## Kharge attacks Modi government on foreign policy, economy, democracy



NEW DELHI (TSIT) Congress president and Leader of the Opposition in the Rajya Sabha, Mallikarjun Kharge, on Wednesday mounted a sweeping attack on the Modi government, accusing it of all-round failure on foreign policy, the economy, social justice and parliamentary democracy, and alleging that democratic institutions and constitutional values were being systematically weakened.

Speaking during the discussion on the motion of thanks to the President's address in the Rajya Sabha in the ongoing Budget Session, Kharge said the address was "silent on the real concerns of the country" and

## 'Why Only Bengal?' Mamata Banerjee addresses SC as court seeks EC reply on SIR



concrete answers on women's reservation, caste census, unemployment, rising inequality, atrocities against Dalits, tribals and minorities, or on India's foreign policy challenges.

Foreign policy has been reduced to "event management", eroding the country's strategic autonomy. He expressed concern over China's growing influence in India's neighbourhood and the widening trade deficit with Beijing. "Foreign policy failures are not just diplomatic failures. They have consequences for internal security as well," Kharge said, linking them to terrorist incidents that have resulted in loss of life and property.

A Bench led by Chief Justice of India Surya Kant took up Banerjee's plea against the ECI, which alleges that the

ongoing SIR exercise would result in "large-scale disenfranchisement" due to what she termed as an opaque, hurried, unconstitutional, and illegal process. As the matter was called out, Senior Advocate

Gopal Sankaranarayanan mentioned the urgency of the petition, noting that the issue involved fresh matters listed as Items 36 and 37.

With the Court indicating it would shortly hear the case, Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee walked up to the podium and sought to address the Bench directly. "This SIR process is only for deletion," Banerjee submitted, asserting that genuine voters were being removed due to minor mismatches arising from social realities such as women changing surnames after marriage or poor migrants shifting residences.

She told the Court that vot-

ers' names were deleted on grounds of "logical discrepancy", even where the mismatch was merely in titles or spelling variations. "There are daughters who shifted to their in-laws' houses. Their names are deleted. Poor people move for work. Why should that be a ground for exclusion?" she asked. In a strongly worded submission, Banerjee questioned the timing and selectivity of the SIR exercise.

"Four States are going to elections. Why after 24 years? Why this hurry to finish everything in three months? Why only Bengal? Why not Assam?" she asked, alleging political targeting.

## India safeguarded Agriculture, Dairy in talks with US, Piyush Goyal tells Lok Sabha amid protests

NEW DELHI: Union Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal on Wednesday asserted that India had "successfully protected" its sensitive sectors, especially agriculture and dairy, during negotiations on the India-United States trade deal, as he briefed the Lok Sabha amid sustained Opposition protests.

"India has been successful in protecting the agricultural and dairy sectors," Goyal said, responding to concerns over the impact of the agreement announced earlier this week by US President Donald Trump and Prime Minister Narendra Modi. Making his statement in the Lok Sabha, Goyal said the agreement was the out-



come of nearly a year of detailed discussions between negotiators from both sides and had been structured to balance the core interests of India and the US "keeping the important interests of both sides in mind". "It is natural that each side would want to safeguard its sensitive areas and ensure the best possible outcomes," he said. The minister said a

key outcome of the deal was a sharp reduction in US tariffs on Indian goods. "US tariffs imposed on Indian products will be reduced to 18 per cent from 50 per cent," he told the House, adding that this would place India among the countries facing the lowest tariff rates compared to its competitors in the American market.

According to Goyal, he

Elaborating on the negotiations, Goyal said talks had been held at multiple levels over the past year. "With a year of discussions, the two sides succeeded in giving final shape to various sectors of the bilateral trade agreement," he said, underlining that India's negotiating team had prioritised domestic sensitivities.



The third day of the 3rd Future Warfare Course began on February 04, 2026 at the Manekshaw Center in New Delhi with an address by Air Marshal Ashutosh Dixit, Chief of the Integrated Staff Committee.

## 7,400 Naxals arrested since 2019, LWE violence down 88 pc from 2010: Govt tells LS

NEW DELHI: More than 7,400 Naxals have been arrested, and 5,880 have surrendered since 2019, with incidents of Left Wing Extremism-perpetrated violence coming down by 88 per cent from 1,936 in 2010 to 234 in 2025, the Lok Sabha was informed on Tuesday.

Replying to a query, Minister of State for Home Affairs, Nityanand Rai, said that in 2025, the security forces neutralised 364 Naxals, arrested 1,022 and facilitated 2,337 surrenders.

Left Wing Extremism (LWE), which has been a serious challenge to internal security, has been significantly curbed in recent times and restricted to only a few pockets, Rai said.

"The number of LWE-affected districts reduced from 126 in 2018 to only eight in December 2025, with only three districts now remaining the

most affected...The number of police stations reporting LWE-related violence has significantly reduced from 465 in 2010 to 119 in 2025," Rai said.

The minister also said a special focus has been laid on the financial choking of LWE activities and the unearthing of the nexus between CPI (Maoists) and its financial supporters.

"For effective action towards choking of funds and other resources to LWE, coordinated actions are being taken by the state police in coordination with the Central agencies by various means," Rai said. On the development front, apart from the flagship schemes of the government, several specific initiatives have been taken in the LWE-affected areas, with special thrust on expanding the road network, improving telecommunication connec-

tivity, education, skill development, and financial inclusion, he said.

The minister said that to improve telecom connectivity in the LWE-affected areas, 9,233 towers have been commissioned and 15,016 km of roads have been constructed under two specific schemes – the Road Requirement Plan (RRP) and the Road Connectivity Project for LWE Affected Areas (RCPLWEA).

Citing other development schemes in the affected areas, Rai said 46 Industrial Training Institutes (ITIs) and 49 Skill Development Centres (SDCs) have been opened. In addition, 179 Eklavya Model Residential Schools (EMRS) for quality education in the tribal areas have been made functional, 6,025 post offices, 1,804 bank branches and 1,321 ATMs have been opened in most LWE-affected districts.

## Underground rail link along 'Chicken's Neck' will ensure secure route to NE: Himanta

GUWAHATI: Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Tuesday said the proposed underground rail link along the strategic 'Chicken's Neck' corridor in West Bengal will ensure a secure transportation route, connecting the Northeast.

He said the "strategic vulnerability" of the narrow strip of land should have been addressed in the aftermath of 1971.

"This is BIG. For decades, the 'Chicken's Neck' has been used as an intimidation tactic by anti-national forces, both within and beyond our borders," Sarma said in a post on X.

"The proposed underground rail link marks a major strategic breakthrough, creating a secure and foolproof transportation corridor between the North East and the rest of the country," he added.

Railway Minister Ashwini

Vaishnav had on Monday said plans are afoot to lay underground railway tracks along the 40-km strategic corridor and also make the existing tracks four-line. The strategic corridor, called the 'Chicken's Neck' for its shape, is a strip of land located in northern West Bengal's Siliguri area, having a width of over 20 km. The strip is sandwiched between Nepal and Bangladesh, with Bhutan

and China a few hundred kilometres away. Thanking Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Vaishnav for the decision, Sarma said, "...We are taking a giant step towards mitigating this long-standing strategic vulnerability - one that, in hindsight, should have been addressed much earlier, perhaps even in the aftermath of 1971." Sarma had earlier said that then PM Indira Gandhi

"could have asked to expand the 'Chicken's Neck corridor' after the 1971 war."

"She could have redrawn the map for NE's straight access to the rest of the country and not remain dependent on the 'Chicken's Neck' corridor," he had said.

The CM had also held that if India's first PM Jawaharlal Nehru had not "bartered Chittagong port" with Pakistan during Partition, the Northeast would not have been dependent on the 'Chicken's Neck'.

The proposed underground lines will be between Tin Mile Haat and Rangapani railway stations in West Bengal, Northeast Frontier Railway officials said.

One of the lines will go towards Bagdogra in West Bengal, vital for the air defence mechanism of the country, they said.

## SAD leader Majithia walks out of Nabha jail after bail in DA case

PATIALA: Shiromani Akali Dal leader Bikram Singh Majithia on Tuesday walked out of the New Nabha jail here, a day after the Supreme Court granted him bail in a disproportionate assets case. He was released after spending seven months in jail.

The Punjab Vigilance Bureau arrested Majithia from his Amritsar residence on June 25 last year in the disproportionate assets case allegedly involving the laundering of Rs 540 crore of drug money.

His supporters gathered outside the jail to welcome him and raised slogans in favour of the SAD.

After he came out of the jail at around 2.15 pm, Majithia twirled his moustache in his signature style, which led to sloganising by his supporters in his favour.

His supporters showered flower petals over him and honoured him with 'Sirpoa' (robe of honour).

Sitting atop a car, he thanked the Almighty. He also thanked his



supporters with folded hands. "I came out because of your prayers and blessings," said Majithia while speaking to the media.

Earlier, the Akali leader's wife, Ganieve Kaur Majithia, thanked God and the Supreme Court.

"This is the victory of truth. The government had forgotten that there is God above," she told reporters. Tight security arrange-

ments were made outside the jail. Majithia's supporters could be seen bringing sweets.

Outside his residence in Amritsar, Majithia's supporters gathered, distributed sweets and danced to the beats of a 'dhol'.

Majithia is the brother-in-law of Shriromani Akali Dal chief Sukhbir Singh Badal and brother of former Union minister Harsimrat Kaur Badal.

A top court bench of Justices Vikram Nath and Sandeep Mehta on Monday passed the order granting bail to Majithia, while hearing his plea challenging a Punjab and Haryana High Court order of December 4, which denied him bail in the case.

The bench noted that Majithia

was earlier granted bail in a separate case registered under the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (NDPS) Act, 1985.

It also noted that Majithia was in custody in connection with the disproportionate assets case for the last seven months.

"Why do you want to keep him inside jail?" the bench had asked the counsel appearing for the state.

On August 22 last year, the Bureau filed a chargesheet in a Mohali court, which ran into more than 40,000 pages.

In its FIR registered against Majithia, the state vigilance body claimed that preliminary investigations revealed that more than Rs 540 crore of "drug money" had been laundered through several channels, allegedly facilitated by Majithia.

The FIR stemmed from an ongoing investigation by a Special Investigation Team (SIT) of the Punjab Police into a 2021 drug case.

In 2021, Majithia was booked under the NDPS Act, based on a 2018 report of the anti-drug SIT. The Akali leader spent more than five months in a Patiala jail before walking out in August 2022 after the Punjab and Haryana High Court granted him bail.

## MHA, Panchayati Raj Ministry plan to jointly strengthen local self-governance in Naxal-hit areas

NEW DELHI: The Union ministries of Home Affairs and Panchayati Raj are undertaking joint planning to strengthen local self-governance in Left Wing Extremism (LWE)-affected areas, the Lok Sabha was informed on Tuesday.

"The survey has collated details of education levels, health indicators, and the availability of basic services such as primary schools, anganwadi centres, and secondary health facilities," he said, adding that the exercise was helping the Centre and the state government in "bridging the developmental gaps and ensuring livelihood."

Responding to a question on whether the government had conducted any independent evaluation of the implementation of individual and community rights under the Forest Rights Act (FRA) and the Panchayats

(Extension to Scheduled Areas) Act (PESA), Rai said the Ministry of Home Affairs had carried out a survey in seven LWE-affected districts of Chhattisgarh through an independent agency.

"The survey has collated details of education levels, health indicators, and the availability of basic services such as primary schools, anganwadi centres, and secondary health facilities," he said.

Rai noted that these measures reflect the government's commitment towards "strengthening community rights and enhancing participatory governance" in areas affected by Left Wing Extremism, in line with the National Policy and Action Plan approved in 2015.

The minister also informed that the number of LWE-affected districts has reduced from 126 in 2018 to only eight in December 2025, with only three districts now remaining the most LWE-affected.

## Delayed delivery of judgment is identified ailment, must be eradicated: SC

NEW DELHI: The practice of reserving judgments for months by high courts without making them public is an "identifiable ailment" that must be eradicated, the Supreme Court said on Tuesday while highlighting the need to ensure timely delivery of justice.

A bench comprising Chief Justice Surya Kant and Justices Joymalya Bagchi and Vipul M Pancholi was hearing a plea that said the Jharkhand High Court orally pronounced a judgment dismissing a petition on December 4 last year and the verdict has not yet been uploaded.

The bench said a complete judgment be provided to the counsel by the end of next week.

Referring to the delay, senior advocate Mukul Rohatgi, who was appearing for the litigant, said, "It seems some kind of lip service is going on... Some message has to go. This amounts to playing with the majesty of

three months," the CJI said. The bench, in its order, referred to the facts of the case and said, "The Jharkhand High Court pronounced the judgment on December 4, 2025, where the writ petition was dismissed. The judgment has not been uploaded yet. We have impressed upon the counsel appearing for the high court that there is no rhyme or reason for such delay. Let a complete judgment be provided to the counsel by the end of next week."

The matter has now been directed to be listed in the week commencing on February 16.

In November 2025, the top court directed all high courts to submit detailed reports on timelines for reserved judgments, including dates of reservation, pronouncement and uploading.

"We will discuss this among other agendas. We will try to find a solution so that such avoidable litigation ends," he said.

"In my 15 years as a high court judge, I never ever reserved a judgment and did not deliver judgment within

## Govt's drug policy robust with focus on making available medicines at affordable rate: Nadda

NEW DELHI: Union Chemicals and Fertilisers Minister J P Nadda on Tuesday said the government is working to make essential medicines available at affordable rates while ensuring the growth of the pharma industry.

Replying to supplementaries during Question Hour in Rajya Sabha, the minister asserted the need to create a balance between industry growth and the pricing policy of essential drugs.

"Our drug policy and pricing policy are robust and constant," Nadda said.

On the regulation of prices, the minister said it is a continuous process. "Our aim through the pricing policy is to ensure that medicines are accessible and affordable. Secondly, there should be growth of the industry. There should be innovation and scope for employment creation," he said.

"There is a balance which we have to undertake," the minister said, adding that the government strives to create that balance. Nadda said the consultations on policy issues are an ongoing and transparent activity which is undertaken by the Department

stakeholders on the operation of the existing policy framework. These suggestions/ feedback received during such consultations provide stakeholders with inputs on issues requiring redressal in the existing policy, if any.

"The Department and NPPA remain engaged with stakeholders with a view to understanding issues and resolving them either under the extant mechanism or by making appropriate provision," he said.

The review of DPCO, 2013 is a continuous process which is done periodically by the Department or as and when required to ensure that the provisions are enforced effectively so that the essential drugs are made accessible and available to the public at an affordable price.

Through the National Health Mission, the minister said the Centre is providing free drugs and diagnostic facilities. Generic medicines are being provided through Jan Jan Aushadhi Kendra.

"Out of pocket expenditure in the last 10 years has reduced from 62.6 per cent to 39.4 per cent," Nadda informed the House.

Feedback was received from

## Premature to assess if US tariff cut in India's interest: Mayawati

LUCKNOW: Bahujan Samaj Party supremo Mayawati on Tuesday said it would be premature to determine if the United States' decision to set an 18 per cent tariff on Indian goods is in the interest of the country, noting that complete details of the agreement are not yet available.

Her remarks came after an announcement by US President Donald Trump, who confirmed the deal after a telephone conversation with Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Monday. Under the new agreement, will bring down the reciprocal tariff on Indian goods to 18 per cent from a total 50 per cent. Reacting to the development, Mayawati said any immediate evaluation without adequate details would be hasty. She maintained that the actual impact can only be understood after the decision is implemented on the ground.

"After mutual agreements between India and the United States with several conditions, news of the US imposing an 18 per cent tariff -- whether it is in the interest of the nation and the public -- cannot be assessed in haste in the absence of complete information."

assess the relevance, impact and efficiency of the existing policy reform required, if any, keeping in view the interest of all stakeholders.

In 2024, he said the Department and the National Pharmaceutical Pricing Authority (NPPA) held consultations with various stakeholders on matters concerning the National Pharmaceutical Pricing Policy, 2012 (NPPP, 2012) and Drug (Prices Control) Order, 2013 (DPCO, 2013).

Feedback was received from

## Karnataka's first 'Boat Ambulance' service launched at sea by Ullal fishermen

Mangaluru, Feb 4: Ambulances rushing with blaring sirens to save lives during road accidents or medical emergencies are a common sight. However, when mishaps occur in the middle of the sea, the lack of facilities to immediately bring the injured ashore has often resulted in loss of lives. Addressing this long-pending concern, fishermen from Ullal in Mangaluru have launched the state's first-ever 'boat ambu-



lance' service, drawing widespread attention. The emergency boat service has been initiated by the Ullal zone Nadadoni and

Gillnet Fishermen's Association. The objective of the service is to provide immediate first aid and swiftly transport the injured to the shore in cases of boat capsizing, fire accidents at sea, or sudden health emergencies among fishermen. Although there has been a demand for a sea ambulance along the coast for decades, government projects could not be implemented due to technical and financial constraints.



In the backdrop of the budget, Minister Zameer Ahmed Khan held a meeting with Christian, Jain and Buddhist leaders and religious leaders and accepted their request. Ministers D. Sudhakar, Rahim Khan, Chief Minister's Political Secretary Naseer Ahmed, Christian Corporation President Prof. Jafat, Department Secretary Shamla Iqbal, Director Jilani Mokashi were present.

## The Earliest Win Starts At Zero—Apollo Cancer Centre launches Campaign ZERO TO HERO for World Cancer Day



Bengaluru : Apollo Cancer Centre has launched its 'ZERO TO HERO' campaign in observance of World Cancer Day on February 4, 2026, driving a transformative movement toward detecting cancer at Stage Zero and enabling better survival and recovery. Cancer cases in India are rising sharply, with over 15 lakh new diagnoses reported in 2024, and numbers continue to increase each year, according to ICMR-NCRP data presented in Parliament. With one in nine Indians now at lifetime risk, cancer has emerged as a pressing public health concern. Yet, over

70% of cases are identified only at late stages (III/IV), when treatment is tougher, outcomes are poorer, and the financial strain on families is significantly higher.

In response to these alarming trends, ACC's Zero to Hero campaign spotlights the life-changing impact of Stage Zero detection and early intervention—turning a diagnosis into a story of survival. The initiative celebrates individuals who took timely action and emerged as heroes through awareness, access and prompt care. Though each cancer is unique (brain, breast, neck, lung, pancreas, liver, etc.),

but these survivors are united by early diagnosis. Their collective journeys underscore the importance of catching cancer early: it can save lives.

Dinesh Madhavan, President, Group Oncology & International, Apollo Hospitals Enterprises Limited said, "Early detection is not just a medical priority—it is a systems priority. The data consistently show that early-stage cancers have markedly higher disease-free survival and longer median survival compared to late-stage diagnoses. At Apollo Cancer Centres, we constantly strive to move beyond treat-

ment to prevention and early detection. Recognising these cases early strengthens our cancer registries, enables faster care pathways, and helps more patients transition from diagnosis to survivorship. This approach has the potential to transform cancer care from reactive to proactive cancer control."

Mr. Akshay Oleti, CEO, Karnataka Region, Apollo Hospitals said, "At Apollo Cancer Centre, we're committed to empowering individuals to take charge of their health. The Zero to Hero campaign is a testament to our dedication to early detection and prevention. We're proud to be part of this transformative movement, and we urge everyone to prioritize awareness, screening, and prompt care. Together, we can turn cancer diagnosis into a story of survival and hope." Clinicians from Apollo Cancer Center Bengaluru said, "Every day, we see the difference early detection makes. When cancer is diagnosed in its earliest stages, treatment is often less invasive, more effective, and survival rates improve significantly."

## Kumaraswamy Seeks Permanent Solution to Human–Wildlife Conflict in Karnataka

New Delhi : Union Minister for Heavy Industries and Steel, H. D. Kumaraswamy, held a high-level meeting with Union Minister for Environment, Forest and Climate Change, Bhupender Yadav, to deliberate on long-term solutions to the escalating human–wildlife conflict in Karnataka and to ensure the safety and livelihood of citizens.

The meeting was held at the office of the Union Forest Minister, Bhupender Yadav, in the Parliament House. During the interaction, H.D. Kumaraswamy expressed serious concern over the increasing incidents of elephant attacks across several districts, including Kodagu, Chikmagaluru, Hassan, Mysuru, Chamarajanagar, Shivamogga, and other regions.

He pointed out that persistent wildlife incursions have resulted in the loss of human lives, particularly among farmers cultivating land along forest fringes and those engaged in livestock rearing. Several individuals have also sustained



severe injuries, leading to permanent disabilities. Emphasising that the situation has assumed critical proportions in Karnataka, Union Minister H.D. Kumaraswamy underscored the urgent need for a sustainable and long-term policy response.

Responding positively to these concerns, Union Minister Bhupender Yadav assured that the matter would receive immediate and priority attention. He sought detailed inputs from H.D. Kumaraswamy and

issued directions to officials regarding the formulation and implementation of appropriate remedial measures. The Union Forest Minister further instructed concerned officials to submit a comprehensive report on the issue before the conclusion of the ongoing Budget Session of Parliament and reaffirmed the Government's commitment to ensuring expeditious action.

Discussion on Inter-Ministerial Coordination

During the meeting, both

ministers also held extensive discussions on matters pertaining to their respective ministries. The deliberations focused on strengthening inter-departmental coordination, accelerating key development initiatives, and enhancing institutional cooperation. They also reviewed the growth trajectory of the steel sector and acknowledged the constructive support extended by the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change in facilitating sustainable industrial development.

## H. D. Kumaraswamy Meets Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman

### Union Ministers Hold Discussions on Growth of the Steel Sector and New Investments



New Delhi : Union Minister for Heavy Industries and Steel, H. D. Kumaraswamy, held a meeting with Union Minister for Finance, Nirmala Sitharaman, to discuss key developmental matters related to the Ministry of Steel. The meeting was held at the Finance Minister's office in Parliament in the presence of senior officials of the Ministry of Steel. During the interaction, Mr. Kumaraswamy engaged in detailed discussions on major development priorities and strategic initiatives concerning ministry of Steel and Heavy Industries. He stated that consultations were held on new investments in the steel sector, ongoing projects, and measures to further strengthen the industry and enhance its competitiveness. Union Minister H.D. Kumaraswamy also conveyed his sincere appreciation to the Finance Minister for presenting a forward-looking Union Budget that promotes sustainable growth and advances the vision of "Vikas Bharat 2047".

## VBG Ram Ji Act Is Transparent, Congress Opposing It to Protect Irregularities: R. Ashok

Bengaluru: Opposition Leader R. Ashok on Tuesday asserted that the VBG Ram Ji Act is a transparent and people-oriented legislation and claimed that the Congress is opposing it as it prevents scope for irregularities. He alleged that Chief Minister Siddaramaiah brought a resolution against the Act in violation of legislative rules.

Speaking to reporters, R. Ashok said that moving a resolution in the Legislative Assembly against the VBG Ram Ji Act was itself illegal, as a mandatory seven-day notice was not given for discussion. He accused the Congress government of spreading misinformation against the Centre. Citing data from the Rural Development Department, he claimed that irregularities amounting to Rs. 16,019 crore were reported in 31,624 cases during 2023-24, Rs. 50.23 crore in 20,742 cases in 2024-25, and Rs. 18.13 crore in 2025-26. He alleged that corruption

took place through nepotism, bogus bills, and allocation of works to Congress agents.

Ashok stated that all works under the Employment Guarantee Scheme are implemented by state Rural Development Departments and not directly by the Centre. He accused the Congress government of failing to provide its 40 per cent share due to financial constraints while taking credit for the scheme. He reiterated that the BJP opposes the resolution and pointed out that while the Congress has named over 400 schemes after the Nehru family, it is

objecting to the renaming of the 20-year-old NREGA scheme. Highlighting reforms, he said the workdays under the scheme were increased from 100 to 125 and that extensive consultations were held with all states before implementation. Referring to a 2013 CAG report, he said over 4.33 lakh fake job cards were identified, causing losses of thousands of crores. He said measures such as reduced job card validity, biometric attendance, GPS, artificial intelligence, and fixed timelines for wage payments were introduced to curb corruption.

## No One Resigned Over Scams During BJP Rule: DCM D K Shivakumar

Who resigned for scams during BJP's time?: DCM D K Shivakumar BJP is trying to trouble Dalit legislators



Bengaluru : Deputy Chief Minister D K Shivakumar today said that no one resigned during PSI scam during BJP rule. Speaking to reporters at Vidhana Soudha, he said, "No one took responsibility for many scams

during BJP rule. Now, the BJP is trying to trouble a Dalit minister by demanding his resignation." "Minister Thimmappur has highlighted all the corruption during BJP rule. There is no proof of allegations made by the BJP on

Thimmappur: They are all baseless allegations. The Opposition parties are trying to showcase their existence. They don't want discussion on MGNREGA and hence they are digressing." "The BJP can't digest the good work that has happened under MGNREGA.

Panchayats could decide on the roks under the earlier scheme but the Centre will decide on the new scheme. It is impossible to implement this scheme even in BJP ruled states. We are ready to discuss if BJP is willing to debate," he added.

## Other departments should join hands for comprehensive development: K. N. Ramesh

Bengaluru: To enhance coordination among various departments in managing the city's infrastructure projects and traffic congestion, the Corporation organized a joint coordination meeting with senior officials from GAIL, Traffic Police, BESCOM, KPTCL, and BWSSB. The key decisions and discussions of the meeting are as follows: Road Cutting Policy and Technology

MARCS Portal: From now on, applications for road cutting and other services must be submitted through the newly developed 'MARCS' portal, even if applications were submitted using the previous system. Any technical issues in the current portal will be rectified promptly.

RIMS Technology Implementation:

The Commissioner informed that the Road Information Management System (RIMS) software will soon be developed to provide comprehensive details of the roads.

Iblr Junction Development Plan:

As per the Chief Commissioner of Greater Bengaluru's directions, two proposals—an underpass and a flyover—have been put forward for this area. Departments with ongoing projects in the area have been instructed to share information.

Since GAIL has



Wipro Junction (Sarjapur Road): A joint inspection with officials was conducted. The Commissioner directed measures such as developing a U-turn and relo-

cating bus bays to reduce traffic congestion at Wipro Junction. Traffic Solution at Kaikondrahalli Junction:

It was discussed to remove the compound wall near Elements Apartment, allowing small vehicles to pass and to construct a bus bay in the vacant area. Bannerghatta Road: The BWSSB was instructed to complete the pipeline work near Fortis Hospital as soon as possible. Since the ongoing work has disrupted proper road restoration, strict instructions were given for immediate road repair.

Corporate Office: ICICI ICICI Home Finance Company Limited ICICI HFC Tower, Andheri - Kurla Road, Andheri (East), Mumbai - 400059, India Branch Office: Shop No. 2/30, 1st Floor, T.C. VII/673/1-4/2 (M G Corporate Centre, Medical College PO, Ulloor, Thrivandrum, Kerala - 695011)

Notice for sale of immovable assets through Private Treaty

Notice for Sale of Immovable Assets through Private Treaty under the Securitisation and Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002 read with Rule 8(8) r/w Rule 9 (1) of the Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules, 2002

ICICI Home Finance Company Limited (ICICI HFC) conducted several e-Auctions for the sale of the mortgaged property mentioned below, however, all such e-Auctions failed. Now, an interested buyer has approached ICICI HFC with an offer to purchase the said property for an amount of Rs. 35,00,000/- Notice is hereby given to the public in general and in particular to the Borrower(s) and Guarantor(s) that the below-described immovable property mortgaged/charged to the Secured Creditor, the Possession of which has been taken by the Authorized Officer of ICICI Home Finance Company Ltd., will be sold on "As is where it is", "As is what it is", and "Whatever there is", by way of Private Treaty as per the brief particulars given hereunder:

| Sr. No. | Name of Borrower(s)/ Co-Borrowers/ Guarantors/Legal Heirs/ Loan Account No.                | Details of the Secured asset(s) with known encumbrances, if any               | Amount Outstanding               | Reserve Price/ Earnest Money Deposit (E) | Date and Time of Property Inspection | Date and Time of Auction               | One Day Before Auction Date | Surfaesi Stage      |
|---------|--|---|----------------------------------|--|--------------------------------------|--|-----------------------------|---------------------|
| (A)     | (B)  | (C)   | (D)                              | (E)                                      | (F)                                  | (G)                                    | (H)                         | (I)                 |
| 1.      | Vijeshkumar V (Borrower) Rosamma T (Co-Borrower) Loan No. LHTVM0001330596/ LHTVM0001337760 | Re Sy No. 214/26/2 Kattakkada Toluk Valiyarathala Junction Trivandrum- 695571 | Rs. 6,94,833/- 03, February 2026 | Rs. 3,50,000/- 03, February 2026         | 11:00 AM To 02:00 PM                 | February 21, 2026 To February 20, 2026 | 04:00 PM                    | Physical Possession |

The online auction will be conducted on website (URL Link- <https://BidDeal.in>) of our auction agency ValueTrust Capital Services Private Limited. The Prospective Bidder(s) must submit the Earnest Money Deposit (EMD) RTGS/ Demand Draft (DD) (Refer Column E) at ICICI Home Finance Company Limited, Branch Office Address mentioned on top of the article or before February 20, 2026 before 04:00 PM. The Prospective Bidder(s) must also submit a signed copy of the Registration Form & Bid Terms and Conditions form at ICICI Home Finance Company Limited, Branch Office Address mentioned on top of the article or before February 20, 2026 before 05:00 PM. Earnest Money Deposit Demand Draft (DD) should be from a Nationalized/Scheduled Bank in favor of 'ICICI Home Finance Company Ltd.- Auction' payable at the branch office address mentioned on top of the article.

The general public is requested to submit their bids higher than the amount being offered by the interested buyer mentioned above. It is hereby informed that in case no bids higher than the amount being offered by the aforementioned interested buyer is received by ICICI HFC, the mortgaged property shall be sold to the said interested buyer as per Rule 8(8) r/w Rule 9 (1) of the Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules, 2002.

For any further clarifications with regards to inspection, terms and conditions of the sale or submission of bids, kindly contact ICICI Home Finance Company Limited on 9920807300. The Authorized Officer reserves the right to reject any or all the bids without furnishing any further reasons.

For detailed terms and conditions of the sale, please visit <https://www.icicihfc.com>.

Date : February 05, 2026  
Place : Trivandrum

Authorized Officer, "ICICI Home Finance Company Limited" CIN Number- U6922MH1999PLC12016

# EDITORIAL

## Trump And Tariffs: With The US Deal, Has India Bucked Thucydides' Famous Adage?

To paraphrase a famous adage, 'cometh the hour, cometh the man', now it is 'cometh the man, cometh the mayhem.' It has been a year since the Trump 2024 Presidential inauguration, and, to put it bluntly, it has been blackmail time ever since. International order, as understood since World War II, has been threatened. 'Reciprocal tariff', or just tariff, is the polished word for coercion. The import tax on a Harley-Davidson has become the leitmotif of acknowledging India's friendship. And, if you are a Ukrainian, seeing your country getting 'sacrificed' by a nation that had supported you all along, must be heartbreaking - just because of a carrot called the Nobel Peace Prize!

"Give me Greenland, or else I'll remember" - such language was last heard, besides at Davos, in a street corner exchange. But the Washington resident means business, as Venezuela (and the world) found out. "I am the new president of Venezuela", he has actually proclaimed, even as he plans to covet their oil. Is 'Ayatollah of Iran' and 'King of Greenland' next, as Trump craves petulantly Iranian oil and that Danish island? This should ring many bells vis-à-vis India's experience regarding the true face of erstwhile benefactors (no exceptions) that jettison you for their own interests. Remember the attempted arm-twisting of India by the Brits and the Americans after the 1965 India-Pakistan war to give in and reach a settlement with Islamabad on Jammu and Kashmir? And the sanctions after Pokhran II? Well, things haven't changed these past decades, and on one thing at least, the mayhem-in-chief is correct: "It's geopolitics, baby, geopolitics!" Interesting times these are, were it not for the fact that every statement made far across the oceans is driving debates, sending social media into overdrive, and affecting the political narrative in our country. "Don't buy Russian oil, don't trade with Iran and Russia, but buy my oil, weapons, bourbon, alfalfa hay, duck meat..." have been the missives from Washington to New Delhi. The almost daily verbiage, even to the best of friends, has made presidents and prime ministers make a pilgrimage to Washington, barring the odd one. Countries, however, are now seeing the real mien of the occupant of the Resolute Desk in the White House - as witnessed by the European nations coming together on l'affaire Greenland.

And in these times, ideal for the screenplay of that old classic flick It's a Mad, Mad, Mad World, let us raise a toast (of American bourbon?) to Thucydides, who lived 2,500 years ago in faraway Greece and wrote a classic treatise on the Peloponnesian Wars. Dear Thucydides, how did you know back then that there would arrive a guy named Trump when you wrote, "The strong do what they can and the weak suffer what they must." Time to prove Thucydides wrong. Prime Minister Mark Carney of Canada has taken the first step at Davos, with a powerful oration that would go down as a classic for its firm independent stand. We have signed a trade deal with Washington, the full contours of which would reveal whether Delhi has bucked Thucydides' edict.

## Chinese AI Videos Used To Look Fake. Now They Look Like Money

Even six months ago, artificial intelligence-generated videos still betrayed themselves, with extra fingers, jerky limbs and uncanny facial expressions. While some of that persists, for the most part, we've entered an era where seeing is no longer believing. It isn't just the quality that has changed. In China, AI video is doing something else that once looked unlikely: making money. While attention remains fixed on the race to build massive foundation models like DeepSeek's, the real contest is shifting to AI products that people will pay for and the search for a killer AI app. Early evidence from Kuaishou Technology suggests the winner may not be a chatbot at all, but a video tool. Long the underdog to ByteDance's Douyin, Kuaishou has spent the past year recasting itself as an AI video contender with global ambitions. Its Kling AI platform currently has the top spot on the video "quality" ranking from Artificial Analysis. And most significantly, it's gaining traction not just at home but in the more lucrative overseas markets. A December update dubbed "motion control," which more accurately transfers movement from a reference video into a generated clip, went viral, for better or worse, as people digested the obvious misuse cases. Since then, monthly active users for Kling rose 110% from 3 million in December to 7.7 million in January, according to market intelligence firm Sensor Tower. Separate figures cited by domestic business outlet LatePost indicate that paying users surged 350% month-over-month in January. Investors have noticed, sending shares up more than 75% in the past year. The company said Kling's annualized revenue run rate, or monthly operating revenue times 12, hit \$240 million in December. That's striking in an arena still dominated by free products - and a timely reminder that monetization is starting to surface in the product layer, not the foundation model itself. Users are hungry for AI applications that go beyond just chatting. And the revenue wasn't all domestic: 29% last year came from China, while 26% was from the US.



according to Sensor Tower. Still, none of this guarantees staying power. Novelty is cheap in AI and competition relentless. Nearly every major domestic player - as well as Silicon Valley titans - now ship some form of video generator, and Vidu, from Beijing-based Shengshu Technologies currently outranks Kling on Artificial Analysis' text-to-video leaderboard. Viral moments don't guarantee durable growth, and the internet has a remarkably short attention span. OpenAI's much-hyped Sora app, an AI-generated TikTok clone, seemed to recede from the mainstream as fast as it arrived. I found Kling's appeal obvious because the output is dangerously "good enough." In minutes, I created a realistic five-second clip of Japan's Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi dancing - the kind of low-effort, high believability content that makes regulators sweat. I also turned images of real people I know into videos with unsettling ease. And with a two-line prompt, I generated a Studio Ghibli-like animated scene for less time than it took to reboot my laptop. One strategic lesson from Kling's breakout success is focus. Kuaishou didn't charge headfirst into the war of a hundred foundation models. It leaned on the troves of visual data from its short-form app to build a specific product, and then targeted user bases with budgets. Professional and enterprise clients account for 70% of

# Edit

KOCHI  
THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 5, 2026

4

info.southindiatimes@gmail.com

## Threat Calls, Laundering, Dance Shows For Dawood: How Mafia Once Ran Bollywood



The firing at film producer Rohit Shetty's residence has once again brought back memories of the multifaceted relationship between Bollywood and the underworld. For decades, the Hindi movie industry had a multidimensional relationship with the underworld, ranging from predator-prey, performer-patron as well as business partners to romantic partners. The relationship was symbiotic as well as parasitic.

### Predator-Prey Relationship

The Lawrence Bishnoi gang claimed responsibility for the firing incident at Rohit Shetty's residence last Sunday. The motive behind the incident is not clear. The same gang, in a similar manner, had fired on film star Salman Khan's residence at Bandra in 2024. Salman is on Bishnoi's radar as he is accused of hunting a black buck in 1998, an animal the Bishnoi community considers holy. In an interview with a news channel a few months back, Bishnoi, still in jail, warned Salman that he should apologise or he'd be killed. Although the gangster is invoking religion, observers believe that Bishnoi's real motive is to generate fear by targeting another celebrity. His gang came into the limelight after killing Punjabi singer Sidhu Moosewala four years back.

### Blasts From The Past

The Mumbai underworld of the 1980s and 1990s had resorted to similar tactics to generate fear and command authority. In the 90s, gangsters such as Dawood Ibrahim, Chhota Rajan, Abu Salem and Arun Gawli preyed upon filmmakers. They made threat calls from their safe havens abroad and extorted exorbitant amounts from them. Those who refused to pay were shot dead. The killing of cassette industry tycoon Gulshan Kumar in August 1997, the murder of producer Mukesh Duggal in June 1997, the firing on film director Rakesh Roshan in 2000, the murder of actress Manisha Koirala's secretary Ajit Dewani in 2001, and the attack on filmmaker Lawrence D'Souza in 2002 are a few examples.

The trick was to kill one and scare everyone. If a big film personality was shot or killed, the rest would be forced to yield to the mafia's demands out of fear. If somebody paid off one gang and the information reached the others, they would also try to extort the filmmaker. Naturally, the anti-extortion cell of Mumbai Police was a busy department those days.

### It's Complicated

Yet, Bollywood and the underworld had a curious relationship as well. Today, most mainstream films are

funded by big studios, but that wasn't the case till a few decades ago. There was a shortage of investors who could invest clean money in films. This gap was exploited by underworld gangs, who made it a means to convert their black money into white. Whatever money these gangs earned from all their illegal businesses, they invested in films. In return, they would ask for their share of the income and international rights of the film. The 2001 case against the film Chori-Chori Chupke Chupke brought to light that modus operandi.

The mafia had such an influence over the film industry that they would often decide even star-casts and screenplays. A taped conversation between Chhota Shakeel and Sanjay Dutt, which was leaked in 2002, reveals how the former had a deep knowledge of filmmaking and had invested heavily in the industry.

### Singing And Dancing

There was another kind of relationship driven by the underworld, the artist, and the fans. In the '90s, underworld gangs often organised live shows that had Bollywood stars putting up performances in exchange for lucrative sums. Pictures and videos of Bollywood celebrities dancing and singing at Dawood Ibrahim's gang shows in Dubai and Sharjah are

common knowledge today. The D-Company invited film personalities to perform at their family events, and Dawood Ibrahim paid the performers handsomely. In fact, many Bollywood personalities went to Dubai willingly to strike a close relationship with the 'Don' and remain in his good offices; yet others went there grudgingly to avoid hostility. In any case, few had the privilege to turn down such invitations.

### There's Romance, Too

According to some retired police officers who investigated organised crime cases in those days, romantic relationships between Bollywood stars and gangsters were not uncommon. Dawood Ibrahim's relationship with actress Mandakini, the Abu Salem-Monica Bedi romance, Anish Ibrahim's affairs with Pakistani actress-model Anita Ayoob and another Mumbai-based actress became quite famous. Usually, such relationships were voluntary. But often, cops say, if an actress refused the advances of a gangster, he would have her killed. For instance, Anish Ibrahim had ordered for Madhuri Dixit to be killed when she refused to visit Dubai on his demand. A timely intelligence received by the Mumbai Police saved her. She relocated abroad for a few years after the threat to her life.

## Who Lit The Fire In Balochistan? Pak's Explanation Avoids The Obvious



Balochistan is once again up in flames as the Balochistan Liberation Army (BLA) fights its way into 14 cities across the state, and seems to be holding territory in at least two. The scenes being played out on social media are intense, particularly posts of smiling young girls getting ready for a fidayee attack. So ferocious are the attacks that, for once, they have caught the attention of the international media, who clearly understand little of their history, again linking the whole episode to an India vs Pakistan issue, which is really an insult to those literally fighting to their last breath. Operation Herof-2, its first iteration, in August 2024, was the fourth and largest military operation, according to Baloch media sources, citing three other major ones from 2019 onwards. That first one held territory for some 20 hours in an arc from Makran to Koh-e-Suleiman, and specific spots like army camps for at least 48 hours. Herof-2 seems to be at least twice in scope. The present operations have targeted some 14 cities and 48 locations, in an arc from Quetta to Pasni. Again, they took control of key highways, and unlike the earlier operation, seem to be holding on to Noshki, where the Deputy Commissioner was seized along with his family, but released later. Also significant are the attacks in Pasni and Kalat. So far, authorities have confirmed the death of at least 17 personnel of the police, frontier corps and security forces with the

Baloch claiming that more than 200 have been killed. On the other side of the coin, Pakistani security forces claim that 177 Baloch have been killed in 48 hours. Unfortunately, for Pakistan, that doesn't mean operational efficiency. It means indiscriminate killing in counter-terrorism (CT) ops. Soldiers are supposed to chase and pick out militants, without hurting civilians. That's tough and usually means more SF casualties. Clearly, the Pakistanis are not interested in counter-terrorism, just brutal force. Bugti's statement that the Baloch should use the political route for their grievances is equally ridiculous. His election was blatantly rigged. He was elected unopposed since he was the only candidate. It's hardly likely that any self-respecting Baloch, militant or not, will trust him as a mediator. The Baloch Leaders On the other side of the fence is the Baloch Liberation Army (BLA), which has grown into a formidable force. Their leader, Bashir Zai, was like most BLA cadres, part of the Baloch Students Organisation-Azad, and chairman from 2008 to 2012. Bugti's claim that "appease-

ment" and approach didn't work is deliberate double-dealing. The then Imran Khan government did offer talks with Baloch leaders and offered a PKR 600 billion package for the upliftment of the region. However, before all this could take effect, he was whisked away by the military for his 'independent' policies. Bugti's statement that the Baloch should use the political route for their grievances is equally ridiculous. His election was blatantly rigged. He was elected unopposed since he was the only candidate. It's hardly likely that any self-respecting Baloch, militant or not, will trust him as a mediator. The Baloch Leaders On the other side of the fence is the Baloch Liberation Army (BLA), which has grown into a formidable force. Their leader, Bashir Zai, was like most BLA cadres, part of the Baloch Students Organisation-Azad, and chairman from 2008 to 2012. Bugti's claim that "appease-



# Stock market advances in early deals on fresh foreign fund inflows

**Mumbai:** Benchmark indices Sensex and Nifty were trading higher in early trade on Wednesday, February 4, building on previous day's sharp rally, amid fresh foreign fund inflows and positive sentiment following the India-US trade deal. A sharp decline in IT stocks, however, restricted the rally in the markets. The 30-share BSE Sensex advanced 68.49 points to 38,816.96 in early trade. The 50-share NSE Nifty went up by 51.90 points to 25,779.45. From the Sensex firms, Mahindra & Mahindra, Power Grid, Reliance Industries, NTPC, ICICI Bank and ITC were among the biggest gainers. Infosys, Tata Consultancy Services, HCL Tech and Tech Mahindra were the biggest laggards, declining as much as 5 per cent. The BSE IT index tumbled 4.95 per cent to 35,311.34 in early trade. Foreign institutional investors turned buyers on Tuesday as they bought equities worth Rs 5,236.28 crore, according to exchange data. Domestic Institutional Investors (DIIs) bought stocks worth Rs 1,014.24 crore. India and the US have agreed on a framework for a trade deal under which



Washington will bring down tariffs on Indian goods to 18 per cent from the current 50 per cent. The announcement is important because the US has imposed a steep tariff on Indian goods entering American markets, effective August 27, 2025. In Asian markets, South Korea's Kospi traded higher, while Japan's Nikkei 225 index, Shanghai's SSE Composite index and Hong Kong's Hang Seng index quoted lower. US markets ended lower on Tuesday. "The rally fuelled by the US-India trade deal will face hurdles to sustain. The IT sell-off in the US yesterday will drag the Indian IT index, too, constraining the rally in the Indian market," VK Vijayakumar, Chief Investment Strategist, Geojit Investments Limited, said.

Brent crude, the global oil benchmark, climbed 0.68 per cent to USD 67.77 per barrel. On Tuesday, the Sensex ended at 38,739.13, up 2,072.67 points or 2.54 per cent. The Nifty zoomed 639.15 points or 2.55 per cent to settle at 25,727.55. The BSE IT index tumbled 5.49 per cent to settle at 35,109.51. "While Oil & Gas, consumer durables, metal and automobile stocks recorded strong gains, IT stocks faced sharp selling pressure, tracking weakness in global technology shares. Sentiment in the sector deteriorated after AI startup Anthropic unveiled an end-to-end workflow automation productivity tool, rekindling concerns that rapid advances in AI could disrupt

traditional software business models and weigh on industry-wide profitability," Ponmudi R, CEO of Enrich Money, an online trading and wealth tech firm, said. Foreign institutional investors turned buyers on Tuesday as they bought equities worth Rs 5,236.28 crore, according to exchange data. Domestic Institutional Investors (DIIs) bought stocks worth Rs 1,014.24 crore. On Tuesday, the Sensex ended at 38,739.13, up 2,072.67 points or 2.54 per cent. The Nifty zoomed 639.15 points or 2.55 per cent to settle at 25,727.55. India and the US have agreed on a framework for a trade deal under which Washington will bring down tariffs on Indian goods to 18 per cent from the current 50 per cent. The announcement is important because the US has imposed a steep tariff on Indian goods entering American markets, effective August 27, 2025. In Asian markets, South Korea's Kospi, Shanghai's SSE Composite index higher and Hong Kong's Hang Seng index ended higher. Japan's Nikkei 225 index ended lower. European markets were trading on a mixed note. US markets ended lower on Tuesday. The Nasdaq Composite index tanked 1.43 per cent, S&P 500 declined by 0.84 per cent and Dow Jones Industrial Average dipped 0.34 per cent. "Domestic equities witnessed a volatile session, swinging between gains and losses as rising US-Iran tensions kept investors on edge," Vinod Nair, Head of Research, Geojit Investments Limited, said. Overall upside remained limited due to weakness in IT stocks amid concerns over reduced demand for traditional outsourcing following Anthropic's introduction of new AI-driven automation tools, he added. Brent crude, the global oil benchmark, advanced 0.36 per cent to USD 67.57 per barrel.

## BHEL BAGS OVER RS 1,000 CR PROJECT FROM HINDALCO INDUSTRIES



**New Delhi:** State-owned BHEL on Wednesday said it has secured an order in the range of Rs 1,200-1,500 crore from Hindalco Industries. BHEL said a letter of intent (LOI) in this regard has been received from Aditya Aluminium, Hindalco Industries. The scope of work includes design, engineering, manufacture, supply up to site, unloading & storage, erection, commissioning and

tors, and a leading power equipment manufacturer globally. The company provides a comprehensive portfolio of products, systems and services to players in power, transmission, transportation, renewables, water, defence & aerospace, oil & gas, among others. BHEL said a letter of intent (LOI) in this regard has been received from Aditya Aluminium, Hindalco Industries.

## Paytm Delivers Third Straight Profitable Quarter as PAT Rises to 225 Crore; Revenue Increases to 2,194 Crore in Q3 FY 2026

Sustained profitability and growth driven by industry-leading monetisation across payments and financial services. Continued leveraging AI capabilities led to expanded merchant payment leadership and higher consumer UPI market share. Recorded more than double the UPI industry growth rate, with consumer UPI GMV up 35% over the last nine months. Received all three key payment licenses for online, offline and cross-border payments for PPSL from RBI; resumed onboarding of online merchants. Paytm (One 97 Communications Limited), India's full stack merchant payments leader serving MSMEs and enterprises, and a leading financial services distribution company, and the pioneer of mobile payments, QR codes, and Soundbox, today announced its financial results for the quarter ending December 2025 (Q3 FY26) reporting its third consecutive profitable

quarter, driven by strong monetisation, higher payments GMV, merchant subscriptions, and distribution of financial services revenue. In the December quarter, Paytm reported a profit after tax (PAT) of 225 crore, an improvement of 433 crore year-on-year. EBITDA for the quarter improved to 156 crore with an EBITDA margin of 7%, reflecting an improvement of 379 crore YoY driven by revenue growth and continued operating leverage. Contribution profit stood at 1,249 crore, up 30% YoY with a contribution margin of 57%, an improvement of 5 percentage points YoY. Paytm UPI continued to gain market share for the third consecutive quarter. Paytm's consumer UPI GMV grew 35% in the last nine months versus industry GMV growth of 16%. In Q3 FY26, operating revenue grew 20% YoY to 2,194 crore, led by higher payments GMV, increase in

merchant subscriptions and growth in distribution of financial services. On a like-for-like basis, revenue growth was approximately 25%. Paytm said that there was an insignificant impact on revenue from industry stoppage of rent payments through credit card (PA PG guidelines, Sep 2025) and Real Money Gaming (RMG) Act, Aug 2025, as the company has taken proactive compliance measures over the past few years. Payments services revenue (including other operating revenue) grew 21% YoY to 1,284 crore. Net payment revenue increased by 25% YoY to 613 crore, due to improved payment processing margin and increase in merchant subscriptions which grew by 27 lakh YoY to reach 1.44 crore. Payments GMV grew 24% YoY to 6.2 lakh crore. In Q3 FY 2026, distribution of financial services revenue grew 34% YoY to 672 Cr, driven by continued growth in distribution of merchant loans and wealth

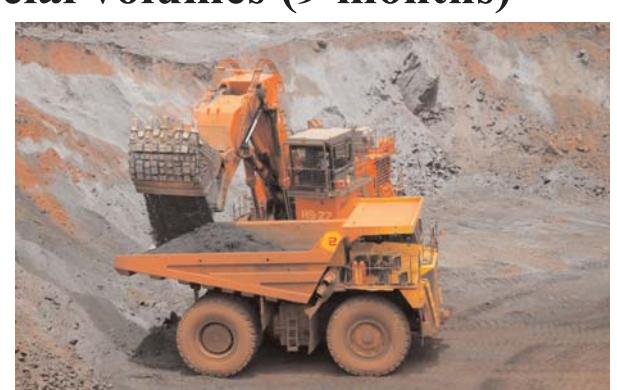
## Silver soars to hit near Rs 3L per kg, gold jumps to Rs 1.65L per 10g

**New Delhi:** Precious metals extended their sharp rally for the second straight day in the national capital on Wednesday, February 4, with silver prices surging to Rs 2.98 lakh per kg and gold climbing to Rs 1.65 lakh per 10 grams. Firm global trends, a weak US dollar, which revived investor interest in precious metals after last week's steep sell-off, contributed to the surge, traders said. According to the All India Saraf Association, silver soared by Rs 14,300, or 5.03 per cent, to Rs 2,98,300 per kilogram (inclusive of all taxes). The white metal closed at Rs 2,84,000 per kg in the previous session. Gold of 99.9 per cent purity also advanced sharply, gaining Rs 7,400, or 4.69 per cent, to Rs 1,65,100 per 10 grams (inclusive of all taxes), compared with Tuesday's close of Rs 1,57,700 per 10 grams. "Gold and silver extend-

ed their rebound on Wednesday, with gold prices rising over 3 per cent and touching around Rs 1.6 lakh per 10 g, while silver jumped as much as 6 per cent intra-day after a period of sharp volatility and correction," Gaurav Garg, Research Analyst at Lemonn Markets Desk, said. In the international market, spot silver gained USD 4.28, or 5.03 per cent, to USD 89.35 per ounce, while gold rose by USD 100.03, or 2.02 per cent, to USD 5,047.07 per ounce. Gold and silver advanced on Wednesday, driven by renewed safe-haven buying amid escalating geopolitical tensions between the US and Iran, Saumil Gandhi, Senior Analyst – Commodities at HDFC Securities, said. "This confrontation undermines the optimism over the US-Iran nuclear talks later this week and has raised concerns about the potential for further conflict between Washington and Tehran, which could increase the risk premium on gold and heighten demand for safe-haven assets," Gandhi said.

## NMDC Achieves Record-Breaking physical and financial volumes (9 months)

Hyderabad, 03rd February 2026: NMDC, India's largest iron ore producer, delivered a stellar performance, registering robust growth across volumes and financials in 9 months of FY26. The Responsible Miner reported its best-ever January production and sales, reinforcing its operational momentum. The company produced 5.56 MT of iron ore and sold 4.79 MT, reflecting a strong year-on-year growth of 9% in production and 7% in sales over the corresponding period last year. The company's cumulative performance up to January 2026 further highlights this upward trajectory. Production surged to 42.65 MT, marking an impressive 19% growth, while sales increased to 39.75 MT, up 9.7% year-on-year. On the financial front, NMDC delivered robust FY26 9-month performance since inception. Revenue surged by 22% to ₹20,381 crore, while PBT climbed 5% to ₹2,280 crore. PAT rose 4% to ₹5,401 crore, and EBITDA expanded to ₹7,666 crore,



registering a 5% growth. NMDC has also declared an interim dividend of Rs 2.50 per equity share for their shareholders. This performance was driven by record volumes and sustained operational excellence, firmly positioning NMDC among India's most resilient mining companies. With back-to-back record volumes and strong financials, NMDC remains firmly on track to achieve its annual targets and is well-positioned to set new benchmarks for the mining industry. Achieving the best-ever figures since inception places NMDC

## Hindalco, KADA Partner to Strengthen Youth Employability with Multi-Skills Training Centre at Kuppam

**Andhra Pradesh, February 2026:** Hindalco Industries Ltd, in collaboration with the Kuppam Area Development Authority (KADA), announced the launch of a state-of-the-art Multi-Skills Training Centre at its Kuppam plant in Andhra Pradesh, reinforcing its commitment to youth empowerment, inclusive growth, and workforce development. The Kuppam Multi-Skills Training Centre aims to train and upskill over 500 youth annually through placement-linked, industry-aligned programmes, benchmarked to national and global standards. The initiative represents a scalable public-private partnership designed to accelerate regional transformation and advance the objectives of the Swarna Kuppam Vision 2029. Speaking at the inauguration, Mr. Samik Basu, Chief Human Resources Officer, Hindalco Industries Limited, added, "At Hindalco, we see skilling as



a powerful catalyst for social and economic transformation. This Centre brings together global innovation and local relevance leveraging immersive, AI-enabled learning in partnership with Eon Reality, USA to make world-class vocational training accessible to youth in their own language. By integrating advanced technology with industry-linked, placement-focused pro-

grammes, we are creating sustainable pathways to employment and preparing a future-ready workforce for the region." Spread across 22,500 sq. ft., the purpose-built facility includes smart classrooms, domain-specific practical labs, digital learning infrastructure, and career guidance infrastructure, designed to deliver industry-relevant, outcome-driven skilling. Over the next three

years, the Centre is expected to train over 875 youth and facilitate up to 600 job placements, while indirectly benefiting more than 5,000 family members and engaging 20,000 community members through awareness and skilling initiatives. A key differentiator of the Centre is its AI-enabled digital learning platform, accessible even on basic smart phones and offering lifetime

# Israeli strikes kill 20 in Gaza

At least 20 Palestinians, including several children and a paramedic, have been killed in Israeli strikes in the north and south of Gaza, hospitals say. The Israeli military said tanks and aircraft had carried out precision strikes against what it called "terrorists" who opened fire on troops in the north of the strip, seriously wounding an officer. It added that the attack happened close to the Yellow Line, beyond which Israeli forces are stationed in Gaza, and that it constituted a "blatant violation" of the three-month-old ceasefire agreement with Hamas. Hamas accused Israel of using the shooting as "a flimsy pretext to justify the continuation of killing and aggression against our people". Al-Shifa hospital in Gaza City said it had received the bodies of 13 people, including five children, who were killed when tents for displaced families and homes in the eastern Zeitoun and Tuffah neighborhoods were hit. Among the mourners gathered in the hospital's courtyard for funeral prayers was Abu Mohammed Haboush, who said his family was asleep in their home when it was shelled. "Our children were martyred - my son was martyred, my brother's son and daughter were martyred," he told Reuters news agency. "We have nothing to do with anything, we are peaceful people." Nasser hospital in the city of Khan Younis said four dead, including one child, were brought there following strikes on tents in the southern Qizan Rashwan area. Another two children and a paramedic were later killed in the coastal al-



Mawasi area south-west of Khan Younis, hospital officials said. A first responder from the Hamas-run Civil Defence agency, Jihad al-Hinnawi, told Reuters that the paramedic had rushed to help victims of a strike on a tent in the coastal al-Mawasi area and was then killed by a second strike on the same location. The

Palestinian Red Crescent said separately that one of its paramedics, Hussein al-Semieri, was killed while on duty in the Khan Younis area. The humanitarian organisation accused the Israeli military of a "glaring violation" of international humanitarian law, which protects medical personnel. The Israeli military said it

was checking the reports. Both Israel and Hamas have accused each other of nearly-daily violations since the ceasefire took effect on 10 October. On Sunday, more than 30 people were killed in Israeli strikes across Gaza. Israel's military said it launched those strikes after gunmen emerged from a tunnel in the southern Rafah area, beyond the Yellow Line. Gaza's Hamas-run health ministry has said at least 556 people have been killed by Israeli fire, while the Israeli military has said four of its soldiers have been killed in Palestinian attacks. The war was triggered by the Hamas-led attack on southern Israel on 7 October 2023, in which about 1,200 people were killed and 251 others were taken hostage. Israel responded to the attack by launching a military campaign in Gaza, during which more than 71,820 people have been killed, according to the territory's health ministry.

## Libyan prosecutors launch probe into killing of Gaddafi's son



Libyan prosecutors say they are investigating the killing of Saif al-Islam Gaddafi, son of the country's long-time leader Col Muammar Gaddafi. The 53-year-old, who was once widely seen as his father's heir apparent, was killed during a "direct confrontation" with four unknown gunmen who broke into his home in the city of Zintan, his office said in a statement. "The victim died from wounds by gunfire," Libyan prosecutors said on Wednesday, adding that efforts were under way to identify the gunmen. In a different version of events, his sister told Libyan TV that he had died near the country's border with Algeria. Saif al-Islam's lawyer told the AFP news agency a "four-man commando" unit carried out an assassination at his home in the city of Zintan, though it was not clear who may have been behind the attack. The public prosecutor's office said forensic experts had been dispatched to Zintan in north-west Libya to conduct investigations. Saif al-Islam was long seen as the most influential and feared figure in the country after his father, who ruled Libya from 1969 until being ousted and killed during an uprising in 2011. BBC World Affairs editor John Simpson, who had met Saif al-Islam Gaddafi, said that he was "a strange, mercurial figure, but he was much less eccentric than his father". "During the 2011 revolution, he agreed to be interviewed for the BBC, only to scream insults at me in front of his officials," Simpson said. "Then he sent them away, and apologised profusely. 'They expect it of me,' he said." According to Libyan journalist and writer Abdulkader Assad, Saif al-Islam might have been targeted by locals who felt their political influence was being threatened by his popularity. "It could also be foreign actors took him out because of his controversial past," Abdulkader told the BBC's Newsday programme.

## RIGHTS GROUPS SAY CHINA DETAINED TWO JOURNALISTS OVER CORRUPTION REPORT



Rights groups and activists are sounding the alarm about the detention of two Chinese investigative journalists after they reportedly exposed corruption by a senior official in Sichuan province. Independent journalists Liu Hu and Wu Yingjiao were taken by police on Sunday after they published their investigation, rights groups say. Critics have long flagged concern

about media repression in China, where authorities have arrested and prosecuted journalists, accusing them of causing trouble. Chengdu police said on Monday that two men, identified by their surnames Liu and Wu and aged 50 and 34, were under investigation for "making false accusations" and "illegal business operations". In response to a question about the arrests, a Chinese foreign ministry spokesperson told reporters on Wednesday that relevant authorities had already released information on the case. "China is a country ruled by law, and Chinese judicial organs handle cases according to law; everyone is equal in face of the law," the spokesperson said.

## Son of Norway's crown princess chokes back tears giving evidence at rape trial



The son of Norway's crown princess has begun giving evidence at his trial for rape and more than 30 other alleged offences. Marius Borg Høiby, 29, looked overwhelmed by the occasion, his voice quivering as he paused several times to take off his glasses and wipe his eyes. Choking back tears, he said it was very difficult to talk, and complained of being followed by the press since he was three years old. He denies four allegations of rape as well as other serious charges against him. He was giving evidence after the first woman he is alleged to have raped told the court

she believed she had been drugged during an "after-party" in the basement of his parents' house in December 2018. The woman, who cannot be named for legal reasons, spoke of her sense of "betrayal and shock" after she was shown videos of him sexually assaulting her shortly after they had had brief, consensual sex. She had already spoken of a "black hole" in her memory. She had told the court behind closed doors she had no recollection of what happened. The 29-year-old defendant, who was born four years before his mother's son,

er, Mette-Marit married Norway's Crown Prince Haakon, is not a member of the royal family or a public figure. During his first appearance in court on Tuesday, he was seen shaking, and he is understood to have had hospital treatment overnight, rather than returning to custody. Appearing in court on Wednesday, he took a seat and after several minutes in which he looked overcome by the occasion, he regained his composure and told the court he had had a lot of sex, drugs and alcohol because he had an extreme need of validation. "I am known for being my mother's son."

## RUSSIAN ATTACKS ON UKRAINE ENERGY SITES 'PARTICULARLY DEPRAVED', UK PM STARMER SAYS

Russia's attacks on Ukraine's energy sector on Monday night - as temperatures dropped to -20C (-4F) - were "barbaric" and "particularly depraved", UK Prime Minister Sir Keir Starmer has said. He made the comments after speaking to US President Donald Trump hours after Russia hit power plants and critical infrastructure in the capital, Kyiv, and elsewhere. It comes at the end of a week-long pause that Trump had asked Russia's President Vladimir Putin to observe as a fierce cold swept Ukraine. Trump told reporters that Putin had "kept his word" and that he would like him to end the war. US envoys are meeting Ukrainian and



have been forced to spend the night sheltering in metro stations, with some pitching tents on the platforms to protect them from the freezing cold. The authorities have been setting up centres around Kyiv for the city's inhabitants to go to warm up. They are also importing more generators in order to

cope with longer blackout periods as engineers try to repair damage. Ukraine's Energy Minister, Denys Shmyhal, has said that the situation with the country's energy system remains "difficult" and that they would take some time to repair. This includes Kyiv's Darnytsia Combined Heat and Power (CHP) plant, which Shmyhal said had been "severely damaged". Iryna Vovk is a psychologist who lives in Kyiv with her daughter. Her husband is away fighting. Speaking to BBC Radio 4's Today programme, Vovk said she was considering moving to her parents' village because of the problems accessing electricity and water in the city. "Here in Kyiv, life is very awful," she said. Asked how her daughter is coping, Vovk said she was "okay in general". "She tries to smile and lead a normal life but it's not a normal life. She cannot study [like] normal, she cannot use online lessons." Ukraine has complained repeatedly of a shortage of

missiles - urging allies to deliver more. The Ukrainian Air Force said it was attacked by more than 100 drones early on Wednesday. It added that, while it had intercepted most of these, drone strikes were reported in 14 locations, along with falling debris. The head of Dniproprostrov's military administration, Oleksandr Ganzha, said a 68-year-old woman and a 38-year-old man were killed during a Russian attack. Two other people were injured. In the Zaporizhzhia region, leader Ivan Fedorov said three people were killed and 11 wounded, including children, during attacks on Tuesday evening that continued overnight.

## LEADER OF SOUTH AFRICA'S SECOND LARGEST PARTY TO STEP DOWN



South Africa's Democratic Alliance (DA) leader John Steenhuisen has said he will not seek re-election as the party's leader in April - a move that may threaten the stability of the coalition government. The DA, South Africa's second largest party, entered into a coalition with its arch rival the African National Congress in 2024 after the ANC lost its parliamentary majority. Steenhuisen took over leadership of the pro-business DA in 2019 and currently serves as agriculture minister in President Cyril Ramaphosa's government. The 49-year-old was widely expected to run again but was reportedly forced to abandon his bid because of several contro

versies. "For the rest of this term of office, I will focus all of my time and energy as minister of agriculture on defeating the most devastating foot-and-mouth disease outbreak our country has ever seen," he told a press conference. Steenhuisen began his political career aged 22 when he was elected to the council of the port city of Durban for the Democratic Party, the DA's predecessor. He rose up through the party's local and then regional leadership before becoming leader of the party, which traditionally has a white support base, two decades later. It was widely reported that Steenhuisen would run unopposed for the leadership at the DA's upcoming conference.

But it seems a variety of issues led to his decision not to do so, including his fallout with another senior DA member, Environment Affairs Minister Dion George, and allegations, of which he was cleared in January, that he had abused his party credit card.

## 'Painful times in my marriage' - Melinda French Gates reacts to ex-husband in Epstein files



Billionaire philanthropist Melinda French Gates has said her ex-husband, Microsoft co-founder Bill Gates, being named in new files relating to the late sex offender Jeffrey Epstein dredged up "painful times in my marriage". She told an NPR podcast she felt "unbelievable sadness", and that "whatever questions remain" needed to be answered by those named in the records, including her ex-husband. "I am so happy to be away from all the muck," she said. The couple divorced in 2021. Records released by the US justice department include an allegation by Epstein that Bill Gates caught a sexually transmitted disease. Gates's spokesperson has called the claim "absolutely absurd". The BBC has con-

tacted his representatives for comments about his ex-wife's remarks.

Bill Gates has not been accused of wrongdoing by any of Epstein's victims, and the appearance of his name in the files does not imply criminal activity of any kind. The billionaire has broken his silence on the release of files by the US Department of Justice (DOJ) in an interview with

9News in Australia. He said the interactions with Epstein were limited to dinners and that did not visit Epstein's island. "Every minute I spent with him I regret and I apologise that I did that," Gates added. In the interview with NPR's Wild Card podcast, Melinda French Gates said: "For me, it's personally hard whenever those details come up, right? Because it brings

## 'I've never hit anything so hard': What it's like to be attacked by a shark



It was the last hour of the last day of Peter Smith's holiday in Tobago when he decided to take a dip in the sea. "The conditions were perfect for a swim," the retired IT director recalls. "I dived into the waves, swam out no more than 20 feet (6m), and stood waist-deep in the water." He and his wife Joanna, from Hertfordshire, were away with friends, and the last thing on their minds was the risk of shark attacks - they are unheard of on this tiny Caribbean island. "Suddenly I felt a very heavy object hit my leg. I look down and there's a shark - and it's big," Peter says. "You're talking maybe 10 foot (3m). That's when your brain works at 1,000 miles an hour." He had been bitten by a bull shark, one of the most dangerous sharks in the world and notorious for hunting in shallow waters. In his first interview since the attack in April 2024, Peter tells BBC News about his terrifying experience - and why he's still not scared of sharks. "The situation got serious really fast" The 66-year-old says he instantly recognised the jaws clenching onto his leg as those of a bull shark. Fearing he would be dragged underwater, he decided to put up a fight. "I start punching the shark. To be honest I don't know what I was trying to do, but I was hitting it," Peter says. "I can honestly say I've never hit anything as hard as I hit that shark. After hitting my leg, it managed to attack my left arm and then my stomach. The situation got serious really fast. I lost a lot of blood." Finally, the animal stopped its attack long enough for Peter to be dragged from the water by people nearby. His friends John and Moira, who were beside him in the sea, each helped fight the shark and raise the alarm. Back on the beach, Joanna, alerted by Moira's screams, ran to the shoreline. "I remember going into the water and seeing his terrible injuries. I could see bones, it was just awful," Joanna recalls. "And somebody said, 'Get her away from here.'" Peter was taken to the only hospital on Tobago with deep lacerations to his stomach, a large bite on one arm and a huge part of his upper thigh bitten off. He describes the pain kicking in as he was being put in the ambulance.



Benfica goalkeeper Anatoliy Trubin celebrates scoring his team's fourth goal with a header alongside teammates during the Champions League tie against Real Madrid at Estadio do SL Benfica in Lisbon, Portugal. Photo by Jose Manuel Alvarez

## More Trouble For Pakistan, Likely To Miss Out On Potential T20 World Cup Super 8 Spot

Pakistan are set to boycott their T20 World Cup 2026 group-stage match against India on government directives, a decision that could prove costly with two crucial points at stake. Pakistan have been drawn in Group A alongside arch-rivals India, the USA, the Netherlands and Namibia. The side will play all of their matches in Sri Lanka, the tournament's co-hosts along with India, under the hybrid model approved by the International Cricket Council (ICC). The arrangement was finalised after the Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) refused to send its team to India, prompting the ICC to award co-hosting rights to Sri Lanka to ensure Pakistan's participation.



Pakistan are scheduled to begin their T20 World Cup 2026 campaign against the Netherlands on February 7 at the Sinhalese Sports Club in Colombo. They will then face the USA on February 10 before boycotting the high-profile fixtures, potentially putting Pakistan at a disadvantage.

in terms of both points and Net Run Rate. According to AccuWeather, Pakistan's tournament opener against the Netherlands carries nearly a 90 per cent chance of rainfall. While no rain is forecast for their matches against the USA and India, the final group-stage clash against Namibia has close to a 25 per cent chance of showers. With Pakistan firm on their stance of boycotting the match against India, weather disruptions could further dent their hopes of reaching the Super 8 stage. Concerns over rain are not unfounded, with the second T20I between Sri Lanka and Pakistan last month washed out without a single ball being bowled in Dambulla.

## HARDEN TO JOIN CAVALIERS IN PUR-SUIT OF FIRST TITLE



James Harden is set to join the Cleveland Cavaliers from the Los Angeles Clippers, with Darius Garland moving in the opposite direction after the sides agreed a trade. Harden, 36, is an 11-time NBA All-Star and regarded as one of the greatest guards in history, but he has never won an NBA title. Although the deal is yet to be confirmed by the NBA, Harden said the opportunity to win a first championship was key in deciding to move. The Cavaliers are fifth in the Eastern Conference in their pursuit of a play-off spot, while the Clippers are ninth in the West. "I see an opportunity to win in the East - they got a very good team, coaching staff, all of the above," Harden told ESPN. "As much as I wanted to stay in LA and give it a go, I've never won one before. As a basketball mind, I think we have a bit better chance." Harden has helped the Clippers climb the table after a dismal 6-21 start this season, but sat out Sunday's defeat by the Philadelphia 76ers while talks with the

## Gautam Gambhir Asked About Pakistan's India Boycott At T20 World Cup. See His Reaction



India head coach Gautam Gambhir on Tuesday ignored questions regarding Pakistan's decision to boycott the high-profile T20 World Cup match against their arch-rivals. While the Pakistan government has allowed the national team to participate in the tournament, it did not give them the green light to play against India. In a viral video, Gambhir was spotted leaving for Mumbai, where he was mobbed by the paparazzi. He thanked the reporters for their well-wishes but ignored their questions on Pakistan's stance before entering the airport. India and Pakistan are in Group A alongside the United States of America (USA), the Netherlands, and Namibia. While Pakistan will face the Netherlands in the tour-

nament opener in Colombo on February 7, co-hosts India will square off against the USA later in the day. The Indian team was in terrific form ahead of the World Cup, winning the five-match T20I series against New Zealand 4-1. Similarly, Pakistan head

into the tournament on the back of a T20I whitewash over Australia at home last week. However, they have a terrible record against India in the ICC T20 World Cups. The two teams have played eight times, with the record standing at 7-1 in India's favour. In the Asia Cup last year, Pakistan were cleaned up by a clinical India in a trilogy of entertaining matches, including the final. Throughout these matches, young Indian stars Abhishek Sharma and Tilak Varma bullied Pakistan bowlers with their fiery knocks, with Tilak scoring a brilliant 69\* during a tense 147-run chase in the final, showing his big-match temperament. India squad for the ICC T20 World Cup 2026: Suryakumar Yadav (captain), Abhishek Sharma, Tilak Varma, Sanju Samson, Shivam Dube, Ishan Kishan, Hardik Pandya, Arshdeep Singh, Jasprit Bumrah, Harshit Rana, Varun Chakaravarthy, Kuldeep Yadav, Axar Patel, Washington Sundar, Rinku Singh.

## After Going Unsold In IPL 2026 Auction, Steve Smith Finds Home In PSL's Newest Franchise



After going unsold in the Indian Premier League (IPL) 2026 auction, Australia great Steve Smith has been picked up by Sialkot Stallionz for the 11th edition of the Pakistan Super League (PSL). Sialkot Stallionz are one of the two new teams added to the PSL, which expanded the total number of teams in the tournament to eight ahead of the 2026 season. Smith, who enjoyed a fine Big Bash League (BBL) 2025-26 campaign, has been acquired as Sialkot Stallionz's direct signing ahead of the PSL's players' draft. "A game changer, powerhouse player, we welcome Steve Smith on board as a Stallionz!" posted Sialkot Stallionz on their

official social media accounts. Smith will find some familiar faces in the Sialkot Stallionz dugout, with former Australia captain Tim Paine having been named as the head coach of the franchise. At 36 years old, Smith is currently in arguably the best form of his career in the shortest for-

mat of the game. Joining the Sydney Sixers squad after the conclusion of the Ashes Test series, Smith smashed 299 runs in just six matches in BBL 2025-26, playing a major role in the Sixers reaching the final. Smith smashed a stunning century and two half-centuries in those six games. However,

## Anaya Bangar, Child Of Ex-India Coach, To Undergo Gender-Affirming Surgery



Anaya Bangar, child of former Indian cricket team player and coach Sanjay Bangar, will undergo gender-affirming surgery in March. Anaya, who is a cricketer and a trans-rights advocate, has publicly shared her transformation story and revealed that she now has the support of her parents as well. While her younger brother Atharva has always supported her, Anaya said that her parents have also given her their complete support and Sanjay Bangar will bear the complete cost of the surgery. "I will be undergoing gender-affirming surgery (vaginoplasty) in March. Fashion designer Saisha Shinde and actress Trineta Halder Gummarraju, who have also undergone the procedure, guided me. I'll be having the surgery at the same clinic in Thailand, where I'll need to stay for at least a month. After that, I'll have to rest for a while. I won't be able to play cricket for at least six months, but I'm glad this is finally happening," Anaya told Times of India. "I've

waited for this moment for five years. This is who I am. I never felt aligned with the gender I was born with. The decision to undergo the gender-affirming surgery came after years of therapy, medical evaluations and deep self-reflection. I went through extensive psychological and medical assessments to ensure I'm ready," she added. Earlier, Anaya said that she was told by her father that she no longer had a future in cricket. However, she has openly spoken about inclusion of transgender athletes in international cricket. "I received immense support from people and was in a better place financially, too. My father saw people taking pictures with me, standing by me and respecting me. Both my parents realised this wasn't a phase. They saw that I was serious about my life and my choices," Anaya said. "I believe that's what led them to come around and offer me full support. My father is bearing the complete expenses of my surgery. At one point, I was completely on my own in the UK, and there is still a lot of stigma around LGBTQ+ people within families. I hope that by speaking out and by my family supporting me, it will help other trans women. It could make these conversations easier in someone else's home."

## MS Dhoni Points Out India's Big Concern In T20 World Cup 2026: "Don't Want To Jinx"



Late this week, India will be starting their T20 World Cup 2026 campaign with a match against USA at Mumbai's Wankhede Stadium. Suryakumar Yadav and Co. will play the tournament as defending champions, having won the title in 2024 under the captaincy of Rohit Sharma. It was the second title for India, as the side had also won the inaugural edition in 2007. As India eye a record third title, MS Dhoni, under whose leadership the country won the 2007 edition, has tipped the side as "one of the most dangerous teams". He, however, added that the dew on the grounds could be a concern for India. "It's one of the most dangerous teams. You know, they would have already started

batting or bowling. But what all is needed in a good team? Everything is there. They have the experience. Especially when it comes to this format, the experience is vast. They have played under pressure. Whoever is playing whatever roles they are playing in the team, they have been in that situation for a considerable period of

time," Dhoni said on Mahi Unplugged. "What worries me? Again, I hate dew. Dew changes a lot of things. So, even when I was playing, something that really scared me was dew. Where the toss becomes crucial and all of that. If we are playing 10 matches with some of the best teams, we will come out as winners more often than not. If the conditions remain neutral," he added. While stating that India are a dangerous side, Dhoni also highlighted how unpredictable the T20 format is. "The problem is when some of your players have a day off and somebody from the opposition has a brilliant day. And it can happen in the T20 group. So, that's the time. Whether it happens in the league stage, whether it happens in the knockout stage, that's where all the praying is needed. You know, nobody should get injured. Whatever roles are given, people should accomplish their roles for the team," he said. "And if that's the case, I don't want to jinx it by saying anything. But it's one of the most dangerous teams," he concluded.

## McCullum defends Brook, Ashes squad and leadership style



England head coach Brendon McCullum has defended Harry Brook, the off-field behaviour of his Ashes squad and his own leadership style, describing some of the criticism they have received in the last few months as a "pile on". Speaking after England's 3-0 T20 series victory over Sri Lanka, McCullum argued the England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB) had handled the fallout from their challenging winter tours "pretty well". England white-ball captain Brook has come under significant scrutiny after it was revealed he was punched by a nightclub bouncer on England's tour of New Zealand that preceded the Ashes. It was subsequently revealed he had lied about being alone for the encounter and was accompanied by several teammates - a stance McCullum defended, saying the 25-year-old was trying to "look after his mates". The story followed England's Ashes squad being criticised for a mid-series break in Noosa where several players were reported to be drinking excessively. In a wide-

