

# Across State

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EDITOR IN CHIEF: SANJAY M. BHAIRE

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## Maharashtra CM Eknath Shinde performs puja in Pandharpur on 'Ashadhi Ekadashi', prays for abundant rain



### Pandharpur

Maharashtra Chief Minister Eknath Shinde on Wednesday performed puja at a temple in Pandharpur town of Solapur district on the occasion of 'Ashadhi Ekadashi'. He prayed to Lord Vitthal for abundant rain in the state that would help farmers, a statement from Maharashtra CM Eknath Shinde's office said. Maharashtra CM Eknath Shinde performed the puja along with his wife Lata Shinde. As a long-standing tradition, the chief minister of

Maharashtra offers prayers at the famous temple dedicated to Lord Vitthal and Goddess Rukmini in Pandharpur on Ashadhi Ekadashi every year. Warkari couple Balu Ahire and Ashabai, hailing from Nashik, performed the ritual alongside CM Shinde in the early hours of Wednesday. Lakhs of 'warkaris' (devotees of Lord Vitthal) congregated in Pandharpur from different parts of Maharashtra and neighbouring states for the celebration. On Tuesday, Maharashtra CM Eknath Shinde said the development

of Pandharpur temple town will be carried out only after consulting residents, ensuring no decision is imposed on them. He stressed on the need for a comprehensive development of the town. Notably, the Mahayuti government is planning to develop Pandharpur on the lines of the Kashi Vishwanath corridor. Meanwhile, Prime Minister Narendra Modi greeted the nation on the auspicious day of Ashadhi Ekadashi. Taking to X, PM Modi wished for the day and prayed for the blessings

of Lord Vitthal to build a society filled with joy and prosperity. "Greetings on Ashadhi Ekadashi! May the blessings of Bhagwan Vitthal always remain upon us and inspire us to build a society filled with joy and prosperity. May this occasion also inspire devotion, humility, and compassion in us all. May it also motivate us to serve the poorest of the poor with diligence," he said. Union Home Minister Amit Shah also took to X to extend his wishes for the day. "Happy Ashadhi Ekadashi to all! Best wishes to all Varkaris, devotees on the occasion of this Mangal day, which is famous for the worship of Vithumauli. May Shri Vitthal and Rakhumai bless us all with happiness, prosperity, and progress," he said. Ashadhi Ekadashi, or Devshayani Ekadashi, is considered one of the most auspicious Ekadashi, holding great religious significance among Hindus.

## Maharashtra govt to spend Rs 5,500 crore on internship scheme giving stipend to unemployed youth

### Mumbai

The Maharashtra government will spend Rs 5,500 crore on the Mukhyamantri Yuva Karya Prashikshan Yojana internship scheme for unemployed youth. This scheme, which aims to enhance the employability and skill set of the youth and prepare them for a competitive job market, was announced in Budget 2024-25 presented by Deputy Chief Minister and Finance Minister Ajit Pawar.

Speaking at a public event in

Pandharpur on Tuesday, Chief Minister Eknath Shinde said, "The government will extend Rs 6,000 to those who are 12th pass, Rs 8,000 to those with ITI and diploma and Rs 10,000 for those with degree and postgraduation as a stipend."

As per the government resolution issued by the Department of Skills, Employment, Entrepreneurship & Innovation—which is the implementing agency of the scheme along with the CM Public Welfare cell—eligible candidates should be between the ages of 18

and 35 and residents of Maharashtra. The internships will last six months, and the stipend will be received via direct bank transfer. The eligibility criteria for industry and non-industry establishments include working in Maharashtra, being registered with the Skills, Employment, Entrepreneurship, and Innovation web portal as an employer, being established for three years, being registered with EPF, ESIC, GST, DPIT, and Udyog Aadhaar, and having a certificate of incorporation.

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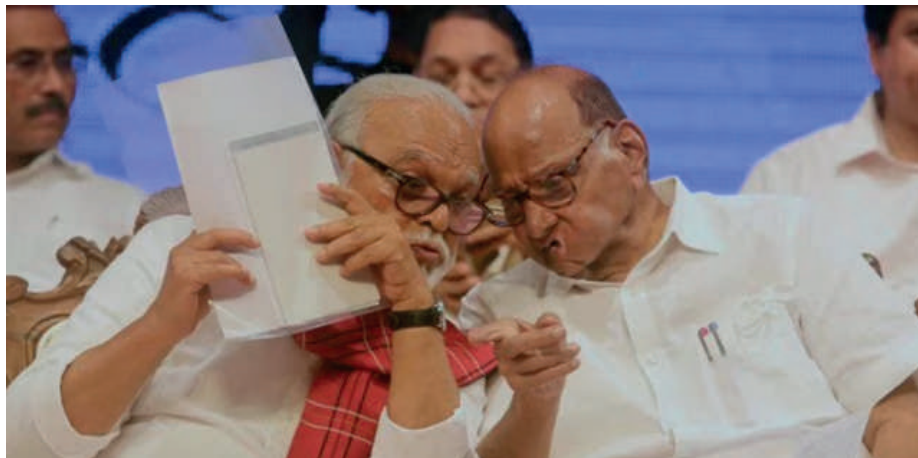
# Mahayuti leaders' remarks created OBC-Maratha discord, now they are seeking my help: Sharad Pawar

Pune

Days after Maharashtra minister Chhagan Bhujbal met Sharad Pawar seeking his intervention in breaking the impasse over the issue of reservation for Maratha and OBC communities, the NCP (SP) chief said on Wednesday those in power now want him to help bring peace in the state.

One of the biggest OBC leaders in Maharashtra, Bhujbal, who is against the inclusion of Marathas in the Kunbi (OBC) category, met Sharad Pawar on Monday asking him to defuse the tension in the state.

“State minister Chhagan Bhujbal met me requesting for intervention to find a solution to the tension within the communities protesting for reservation while saying there will be an increase in differences in two communities in the state if the issue is not resolved,” said Pawar. “Bhujbal came especially to meet me and



waited for an hour saying he would not leave without meeting. He told me that a few things have to be done in the interest of the state. If things have to be corrected then you should be part of it,” Pawar added.

Pawar also accused the Maharashtra Government of keeping the Opposition in the dark over what conspired during their meetings with the Maratha and OBC protesters demanding reservation. Chief Minister Eknath

Shinde, Deputy Chief Ministers Devendra Fadanavis and Ajit Pawar, minister Chhagan Bhujbal and their colleagues had met the Maratha and OBC leaders over the issue on July 9.

“In fact, it was the statements made by the leaders of the ruling alliance that heightened the differences between the communities. If a solution has to be brought out then those in power should take a sensible stand. It can't be

seen,” he said.

“We didn't know what conspired in the meeting. Now, for peace, Bhujbal has approached me. I have told them to disclose the commitment made to Maratha leader Manoj Jarange-Patil and how many of them have been fulfilled or will be. I also asked them to share the commitment made to retain the OBC interest. We will definitely forget the past and join them to bring in peace.”

On the Opposition not participating in the meeting called by the government on the reservation issue, Pawar said there were two reasons he or his party's leaders stayed away. In fact, Bhujbal had criticised Pawar at a public rally in Baramati over the weekend for his absence at an all-party meeting convened by the state government to address concerns regarding the Maratha reservation.

This meeting was called by the chief minister but it came to our notice CM and his colleagues had gone to Jalna to meet those on hunger strike including Jarange-Patil. The hunger strike was called by protesters after that interaction. Thereafter, there was a common programme of Jarange-Patil and CM which means there was some dialogue between them that we were not aware of. State Government ministers went to the hunger strike

of the OBC leaders, but we don't know what they interacted about,” he said.

“The ruling parties were talking to both Jarange-Patil and the OBC leader and then making big statements later. The proposals and dialogue are not known by the public. So, we decided that unless we get to know what commitment the government has made to Jarange-Patil and the OBC leaders, we need not participate,” said the veteran politician.

Now, those in the government are insisting the Opposition give its opinion, Pawar said. “They are ruling, the power to make decisions is with them, and the dialogue is done by them. And the Opposition should first give their opinion based on which they will take a decision. It is not a proper sensible stand of the government.”

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## Puja Khedkar's family removed 'encroachment' on footpath outside house voluntarily: Pune civic body

Pune

The family of controversial IAS probationer Puja Khedkar removed the alleged encroachment on the footpath outside their bungalow in Aundh's National Housing Society on Wednesday morning. Earlier, the civic body issued a notice to the family about the alleged encroachment that involved planting greenery along the compound wall.

“It has come to our knowledge that the family has removed the encroachment over the footpath. We haven't been informed officially yet, but it has come to our notice that the structure was voluntarily removed after the notice was issued,” Pune Municipal Corporation engineer Markarnd Wadekar told

On July 13, the PMC served notice to Puja's mother, Manorama Khedkar, for encroachment on civic-owned land outside her residence at the

National Housing Society on Baner Road in Aundh. The notice said that the civic body found that a structure along the 60-foot-long boundary wall of the residential premise, having a width of three feet and a height of two feet, was encroaching upon the civic land meant for road purposes.

“The encroachment is causing inconvenience to citizens by preventing them from using the road and footpath. The PMC also received a complaint regarding it. The encroachment on Baner Road just outside your property is causing safety concerns for citizens using the road,” it said.

Khedkar and her family have been the subject of a media storm over her availing the disability and non-creamy layer Other Backward Classes (IBC) quota to secure an IAS rank in the Union Public Service Commission (UPSC).

# MMRDA finds bidders for 6 new infra projects; Work likely to begin post monsoon

**Mumbai**

Mumbai Metropolitan Region Development Authority (MMRDA) has found bidders for its six major new infrastructure projects aimed at easing congestion in the Mumbai Metropolitan Region (MMR).

Tenders for these projects were floated a few months ago and were opened on Tuesday.

The six projects include expansion of the Eastern Freeway from Chedda Nagar to Anand Nagar in Thane costing approximately Rs 12.80 crore; Airoli Katai Naka Elevated Corridor Phase 3 costing Rs 9.43 crore; construction of a creek bridge from Gaimukh (Thane Godbunder Road) to Payegaon (Chinchoti-Anjur Phata Road costing Rs 4.64 crore; construction of a creek bridge from Kasarvadavli to Kharbav in Thane costing Rs 7.26 crore; construction of an 8.5 km elevated road in Thane city from Anand Nagar to Saket on the Eastern Express Highway and construction of a 13-km Thane Coastal Road project from Balkum to Gaimukh.

The bidders who participated for these mega projects are primarily Navyuga, Afcons, Ashoka Buildcon, Apco Infratect Pvt, J Kumar.

Interestingly these companies are already working or constructed other mega projects such as the Samruddhi Mahamarg, under-construction Mumbai Pune Expressway augmentation (the missing link project), and Bullet train project among others.

Once all necessary permissions are secured, construction is expected to commence post the current monsoon season," Mukherjee explained.

MMRDA has secured funding exceeding Rs 1 lakh crore for the development of 37 projects in the MMR.

A substantial portion, amounting to Rs 50,301 crore, has been acquired from the Power Finance Corporation (PFC), primarily designated for these projects.

Mukherjee said that the initiative underscores MMRDA's commitment to enhancing regional infrastructure and addressing urban congestion effectively.

With the completion of these projects, in the next five years, the vehicles coming from outside city need not be required to take the local roads, reducing almost 50 per cent of traffic burden.

# Committee probing 33 crore tree plantation scheme gives clean chit to Mungantiwar

**Mumbai**

A committee appointed by the erstwhile Maharashtra Vikas Aghad government to probe the alleged irregularities in the 33 crore tree plantation scheme has given a clean chit to State Forest Minister Sudhir Mungantiwar and stated that the scheme was implemented successfully in the state.

During his first tenure as state forest minister between 2014 and 2019, Mungantiwar had implemented the 33 crore tree plantation scheme in the state. In 2020, when the Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) government was in power there were allegations of corruption and irregularities in the scheme, following which leader of then undivided Shiv Sena, Sanjay Rathod, who was the forest minister then, ordered a probe. Rathod is now part of the ruling Mahayuti alliance and is a cabinet colleague of Mungantiwar.

A committee was then appointed to investigate the matter, which recently submitted its report, clarifying that there was no irregularity or misappropriation in the tree plantation scheme and mentioned it as "successful" in the state.

"It has been found that there is no irregularity or misappropriation in the scheme. The implementation of the tree plantation scheme is satisfactory and the committee is of the clear opinion that the campaign has been successful in the state," the report states adding that around 52 crore trees were planted in the state as a part of the scheme.

Responding to the report, Mungantiwar said, "The Maha Vikas Aghadi appointed a committee during their government's tenure. I had also said at that time to appoint a committee and investigate it. They conducted an inquiry and found nothing. Such a report comes when they try to make allegations in a noble drive like tree plantation. It was not at all appropriate to level such allegations."

# Customs seizes gold, electronics worth Rs 13.24 crore at Mumbai airport, arrest 7 passengers in 5 days

**Mumbai**

The Mumbai Customs officials seized over 13.24 kg of smuggled gold and electronics worth Rs 10.33 crore at the Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj International Airport in Mumbai and arrested seven people over the five days from July 10 to 14.

The accused were arrested in 24 cases for concealing smuggled gold in various forms, such as gold dust in wax, crude jewellery, and gold bars. The gold was concealed inside clothes, between layers of paper, in the body, and on their bodies.

During the operations, five Indian nationals travelling from Dubai (2), Abu Dhabi (2), and Jeddah (1) were intercepted and found carrying 24 KT gold dust, 24 KT crude gold chains, and bangles with a total net weight of 4,850 grams.

Two Indian nationals, residents of Muzaffarnagar in Uttar Pradesh and Haridwar in Uttarakhand, were



intercepted by the Central Industrial Security Force (CISF) and handed over to the Air Intelligence Unit (AIU). 24 KT gold dust in wax, with a net weight of 1,950 grams, was found concealed inside a handbag.

The Customs department also stated that during one flight's inspection, 24

KT gold dust in wax form, having a gross weight of 3,199 grams and a provisional net weight of 3,010 grams, worth Rs 1.89 crore, was found concealed in the aircraft's washroom under the tap water platform.

The Customs officials also intercepted 16 Indian nationals

travelling from Abu Dhabi (12), Dubai (2), Bahrain (1), and Sharjah (1) and found them illegally carrying 3,431 grams of gold and electronics worth Rs.2.16 crore concealed in baggage, between two layers of papers, in their trouser pockets, and on their bodies.

"These passengers were booked but not arrested as contraband recovered from them was not beyond the limit of big quantity set as a threshold for serious offence of smuggling by the law enforcement agency and let off after a notice was served to them, said a source.

The Customs department also seized foreign currency worth Rs 45 lakh after intercepting two foreign nationals travelling to Bangkok. Foreign currency amounting to €7,300, \$2,500, £29,000, and NZ\$12,000 was found concealed in special compartments tailored to the laptop bag being carried by passengers, it stated.

# Are Doors Still Open For Nephew Ajit? Sharad Pawar Said This

## Mumbai

Sharad Pawar today welcomed several National Congress Party (NCP) leaders back to his camp. In high spirits after the surge in his faction's strength, the 83-year-old made it clear that if his nephew Ajit Pawar ever sought to return to the fold, the decision would be taken by his party, not him.

The NCP split last year when Ajit Pawar led a shock rebellion and joined forces with Maharashtra's Eknath Shinde-BJP government, with eight MLAs.

"Everyone has a place in the house. As far as the party is concerned, I wouldn't take the decision myself, all those who stood with me will be consulted," Sharad Pawar said.

Sharad Pawar personally welcomed the returnees - including Ajit Gavhane, Rahul Bhosale, Yash Sane, Pankaj Bhalekar, and around 20 former municipal corporators and other unit heads - to the NCP (Sharadchandra Pawar) fold with party flags, stoles and blessings.

After the split, the Election Commission on February 6 recognised Ajit Pawar's faction as the real NCP and also allotted the party's symbol 'clock' to the group led by him. The poll body allotted 'Nationalist Congress Party-Sharadchandra Pawar' as the party name for the group led by Sharad Pawar.

Last month, Sharad Pawar said those who wanted to



"weaken" his party would not be taken in, but he would accept leaders who would not "hurt" the image of the party.

The recent development is being seen as a jolt to Ajit Pawar just three months before the Maharashtra assembly elections.

The homecoming of Ajit Garwane, former NCP Pimpri-Chinchwad unit chief, is significant. The assembly seat of Pimpri Chinchwad is currently held by the BJP. Mr Gavhane claimed he quit Ajit Pawar's faction because he was not satisfied with the work done by the BJP for the region.

"If you look at Pimpri-Chinchwad, both Ajit dada and Pawar sahab had contributed to its development. But since 2017, the Bharatiya Janata Party has been ruling PPMC (Pimpri-Chinchwad Municipal Corporation). There is rampant corruption here, and the sitting MLA is responsible for it," Mr

Gavhane said.

He also said that he was interested in contesting the Maharashtra assembly election.

Mr Pawar's daughter Supriya Sule, the NCP (Sharad Pawar faction)'s working president, said many people in the "opposition also look towards Mr Pawar with great hopes, which is why they are joining him".

The Ajit Pawar camp's poor show in the recent Lok Sabha elections is seen as a big trigger for the crossovers.

In the recent Lok Sabha polls, the opposition Maha Vikas Aghadi of Congress, Shiv Sena (UBT) and NCP (Sharadchandra Pawar) won 30 of 48 seats. The BJP won nine seats, a sharp drop from the 23 it won in the 2019 election in the state. Its ally Shiv Sena won seven seats. Ajit Pawar's party contested the Lok Sabha elections as part of the BJP-led NDA, but could win just one seat - Raigad.

# On the back foot after poor LS show, Vanchit Bahujan Aghadi shifts stance, announces 'save reservation' rally

## Mumbai

With an eye on the upcoming Assembly elections in Maharashtra, Vanchit Bahujan Aghadi (VBA) president Prakash Ambedkar has decided to embark on an 'Arakshan Bachao (Save Reservation)' rally across the state from July 25, marking a subtle shift in his political stance.

Since 2019, Ambedkar has centred his politics around saving the Constitution, saying that the right-wing RSS and BJP have a hidden agenda to undermine the Constitution drafted by his grandfather Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar. However, after a below-par performance in the Lok Sabha elections, Ambedkar seems to have shifted gears to focus on reservations, a burning topic in Maharashtra.

"The growing animosity between Marathas and Other Backward Classes (OBCs) over the reservation issue has raised an alarm. Our attempt is to reassure and fight for Scheduled Caste/Scheduled Tribe (SC/ST) and OBC reservation. We want to convey the message that reservation to SC/STs and OBCs should remain intact and undiluted," Ambedkar said.

"Several OBC outfits have approached us. They want VBA to take the lead to safeguard the rights of SC/STs and OBCs," he added.

At present, reservation in Maharashtra stands at 62 per cent - 13 per cent for SCs, 8 per cent for STs, 19 per cent for OBCs, 2 per cent for Special Backward Class (SBC), 2 per cent for Vimukta Jati, 2.5 per



cent for Nomadic Tribe, 3.5 per cent for Nomadic Tribe (C) Dhargar, and 2 per cent for Nomadic Tribe (D), along with 10 per cent for Economically Weaker Sections (EWS).

In February 2024, the government announced a 10 per cent quota for Marathas under the Maharashtra State Reservation For Socially and Educationally Backward Classes Act but it has been challenged in court.

The stated objective of the VBA's Arakshan Bachao rally is to gain a greater foothold amongst the SC, ST and OBC groups. The rally will begin from Chaitya Bhoomi in Dadar - a venue where lakhs of Ambedkarites pay respects to Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar on his death anniversary on December 6 every year - in Mumbai on July 25.

"On July 26, we will offer tribute to Shahu Maharaj at Kolhapur. The date July 26 is significant as it was on this day that the great reformist and Kolhapur ruler Shahu Maharaj had first announced reservation to the oppressed and backwards," Ambedkar explained.

# Voter sentiments turned against BJP post NCP pact, led to poor LS poll show: RSS-linked weekly

## Nagpur

Public sentiments turned sharply against the BJP following its alliance with the Ajit Pawar-led NCP that subsequently led to bad performance of the saffron party in the Lok Sabha polls in Maharashtra, a report published by a Marathi weekly linked to the RSS said.

The weekly publication, 'Vivek', affiliated with the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), conducted an informal survey involving more than 200 individuals from Mumbai, Konkan, and western Maharashtra to analyse the reasons behind the BJP's electoral setback in the crucial state, which sends the second highest number of MPs to the Lok Sabha at 48.

The report said BJP members and other individuals

expressed disapproval of the party's decision to join forces with the Nationalist Congress Party (NCP), which became an ally in the Shiv Sena-BJP government in the state in July 2023.

Describing the unrest among party members as just the "tip of the iceberg," the report shed light on the underlying discontent within the BJP.

The BJP's seat count in Maharashtra dropped drastically from 23 in 2019 to just nine in the recent Lok Sabha polls, with its ally Shiv Sena led by Chief Minister Eknath Shinde securing seven seats and the NCP, led by deputy CM Ajit Pawar, managing to win in just one constituency.

In contrast, the Opposition Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA),

comprising the Shiv Sena (UBT), NCP (Sharadchandra Pawar), and the Congress, put up an impressive show and collectively won 30 out of the 48 seats.

The report highlighted the disapproval among BJP members and sympathisers regarding the alliance with the NCP and pointed out the perceived departure from the party's core values. Almost every person who is either in the BJP or affiliated to organisations (Sangh Parivar) cited that he does not approve of the BJP allying with the NCP (led by Ajit Pawar). "Before writing this piece, we interacted with more than 200 industrialists, traders, doctors, professors and teachers. The unrest among the party cadre because the BJP allied with the NCP is the tip of the iceberg," it observed.

## NIA arrests 4 men suspected to be part of international human trafficking syndicate

New Delhi

The National Investigation Agency (NIA) has arrested four key accused involved in luring and trafficking Indian youth to foreign countries on the pretext of offering them jobs, according to an official statement issued on Tuesday.

The accused arrested on Monday have been identified

through operatives based in various parts of India, Laos and other countries," said the statement issued by the federal probe agency.

Through these call centres, the youth were coerced into carrying out illegal online activities such as investment scams, relationship scams, and cryptocurrency scams, it said.



as Manjoor Alam alias Guddu of Delhi, Sahil and Ashish alias Akhil of Bahadurgarh (Haryana), and Pawan Yadav alias Afroze alias Afzal of Siwan (Bihar), it said.

They were part of an organised trafficking syndicate involved in luring and trafficking Indian youth to foreign countries on the pretext of offering them lucrative jobs, NIA's investigations have revealed.

"The trafficked youth were forced to work in fake call centres at Laos, Golden Triangle SEZ, among other places in the South East Asian region, as part of the massive network being operated by foreign nationals

The NIA, which had taken over the case from Delhi Police on June 19 this year, is continuing with its investigations to dismantle all such human trafficking syndicates.

In May, the agency conducted extensive searches in 15 locations across six states and two Union territories, in collaboration with the respective state/UT police.

The searches led to the registration of eight new FIRs in human trafficking and cyber fraud cases.

Subsequently, in June, the NIA charge sheeted five accused, including foreign nationals, in a similar case in Mumbai.

## UP BJP Chief Tells PM He Wants To Quit, Amit Shah In Action Amid Rejig Buzz

New Delhi

The BJP is prepping for an organisational rejig in Uttar Pradesh after its big drubbing in the politically-significant state in this Lok Sabha election, sources have told NDTV. State BJP president Bhupendra Chaudhary, it is learnt, has taken responsibility for the party's poor show and offered to step down during a meeting with Prime Minister Narendra Modi in Delhi today. Union Home Minister Amit Shah has now reached the Prime Minister's residence to discuss the next move.

Over the past few days, key BJP leaders in Uttar Pradesh are in the national capital and are holding meetings with the party brass. Earlier, Deputy Chief Minister Keshav Prasad Maurya met BJP national president JP Nadda, fuelling the buzz over a big revamp.

According to sources, the Prime Minister discussed key organisation issues with the Uttar Pradesh BJP president. The BJP, it is learnt, is keen on having an OBC leader as its state chief as it preps to bounce back from the poll setback and prepare for the 2027 state polls. The incumbent, Mr Chaudhary, is a Jat leader from Moradabad and was given the role in 2022 to quell the resentment against BJP within the community.

New Delhi: The BJP is prepping for an organisational rejig in Uttar Pradesh after its big drubbing in the politically-significant state in this Lok Sabha election, sources have told



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community.

BJP, however, dismissed the infighting buzz. Responding to the Samajwadi Party chief, Mr Maurya tweeted this afternoon that the BJP's governments and organisation in the country and the state are strong. "The return of SP's reign of goons in UP is impossible. BJP will repeat 2017 in the 2027 state polls," he posted on X. Significantly, Mr Maurya was state BJP chief in 2017 and the BJP had scored a thumping win in that election.

In a potent remark at the BJP state executive meeting, Mr Adityanath had said "overconfidence" cost the party in the Lok Sabha election. "The percentage of votes that was in favour of BJP in 2014 and subsequent elections, BJP has been successful in getting the same number of votes in 2024 as well, but the shifting of votes and overconfidence have hurt our expectations," Mr Adityanath said, calling upon party workers to step up preparations for the upcoming bypolls.

## Gangster-Politician Atiq Ahmed's Property Worth ₹ 50 Crore Transferred To UP Government

Prayagraj

Killed gangster-turned-politician Atiq Ahmed's property worth about ₹ 50 crore, allegedly brought using money earned from criminal activities, has been transferred to the government.

District Government Advocate (Criminal) Gulab Chandra Agrahari said Atiq had bought 2.377 hectares of land in the name of a mason Hoobalal from the earnings of crime. While registering the land in the name of Hoobalal, Atiq had said that if needed, he would get the land registered in his name. Mr Agrahari said this property was attached by the Police Commissioner Court under Section 14 (1) of the Gangsters Act and three months were given to file a reply. But no evidence

was presented by the party concerned as proof of ownership of the land.

He said that after this, the Police Commissioner Court sent the file in this case to the Gangster Court Prayagraj. On Tuesday, Judge Vinod Kumar Chaurasia ruled the police commissioner's action "fair and just" and vested the property acquired in favour of the government. According to the police, during the investigation of the case registered against Atiq under the Gangsters Act, it was found that he has property in the name of Hoobalal under the Airport police station area. During interrogation, Hoobalal said that Atiq had got this land registered in his name by threatening him in 2015. The police had attached this land in November 2023.

## Karnataka High Court Gives Bail To 3 Murder Accused In Gauri Lankesh Case

Bengaluru

The Karnataka High Court has granted bail to three accused arrested in connection with the murder of journalist-activist Gauri Lankesh.



Justice S Vishwajith Shetty today granted bail to Amit Digvekar, HL Suresh and KT Naveen Kumar.

Citing delay in the trial, the three men accused of murder, had sought bail.

In December last year, the court had granted bail to another accused N Mohan Nayak.

Gauri Lankesh, an outspoken critic of Hindutva groups, was shot dead on September 5, 2017 outside her house in Bengaluru.

# Finance Minister Sitharaman participates in customary 'halwa' ceremony; marks final stage of Budget preparation

## New Delhi

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Tuesday participated in a traditional 'halwa' ceremony, marking the final stage for the preparation of Union Budget 2024-25 to be unveiled on July 23 in Lok Sabha.

The ceremony is a ritual in which traditional dessert 'halwa' is prepared and served to officials and staff members of the finance ministry who are involved in the preparation of the budget.

It is organised in the basement of North Block, which houses the ministry in the national capital and is attended by the finance minister and other high-ranking officials.

"The final stage of the Budget preparation process for Union Budget 2024-25 commenced with the customary halwa ceremony in the presence of Union Minister for Finance and Corporate Affairs Smt. @nsitharaman, in New Delhi, today," the finance ministry said in a post on X.

As part of the ceremony, the finance minister also took a round of the Budget Press and reviewed the preparations besides extending her best wishes to the officials concerned.

Like the previous three full Union Budgets and one Interim, the full Union Budget 2024-25 will also be delivered in paperless form.

All the Union Budget documents, including the Annual Financial Statement

(commonly known as Budget), Demand for Grants (DG), Finance Bill etc. as prescribed by the Constitution, will be available on "Union Budget Mobile App" for hassle-free access to Budget.



Besides Sitharaman, Minister of State for Finance Pankaj Chaudhary and other senior officials, including Finance Secretary TV Somanathan, Economic Affairs Secretary Ajay Seth, and Financial Services Secretary Vivek Joshi were present at the ceremony.

## Halwa ceremony

It is a kind of a 'send-off' for finance ministry officials and staff involved in the

preparation of the Union government's annual financial statement. They enter what is called a 'lock-in' period, during which they stay in the basement of North Block, cut off from the world outside with

a view to maintaining the secrecy around the final budget document.

They will emerge only after the finance minister completes her Budget speech in the Lok Sabha. It is considered a gesture of appreciation for those who have worked on the Budget. The basement of North Block houses a printing press that was traditionally used to print budget documents for 40 years from 1980 to

2020.

Thereafter, the budget went digital with bare minimum documents printed and the bulk distribution happening via mobile app or on the website. Going digital also meant that the lock-in period has become shorter to just five days from the previous one which lasted up to two weeks.

## Printing Press

All Budget-related documents are printed at North Block itself using a dedicated government press. Earlier, the documents were printed at Rashtrapati Bhavan, but this was shifted to a press on Minto Road in the national capital in 1950 after documents were leaked, and in 1980 to North Block. The printing of several hundred copies of the voluminous budget documents was such an elaborate exercise that printing staff had to be quarantined inside the printing press in the basement of North Block for up to two weeks.

## Tradition

While the Narendra Modi government has done away with several traditional aspects of the Budget since coming to power in 2014, such as merging Rail Budget with the Union Budget, bringing forward the date of presentation to February 1 instead of the last date of that month, and moving to a digital format — the 'halwa' ceremony as a tradition has survived.

# Gautam Adani amazed at US envoy Eric Garcetti's love for 'kadak chai', 'chole bhature'

## Ahmedabad

Gautam Adani, chairman of Adani Group, on Tuesday said he is amazed to see the adoption of Indian culture by Eric Garcetti, the United States Ambassador to India — from drinking 'kadak' chai to savouring 'chole bhature'.

Earlier in the day, Garcetti visited the Adani Group's Khavda Renewal Energy Facility in Gujarat, saying it was a learning experience on how the company is helping India advance towards its zero-emissions goals.

In a post on X, Gautam Adani said he is grateful for the US envoy's visit to Adani's 30 GW Renewable Energy site at Khavda, as well as the flagship Mundra Port.

"Invaluable insights on



geopolitics, energy transition and India-US relations in an open and candid 'Q & A' with Adanians," said Gautam Adani.

"Amazing to see his adoption

of Indian culture, from kadak chai to celebrating holi, to playing cricket to speaking in Hindi and eating chole bhature every day," he added.

The Adani Group is developing the world's largest renewable energy project of 30,000 MW on barren land at Khavda in Kutch, Gujarat. Built across 538 sq km, it is five times the size of Paris and almost as large as Mumbai city.

"Inspired by my visit to the Khavda Renewal Energy Facility in Gujarat, where I learned about @AdaniGreen's innovative projects advancing India's zero-emissions goals," Garcetti earlier posted on X.

He said that sustainable energy is a cornerstone of environmental stewardship.

"Our bilateral partnership is key to shaping the solutions for a cleaner and greener future for the region and the world," Garcetti

noted.

The commissioning of the first 2 GW at the world's largest renewable energy plant in Khavda within 12 months of breaking ground has set a record.

Spanning over 8,000 hectares, the Mundra Economic Hub offers investment options as the largest multi-product SEZ, Free Trade and Warehousing Zone (FTWZ) and Domestic Industrial Zone. Mundra, the first port of APSEZ, welcomed its maiden ship in 1998. Since then, the company has built a network of 15 ports and terminals on the east and west coasts of the country. The flagship port Mundra became the first in India to handle 16 MMT cargo in a single month (October 2023).

# NDA faces jungle raj barb after father of INDIA ally leader killed

**New Delhi**

The brutal Monday night murder of an Opposition INDIA alliance party leader's father in Bihar's Darbhanga triggered a political slugfest in the state, with the RJD and allies accusing the ruling NDA of unleashing "jungle raj".

"Jungle raj" is a phrase the anti-RJD supremo Lalu Prasad camp has used to describe the ex-CM's reign. However, today it was Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar and his BJP allies' turn to face

the heat and face swipes of "jungle raj" in the state.

Jitan Sahani, the father of Vikassheel Insaan Party chief Mukesh Sahani, was killed on Monday night at his residence in Darbhanga. CM Nitish has ordered the constitution of a special investigation team (SIT) to probe the murder.

RJD's Tajashwi Yadav said: "The double engine government in the state has established a reign of terror and criminals are feeling emboldened because of backing by the government."

# Use Russia ties to end war, US again appeals to India

**New Delhi**

The US State Department has reiterated its appeal to India to "utilise" its relationship with Russia to urge President Vladimir Putin to end the Ukraine war. US State Department spokesperson Mathew Miller said this while answering media queries in the US yesterday when he was asked about PM Narendra Modi's Moscow visit and how India and Russia decided to boost their trade ties.



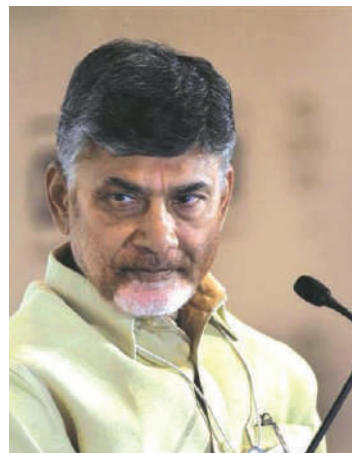
Miller said India had a longstanding relationship with Russia, which was "well known". "We have encouraged India to utilise that relationship with Russia, that longstanding relationship and the unique position that they have, to urge Putin to end the war and find lasting peace," he said.

# Naidu meets Shah over AP fiscal package

**New Delhi**

In a significant development ahead of the presentation of the Union Budget on July 23, TDP chief and Andhra Pradesh CM N Chandrababu Naidu held a late night meeting with Union Home Minister Amit Shah and said the Centre and the state would devise a recovery plan for the state.

This is the first time Naidu has publicly stated plans for agreement on a financial support package for the state, a key reason the TDP extended support to the



BJP to form the government at the Centre.

After meeting Shah, Naidu took to X and said, "I met Union Home Minister Amit Shah to apprise him of the devastating condition of finances that Andhra Pradesh had slipped into over the past five years. I also discussed the findings of the four White Papers released, outlining the staggering debt accumulated between FY 2019-24 that spiralled our state's finances out of control."

# Centre's 1st clarification under new criminal laws

**New Delhi**

Days after new criminal laws replacing the colonial era IPC, CrPC and Evidence Act came into force on July 1, the Centre on Tuesday issued the first clarification under the new set of legislations, following an uproar and strike by lawyers.

In a letter to Chief Secretaries of all states, Union Home Secretary Ajay Bhalla said under the new Bharatiya Nagrik Suraksha Sanhita, police stations or places under the control of the police department may not be designated as places for examination of witnesses through audio-video electronic means.

Under BNSS, Sections 265, 266 and 308 provide for the examination of witnesses by



audio-video electronic means at designated places to be notified by state governments.

Lawyers across the board have been up in arms against these sections, demanding clarity

over places which the state governments can notify for the examination of witnesses through audio-visual means. The district bar associations of Delhi had abstained from judicial work on July 15 to protest these provisions after the laws took effect from July 1. The coordination committee of All Delhi Bar Associations had called for a protest on Monday (July 15), due to which work in all the courts of the national capital was disrupted.

The lawyers said the provision of recording of evidence of the complainant or witness in the police station was prejudicial to the interest of the accused.

# Supreme Court to attain full strength of 34 judges with elevation of Justices N Kotiswar Singh and R Mahadevan

**New Delhi**

The Supreme Court is all set to attain its full strength with the elevation of Justices N Kotiswar Singh and R Mahadevan.

The apex court has a sanctioned strength of 34 judges, including the chief justice, and was functioning with 32 judges.

CJI DY Chandrachud is likely to administer the oath of office to the two judges on Thursday.

The Supreme Court will function with 34 judges until Justice Hima Kohli retires on September 1, 2024, followed by CJI Chandrachud, who superannuates on November 10 this year.

On July 11, the five-member collegium presided over by the CJI had recommended to the Centre the names of Singh and Mahadevan for elevation to the

apex court.

Chief Justice of Jammu and Kashmir High Court, Justice N Kotiswar Singh, has become the first judge from Manipur to have been appointed to the top court.

"His appointment as a judge of the Supreme Court will provide representation to the North-East, and in particular he will be the first judge from the state of Manipur to be appointed as a judge of the Supreme Court," the SC Collegium had said on July 11 while recommending his name along with that of Justice Mahadevan.

Justice Singh was appointed as a judge of the Gauhati High Court in October 2011. Following the formation of the Manipur High Court, he was transferred there.

# Will launch satellite for Mauritius: EAM S Jaishankar

**New Delhi**



India on Tuesday inaugurated 12 community development projects in Mauritius and said it looked forward to launching a satellite for the island nation. A sum of Rs 20 crore was sanctioned in January this year by Narendra Modi-led government for the satellite. EAM S Jaishankar, who is on two-day visit to Mauritius, met its PM Pravind Jugnauth and said 12 infrastructure projects were inaugurated. With this, 37 of the 96 community projects had become operational. India also assured Mauritius of the support on regaining control of the Chagos islands.

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## CSIR's 1st woman Director-General gets 2-year extension



### New Delhi

The first woman Director-General of India's premiere research conglomerate the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research N Kalaiselvi has received a two-year extension in the position.

The Appointments Committee of Cabinet chaired by prime

minister Narendra Modi approved the extension for two years until 2026.

Kalaiselvi will also be secretary, Department of Scientific and Industrial Research.

Born in Tirunelveli in Tamil Nadu Kalaiselvi made history by becoming the first woman DG of CSIR in 80 years in 2022.

She leads a network of 38 labs and 4,500 scientists.

Kalaiselvi is known for her expertise in electrochemical science, particularly in lithium-ion batteries.

She is yet another top leader PM Modi has chosen to retain in his third term in office signalling continuity of policy and approach in science and research.

## Signal failure among lapses to blame for Kanchanjunga train mishap: Probe

### New Delhi

Contrary to the Railway Board's stance blaming the deceased loco pilot of a goods train for the accident, the Commissioner of Railway Safety (CRS) probing the Kanchanjunga Express tragedy found that lapses at multiple levels in handling operations, including signal failures, led to the mishap.

Ten persons, including the loco pilot, were killed and at least 40 injured when the Sealdah-bound Kanchanjunga Express from Agartala was hit by the goods train from the rear in West Bengal's Darjeeling district, 11 km from New Jalpaiguri station.

In its probe into the June 17 accident, the CRS noted 208 cases of Signal Passing at Danger (red signal overshooting) taking place between April 1, 2019, and March 31, 2024, in automatic signalling territory, of which 12 cases resulted in collision.

"This was a cause for concern and should be taken up with those concerned to improve the reliability of the system," the probe report said, suggesting taking up on "top priority" implementation

of the automatic train-protection system (KAVACH).

The CRS said a paper authority or T/A 912 to cross defective signals was issued to the loco pilot of the goods train involved in the accident. But



the paper didn't mention the speed that a train driver was supposed to follow while crossing the defective section stretching 14 km between Rangapani and Chhatarhat railway stations having nine signals in between.

According to the Railway Board, some circuits and fuses of the relay hut between Rangapani and Chhatarhat were shorted due to lightning and all the signals between these two stations had turned red as a result. In such a situation, the protocol of the loco pilot is to stop for one minute in day time and two minutes after night sets in at all the signals and not to exceed the speed of 15 km per hour.

## ED makes fresh arrest in Rajasthan's Jal Jeevan Mission case

### Jaipur

The Enforcement Directorate has made a fresh arrest in connection with its money laundering investigation into alleged irregularities in the Jal Jeevan Mission scheme being implemented in Rajasthan, officials said on Wednesday.

Sanjay Badaya, an alleged middleman, was taken into custody on Tuesday after questioning at the agency office here, they said.

The central government's Jal Jeevan Mission (JJM) aims to provide safe and adequate drinking water through household tap connections and is being implemented in Rajasthan by the



state's Public Health Engineering (PHE) Department.

This is the fourth arrest in the case.

The Central agency had earlier arrested three people—Mahesh Mittal, proprietor of Shree Ganpati Tubewell Company, Padamchand Jain, proprietor of Shree Shyam Tubewell Company, and Piyush Jain.

The agency's investigation found that Padamchand Jain, Mittal and others were involved in giving bribes to public servants to obtain illegal protection, tenders, getting bills sanctioned and covering up irregularities in works executed by them in respect of various tenders they

received from the PHED.

The suspects were also involved in the purchase of stolen goods from Haryana for using them in their tenders and had also submitted "fake" work completion letters from IRCON to get PHED contracts, the agency claimed.

The ED's money-laundering case stems from an FIR registered by Rajasthan's Anti-Corruption Bureau (ACB) in which Padamchand Jain, Mahesh Mittal, Piyush Jain and others were charged.

Premises in Jaipur and Dausa, including the residential and official premises of senior PHE Department officials, former Rajasthan minister Mahesh Joshi and former additional chief secretary Subodh Agarwal, have been searched by the ED in connection with the probe. Assets worth Rs 11.03 crore have been attached in the case so far.

## BJP policies to blame, says Rahul Gandhi on J&K attacks

### New Delhi

Leader of Opposition Rahul Gandhi on Tuesday said the soldiers and their families "are bearing the brunt of BJP's wrong policies".



"Today, our soldiers were martyred in another terrorist encounter in J&K. Such horrific incidents one after the other are extremely worrying," Rahul said in a post on X in Hindi. "Our soldiers and their families are bearing the brunt of BJP's wrong policies. Every patriotic Indian

demands that the government should take full responsibility for the repeated security lapses and take strict action against the culprits. In this hour of grief, the entire country stands united against terrorism," Rahul said.

Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge claimed the Modi government had been acting as if "everything is business as usual in Jammu and Kashmir".

"Deeply distressed by the martyrdom of four brave soldiers, including an officer, in an encounter in Doda... No words of strong and unequivocal condemnation will suffice for these acts of violence being perpetrated by cowardly terrorists," Mallikarjun Kharge wrote on X.



## Govt puts IAS probationer Puja Khedkar's district training on hold

New Delhi

The government on Tuesday halted the ongoing district-level training of controversial IAS probationer Puja Khedkar and directed her to report to Lal Bahadur Shastri National Academy of Administration by July 23.

Khedkar, 34, has been under fire for allegedly faking her disability and caste certificates to secure entry to the prestigious services, with top government sources indicating her likely termination.

This is the first punitive action against Khedkar, who found herself in the eye of a storm after seeking undue benefits which she was not entitled to in her capacity as an assistant collector in Pune.

Additional Chief Secretary of Maharashtra Nitin Gadre in a letter to Khedkar on Tuesday said, "The academy has decided to put your district training programme on hold and immediately recalls you for further necessary action. You are hereby relieved from the district training programme of the state government of Maharashtra. You are instructed to join the academy at the earliest but not later than July 23, 2024 under any circumstance."

The Union government's personnel ministry had on July 11 constituted a panel of Additional Secretary Manoj Dwivedi to look into the allegations of fraud by Khedkar. The panel was asked to submit a report in weeks.

In the meantime, top official sources told The Tribune that Khedkar was likely staring at termination on account of possible forgery of her disability and non-creamy OBC layer certificate which entitled her to compete for the 2022 Civil Services Exam under the persons with benchmark disabilities category.

## 13 Indians among 16 crew missing after oil tanker sinks off Oman coast



Muscat

Thirteen Indians are among the 16-member crew of a Comoros-flagged oil tanker that went missing after it capsized off the coast of Oman, the country's maritime authority said.

The tanker capsized 25 nautical miles southeast of Ras Madrasah in the Wilayat of Duqm, and a search and rescue operation was activated in coordination with the concerned authorities, Oman's Maritime Security Centre said in a post on X on Monday.

The crew of 'Prestige Falcon' included 13 Indians and 3 Sri Lankans, the centre said in a statement on Tuesday.

"The crew of the ship are still missing," it said, noting that the search continued.

The vessel was headed for the Yemeni port city of Aden, according to the shipping website marinetransit.com, which said it departed from the port of Hamriya, in Dubai.

Duqm Port is a major hub of Oman's major oil and gas mining projects.

# Jitters in UP BJP; Yogi Adityanath, deputy Keshav Prasad Maurya differ on poor Lok Sabha poll show

New Delhi

BJP's Uttar Pradesh unit is grappling with anxieties amid divergent views of CM Yogi Adityanath and his deputy Keshav Prasad Maurya over factors behind the party's underwhelming Lok Sabha election performance.

Amid these tensions, Maurya held a late-night meeting with BJP chief JP Nadda at the party headquarters here after which state UP chief Bhupendra Chaudhry also met Nadda.

Sources did not disclose the agenda for the meeting, but said it was in the light of impending organisational changes in the party following the LS elections.

Though the BJP recently changed in-charges and co in-charges in most states, it didn't touch UP, where Bajjayant Panda is the in-charge at present.

Maurya's meeting set off speculation over motives as it followed the Sunday BJP UP executive meeting in Lucknow where Yogi attributed BJP's win in just 33 out of 80 seats to "overconfidence and shift of votes", while Maurya flagged workers' disenchantment as a reason.

Maurya told the meeting that the party was "greater than the government and ministers, and MLAs must ensure the dignity of workers". "Your pain is my pain," he said, drawing huge applause.

The central and state BJP



have been at pains to explain the party's UP setback since result day on June 4 with saffron sources indicating changes to the UP party organisation but terming any immediate threat to CM Yogi unlikely in the wake of the looming Parliament Session, Budget and Assembly polls in Jharkhand, Haryana and Delhi.

Maurya's meeting with Nadda assumes significance as it comes after Maurya flagged a distant UP government and party relationship as major concern in

the state even as the CM defended his leadership, saying the BJP had managed to garner the same amount of votes in the 2024 LS cycle as it did in 2014 and subsequent cycles, but "shifting of votes and overconfidence undermined the party's prospects in 2024".

The overconfidence line was meant for 55 of the sitting 62 who were re-nominated to contest by the central BJP and many lost. As of today, Yogi looked firmly in the saddle addressing marathon meetings in UP.

## Vinay Kwatra is new Indian Ambassador to US

New Delhi

Former Indian Foreign Secretary Vinay Mohan Kwatra has been nominated as the next Indian Ambassador to the US. India has officially communicated to the US about Kwatra's nomination.

The nomination will be followed by procedural formalities in the US following which Kwatra will be taking over in Washington DC. The post had been lying vacant since January when Taranjit Singh Sandhu retired.



Kwatra ended his term as the Foreign Secretary on July 15 and was succeeded by Vikram Misri. Kwatra, a 1988 batch Indian Foreign Service Officer, remained the Foreign Secretary from April 2022

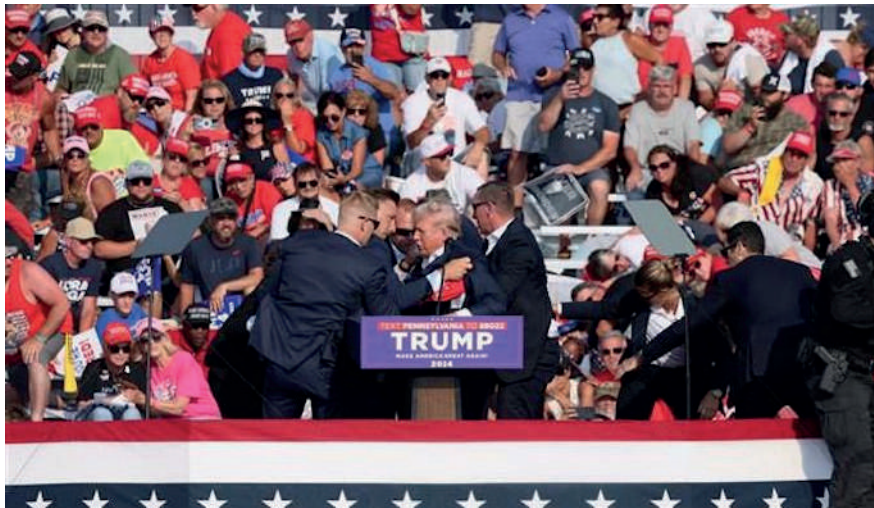
onwards.

The new Ambassador has been appointed at a time when India-US relations are going through a churn as the US has expressed its displeasure over India's ties with Russia. Also, the US is pressing India to take action against those who tried to allegedly kill Sikh separatist Gurpatwant Singh Pannun. An Indian Origin man, Vivek Gupta, was arrested in Czech Republic and was deported to the US at the behest of US authorities.

# Attack on Trump

PRIME Minister Narendra Modi and Leader of the Opposition Rahul Gandhi are among the wide range of political leaders worldwide who have strongly condemned the assassination attempt on former US President Donald Trump. It's sick, there is no place for this kind of violence, President Joe Biden reacted. Trump's opponents have been quick to denounce the attack, calling for national unity. The shooting incident at an election rally takes the already tumultuous 2024 US presidential campaign into an even darker direction. It was a close shave for the Republican contender, who was shot in his right ear while he was on stage. Trump holding his fist up high in the immediate aftermath of the shooting could become the defining image of his campaign. It fits well with how he would like to be seen — exemplifying fortitude and courage. A shift in the

messaging and tenor of his bid to return as President is imminent.



The violence complicates the Biden camp's calculations. The Democratic Party is in disarray over the President's disastrous debate performance and a series of gaffes. His refusal to make way for a younger candidate has led to dissension and ridicule. Going forward,

a re-election bid based entirely on demonising Trump over his track record in public office and conduct in private life is suddenly fraught with risks. For, he has just survived an assassination attempt. Public sympathy cannot be discounted.

Brazilian President Lula da Silva, no admirer of Trump, has said the attack must be vehemently repudiated by all defenders of democracy and dialogue in politics. So it should be. Will it result in toned-down Trump and Biden campaigns, minus the vocabulary of hate and violence? Unlikely. That's the disturbing reality of the self-anointed custodian of democracy.

// satyasya paramam nidhanam //

We would like to hear from you. Please share your comments on [editor.acrossstate@gmail.com](mailto:editor.acrossstate@gmail.com)

*The future belongs to those who believe in the beauty of their dreams.*

-Eleanor Roosevelt

## INDIA shining

### Opposition eclipses BJP in Assembly bypolls

A month after its impressive performance in the Lok Sabha polls, the INDIA bloc has upstaged the BJP in the Assembly byelections in seven states, winning 10 seats out of 13. The Congress won four seats — two each in Uttarakhand and Himachal Pradesh — while the Trinamool Congress (TMC) clinched all four in West Bengal. The Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) won the Jalandhar West seat in Punjab and the DMK bagged the Vikravandi constituency in Tamil Nadu. The BJP got one seat each in Himachal and Madhya Pradesh, while an independent candidate won a seat in Bihar.

The victories in Uttarakhand and Himachal are a morale-booster for the Congress as the party had suffered a rout in both states



at the hands of the BJP in the Lok Sabha elections. The same holds true for AAP, which was under pressure after having won just three seats out of 13 in the Punjab parliamentary battle. Himachal Chief Minister Sukhvinder Singh Sukhu and his Punjab counterpart Bhagwant Mann can breathe easy for now. The TMC and the DMK — the ruling parties in West Bengal and Tamil Nadu, respectively

— have strengthened their position. For the BJP, the losses are another setback after it failed to get a majority on its own in the Lower House. The reversals are particularly significant in Uttarakhand, where the party is in power and had swept the 2024 Lok Sabha polls.

The bypoll results augur well for the resurgent Opposition, which made its presence felt in the recent session of Parliament.

INDIA is looking to upset the BJP applecart in Haryana and Maharashtra, which will witness Assembly elections later this year. However, there is no room for complacency in the Opposition camp as the saffron party has a knack for winning elections against heavy odds. What the BJP needs is honest introspection to find out why things are going wrong and how it can do course correction.

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**Sanjay Mangesh Bhaire**  
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# Highway hiccups

## Punjab shouldn't let NHAI projects flounder

THE termination of three national highway projects worth over Rs 3,300 crore by the National Highways Authority of India (NHAI) is bad news for Punjab, which aspires to become a go-to destination not only for investors but also for tourists. The NHAI, which has also initiated the process for scrapping four other projects worth over Rs 4,940 crore, has flagged a major roadblock — an inordinate delay in the possession of acquired land due

inconvenience to motorists day in, day out. It is difficult for the state government to improve ease of doing business when the work on highways drags on indefinitely or is discontinued abruptly.

Much depends on offering the rightful sum to landowners. Even as land is acquired under the National Highways Act, 1956, compensation is decided as per the Right to Fair Compensation and Transparency in Land Acquisition, Rehabilitation and Resettlement Act, 2013. The award is supposed to be two to four times the determined market value of the land, but procedural anomalies and irregularities often lead to a stalemate or even litigation. These thorny issues must be sorted out in a time-bound manner. Punjab



can take a cue from Telangana, one of the best-performing states in terms of providing a business-friendly environment. Earlier this week, Telangana CM A Revanth Reddy told district collectors to ensure that farmers who parted with their land for the construction of national highways got the maximum compensation as per law. A proactive approach can help Punjab turn a corner.

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Unfinished highway projects are an eyesore for commuters as well as visitors. The ubiquitous traffic diversions cause

THROWING their weight behind Ukraine, NATO members have affirmed their commitment to supporting the war-torn country in 'building a force capable of defeating Russian aggression today and deterring it in the future'. The US and its allies have announced that they intend to provide a minimum baseline funding of 40 billion euros in military aid within the next year, adding that their alliance will continue to back Ukraine 'on its irreversible path to full Euro-Atlantic integration, including NATO membership'. The pledge is part of the declaration issued on Wednesday at the NATO summit in Washington.

It is apparent that the Western bloc has no qualms about provoking Russia and prolonging the Ukraine war, which began in February 2022 and has caused the deaths of thousands of civilians. The push for Ukraine's NATO membership was the flashpoint that prompted Russian President Vladimir Putin to invade the neighbour. The

irony is not lost on anyone: NATO is adopting a holier-than-thou approach by solely blaming Russia for the war. Amid increasing domestic pressure on President Joe Biden to drop his re-election bid, the US has declared that it will start deploying longer-range missiles in Germany in 2026 in a bid to counter the 'growing threat' Russia poses to Europe. This makes it clear that the West is unwilling to bring Russia to the negotiating table, a stark reality that was laid bare by Moscow's absence

# Triple whammy

## Informal sector reeling under job losses

IN recent years, India's informal sector has faced significant challenges due to three major shocks: demonetisation in 2016, the rollout of the Goods and Services Tax regime in 2017 and the Covid-induced lockdown in 2020. These events have collectively led to the loss of 16.45 lakh jobs in seven years, according to the latest Annual Survey of Unincorporated Enterprises by the Ministry of Statistics and

three exogenous shocks on the sector's capacity to sustain employment.

Despite these challenges, the sector has shown resilience. The number of establishments increased by 5.88 per cent and there was a 7.84 per cent rise in the estimated number of workers between 2021-22 and 2022-23. The sector's Gross Value Added grew by 9.83 per cent, indicating some recovery. This

was supported by enhanced capital investment and access to loans and greater use of IT.

In this context, Prime Minister Narendra Modi laying emphasis on job creation, especially in rural areas and the manufacturing sector, in the lead-up to the Union Budget assumes significance. The informal sector's ability to generate employment remains crucial for economic stability. For a more effective support of this



Programme Implementation. The survey highlights the fragility of unincorporated enterprises. Operating outside the formal regulatory framework, such firms are particularly vulnerable to policy changes and economic disruptions. The employment in these enterprises fell from 11.13 crore in 2015-16 to 10.96 crore in 2022-23, marking a 1.5 per cent decline. This drop reflects the compounded impact of the

sector, the Union Government must focus on improving Centre-state relations and enhancing programme implementation on the ground. To foster sustainable growth, it is imperative to address the systemic vulnerabilities exposed by the triple shocks. Strengthening the informal sector through targeted policies and ensuring a more robust safety net for workers can help mitigate future risks.

# NATO at it again

## US, allies must avoid belligerent rhetoric



from the Ukraine peace summit hosted by Switzerland last month.

The US-led NATO has also not stopped short of riling China, calling it a 'decisive enabler' of Russia's war

in Ukraine. Reacting sharply, Beijing has urged NATO to 'reflect on the root cause of the crisis and take concrete action to de-escalate rather than shift the

blame'. Indeed, NATO would do well to introspect and shun belligerent rhetoric; otherwise, this can worsen the situation in eastern Europe and bring the world to the brink of a catastrophic conflagration.

# J&K L-G's powers

## Leave no scope for doubts, discord

THE Union Home Ministry's decision to give more powers to the J&K Lieutenant Governor (L-G) by amending the transaction rules framed under the Jammu and Kashmir Reorganisation Act, 2019, has drawn criticism from the Opposition. The L-G has been empowered to take a call on matters concerning the police, public order and all-India services officers, besides grant of sanction for prosecution in various cases. The Centre has claimed that the rules have been amended to clearly define and delineate the powers of the legislative Assembly and the functions of the L-G so as to enable smooth administration of the Union Territory. But the Opposition is seeing the move as an attempt to undermine the powers of an elected government. The



state-turned-UT has been without an elected dispensation since 2018, when the BJP-PDP alliance fell apart.

The timing of the decision has triggered doubts and apprehensions in the backdrop of the Supreme

Court's September 30 deadline for holding the Assembly elections. Questions are also being raised about the restoration of J&K's statehood, for which the Centre is yet to spell out a timeline despite the court's order to expedite the

process. With the security situation deteriorating in the wake of a spate of terror attacks, the government may find it tough to conduct free, fair and peaceful elections. The onus will be on the L-G to take all stakeholders along during the entire electoral process.

Repeated confrontations between the Delhi L-G and the Chief Minister have severely impacted governance in the Capital in recent years. The Centre would do well to avoid implementing such a disruptive model in J&K, whose residents affirmed their faith in democracy with an encouraging turnout in the recent Lok Sabha polls. It's time for a new beginning for the people of the trouble-torn region. The potentially new dawn should not be marred by discord and disharmony.

## Shambhu barricades

### Order to open border a win for public, protesters

THE Punjab and Haryana High Court's order to remove barricades at the Shambhu border marks a significant moment in the ongoing protests by farmers. For over five months, the blockade, set up by the Haryana Government, has caused severe inconvenience to commuters, disrupted local businesses and ignited widespread public frustration. This court order represents a critical step towards restoring normalcy and addressing the grievances of both the protesting farmers and the affected residents. The ruling underscores the importance of balancing the right to peaceful protest with the need to maintaining public order and accessibility. The blockade, which began as a measure to prevent farmers from advancing towards Delhi, had escalated into a roadblock for ordinary citizens. The HC directive to Punjab and Haryana to coordinate the removal of the barriers highlights a judicial acknowledgment of the hardship imposed on the public.

For the protesting farmers, this

ruling is a validation of their stance. As one farmer leader pointed out, the order reveals that the barricades were a state-imposed restriction. This distinction is crucial for altering public perception and countering the narrative that farmers were responsible for the blockade. The Samyukt Kisan Morcha's plan to discuss their next move shows a continued commitment to peaceful advocacy of their demands.

As the barricades come down and normal traffic resumes, traders in Ambala, who faced losses due to reduced customer flow, hope for a turn towards economic recovery. Even as both state governments must facilitate a smooth transition, the farmers should ensure that their next steps do not lead to any escalation. This episode highlights the delicate balance required in handling public protests and the need for solutions that respect both civil liberties and public welfare. Dialogue remains the most effective path to resolution.

## SC ensures equality

### Upholds maintenance rights for Muslim women

The Supreme Court on Wednesday affirmed that Muslim women are entitled to maintenance under Section 125 of the Code of Criminal Procedure (CrPC). Justices BV Nagarathna and Augustine George Masih underscored the principle that maintenance is not a form of charity but a fundamental right of all married women, irrespective of their religion. The ruling comes in response to an appeal by Mohd Abdul Samad, who challenged the Telangana High Court's decision to uphold a family court's maintenance order. Samad argued that a divorced Muslim woman should seek maintenance solely under the Muslim Women (Protection of Rights on Divorce) Act, 1986. However, the SC dismissed his appeal, asserting that Section 125 is a secular provision applicable to all women.

This verdict is reminiscent of the historic Shah Bano case, where the apex court ruled in favour of a divorced Muslim

woman's right to maintenance under Section 125. Despite the subsequent enactment of the 1986 Act, which initially sought to limit this right, the court's recent decision reinforces the enduring applicability of Section 125. The evolution of the Act and subsequent judicial precedents have progressively expanded the maintenance rights of divorced Muslim women. The 2001 Danial Latifi case upheld the Act but extended maintenance rights beyond the iddat period until remarriage.

The latest ruling aligns with these developments, ensuring that Muslim women are not deprived of their entitlements. By affirming that maintenance is a right for all married women, the court has taken a significant step towards gender justice and equality in India. This ruling not only upholds constitutional principles but also strengthens the social and economic security of Muslim women, setting a precedent for future cases.

## Food price rise pushes WPI inflation to 16-month high of 3.36% in June



### New Delhi

Wholesale inflation in the country surged to a 16-month high of 3.36 per cent in June on account of rise in prices of food articles, especially vegetables and manufactured items.

This was the fourth consecutive month when inflation witnessed an upward journey. The wholesale price index (WPI) based inflation was 2.61 per cent in May. It was (-) 4.18 per cent in June 2023. Wholesale inflation had touched a high of 3.85 per cent in February 2023.

“Positive rate of inflation in June, 2024, is primarily due to increase in prices of food articles, manufacture of food products,

crude petroleum & natural gas, mineral oils, other manufacturing etc,” the Ministry of Commerce & Industry said in a statement on Monday.

As per the data, inflation in food articles rose 10.87 per cent in June, as against 9.82 per cent in May. Inflation in vegetables was 38.76 per cent during June, up from 32.42 per cent in May. Onion inflation was at 93.35 per cent, while potato was 66.37 per cent in the month under review. Pulses inflation rose 21.64 per cent in June.

During the month, inflation in other food items like fruits stood at 10.14 per cent.

## Zomato, Swiggy hike platform fee by 20 per cent to Rs 6 per order

### New Delhi

Food delivery platforms Zomato and Swiggy have once again hiked platform fee to Rs 6

delivery fee, Goods and Services Tax (GST), restaurant charges and handling charges.

The higher platform fee will roll out to other cities as well.

The platform fee goes to the food aggregators to apparently control costs and increase revenues.

In April, Zomato hiked its platform fee by 25 per cent to Rs 5 per order.

Zomato introduced a platform fee of Rs 2 in August last year and later increased it to Rs 3 to improve its margins and become profitable.



per order from an earlier Rs 5 — a 20 per cent increase.

Currently being charged in Delhi and Bengaluru, the platform fee is different from

## Retail inflation rises to 5.08% in June, IIP jumps to 5.9% in May

### New Delhi

Retail inflation increased to 5.08 per cent in June as kitchen items became dearer, according to government data released on Friday. The Consumer Price Index (CPI) based retail inflation was 4.8 per cent in May 2024 and 4.87 per cent in June 2023 (previous low). Inflation in the food basket was 9.36 per cent in June, up from 8.69 per cent in May, according to the data released by the National Statistical Office (NSO).

The RBI projected the CPI inflation for 2024-25 at 4.5 per cent, with Q1 at 4.9 per cent, Q2 at 3.8 per cent, Q3 at 4.6 per cent, and Q4 at 4.5 per cent.

### India's industrial



production grew 5.9 per cent in May this year, mainly due to good show by mining and power sectors, according to official data released on Friday. The factory output measured in terms of the Index

of Industrial Production (IIP) witnessed a growth of 5.7 per cent in May 2023.

India's Index of Industrial Production grew by 5.9 per cent in May 2024, an official statement said.

## Interest rate change talks premature: RBI Governor

### New Delhi

Reserve Bank Governor Shaktikanta Das on Thursday said the question of change of stance on interest rate is quite premature given the gap between current inflation and 4 per cent target.

“Given gap between current inflation and 4 per cent target, question of change of stance is quite premature...when we move towards 4 per cent CPI (retail inflation) on a sustained basis is when we will get the confidence to think about a change in stance,” Das said in an interview to CNBC-TV 18.

He said inflation journey is progressing as per expectations, but added that it is the last mile of the journey towards 4 per cent, which will be the most difficult or sticky.

Consumer Price Index (CPI)-based retail inflation has been projected at 4.5 per cent with quarter-wise projections at 4.9 per cent in Q1 (April-June), 3.8 per cent in Q2, 4.6 per cent in Q3, and 4.5 per cent in Q4, RBI had said in its June bi-monthly report.

The Reserve Bank, which has been mandated to ensure inflation remains at 4 per cent (with margin of 2 per cent on either side), mainly factors in CPI while arriving at its monetary policy.

He had said headline inflation softened further during March-April, though persisting food inflation pressures offset the gains of disinflation in core and deflation in the fuel groups.

Despite some moderation, pulses and vegetables inflation remained firmly in double digits.



## Veg oil imports up 18% in June

### New Delhi

Import of vegetable oils, comprising edible and non-edible oils, rose 18 per cent in June to 15.5 lakh tonnes on higher imports of crude palm oil and crude sunflower oil, according to trade data.

Solvent Extractors' Association of India (SEA) data showed that import of vegetable

oils during June 2024 stood at 15,50,659 tonnes compared to 13,14,476 tonnes in the year-ago period. Edible oils import increased in June to 15,27,481 tonnes from 13,11,576 tonnes in the same month last year. However, the imports of non-edible oils jumped to 23,178 tonnes from 2,300 tonnes during the period under review.



## Export of India-made two-wheelers, passenger vehicles on the upswing



### New Delhi

Two-wheelers and passenger vehicles made in India are well placed to achieve strong numbers in the current fiscal year, according to latest data.

During the first quarter (April-June) of the current fiscal year, exports of two-wheelers increased by 16.7 per cent. Also, passenger vehicles exports witnessed a growth of 18.6 per cent, even though the wholesales witnessed a marginal growth (3 per cent) in the domestic market on account of higher base of previous fiscal.

According to data released by Society of Indian Automobile Manufacturers (SIAM), between April and June (Q1) this year, two-wheeler exports touched 9,23,148 units as compared to 7,91,316 units during the corresponding period of previous year (2023-24). The major exporters include Bajaj Auto (3,68,420 units), TVS

Motor Company Ltd (2,28,027) and Honda Motorcycle and Scooter (1,38,560).

Similarly, amid strong demand in key markets, passenger vehicle exports touched 1,80,483 units in Q1 this year as compared to corresponding period of the previous fiscal when 1,52,156 units were exported.

The bulk of the exports were passenger cars (1,00,895) followed by utility vehicles (77,675). The major exporters include Maruti Suzuki (69,962 units), Hyundai Motor India (42,600), Honda Cars (18,009). Among the others are Volkswagen India (17,313), Nissan Motor (12,809) and Kia Motor India (7,713). The rebound in exports assumes significance as in 2023-24, the overseas sales saw an increase of 1.5 per cent with 6,72,000 units as compared to 6,62,703 units in 2022-23.

In domestic market, passenger vehicle wholesales remained flat at 10,26,006, recording a growth of just 3 per cent Y-o-Y. (Monthly figure does not include data for Tata Motors).

“Sales of passenger vehicles in Q1 of 2024 has been the highest ever of Q1 and also crossed 1 million (10,26,006) units in Q1 for the first time, with a growth of 3 per cent, compared to the previous year. Two-wheelers also posted a growth of 20.4 per cent in this quarter, compared to last year, with sales of 49,85,631 units,” said Rajesh Menon, director general, SIAM.

Commenting on sales data of Q1 for 2024-25, Vinod Aggarwal, SIAM president, said: “All segments viz., passenger vehicle, commercial vehicle, three-wheeler and two-wheelers posted growth in Q1 of 2024-25 over the Q1 of last year. While passenger vehicles and commercial vehicles have witnessed moderate growth, the two wheelers and three wheelers have posted very handsome growth in double digits.

“Within two-wheelers, scooters have posted even higher growth based on some green shoots of recovery in entry level two-wheelers. With positive outlook on monsoon and coming festive season, the automotive sector is poised to perform better in the balance part of the year.”

## Almost reached pre-pandemic levels on work from office, will soon stop tracking the number: TCS



### Mumbai

The country's largest IT services exporter TCS has reached pre-pandemic levels on the percentage of employees working from offices, a top official has said.

Admitting that it took longer than expected, the Tata group company's chief of human resources Milind Lakkad said the levels have been achieved after 18 months of “hard” efforts.

“We actually have come to the point where we believe we are coming back to almost the same levels as we were pre-pandemic times,” Lakkad said.

Stating that “it is kind of a business as usual” for the company employing over 6 lakh people, Lakkad said TCS will not track this metric as much in the next couple of quarters.

The number of employees working from offices for five days a week is higher than the 70 per cent it had previously announced, he said, without giving a figure.

It can be noted that the pandemic-induced lockdowns resulted in the entire IT industry's staff delivering work from their homes, but companies, who look at working from offices as more virtuous because of the team building, mentoring, culture deepening aspects, have struggled to get them back to workplaces.

TCS reported a marginal decline in the number of women employees at 35.5 per cent as of June this year, but Lakkad said this is not an aspect of concern for the company and added that it has a slew of policies and measures in place before the pandemic itself wherein it has been flexible as an organisation to take care of employees' needs.

Lakkad declined to specifically answer if it will close the fiscal year 2024-25 by

hiring 40,000 freshers. Likewise, when asked if it will close the fiscal on a positive number on the net hiring front ‘last year saw a decline in staffage amid business volatilities ‘Lakkad declined to give a specific answer.

To a question on whether incidence of involuntary attrition has gone up as the company becomes more rigorous in assessing its employees, Lakkad said such an eventuality is not a core part of its HR strategy.

When a resource is hired the company feels it is its responsibility to ensure that the talent is productive, he said, adding that it is only when there are skill mismatches over a period of time or productivity issues even after attempts are mounted to improve, that it resorts to involuntary attrition.

Meanwhile, amid a raging national controversy following the integrity of professional examinations, Lakkad said the focus on governance and ethics will have to continue, and added that technology can offer the solutions in avoiding instances of people gaming the system by helping in assessments and background verifications.

On SBI's disclosure that 80 per cent of its fresher hires are qualified engineers, Lakkad said the country is producing a huge number of engineers every year and TCS does not see any concerns from a talent availability standpoint.

With the TCS management calling expanding on utilisation as a key metric to grow its profit margins, Lakkad said there still exists the headroom of a few percentage points to grow the number but made it clear that it will not “take it to the brim” and continue to have sufficient bench strength.

## Adani-Hindenburg row: SC dismisses review petition

### New Delhi

The Supreme Court has dismissed a petition seeking review of its January 3 order dismissing PILs seeking to transfer the probe into allegations of stock price manipulation levelled by Hindenburg Research Report against Adani Group from SEBI to an SIT.

“Having perused the review petition, there is no error apparent on the face of the record. No case for review under Order XLVII Rule 1 of the Supreme Court Rules 2013. The review petition is, therefore, dismissed,” the Bench said in its May 8 order, which has become public now.

“The facts of this case do not warrant a transfer of investigation from SEBI... The threshold for the



transfer of investigation has not been demonstrated to exist,” the Bench said in its January 3 order.

# Merchandise trade deficit widens to \$20.98 bn in June

New Delhi

Driven largely by a surge in imports, India's merchandise trade deficit widens to \$20.98 billion in June 2024 compared to \$19.19 billion in June 2023. Rising trade deficit means the country is importing more than the exports.

In June 2024, while merchandise exports rose 2.6 per cent on year-on-year to \$35.2 billion whereas merchandise imports increased by 4.9 per cent to \$56.18 billion. Merchandise exports and imports stood at \$34.32 billion and \$53.51 billion in June 2023, respectively.

The top importing countries were the UAE, China, Russia, Indonesia and the USA. Also, non-petroleum, non-gems & jewellery (gold, silver & precious metals) imports in June 2024 were \$36.04 billion compared to \$33.66 billion in June 2023.

As far exports is concerned, the jump in exports was driven by increase in demand for coffee

(70.02%), iron Ore (24.66%), electronic goods (16.91%), cereal preparations & miscellaneous processed items (15.43%), engineering goods (10.27%), drugs & pharmaceuticals (9.93%) and spices (9.84%).

During June this year, services exports stood at \$30.27 billion, up from \$27.29 billion in June of the previous year. Services imports rose to \$17.29 billion from \$15.61 billion in June 2023. Commerce Secretary Sunil Barthwal said in April-June, exports were \$200.33 billion (goods and services) and if the trend continues, then trade will cross \$800 billion trade this year.

Last month, Union Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal had also said that exports of goods and services from India are expected to cross \$800 billion by the end of the current financial year despite external headwinds. In May, merchandise exports rose by 9.1 per cent to \$38.13 billion, despite the



trade deficit widening to \$23.78 billion, the highest in seven months, according to government data. According to exporters, the Indian exports have been affected by a

slowdown in global growth coupled with geopolitical challenges, including conflicts in West Asia and Ukraine, as well as the Red Sea crisis, have also impacted global trade.

## Defence ministry notifies 5th indigenisation list with 346 components for DPSUs

New Delhi

Items in the indigenization list can only be procured from the Indian Industry based on the timelines provided by the ministry

Union ministry of defence on July 16 issued its fifth indigenisation list consisting 346 items for the defence public sector undertakings (DPSUs), the ministry said in a statement.

The list includes strategically-important line replacement units/systems/ sub-systems/ assemblies/sub-assemblies/spares & components and raw materials, with import substitution value worth Rs 1,048 crore, according to the ministry.

Items in the indigenization list can only be procured from the Indian Industry based on the timelines provided by the ministry.

The items on the list will be undertaken by DPSUs for indigenization via various various routes including 'Make' procedure or in-house development involving the industry, including MSMEs.

"This will provide impetus to the growth in economy, enhanced investment in defence and lead to reduced import dependence. In addition, this will augment the design capabilities of



domestic defence Industry due to the involvement of academia and research institutions," the ministry said.

Before this, four PILs with 4,666 items have been notified. Out of the total, 2,972 items with an import substitution value worth Rs 3,400 crore have been indigenized, the ministry informed.

"Till June 2024, over 36,000 defence items were offered to the industry for indigenisation by the DPSUs and SHQs. Of them, more than 12,300 items have been indigenised in the last three

years. As a result, the DPSUs have placed orders on domestic vendors to the tune of Rs 7,572 crore."

Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL), Bharat Electronics Limited (BEL), Bharat Dynamics Limited (BDL), BEML Limited, India Optel Limited (IOL), Mazagon Dock Shipbuilders Limited (MDL), Goa Shipyard Limited (GSL), Garden Reach Shipbuilders & Engineers Ltd (GRSE) and Hindustan Shipyard Limited (HSL) are the DPSUs involved in defence items of the fifth PIL.

## 69% CEOs say govt should focus on tax simplification, energy reforms under Modi 3.0

Mumbai

The Modi 3.0 administration is likely to continue with transformational reforms, with an increased focus on capex, tax simplifications, revenue augmentation, governance and energy, 69 percent of CEOs said in the MC-Deloitte CEO Survey.

The survey asked 78 CEOs across industries for their assessment of the reform agenda of the newly elected government.

While a majority of the CEOs said that the government will continue its focus on capital expenditure and energy reforms, 14 percent said that the government may opt for more populist measures in terms of subsidies, cash transfers and welfare programmes, with reduced focus on capex and infrastructure spending.

Another 13 percent said that the pace of overall economic reforms is likely to slow down.

In the Modi 3.0 administration, allies such as the Telugu Desam Party (TDP) and the Janata Dal-United (JD-U) play significant roles.

On being asked which reforms should be the government's top priority to

boost growth, 37 percent of CEOs said investment and trade reforms, higher exports and foreign investments should be the main focus.

Another 24 percent of CEOs felt that simplification of the tax regime needs to be prioritised by the government while 15 percent said fiscal consolidation, with a focus on bringing down the fiscal deficit to 4.5 percent without compromising capex spending, is a top priority.

Speculation is rife that the government is likely to provide income-tax (I-T) relief to the middle class in the upcoming budget to boost spending.

The Centre had set a fiscal deficit target of 5.1 percent of the GDP in the interim budget, and the government intends to bring the fiscal deficit down to 4.5 percent of the GDP by FY26.

As many as 14 percent of the CEOs said that the government is likely to focus on factor reforms, including land and labour to boost growth while only five percent said that privatisation of public sector enterprises and monetisation of public assets will be on priority.

# The Global Governance of the Energy Transition: Lessons for the Indo-Pacific and Latin America

Latin American countries are emphasising new forms of global governance that cater to the needs of much of their population. As such, they highlight tackling global warming and climate change alongside poverty alleviation efforts. For instance, in global governance forums such as the G20, Brazilian authorities have stressed the need to widen the focus beyond environmental issues and formulate a comprehensive agenda of human development to create benefits for the poor and marginalised, who are now primarily urban-based and suffer the most from environmental harm. Just as India underlined during its presidency of the G20 in 2023, Brazil is proposing mechanisms to increase social participation in international financial decisions, so that the challenges of climate change can be better addressed. The UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) showcase such a governance approach, integrating environmental and human debates and allowing for greater dialogue between policies. A Latin America-focused institution like SUFIP could bridge developed and developing countries to find financial solutions in a region currently characterised by an urgent need for energy transition. From a broad perspective, a security-oriented regional architecture such as the Indo-Pacific deserves scrutiny from Latin American analysts, as the international policy circles of this region avoid such an approach, especially in a policy issue like energy transition finance that is regarded primarily from a technical point of view. As the example of SUFIP illustrates, there is implied politics and competition that should not be eschewed.

Competition and the Global Energy Transition

Although most stakeholders involved in the global green transition can be assumed to possess good intentions, they must contend with the reality of the global economic and political order. Therefore, it is important

to consider international political economy explanations to address the role of competition among alternative multilateral governance mechanisms in the world economy. At the end of 2023, discussions at the COP28 climate summit highlighted the lack of financial resources to meet the targets envisaged by the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and the Paris Agreement. Developed countries agreed to contribute US\$700 million to an alleviation fund. However, the world is far from reaching a consensus regarding the monetary magnitude of financing decarbonisation.,

Fostering cooperation in the energy sector will require efforts from different stakeholders who may have competing world views and interests. Global governance platforms have become important parts of the dialogue. The Indo-Pacific region must contend with various challenges in its energy transition; as such, it is important to acknowledge that the geopolitical components of the process are not a zero-sum game. Contending nations or companies might also be involved in cooperative forms of environmental governance to reach common goals. Organisations such as the G20 and BRICS Plus, and new forums such as SUFIP, could provide additional arenas for debate and problem solving.

Financing the energy transition and attracting investments for clean energy projects can be burdensome, particularly for developing countries in Latin America and the Indo-Pacific. Countries may lack a safe regulatory environment for investors. However, access to affordable capital, innovative financial mechanisms, and international cooperation are critical for scaling up renewable energy use. Many countries in both regions need adequate infrastructure crucial for enabling the transition to clean energy. Developing and upgrading transmission and distribution grids, energy storage systems,

and charging infrastructure for electric vehicles are examples of infrastructure that will require financing.

Multilateral platforms can also offer advice on policy and regulatory frameworks to be adopted by their member countries. Establishing robust policy and regulatory frameworks is critical to encourage the adoption of clean energy technologies and driving climate change mitigation efforts. Developing effective policies, setting ambitious renewable energy targets, and implementing transparent and consistent regulations pose

## Part II

challenges that these global governance institutions can help overcome. Multilateral financial organisations, such as the World Bank or the Inter-American Bank of Development in Latin America, have provided such policy assistance for years. Therefore, new international political economy structures, characterised by emerging powers or regions, may offer a much-needed competition framework in terms of policy advice and financing alternatives.

Moving towards a multipolar financial order might be beneficial for environmental sustainability and to achieve the UNFCCC's emissions targets. Funding environmental preservation requires action from countries such as China and India, the two countries that are the world's largest greenhouse gas emitters but with lower per-capita income levels than industrialised countries. Competing with the Bretton Woods Institutions—and not substituting them—might prove more fruitful for domestic and multilateral development banks such as the New Development Bank (NDB), the Asian Development Bank, and the Indian Exim Bank.

The new multilateral arrangements must also contend

with their own challenges. For example, how will countries of the augmented BRICS reconcile global environmental policy targets (e.g., decarbonisation) with their domestic economic goals, the achievement of which relies on carbon-intensive resources?

At the same time, financial institutions and donors, comprising mainly developed countries, may also experience policy contradictions. For example, a number of developed countries have established emissions markets and taxation systems to price carbon usage. In theory, the creation of markets based on the setting of maximum limits for emissions and the imposition of a carbon tax should result in a reduction in greenhouse gas emissions. Allowing free transactions to determine the equilibrium price in a regulated market will determine the amounts emitted.

These countries are members of climate clubs that establish carbon emissions limits. Yet, their recent policies have been using environmental concerns (for instance, the issue of carbon leakage) to justify restrictive, or even protectionist, trade policies. Mechanisms such as the Carbon Border Adjustment are attempts to mitigate the impact of carbon dioxide on international trade. Conversely, there is a trend for domestic green industrial policies, which typically contain a certain degree of protectionism, to foster domestic capacity in renewable productive-chain components, such as solar panels. Initiatives such as the US's Inflation Reduction Act also comprise subsidies and industrial policy measures that will have consequences for the country's trade partners.

In this global landscape, Latin America can provide clean energy raw materials (including key minerals, such as lithium) for the Indo-Pacific region., Increasing diversification and improving competition in international trade and investments may be

part of a geopolitical concern. This diversification, in both import and export markets and in foreign investments, might broaden renewable supply chains (for instance, for mineral inputs, solar batteries, and solar panels). Despite the geographical distance between the Indo-Pacific and Latin America, trade in basic intermediate inputs and final products may improve capacity building in the supply chains of renewables., To achieve this aim, institutions of trust and governance are necessary. Therefore, these new multilateral arrangements also serve as debate arenas to iron out contradictions between global and domestic policy aims. This is especially true for SUFIP, as it is sponsored by the French Developing Agency, and France is the backbone for European Union trade policy decisions.

Finally, it is also important to address how mechanisms such as SUFIP relate to a programme such as China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and the NDB. Although Chinese foreign investments have been steered towards carbon-intensive industries and sectors, such as steel and automobiles, there are also investments in renewable supply chains. China-backed infrastructure projects may spur positive externalities for the energy transition in countries receiving investments, but assessments must be made on a case-by-case basis.,

Meanwhile, there are opportunities for mission-oriented loans from NDB towards ecological projects, but this institution is still nascent, and it is too early to assess its effectiveness as an alternative source of energy transition finance., In brief, although BRICS is a contending geopolitical concept, especially in the Indo-Pacific region, competition between different financing and development mechanisms might yet prove to be valuable for the green transition, especially for developing countries requiring investments in this area.



# Consensus: A New Approach in Economic Reforms for Modi 3.0

The past 10 years under Prime Minister Narendra Modi saw a series of crucial economic reforms that include the Goods and Services Tax and the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code around easing doing business; and the Jan Dhan Yojana and the Direct Benefit Transfer aimed at facilitating financial inclusion. Given the verdict and past track record, economic reforms are likely to continue through 2029.

In 2014, when Modi began his first term, he inherited a GDP of US\$2.04 trillion. Over the eight years till 2022, India's GDP grew by 70 percent to reach US\$3.4 trillion; global GDP, meanwhile, rose by a far lower 26 percent to US\$100.9 trillion over the same period. For the fiscal year 2023-'24, India's nominal GDP was estimated at INR 293.90 lakh crore (nearly US\$4 trillion), rising by 9.1 percent over the previous FY.

The momentum of past reforms will only continue to power India's growth. A number of these reforms were structural in nature, impacting the economy through institutions and easing the regulatory framework for doing business. To accelerate the pace, the Modi government will need to push harder politically, dive deeper economically, and deliver more administratively. The imperative is to drive an economic consensus in two areas: first, with political allies and partners; and second, with state governments, both those governed by the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) led by the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and those that are not.

In his first two terms, the prime minister showed will to pursue reforms in order to serve the country's development goals. In his third term, Modi will need to muster the third component of India's reforms trinity. Following a dexterous stance to push reforms that flowed from the constraints of 1991 and the convictions of 2014-24, he will have to work on building consensus between 2024 and 2029. Being dependent on NDA partners, notably Telugu Desam Party with 16 seats and Janata Dal (United) with 12 seats, the Modi government's reforms will have to be powered and tempered by political persuasions.

## Recommendations for Policy Continuity

In his third term, PM Modi must

deliver policy continuity alongside political dynamism. He will need to do this on four fronts.

### Enable, not Stall, the Rise of Wealth- and Job-creators

Between 2014 and 2024, Modi 1.0 and Modi 2.0 rejected so-called 'povertarian' policies and continued with welfare economics though



not at the cost of wealth creation. Modi 3.0 must continue on this path with greater conviction and draw lessons from the experiences of countries that have adopted socialist policies that failed to bring growth to their economies and prosperity to their people: from Argentina to Venezuela, and North Korea to pre-1991 India, these countries witnessed shortages, poverty, and a deep suspicion of private enterprises.

The lessons from Prime Minister P.V. Narasimha Rao's economic reforms of 1991 are clear: welfare schemes for the poorest bottom of the growth pyramid cannot and must not come by expropriating from the richest top—that would be a return to India's povertarian past. Growth is the only path to both wealth and welfare. Growth has eliminated extreme poverty in India. Policy tools such as taxation and investments, combined with efficient public expenditure and job creation, are the way forward.

Burdening a rising nation with redistribution rhetoric or penalising wealth- and job-creators for the risks they take and the returns some of them gather will take India back to the repressive first four decades post-Independence. The contempt for and urge to cut down large corporations must end. It must be economically understood, and politically communicated, that it is large corporations, not

small and medium enterprises, that become most competitive internationally, even in labour using industries, and are also able to progressively ascend the technology ladder. Finally, for all the political virtues of going small and staying small, it is only large companies on whom labour laws, particularly

on worker protection and security, apply. Modi 3.0 must end the policy disincentives that discourage firms from growing.

To put this in perspective, India is home to 63 million enterprises. Of these, there are only 1 million, or 1.6 percent of the total, formal employers. Because more than 98 percent of Indian employers stay small by choice, their access to formal banking finance, top talent, cutting-edge technology or complex supply chains gets limited. As far as job creation goes, not only do most of them employ fewer than three employees on an average, they do not need to follow laws on minimum wages or social security. Small companies want to remain small not because they want to evade laws but because compliances on the formal sector have become monstrous and their breach beyond manageable. One figure illustrates this point—400: the moment an entrepreneur becomes part of the formal economy, it can lead to more than 400 compliances a year that become applicable as soon as the setup is formalised. The 21st-century India will be a game of scale and Modi 3.0 has his policy task cut out through compliance reforms, a statistically-insignificant beginning of which has been made, but the mass morass continues to float and slow the rise of India.

Despite this, not only has the economy been growing, jobs

are being created in tandem. As a Reserve Bank of India report notes, between April 2023 and March 2024, India created 46.7 million new jobs. This has taken the total number of "provisional jobs" in 27 industries across agriculture, manufacturing and services to 643.3 million, a rise of 7.8 percent over the previous year's number of 596.7 million (see Figure 1). The jobless growth narrative needs a deeper discussion. This discussion must include employers, anecdotal evidence from whom, across sectors such as corporations, traders, and shopkeepers, suggests a shortage of manpower and not jobs. Yet this is an issue that is not restricted to India but has become a global challenge.

### Deepen the Union-States economic partnership

Modi 3.0 must ensure that the reforms delivered by Modi 1.0 and Modi 2.0 trickle down to the states with equal conviction. The alpha of India's combined growth will come from a number of more progressive states. If India is to be a US\$10-trillion economy by 2032, it cannot do so without Maharashtra, Uttar Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Gujarat, and Karnataka becoming the core drivers of growth. All five states will need to grow at nominal rates of between 10 and 12 percent per annum or higher to become US\$600-billion to US\$1-trillion economies by 2032. Against their combined GDP of US\$4.5 trillion, the balance of US\$5.4 trillion needs to come from other states. Although every state is attempting to attract investments that create jobs, not all are, or will be, in tune with the national growth aspiration—such is the nature of India's political economy and the accompanying layers in its democracy.

The top five largest states of India are the economic equivalents of several countries—Maharashtra is about the size of South Africa, Tamil Nadu is almost as large as New Zealand, Uttar Pradesh and Karnataka are around the size of Greece, and Gujarat is larger

than Hungary. If Maharashtra grows by 10 percent per annum, it will be as large as Saudi Arabia today, a trillion-dollar state, by 2034, while Gujarat will become a US\$660-billion economy, larger than Argentina today. During the same period, at the same growth rates, mid-sized states such as Rajasthan would be close to Viet Nam, and Telangana larger than South Africa.

As far as politics goes, Modi 3.0 can nudge for a national alignment and push for higher growth in states. If politics remains a hurdle, he could focus on and push NDA-governed state governments to work with the Union government. While the big three—Maharashtra, Uttar Pradesh, and Gujarat—can provide the scale, states such as Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, and Haryana can offer growth spurts because of their smaller bases. A consensus around economic growth can also create competitive federalism among other states. Factor market reforms such as those around land, labour and agriculture, need political and administrative support of state governments for implementation. Further, within states, cities have to become more liveable, efficient and dynamic hubs of education, healthcare, and entertainment. To attract top talent, both domestic and global, they need to come around industrial clusters, organically or as planned topographies, but preferably the latter.

Continue to Lead Financial Reforms...

Barring full convertibility, capital as the third leg of factor markets is largely in place, and in some areas such as payments, India is the world leader. On the last, India's UPI (unified payments interface) system is not only the world's benchmark, it is also the fastest-growing and the largest such system. To illustrate the scale of this achievement, what India transacts on UPI in one month is greater than the GDPs of several nations—in May 2022, at US\$125 billion, it was around the GDP of Ethiopia; in May 2023 (US\$179 billion), nearly the GDP of Hungary; and in May 2024 (US\$245 billion, see Fig. 2), approximately the GDP of New Zealand. The transactions on UPI over the past 12 months (US\$2.4 trillion) were greater than the respective GDPs of Russia, Canada, or Italy.

# Indian Army's search for indigenous light tank: A step forward with Zorawar

With the announcement that India will have its own indigenously developed Light Battle Tank (LBT), the Zorawar, the Indian Army (IA) is on course to matching its principal adversary, the Peoples Liberation Army-Army (PLAA) and its Type-15 light tank. Although the LBT is yet to be subjected to gruelling tests and its readiness for combat deployment is still some distance away, the Zorawar—which is a collaborative effort between Larsen and Toubro (L&T) and the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO)—is a remarkable achievement. As this this author had recommended three years ago, “Domestically, the IA must work closely with the DRDO and private sector enterprises to accelerate domestic development of light tanks. The GoI will have to step up and make funds available.” This recommendation has borne fruit. The Zorawar was developed at warp speed—a record two years. Yet, this is only the initial variant of the Zorawar which, as the DRDO Chief Sameer Kamath admitted, has to be subjected to all forms of rigorous environmental, terrain, climatic and user trials before the IA can proceed to commission the tank for mass production and induction. These trials are likely to take another 2 to 2.5 years.

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L&T's Hazira plant in Gujarat played a key role in the development of the LBT prototype following a tie up with the Combat Vehicles Research and Development Establishment (CVRDE), a lab of the DRDO. The Zorawar LBT features include a three-man crew, weight of 25 tons, a 105 mm gun developed by John Cockerill, and an integrated Unmanned Aerial Vehicle (UAV) capability that provides greater visibility on the battlefield and is rapidly deployable through air transportation to high altitudes. Its engine is developed by the American Cummins, after India's failure to get the German Motoren-und Turbinen Union (MTU) engine due to Germany's refusal to relax its export control restrictions to sell the engine to India. The Ministry of Defence (MoD) showed great alacrity in switching to the American-built Cummins following Germany's demurrer, which as of this writing, has satisfactorily met the requirements of the L&T, CVRDE and the IA. The Zorawar LBT's current prototype has a power to weight ratio that is under 40 Horse Power (HP) per tonne (HP/tonne)—optimal to meet the low track pressure which is determined by the surface properties prevalent in the high-altitude region of Ladakh. A further necessity for the tank is to operate effectively in the thin or rarefied air of Ladakh where the general elevation is 5,000 meters above sea-level making engine performance critical to meeting the LBT's mobility requirements in mountainous terrain. Extensive testing will be required if the Zorawar LBT is to satisfactorily meet the demanding requirements of high-altitude armoured operations. Further, some of the other claims that it is superior to its



Chinese counterpart, the Type-15, both in mobility and accuracy can only be ascertained after several field trials are completed before its deployment in Ladakh and, above all, in an actual combat engagement with the PLAA's Type-15 LBT.

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The initial order will consist of a batch of 59 tanks with a potential follow-on order of roughly 350 tanks. Irrespective of the quantity of the tanks that the IA plans to order, the service with the DRDO and industry must make sure it secures delivery of the Zorawar LBTs for effective operational use on the terrain and in the environment for which they were initially designed and developed. Otherwise, the IA is likely to suffer the same travails it endured with the development of the Arjun Main Battle Tank (MBT). Any improvements that are required can be done incrementally and not all the components of the tank need to be indigenously sourced. In any case, as is evident from the foregoing, the DRDO and L&T have sourced the Cummins engine to power the Zorawar and its 105mm gun from foreign vendors. The IA and the lead developers of the Zorawar LBT can replace imported components with native ones down the line. The prototype unveiled by the CVRDE and L&T is lighter than its Chinese counterpart the Type-15, which has an approximate weight of 33 tonnes with additional armour increasing its weight to 36 tonnes. Yet, the Zorawar could see its weight grow with the possibility

of the IA demanding that more armour be slapped on the LBT as well as the integration of an Active Protection System (APS) to detect and repel incoming anti-tank munitions, which none of the IA's in service tanks such as the T-72s and T-90s currently possess. The key test for the IA will be to ensure that its own performance and technical demands do not completely derail the development of the Zorawar LBT.

The initial order will consist of a batch of 59 tanks with a potential follow-on order of roughly 350 tanks.

The last decade has not been good for tanks, especially with the ongoing war between Russia and Ukraine making the tank's reputation suffer even further. Yet tanks are still needed, despite their seeming obsolescence, because they are still vital for breakthroughs on the battlefield and offer a level of mobile firepower in land combat still unmatched by any other weapons system or platform.

India, for its part, has made impressive progress in at least building an early variant of an LBT that matches the Peoples Republic of China. In the coming months and years, the real test and a moment of great success for the Indian defence establishment and the IA will be their actual deployment against the PLAA's Type-15 light tank, which are currently deployed in Ladakh and in the Xinjiang and Tibet military regions under the Peoples Liberation Army (PLA)'s Western Theater Command (WTC). The DRDO chief Kamath declared that the Zorawar should be fit for operational deployment by 2027 following user trials; this date must not belie expectations.

# Making Water the Business of Cities: Approaching Urban Water Governance Through the WEF Nexus

The evolution of cities will impact efforts to address climate change and ensure resource security, with policy, market, and human behaviour factors converging to determine outcomes in urban areas. Currently, 56 percent of the global population reside in cities, a proportion that is expected to grow to 68 percent by 2050, with 90 percent of this growth concentrated in Asia and Africa. Despite occupying only 3 percent of the world's land, cities consume approximately 75 percent of global electricity and contribute 70 percent of anthropogenic greenhouse gas emissions. India is anticipating an additional 416 million urban residents by 2050—the largest projected increase worldwide. This urban surge will double the country's building space, with 70 percent of new constructions located in urban areas.

The growing population and economic activity in Indian cities is straining freshwater supplies, sewage systems, and land use. Resource demands and capital converge in cities and highlight water, energy, and food (WEF) issues. Cities are also vulnerable due to their high population densities and critical infrastructures. The central role of cities in resource networks can create cascading security risks, as seen in the growing water, energy, and food security crises in Indian cities. By 2030, global demand for food, water, and energy are projected to increase by 35 percent, 50 percent, and 40 percent, respectively, compared to 2012. Uncertainties in water availability, energy security, and food price stability also impact political and economic stability, which is essential for maintaining infrastructure and resource distribution systems.

Traditional sector-specific policymaking approaches are inadequate for managing the interconnected challenges of the nexus and often fail to account for detrimental cross-sectoral effects and synergies. A decade after the WEF nexus became a focal point of political and research agendas, an integrated perspective on these resources has become crucial. India, the largest groundwater user globally, extracted 244.92 billion cubic metres in 2020, surpassing the combined usage of the United States (US) and China. Nexus approaches aim to investigate critical linkages among food, water, and energy systems and their societal implications.

Cities are often seen as innovation hubs that are capable of leading sustainable transformations, with high densities promoting resource-use efficiency. However, urban-focused research on the WEF nexus is limited, often failing to capture urban complexities, being overly reliant on technical solutions, and rarely including stakeholder participation. By reimagining resource-efficient and sustainable cities, India can set a model for emerging countries in the Global South.

This report delves into the interplay of water, energy, and food issues in urban settings, emphasising the importance of the WEF nexus for Indian cities. By exploring the interdependencies and synergies among these resources, the report highlights how a nexus approach can enhance urban sustainability and resilience. Through a comprehensive analysis of current policies and the identification of existing gaps in the management of WEF resources, the report examines the challenges faced by Indian cities and offers strategic recommendations to optimise resource use, promote sustainable development, and ensure the well-being of urban populations.

WEF Issues in Indian Cities  
Food Insecurity

India has made progress in agricultural production, achieving 3,296.87 lakh tonnes in food grain production in 2022-23, up by 140.71 lakh tonnes from 2021-22 and 308.69 lakh tonnes from the previous five-year average. Despite this, as of 2023, nearly 200 million people in the country are undernourished. Food insecurity in Indian cities remains prevalent despite economic progress and rapid urbanisation. Economic disparities, rising living costs, and shifting food consumption patterns have led to urban populations facing both food scarcity and dietary excess. Low-income groups, especially those in urban slums, are disproportionately affected by irregular employment, insufficient incomes, and limited access to affordable, nutritious food.

Studies highlight a high prevalence of food insecurity at the household level across urban areas. For instance, in an urban resettlement colony in Delhi, 77.2 percent of households were found



to be food insecure. Another study found that 17 percent of the 1,700 households surveyed in Bengaluru face food insecurity, while 13 percent are experiencing severe food insecurity due to inadequate food quantity and variety. A cross-sectional survey in Mumbai found that 60 percent of urban slum households were severely food insecure, with an additional 16.6 percent experiencing mild to moderate food insecurity. In eastern Uttar Pradesh, 43 percent of households were food insecure, with many experiencing intense hunger. Research in Delhi and Chennai showed 8.5 percent food insecurity among the lowest wealth quintile compared to 1.7 percent in wealthier households, with a higher prevalence in Delhi. A longitudinal survey in Bihar noted an increase in severe food insecurity, from 25 percent in 2016 to 35 percent in 2021. Jharkhand exhibits similar levels of food insecurity, especially in priority districts. Both Bihar and Jharkhand, which face significant challenges in achieving food security, score the lowest on Sustainable Development Goal 2 (Zero Hunger).

At the same time, the average citizen in urban India wastes 0.34 kg of food per day, resulting in 153 gigagrams of food waste daily across these regions. According to the United Nations Food Waste Index Report, Indian households waste 78.2 million tonnes of food annually. A report by the UN Environment Programme, released ahead of the International Day of Zero Waste in December 2024, places India's per-capita food waste at 55 kg per year and highlights that rural India wastes less food compared to urban areas.

## Water Insecurity

Achieving food sufficiency in India has come at the cost of increased water extraction and energy consumption in agriculture. India will need

more food grains annually to sustain its growing population, which is projected to reach 1.7 billion by 2060. However, challenges such as water scarcity and limited arable land complicate efforts to meet this demand.

The requirement for irrigation water in India is expected to grow by over 50 percent by 2050 while per-capita water availability continues to decline. Annual irrigation requirement is projected to increase by 4.63-20.46 percent by 2050 even as climate change results in reduced crop yields by 4.5-9 percent and per-capita water availability continues to decline. Climate change could lead to India's food production dropping by 16 percent while the population at risk for hunger increases by 23 percent by 2030. The average annual per-capita water availability for the years 2021 and 2031 has been assessed at 1,486 cubic metres and 1,367 cubic metres, respectively. Since Independence, India's

annual per-capita water availability has declined by 75 percent, from 6,042 cubic metres in 1947 to 1,486 cubic meters in 2021. This is expected to drop by another 20 percent by 2050, making India the world's largest user of groundwater and a severely water-stressed country.

Cities like Bengaluru and Chennai have experienced severe water shortages in recent summers. Urban households consume only about 7 percent of the country's water, with 6-8 percent of total water demand used for cooking. Meanwhile, 85 percent of water demand comes from agriculture. Climate change will exacerbate water scarcity in India, where large regions already suffer from limited water availability and rely heavily on groundwater for irrigation. A UN report from March 2023 warned that India will be the most severely affected country as the global urban population facing water scarcity increases from 933 million in 2016 to between 1.7 and 2.4 billion by 2050.

Groundwater constitutes 48 percent of the urban water supply in India. However, groundwater levels in seven of India's ten most populated cities have drastically declined over the past two decades, often exceeding the annual limit of 20 cm of decline and reaching depths as low as 20 metres. The northwestern states of Punjab and Haryana, which produce most of the country's rice and wheat, are particularly water-stressed, with groundwater extraction rates surpassing 100 percent. Over two decades, groundwater levels in these areas have dropped from 3-10 metres to below 30 metres.

World Bank projections indicate that, with a global mean warming of 2°C above pre-industrial levels, India's food water requirements will exceed green water availability. This gap between water demand and supply is likely to have serious implications for food grain production and food security in India. In Delhi, the Delhi Jal Board struggles to meet the water and wastewater needs of the capital, providing an erratic and unequal water supply well below international standards. Mismanagement of water particularly affects the urban poor, with slum dwellers receiving only about 27 litres per capita per day. Despite a third of India's population living in cities, less than half of

the country's urban population has access to piped water supply.

## Energy Insecurity

Agriculture has the largest energy consumption in India, with the share of direct energy use in the form of electricity in the agriculture sector increasing from 28.75 percent in 2009-10 to 37.1 percent in 2019-20. Energy is also essential in every stage of the municipal water supply system, including extraction, treatment, pumping, and recycling, making it a significant operational cost. Water and wastewater treatment plants are the most energy-intensive facilities operated by local governments, accounting for 30-60 percent of a municipality's total energy bill.

With more than half of India's population expected to live in cities by 2036, millions of households are anticipated to purchase new appliances, air-conditioning units, and motor vehicles. In urban areas, energy consumption is primarily in the form of electricity. Consequently, the country's electricity demand has increased by 50 percent since 2014. India's electricity demand grew by 7 percent in 2023 and is projected to grow by an average of 6 percent annually through 2026 due to higher economic activity. A fourfold increase in commercial energy consumption is projected by 2025.

As water shortages become more acute, unscheduled power cuts and outages have become common, causing housing and living standards to decline and making access to healthcare facilities challenging. To meet the growing electricity demand over the next 20 years, India will need to add a power system the size of the European Union to its current capacity. The country's electricity demand is set to increase much more rapidly than its overall energy demand as the country's building space doubles over the next two decades, with 70 percent of new constructions occurring in urban areas. The extent to which these new constructions follow energy-efficient building codes will influence energy use patterns.

The shift towards urban living is accelerating the transition in residential energy use from solid biomass to electricity and modern fuels. Rising appliance ownership and demand for cooling are driving the share of electricity in residential energy use to nearly triple. However, India relies heavily on coal for electricity supply (55 percent of energy needs), and unscheduled power cuts and outages are common during shortages, particularly during heatwaves and higher temperatures; urban households in India experience power outages for at least two hours a day.

Thermal energy, which constitutes more than 70 percent of India's total electricity generation and 60 percent of its installed power capacity, is highly dependent on freshwater for cooling. Projections indicate that more than two-thirds of the country's power plants will face high water stress by the end of the decade. During the 2016 drought, water-related outages in thermal power plants were significant enough to cover Sri Lanka's annual demand, costing utilities billions in lost revenue. Between 2017 and 2021, there was approximately 8.2 terawatt-hours (TWh) of lost energy production due to water shortages—enough to power 1.5 million Indian households for five years

## Any guesses on Isha Ambani's giant pink diamond necklace's price? It's equal to a country's GDP



Isha Ambani stole the spotlight at her brother Anant Ambani's baraat ceremony on Friday, arriving in a custom Abu Jani Sandeep Khosla lehenga and a giant pink diamond necklace that became the talk of the town.

The necklace is called the 'Garden of Love'. The masterpiece is designed by Kantilal Chhotalal. It features a heart-shaped blue diamond at the centre, surrounded by portrait-cut diamonds arranged to resemble flowers. Isha complemented the necklace with diamond flower earrings, mang tika, and bracelets.

According to reports by the brand, the jewellery was created in four thousand artisan hours.

Isha paired the jewellery with a triple-toned silk lehenga in pastel hues of blush pink,

yellow and green, adorned with Resham floral embroidery and sequin work. The bustier-style blouse featured a wide plunging neckline, half-length sleeves and a cropped midriff-baring hem.

The A-line skirt boasted a floor-length hem and dori ties on the side, while the triple-toned dupatta added an ethereal touch to the ensemble.

Isha's makeup complemented her attire, with Kohl-lined eyes, smoky eyeshadow, mascara-coated lashes, darkened brows, caramel lips and touch of rouge on the cheeks.

Anant, the youngest son of Mukesh Ambani and Nita Ambani tied the knot with Radhika, the daughter of Viren Merchant and Shaila Merchant.

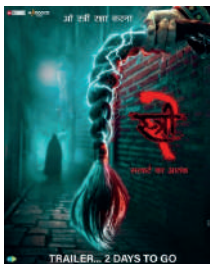
aaya, O Stree Raksha Karna!' 'Stree', which was directed by

debutant Amar Kaushik, also starred Rajkumar Rao, Flora Saini, Pankaj Tripathi, Aparshakti Khurana and Abhishek Banerjee.

The plot is based on the urban legend Nale Ba ('Come Tomorrow') of Karnataka.

Rajkumar, who played a tailor in 'Stree', learned to sew as part of the preparation for his role.

'Stree' is considered one of the best horror-comedy films in Hindi cinema and laid the foundation for a supernatural universe.



## Shraddha Kapoor shares new poster of 'Stree 2' featuring Stree's braid

In the first part of the film, which was released in 2018, Shraddha's character dropped hints about her identity by using the braid of Stree (the ghost) on herself, intriguing viewers and leaving them wondering if she was a ghost.

The actress also shared that the trailer of the film will be released in two days.

Shraddha wrote in the caption, 'Ek badi suchna - O Stree aa rahi hai in just 2 din. #Stree2 Trailer in 2 days! The legend returns this Independence Day, August 15, 2024.' 'Aatank jab Chanderi par chhaya, tab sabko ek hi nara yaad

## No 'good news', for now enjoy 'Bad Newz': Vicky Kaushal on Katrina Kaif's pregnancy rumours

Actor Vicky Kaushal on Monday dismissed media reports about wife Katrina Kaif's pregnancy as "speculation", saying they will happily announce whenever they have "good news".

Kaushal, who is currently promoting his upcoming comedy "Bad Newz", was in the city to promote the movie ahead of its Friday release. The film also stars Triptii Dimri and Amy Virk.

"As far as the good news that you spoke about is concerned, we will be very happy to share it with you when we have it. But till then, there is no truth to that, there is only speculation which is coming from the media. So please, enjoy 'Bad Newz' for now, we will share with you when there is time for good news," Kaushal said at a promotional event here.

When the host requested the media to not ask personal questions, the actor quipped, "There is a very good line in the picture, which is 'Don't get personal'." Pregnancy rumours gained prominence when a picture of the couple walking on the streets of London became viral on social media with many fans speculating that Kaif was sporting a baby bump.

Kaushal later shared plans for Kaif's 41st birthday tomorrow.



"Thanks for mentioning her birthday, it's a very special day and the plan is to just spend some quality time together. I'm rushing back to her birthday now... I've been busy with the promotions and she has also been travelling," he said.

"Bad Newz" revolves around a woman (Dimri) who is carrying twins, but with different fathers, played by Kaushal and Virk. Directed by Anand Tiwari, "Bad Newz" has been produced by Amritpal Singh Bindra, Apoorva Mehta and Karan Johar. The film is slated to release on July 19.

## When Pradhan ji comes calling

Raghubir Yadav can take criticism as well as he takes praise. The Pradhan ji of Panchayat, who staged his play Piano at the Tagore Theatre on Sunday and followed it with an interactive session called Vaqtavya on Monday morning, told a critic who pointed out a few inconsistencies in the play, an adaptation of Ferenc Karinthy's French play Steinway Grand, "Kuch cheezein maafi maangne ke liye bhi toh honi chahiye (some things should be left to beg apologies)"

But then Yadav has been a student of Ebrahim Alkazi at the National School of Drama, a teacher known for his work ethics and humility. He has not forgotten what Alkazi had told him once when he made an excuse to stay away from his class, "agar marna bhi ho, toh kaam karte hue maro".

There is another thing he has not forgotten. A five-minute-long recital from Laila Majnu, a play which he did years ago and regaled his audience during the session.

The NSD shaped his sensibilities, but then Yadav's association with theatre started



even before he entered the campus of the drama school. He ran away from his home years ago to make a mark for himself.

"I worked with a theatre company in Bhopal for Rs 2.50 per day after I ran away from hometown, Jabalpur. I worked there for about six years and that was the best time of my life," he says. For him more than a struggling phase, it was a learning process. He says, "Jo cheez asaani se mile, usme mazaa bhi kahan rehta hai (anything gained with ease does not give much pleasure)."

There was a time when Yadav used to reject certain characters. Now, he has learnt to enjoy each

and every aspect of his work without thinking about the kind of role it is. Neither the box-office numbers nor the dividing line between art cinema and parallel cinema bother him much. His logic is, "If a film with an Rs 400 crore budget earns Rs 200 crore, and an Rs 50 lakh budget film earns Rs 2 crore, which one is more commercial?"

But as much as we love Raghubir Yadav the actor, his first love was not acting. "There was a papadwala, who passed our house singing when I was young, he was my first guru and music was my first love; but if I had told him that, he would've forgotten how to sell papad only," he laughs. Yadav is of the opinion that one can, and should, learn from every single thing happening around them.

It is not the first time that Raghubir has performed in Chandigarh. He came by a while ago for another play. "The people that I have met here are so khoobsurat. No wonder the city is called City Beautiful. Everyone here has made all my visits worthwhile," he says.

## Actor Rakul Preet Singh's brother among ten arrested by Hyderabad police in drug case

Actor Rakul Preet Singh's brother, Aman Preet Singh, was among ten people arrested in a major drug case busted in Hyderabad on Monday, as authorities seized 199 grams of cocaine worth Rs 35 lakh, Cyberabad police said.

According to officials, Aman Preet Singh is among five people



arrested as customers after a joint raid by the Telangana Anti-Narcotics Bureau (TGANB) and Narsingi Police, Cyberabad, and the subsequent arrest of five drug peddlers. The joint raid was conducted based on credible information at a flat in Vishal Nagar and seized 199 grams of cocaine worth Rs 35 lakh from their possession.

In addition to the five drug peddlers, officials identified 13 customers of the contraband, including Aman Preet Singh. "Till now, five persons have been brought and tested. The results turned positive for cocaine. They are being sent to the hospital. The accused have been identified as Aniketh Reddy, Prasad, Aman Preet Singh, Madhusudhan and Nikhil Daman. All of them have been taken into custody by the Police SOT team and will be produced before the court after medical tests," DCP Rajendra Nagar Srinivas said.

Detailing about the raid, officials said that TGANB and Narsingi Police conducted the operation at Flat No 202 of Janab Fort View Apartments in Vishal Nagar, Hydershakote, and apprehended five persons

including two foreign nationals, along with 199 grams of cocaine worth Rs 35 lakh from their possession.

The arrested accused have been identified as Onuoha Blessing alias Joana Gomes (31), a resident of Bangalore with a Nigerian passport, Azeez Noheem Adeshola (29), a native of Lagos, Nigeria, Allam Satya Venkata Gowtham (31), a native of Vishakapatnam, Andhra Pradesh, Sanaboina Varun Kumar (42), a native of Amalapuram, East Godavari District, Andhra Pradesh, and Mohd Mahaboob Shareef (36), a resident of Rangareddy district.

"They were trying to distribute to drug peddlers in the limits of Narsingi PS, Cyberabad. Two passports, two motorcycles, ten mobile phones, and other incriminating material were also seized," they said.

Two more Nigerian nationals, identified as Divine Ebuka Suzee alias Ebuka alias Emmanuel alias Level (35) and Ezeonyili Franklin Uchenna alias Kaleshi (22), are wanted in the case and are on the run, they added.

Officials said that the kingpin of the gang, Divine Ebuka Suzee, may have fled to Nigeria. He runs a significant drug syndicate in association with the arrested drug dealers. He sends his main associate, Onuoha Blessing, to Delhi to transport drugs to Hyderabad and other cities in India. She travels by both flights and trains to supply the dealers. In Hyderabad, these dealers supply the drugs to consumers.

"Onuoha Blessing, originally from Nigeria, concealed her identity and obtained a passport from the Republic of Guinea-Bissau under the fake name Joana Gomes. She came to India in 2018 for the drug trade," they pointed out.

"Onuoha used a fake passport to avoid legal issues and escape back to her country when needed. She employed international SIM cards for communication," they added.

# Hina Khan resumes work after cancer diagnosis

Popular television actor Hina Khan has returned to work after being diagnosed with stage three breast cancer for which she is currently undergoing treatment.

Khan, 36, who became a popular name in the television industry after playing the lead role in "Yeh Rishta Kya Kehlata Hai", had shared the news about her diagnosis last month via an Instagram post. The actor has kept her followers updated on her treatment and chemotherapy. In a new video on Monday, the actor is seen getting ready for her first work assignment post the diagnosis for which she wore a wig.

"My first work assignment after my diagnosis.. Walking the



talk is challenging, especially when facing life's biggest challenges. So, give yourself a break on bad days; it's okay... you deserve it. However, don't forget to live your life on the good days, no matter how few they are. These days still hold

importance. Accept the change, embrace the difference, and NORMALISE it," she wrote in the caption.

The actor said it was important to normalise working if one had the strength and energy.

"And to all you beautiful people who are battling this disease. Remember, it's your story; it's your life. You decide what to make of it. Don't give up and find what you love doing. Your work, your passion—if you don't know what it is, invent it. But remember to give yourself the healing you deserve. Coz doing what you love is also Healing." Khan has also starred in films including "Hacked" and "Shinda Shinda No Papa".

## Prabhas-starrer 'Kalki 2898 AD' grosses Rs 1,000 crore at global box office

Prabhas-starrer "Kalki 2898 AD" has grossed Rs 1,000 crore collection worldwide, the movie makers said on Saturday.

In a social media post, they said, "1000 CRORES and counting... This milestone is a celebration of your love. We poured our hearts into this film, and you embraced it with open hearts. Thank you to the audience across the world." The film which was released on June 27 across the globe



in various languages has been creating ripples in the industry.

Directed by Nag Ashwin, the multilingual big-budget sci-fi movie also features Kamal Haasan, Amitabh Bachchan, and Deepika Padukone. It was produced by Aswini Dutt

of Vyjayanthi Movies. The movie grossed Rs 555 crore worldwide at the box office in its opening weekend, the makers said.

## Kannada actor, presenter Aparna Vastarey passes away

Popular Kannada actor, television presenter and former radio jockey Aparna Vastarey has passed away, sources close to her said.

Vastarey, 57, was battling lung cancer for the last two years, her husband Nagaraj Vastarey said.

She died on Thursday night. Known for her work as a presenter on DD Chandana and for anchoring several government programmes and events, she had a strong fan base because of her perfect diction in Kannada.

In 1998, she created a record

by presenting shows for eight hours at a stretch as part of Diwali celebrations.

She made her cinematic debut in 1984 with Puttanna Kanagal's last film, 'Masanada Hoovu,' and acted in a number of Kannada TV shows.

Vastarey was also the voice behind the Bengaluru Metro announcements.

She appeared in the Kannada reality television show Bigg Boss. Her role as 'Varalakshmi' in the popular comedy show 'Majaa Talkies' was appreciated

by the people. Several film, television, literary, and political personalities, including Chief Minister Siddaramaiah, condoled Vastarey's death.

'Saddened to hear the news of the death of actress and famous presenter Aparna. A multifaceted talent who was a household name in the state, by presenting in the Kannada language very elegantly in the programmes of major Kannada channels and government functions, has left us very soon,' Siddaramaiah posted on X.

# The Conqueror: Carlos Alcaraz blows away Novak Djokovic to retain Wimbledon title



## London

Carlos Alcaraz defeated Novak Djokovic 6-2 6-2 7-6(4) in the Wimbledon final here today to collect his fourth Grand Slam title at the age of 21. It was a rematch of last year's championship match on the grass of the All England Club, which Alcaraz won in five sets.

This one — played in front of a Centre Court crowd that included Kate, the Princess of

Wales, in a rare public appearance since announcing she has cancer — was much easier for Alcaraz, at least until he stumbled while holding three match points as he served for the victory at 5-4 in the third set.

Still, Alcaraz regrouped and eventually picked up a second Major trophy in a row after last month's triumph on the clay at the French Open.

The Spaniard won his first

Slam title at the 2022 US Open as a teenager, and no man ever has collected more Slam hardware before turning 22 than he has. He improved to 4-0 in Major finals.

The 37-year-old Djokovic, wearing a gray sleeve on his surgically repaired right knee, was denied in his bid for an eighth Wimbledon title and record 25th Major overall. He tore his meniscus at Roland Garros on June 3 and had an operation in



Paris two days later. Less than six weeks later, Djokovic was hardly at his best today — and Alcaraz certainly had something to do with that.

“Especially in the first couple of sets, the level of tennis wasn't really up to par on my side,” said Djokovic, whose two children were in his guest box. “He had it all today. I tried to push him. ... It wasn't meant to be.”

Alcaraz was up 5-4, 40-love in the third set when the occasion got the better of him. He frittered away his first championship point with a double-fault, beginning a run of five mistakes by him that donated points — and that game — to Djokovic. That was the

only time all match that Djokovic broke Alcaraz. Suddenly, it was 5-all. Suddenly, Alcaraz appeared rattled. Suddenly, Djokovic could hope. But in the ensuing tiebreaker, Alcaraz earned his fourth match point and stayed cool as can be this time. Soon he was climbing through the stands to hug his coach, Juan Carlos Ferrero, and others.

“It's a dream for me, winning this trophy,” said Alcaraz, who became the ninth man to retain his Wimbledon title in the professional era. “This is the most beautiful tournament, most beautiful court and most beautiful trophy.”

# Spain beats England 2-1 to win record fourth European Championship title

## Berlin

Spain won a record fourth European Championship title on Sunday after Mikel Oyarzabal's 87th-minute goal clinched a 2-1 victory over England, whose painful decades-long wait for a major trophy goes on.

Oyarzabal slid in to poke home Marc Cucurella's cross, just when the game at Berlin's Olympiastadion seemed destined for extra time after the latest show of resilience by England at the tournament.

Substitute Cole Palmer equalized for England in the 73rd minute to cancel out Nico Williams' opener in the 47th from 17-year-old prodigy Lamine Yamal's pass. Spain also won the title in 1964, 2008 and 2012.

England men's team has now lost back-to-back Euro finals and is still without a major title since winning the 1966 World Cup.

It is another agonizing loss for one of the world's most underperforming national teams, this one

coming in front of Prince William and Spain's King Felipe at the venue built for the 1936 Olympics.

After the final whistle, Williams put his hands to his face before he was embraced by his teammates. Dani Carvajal slumped to the field and was piled on by jubilant teammates.

Yamal, Marc Cucurella and Dani Olmo were among the first to jump over the advertising hoardings to reach the Spanish fans in the stadium's east end.



## Messi loses fitness battle at Copa America, puts goal of playing 6th World Cup on hold



### Buenos Aires

Lionel Messi cried uncontrollably after he exited from a Copa America final before fulltime for the first time in his career.

Beyond the severe pain in his right ankle on Sunday night in Miami Gardens, the tears on the face of Argentina's captain showed a deeper anguish.

Despite winning the title in one of his "last battles," as Messi described this Copa, the 37-year-old superstar did not pass the fitness test that could have opened the way for him to play his sixth World Cup in 2026.

Argentina successfully defended its South American title with a hard-fought 1-0 extra-time win against Colombia. Messi left the pitch in Hard Rock Stadium in the 64th minute, breaking down without being touched.

The Copa was Messi's first major tournament since leaving European soccer to play in the less competitive Major League

Soccer in the US. Still, he has missed several games over the last year for his Inter Miami club and Argentina due to muscle issues.

Messi felt muscular pains in his right leg in the second group match against Chile, which sidelined him from the following game against Peru. He did not deliver an impressive performance in the quarterfinals against Ecuador and missed his chance in the penalty shootout.

In the semifinal victory over Canada, he scored his only goal in the tournament in the 2-0 win.

With a limp, Messi celebrated his second Copa title in modest fashion on the field. The injury still hurt the star on Monday.

"One more," he said on his social media channels.

Messi did not speak to the media after the injury, and Argentina did not give details about the damage.

Messi's farewell to the national team is still on hold, but there's

other players aged above 35 who are likely to have played their last major international tournament; winger Ángel Di María (36), defender Nicolás Otamendi (36), and substitute goalkeeper Franco Armani (37).

Argentina does have up-and-coming players and a squad averaging 28 years of age when the veterans are not counted. That is partly why it held strong against Colombia despite the absence of its star for 56 minutes of play.

"I don't know whether we marked an era, but this team never ceases to surprise. It recovers from difficulties," Argentina coach Lionel Scaloni said.

"When (Messi) leaves, the team multiplies with the one that comes in and we play better in a different way."

Young talents such as Alejandro Garnacho, Valentín Carboni, Thiago Almada, Claudio Echeverri and Valentín Barco are not to be compared with the eight-time Ballon d'Or winner, but they can help Argentina remain competitive when it defends the World Cup in 2026.

Key squad members such as goalkeeper Emiliano Martínez, defender Cristian Romero, midfielder Rodrigo de Paul and striker Lautaro Martínez are likely to remain.

Argentina will return to action in September in World Cup qualifying against Chile and Colombia. The Argentines lead South America. That international window will give more hints about whether Messi's legend will go on or stop at Sunday's title.

## Hardik Pandya to lead India in 3-match T20Is against Sri Lanka



### Mumbai

Star all-rounder Hardik Pandya is all set to lead India in the three-match T20 International series against Sri Lanka starting July 27.

However, one of the heroes of India's T20 World Cup victory last month will take a break during the three-match ODI series, which is scheduled in August, due to "personal reasons".

"Hardik Pandya was India's T20 vice-captain under Rohit Sharma. He is completely fit and available for the three-match T20I series and will lead the side," a senior BCCI source told PTI on conditions of anonymity.

Rohit retired from T20 Internationals at the end of the World Cup.

The T20Is against Sri Lanka will run from July 27 to 30 in Pallekele, followed by the ODIs from August 2 to 7 in Colombo. The squad for the series is expected to be announced in the next couple of days.

While there is still no clarity on who would be Pandya's deputy, the toss-up is between Shubman Gill, who recently captained India to a 4-1 series win over Zimbabwe, and Suryakumar Yadav, who led the side during the T20Is against South Africa last year.

About the ODIs, the official confirmed that Pandya has asked for leave and has already communicated this to regular

skipper Rohit Sharma, who is also taking a break from this series.

"The break from ODIs is for very personal reasons. Hardik doesn't have any fitness issue as is being floated in the media," the official said.

For the ODIs, KL Rahul, who led in the last ODI series in South Africa, and Gill are in contention for the leadership role.

Thrust on domestic availability

BCCI secretary Jay Shah has made it clear that even star cricketers must make themselves available for domestic engagements when they are free from national duty. But exceptions will be made for the likes of Rohit, Virat Kohli and pace spearhead Jasprit Bumrah.

The BCCI would, however, want all the other Test specialists to play at least one if not a couple of Duleep Trophy games in August as a precursor to the Tests against Bangladesh and New Zealand.

"This time there is no zonal selection committee for Duleep Trophy. Only national selection committee will pick Duleep teams.

"All Test team contenders will be picked. For Rohit, Virat and Bumrah, it will be their choice if they want to play or not," the source added.

## BCCI to release Rs 1 crore for treatment of cancer-stricken Anshuman Gaekwad

### Mumbai

In a noble gesture, the BCCI on Sunday decided to release Rs 1 crore for the treatment of former India coach Anshuman Gaikwad, who is battling blood cancer at a medical facility in London.

BCCI's decision has come following emotional appeals for support from former captain Kapil Dev and Sandip Patil, who had enjoyed the cricket board to help Gaikwad.

the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) to release Rs 1 crore with immediate effect to provide financial assistance to India's veteran cricketer Mr Anshuman Gaekwad, who is battling cancer," BCCI apex council said in a statement.

Gaekwad, son of former India captain D K Gaekwad, is undergoing treatment for blood cancer at the King's College Hospital in London. Shah has also spoken to Mr Gaekwad's family

to take stock of the situation and extend support. The board stands by Gaekwad's family in this hour of crisis and will do whatever is essential for Mr Gaekwad's quick recovery," the statement continued. "The BCCI will continue to monitor Mr Gaekwad's progress and is confident that he will come out of this phase strongly," it added.

The 71-year-old Gaekwad played 40 Tests and 15 ODIs for India between 1975 and 1987.

# Narrow Escape For Devendra Fadnavis, Ajit Pawar After Helicopter Loses Way Amid Bad Weather

## Gadchiroli

Maharashtra Deputy Chief Ministers Devendra Fadnavis and Ajit Pawar and Industry Minister Uday Samant had a narrow escape on Wednesday after the helicopter in which they were travelling from Nagpur to Gadchiroli lost its way due to poor visibility amid bad weather.

However, the pilot skilfully managed to get back on course and landed the helicopter safely.

The trio had gone to Gadchiroli for the foundation stone laying ceremony of the ₹ 10,000 crore Surjagad Ispat integrated steel project in Aheri tehsil of the district.

It was Ajit Pawar who narrated the incident at the function, crediting the pilot's skill in their safe landing.

"The helicopter properly took off from Nagpur for Gadchiroli. I was quite comfortable after our



take-off, watching the clouds. I also told Fadnavis to see them. However, during the journey, the helicopter lost its route due to monsoon clouds. Despite this, Fadnavis was quite calm and was chatting with me. I was getting restless and worried. However, Fadnavis told me not to worry saying that he had met with six accidents earlier and escaped

safely. He told me that I will also be safe today," he said.

The NCP chief said Fadnavis repeatedly told him not to worry.

"I was getting worried about a safe landing. But Fadnavis was quite cool. Uday Samant told me to watch out for the landing site. After looking at it from the window, I heaved a sigh of relief," he added.

# Hathras Tragedy: Bhole Baba Has Reached His Ashram, Will Stay Here, Says Lawyer



## Lucknow

Self-styled godman Surajpal alias Narayan Sakar Hari alias Bhole Baba, who held a satsang in Hathras recently where 121 devotees were killed after a stampede, has reached his ashram at Bahadur Nagar village in Kasganj, his lawyer said on Wednesday.

"He has reached his ashram and will stay here. He came here from his another ashram. He was never at anyone's place or any hotel or another country," Bhole Baba's lawyer A P Singh told reporters in Kasganj.

Mr Singh said that the village is Baba's 'janmasthan' (birthplace) and he last came here for a day in 2023.

The stampede at the 'satsang' of Bhole Baba claimed 121 lives in Sikandararu area of Hathras on July 2.

The Uttar Pradesh government has constituted an SIT and a judicial commission to probe into the incident.

The godman was not mentioned as accused in the FIR lodged at Sikandararu police station.

The SIT in its report submitted to the state government on July 9 did not rule out a "big conspiracy" behind the stampede. The report

also flagged lapses on the part of the local administration that led to the stampede.

The report held the organisers responsible for the incident, claiming they did not make arrangements to manage the crowd and also fixed the responsibility of administration, according to official sources.

The lawyer of Bhole Baba had on July 6 claimed "some poisonous substance" sprayed by "some unidentified men" triggered the stampede.

A separate judicial commission headed by retired Allahabad High Court judge Brijesh Kumar Shrivastava, and retired IPS officer Hemant Rao as its member, is also probing the Hathras stampede case.

Earlier, government agencies, including police, had blamed the organisers for the mismanagement at the event, noting that the size of the crowd exceeded to over 2.50 lakh from the permitted 80,000.

So far, nine people, including key accused Devprakash Madhukar, have been arrested in connection with the stampede.

Madhukar was the main organiser and fundraiser of the July 2 'satsang' of Bhole Baba at Phulrai village in Hathras.

# "I Divorce You... Your Ex-Wife": Dubai Princess Dumps Husband In Insta Post

## Dubai

Shaikha Mahra Bint Mohammed Bin Rashid Al Maktoum, the daughter of Dubai's ruler, has publicly declared "divorce" from her husband, Sheikh Mana Bin Mohammed Bin Rashid bin Mana Al Maktoum, on Instagram.

The announcement comes just over two months after the couple welcomed their first child.

"Dear Husband," the Dubai princess began. "As you are occupied with other companions, I hereby declare our divorce. I divorce you, I divorce you, and I divorce you. Take care. Your ex-wife."

The news has sparked a frenzy on social media, with many noticing that the couple unfollowed each other on Instagram and deleted all photos of each other from their profiles. Some speculated the pair had blocked each other, while others wondered if Ms Sheikh Mahra's account had been hacked.

Bad news. God bless you," a user commented under the post.

Another wrote, "I am proud. Your Decision."

A user applauded the princess for her "courage and bravery", saying, "It is just a phase of life and

it will continue with good and bitterness and life doesn't stop for anybody."

Meanwhile, someone asked, "But the divorce will occur from Husband's side, right? And Wife has to choose Khul'?"

The couple got married in May last year, and they welcomed their daughter 12 months later. Ms Sheikh Mahra had gushed about her "most memorable experience" giving birth, thanking her doctor and hospital staff for their care. In photos, her husband, Sheikh Mana, was seen cradling their little one in his arms.

Just weeks ago, the princess had shared a cryptic post on Instagram, cuddling with her baby, writing, "Just the two of us." Was that a possible hint at the trouble brewing beneath the surface?

Shaikha Mahra is the daughter of the Vice President and Prime Minister of the United Arab Emirates and the Ruler of Dubai. She is an advocate for women's empowerment and local designers in the UAE. She holds a degree in International Relations from a university in the UK and also has a college degree from the Mohammed bin Rashid Government Administration.

