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TRUMP EXTENDS CEASEFIRE SECOND ROUND OF TALKS WITH IRAN HANG IN LIMBO

Washington

In a significant development amid tensions with Iran, Trump announced an extension of the ongoing ceasefire, citing diplomatic considerations and requests from Pakistan. He stated that the halt on attacks against Iran will continue until the latter comes up with a deal and negotiations are concluded.

However, he added that the blockade of Iranian ports will remain in place and instructed the US military to stay on high alert.

"Based on the fact that the Government of Iran is seriously fractured, not unexpectedly so and, upon the request of Field Marshal Asim Munir, and Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif, of Pakistan, we have been asked to hold our Attack on the Country of Iran until such time as their leaders and representatives can come up with a unified proposal. I have therefore directed our Military to continue the Blockade and, in all other respects, remain ready and able, and will therefore extend the Ceasefire until such time as their proposal

is submitted, and discussions are concluded, one way or the other," Trump posted on Truth Social.

Trump on Strait of Hormuz

The US President said that Iran wants the Strait of Hormuz to remain open, as it generates substantial revenue, and that its claims to the



losing if it is closed!). They only say they want it closed because I have it totally BLOCKADED (CLOSED!), so they merely want to "save face." People approached me four days ago, saying, "Sir, Iran wants to open up the Strait, immediately." But if we do that, there can never be a Deal with Iran, unless we blow up the rest of their Country, their leaders included!" he said in another post.

Second round of talks hang fire

The fragile two-week ceasefire between the US and Iran expired on Wednesday. Earlier, Trump had indicated he was unwilling to prolong the truce, stressing that both sides needed to act swiftly to secure an agreement.

However, in a last-minute shift, he chose to extend the ceasefire, offering additional time for diplomacy. Despite this extension, uncertainty continues to surround the second round of negotiations, as talks between the two sides remain stalled and without a confirmed timeline.

contrary are merely an attempt to 'save face' amid the US blockade. He said Tehran would never make a deal with the US if the critical waterway remained open.

"Iran doesn't want the Strait of Hormuz closed, they want it open so they can make \$500 Million Dollars a day (which is, therefore, what they are

Iran issues stark warning to US and Israel

Tehran

Iran has issued a strong warning, saying it will respond with full military force if the United States or Israel launches any attack against it. The message was delivered through a statement carried by Iran's state media early on Wednesday.

The statement came from Ebrahim Zolfaghari, spokesperson for the Khatam al-Anbiya Central Headquarters. It was read on national television, where he said Iran's armed forces are prepared to act decisively. He added that

both the US and Israel would face severe consequences, describing them in harsh terms and warning that any aggression would be met with an even stronger response.



As tensions remain high, the future of the ceasefire and diplomatic talks continues to hang in the balance.

Vance's Islamabad travel on hold

Meanwhile, plans for US Vice President JD Vance to travel to Islamabad for another round of discussions have been paused. Reports suggest that Iran has, for now, stepped back from continuing talks.

Pakistan's information minister also noted that Iran has not officially confirmed whether it will take part in further negotiations, adding to the uncertainty surrounding the situation.

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2006 Malegaon blast case: Bombay HC discharges 4 accused, quashes charges against them

Mumbai

The Bombay High Court on Wednesday discharged four men accused in the 2006 Malegaon blast case and quashed a special court order framing charges against them.

A bench of Chief Justice Shree Chandrasekhar and Justice Shyam Chandak allowed the appeals filed by the four accused — Rajendra Chaudhary, Dhan Singh, Manohar Ram Singh Narwaria and Lokesh Sharma — against the special court order.

A copy of the detailed order would be made available later.

The four were charged under various sections of the Indian Penal Code for murder and criminal conspiracy, and also under the stringent Unlawful (Activities) Prevention Act (UAPA).

On September 8, 2006, four bombs exploded in Nashik district's Malegaon town, three inside the premises of Hamidia Masjid and Bada Kabrastan just after Friday prayers, and the fourth in Mushawarat

Chowk, claiming 31 lives and injuring 312 persons.

The state Anti-Terrorism Squad (ATS), which initially probed the case, had arrested nine Muslim men in connection with the case.

The National Investigation Agency (NIA), which later took over the case, claimed the blasts were the handiwork of right-wing extremists and arrested these four accused.

The nine Muslim men had been discharged from the case by a special court.

In September last year, a special court framed charges against the four accused. They then moved HC against the court order.

In January this year, the HC, while admitting the pleas, noted that a prima facie case for interference was made out and stayed further proceedings before the trial court pending the outcome of the matter.

The four accused, in their plea in HC, claimed that the NIA had failed to produce any evidence against them.

Maharashtra clears Rs 500 crore biogas policy to tackle waste, fuel demand

Mumbai

The Maharashtra Cabinet on Wednesday approved the Compressed Biogas (CBG) Policy, 2026, with an outlay of Rs 500 crore for 2026-27, aiming to convert urban waste and farm residue into clean fuel and organic fertiliser.

The policy seeks to reduce landfill burden, curb pollution and cut dependence on fossil fuels.

It focuses on linking segregated biodegradable waste from cities to biogas plants, with urban local bodies leading implementation. Agricultural residue and cattle waste will also be used as feedstock, with cluster-based projects allowed where supply is limited.

Biogas plants of at least 200 tonnes per day will be set up by public and private players under a public-private partnership

model, backed by assured payments.

The government will provide land on lease, fast-track approvals through a single-window system and roll out a digital platform to connect waste suppliers and developers.

Officials said the policy will reduce dumping, check air and water pollution, and create jobs while offering farmers an additional source of income.

El Niño Threat: Maharashtra CM Fadnavis orders strict water planning

Mumbai

Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis on Wednesday directed officials to enforce stringent water planning and conservation measures to ensure adequate drinking water supply till the end of August 2026, warning of potential rainfall disruptions due to the El Niño phenomenon.

The directive comes even as the state currently holds 653.63 Thousand Million Cubic (TMC) feet of water across its dams—an increase of 101.77 TMC compared to 551.86 TMC during the same time last year.

At a state cabinet review, Additional Chief Secretary (Water Resources) Deepak Kapoor presented data on reservoir levels and flagged risks associated with El Niño.

Past trends show significant declines in storage during such years, with levels dropping by 12% in 2014 and around 14% in 2015, triggering widespread shortages.

On October 15, 2014, storage stood at 872 TMC, falling sharply to 625 TMC in 2015.

In contrast, reserves were significantly higher at 1330.97 TMC on the same date in 2025. As of April 21, 2026, storage is at 653.63 TMC—still higher than last year, but vulnerable if rainfall weakens.

Fadnavis urged citizens to begin conserving water immediately to cushion the impact of a possible deficient monsoon. He also called for accelerated water conservation projects, improved management systems, and revival of traditional water sources.

This marks the second high-level review meeting chaired by the Chief Minister this week. Earlier on Monday, he

had instructed departments to step up disaster preparedness and inter-agency coordination in anticipation of El Niño-related challenges. Officials from the India Meteorological Department were also present at the meeting.



Kharge should withdraw remark against PM Modi, apologise in public- CM

Mumbai

Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis on Wednesday demanded Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge's public apology over his controversial remarks against Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

Addressing reporters in Mumbai, Fadnavis said, "Congress leader Mallikarjun Kharge should withdraw his statement against the PM and apologise in public."

Alleging that Congress and its leaders are increasingly adopting such tactics of making derogatory remarks against the PM, Fadnavis said, "Somewhere it reflects their disappointment and frustration. As they are repeatedly facing defeats in elections. In the past, a Congress leader had used the term 'Maut Ka Saudagar'... Now, they surpassed all limits."

The CM's response came a day after Kharge, who is also the leader of the Opposition in

Rajya Sabha, allegedly used the term "terrorist" to describe PM's actions. Condemning his remark, Fadnavis said, "With the series of defeats, Kharge may be going through frustration. It may have impacted him mentally... Congress and its leaders are losing public trust."

Hailing the PM, Fadnavis said, "He is a desh bhakt and creator of modern India." He added that the people will teach the Congress a lesson in the elections.

Earlier, Kharge had clarified that his remark saying, "I have not attacked the PM. I said that tax terrorism is happening — ED is conducting raids, Income Tax Dept is conducting raids, and CBI is conducting raids. This terrorism is being facilitated by the PM. I did not call him a terrorist... What I said was, 'he is trying to silence people through raids and attempting to defeat them in elections'. This is what I said in Chennai."

Maharashtra MLC elections: Shiv Sena (UBT) and Congress in race for MVA's only winnable seat

Mumbai

With elections to the Maharashtra Legislative Council due next month, the Opposition Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA)—likely to secure only one seat based on its strength in the Assembly—is witnessing a race between the Shiv Sena (UBT) and the Congress over the nomination.

Within the alliance, the Sena (UBT), which has around 20 MLAs, the highest among the three MVA partners, has staked a claim to the seat. Congress leaders, however, are also in the race, with several aspirants indicating interest.

Senior Shiv Sena (UBT) leader Sanjay Raut said discussions among the three parties would determine the candidate. "There will be discussions among the three MVA parties on this one seat. The Congress and the NCP have already indicated their stand. If Uddhav Thackeray decides to go to the Council, he will have their support," Raut said. "The final decision on whom to send will be taken by the Shiv Sena chief and will be announced soon," he added.



The negotiations come in the backdrop of a recent understanding within the alliance. During a Rajya Sabha election, both the Congress and Shiv Sena (UBT) had stepped aside to back Sharad Pawar. With that precedent, both parties are now pressing their claims for the Council seat.

At the centre of the discussions is whether Thackeray himself will contest. His current term in the

Council is ending, and leaders within the Sena (UBT) have argued that he should return to the legislature.

"The Shiv Sena chief should be in the legislature. He is a former chief minister and a principal leader of the MVA. His presence will ensure the alliance remains united," Raut said.

Party sources said that if Thackeray decides against contesting, possibly citing health reasons, the Shiv Sena (UBT) will field another candidate.

The name of a possible alternative has not been finalised, though several leaders, including former MLC Amabadas Danve, are said to be seeking the nomination.

On the Congress side, state president Harshvardhan Sapkal is among those interested.

Elections on May 12

Elections to nine seats of the Maharashtra Legislative Council will be held on May 12, following the Election Commission's announcement last week. The notification for the polls is scheduled to be issued on April 23, with the last date for filing nominations on April 30. Scrutiny will take place on May 2, and candidates can withdraw their nominations till May 4.

The election, conducted by MLAs through proportional representation, comes as the terms of nine members end on May 13. Given the current strength in the Assembly, the ruling alliance is expected to win most of the seats, leaving the Opposition MVA with realistic chances of securing only one.

Maharashtra BJP to launch drive against drug menace from May 1

Mumbai

The ruling BJP will launch a year-long campaign against drug menace from May 1. The party has also sought support from its ideological mentor RSS to guide and lend support to carry out this drive.

The decision comes in wake of recent incident where two MBA students died due to suspected drug overdose during a concert in Goregaon.

"It was decided that a campaign titled 'Mumbai Against Drugs' will be launched on May 1. This campaign will run for 365 days," said Mumbai BJP chief Ameet Satam.

"The recent deaths caused by drug overdose are a serious warning that this issue cannot be resolved through police action alone. In this context, under the guidance of Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis, a comprehensive anti-drug mass movement is being launched by bringing together all sections of society. Through this initiative, we can build an effective fight against drug abuse," Satam said.

The drive will be carried out



across Maharashtra. The party will involve guardian ministers and local party leaders in district and taluka levels.

"The anti drug drive is not pertaining to any party agenda. This is a challenge for entire society. And it should be perceived as non political movement," a BJP source said.

Apart from ministers, BJP top leaders, non-government organisations, along with police and citizen rights forum, will be roped in for the drive.

'Zero tolerance' to U-turn: MMRDA quietly retains Metro Line 4 consultant it threatened to sack after fatal Mulund slab collapse

Mumbai

In a reversal of its earlier stance following the fatal Mulund metro slab collapse, the Mumbai Metropolitan Region Development Authority (MMRDA) has decided to continue with the services of DB Hill-LBG consortium as the general consultant for Metro Line 4.

The consortium, comprising Deutsche Bahn Engineering & Consulting, Hill International, and Louis Berger Group, has been responsible for monitoring construction and ensuring safety since being awarded the contract in 2018. It also oversees additional stretches, including the extended Line 4A and serves as consultant on other metro corridors.

This comes weeks after the authority signalled strict action, including a proposed termination, in the aftermath of the February

14 incident in Mulund, when a parapet wall slab fell onto LBS Road, killing one person and injuring three others.

The victims — Ramdhani Yadav, 50, who died in the incident, and his relatives Rajkumar Indrajeet Yadav, 45, and Mahendra Pratap Yadav, 52, who were critically injured — were travelling in a rickshaw when the slab collapsed. A fourth person, Deepa Rula, 40, who was in a car nearby, was discharged shortly after the incident.

Following the accident, MMRDA had imposed a Rs 1 crore fine on the general consultant and, in an Authority meeting chaired by Deputy Chief Minister Eknath Shinde, declared its intention to terminate the consortium. The move was then described as a "sign of zero tolerance policy towards safety violations and work site accidents."

Sanjay Raut accuses PM Modi of violating poll code, Shinde Sena asks him to 'assess own level'

Mumbai

A day after Prime Minister Narendra Modi addressed the nation over the setback to the women's reservation quota, a sharp war of words broke out on Sunday between the Uddhav-led Sena (UBT) and the Shinde-led Sena, with both sides accusing each other of misleading the public.

At a press conference, Sanjay Raut said the rejection of the Bill to enable women's quota in the Lok Sabha was a "major setback" for the government and accused the Prime Minister of deflecting responsibility by blaming the Opposition. He claimed Modi referred to the Congress "86 times" in his address despite advocating a Congress-free



India.

"We opposed the Bill together because its intent is questionable. The structure shows political motives," Raut said, alleging that expanding Lok Sabha seats beyond 543 was aimed

at protecting ruling party leaders. He added that the 2023 women's reservation law remains unimplemented and demanded that Modi apologise.

Raut also accused the Prime Minister of raising

the issue during an election period, calling it a violation of the Model Code of Conduct, and described the address as an attempt to manage "a crisis within the BJP".

The remarks drew a sharp response from the Shinde-led Sena. State minister Sanjay Shirsat said Modi had been seen as a "strong and blemish-free leader for over 15 years" and that Raut should "assess his own level" before criticising the prime minister.

"People are tired of such statements. They no longer take them seriously," Shirsat said, adding that those dependent on alliances were attacking the PM.

He backed Modi's criticism of the Congress

and said the Bill could have strengthened democracy by expanding representation and giving women a larger role.

He also accused the Uddhav-led Sena (UBT) of drifting towards the Congress and away from Bal Thackeray's legacy.

Joining the attack, BJP leader Navnath Ban rejected Raut's remarks describing Modi as suffering from a "national disease". "Modi is not a disease but a pillar of the nation," he said, citing his repeated electoral victories.

Bane also dismissed Raut's claim that Modi and Devendra Fadnavis had failed, and accused the Opposition of opposing the women's quota and fuelling divisions.

Anil Parab alleges cartelisation in MMRDA tenders, flags key Mumbai projects

Mumbai

Shiv Sena (UBT) MLC Anil Parab Sunday alleged large-scale bid rigging and cartelisation in tenders floated by the Mumbai Metropolitan Region Development Authority, claiming the process is causing losses to the public exchequer.

In a letter to Metropolitan Commissioner Sanjay Mukherjee, the Sena (UBT) MLC flagged alleged irregularities in tenders related to fibre optic cabling on the Atal Setu, the BKC-Chunabhatti connector, and a foot over bridge (FoB) at Vikhroli.

Parab alleged a pattern in which tenders are floated and bids invited, after which some bidders are pressured to withdraw, reducing competition before contracts are awarded to a preferred firm.

Referring to the Rs 90-crore Vikhroli FoB project, Parab said eight bidders had initially participated, but six later withdrew. The tender, he said, has not been opened even 2 months after the closing, raising concerns about transparency.

He demanded that the bids be opened in the presence of all bidders or the tender be cancelled and reissued, and called for action against



firms that withdrew.

Parab also pointed to repeated deadline extensions in the Atal Setu fibre optic tender, stating it has been extended "eight to ten times" since February without clear justification, allegedly to favour a particular bidder.

He has sought details of all tenders since January 2026 that have been extended more than three times, including participating bidders and final awards.

Parab warned that if corrective steps are not taken, he would approach the Lokayukta and the Central Vigilance Commission and raise the issue in the Assembly.

The MMRDA had not responded to the allegations.

From using AI to deploying more pumps—how BMC is preparing for monsoon this year

Mumbai

With less than 60 days left for the arrival of monsoon, the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) has ramped up its annual preparatory measures against flooding in Mumbai. However, besides installing a slew of dewatering pumps and carrying out interventions in flood-prone zones, the civic body has derived its own Artificial Intelligence (AI) model to keep a track of the ongoing desilting works and flag fraudulent practices.

The move comes at a time when the civic body has been under the scanner of the Enforcement Directorate (ED) for a Rs 1,100 crore desilting scam. Desilting is a process of removal of silt, muck and sediments that get deposited at the beds of water bodies, including rivers and drains. These sediments slow down the pace of water flow, which in turn results in overflowing of water, thus leading to waterlogging in the city on the occasion of heavy rainfall during monsoon.

To carry out desilting, the civic authorities appoint private contractors, who charge the BMC on the basis of the quantum of silt removed. Therefore, to ensure there are no fraudulent measures implemented by the contractors to inflate the silt quantum the civic authorities are relying heavily on the AI model.

From last year, the civic administration has mandated that the contractors should record the entire

process of desilting — from removing the silt to loading them on trucks and transporting them to unloading them for disposal, in video footage — which are uploaded in the BMC's portal and are scanned through AI.

Speaking to The Indian Express, Abhijit Bangar — additional municipal commissioner (Projects) said that the AI model scans through the footage and flags discrepancies. For example, if there is a video that shows a truck being loaded in less than 2 minutes, that footage is flagged, because it usually takes minimum 7-8 minutes to load a truck post desilting. "As a fraudulent measure, some contractors mix silt with floating waste items to inflate the quantum of silt removed daily. Hence, waste is easier to load on a truck and the process is completed quickly. The AI model has been taught about this pattern therefore it flags critical time gaps easily in the system," Bangar said. "Often contractors upload an old video by copying it from a different device. The change in resolution or video quality gets caught in the system and is flagged immediately. Also, since silt is sediment in nature it doesn't cause displacement of dust while loading and unloading, however when waste is mixed with it there is dust displacement. These effects show up in the video and the AI tool flags them immediately, following which the contractors are summoned," Bangar added.

Rajnath on playing peacemaker in Iran war: 'Time may come when India...'

New Delhi

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh on Wednesday said India has made efforts to contribute to peace amid the West Asia crisis, but emphasised that "everything has its time".

"India has tried... But everything has its time. It is possible that tomorrow, the time may come when India plays its role in this and achieves success as well. We cannot rule out this possibility. The Prime Minister has appealed to both sides to end the war. Our Prime Minister has a very balanced approach to diplomatic matters," he said while addressing the Indian diaspora in Berlin.

Singh said that when PM Modi met Russian President Vladimir Putin and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, he had raised the issue.

"Even when he (PM Modi) met Trump, he also discussed and said that a solution should



be found... The way India is moving, you must have seen that in the Strait of Hormuz, no ship from any country was able to pass through. If anyone managed to pass through their 7-8 ships, then it was India... It is not that the US considers India as its enemy, or Iran considers India as its enemy. No, this is a very balanced approach of India," he said.

Singh, who is on a three-day visit to Germany, was escorted by fighter jets during his flight from Munich to Berlin and

accorded military honours on his arrival in Berlin.

During the visit, Singh will hold bilateral talks with his German counterpart, Boris Pistorius and other senior leaders to further strengthen the strategic defence partnership between the two countries. A Defence Industrial Cooperation Roadmap and Implementing Arrangement for Cooperation in UN Peacekeeping Operations Training are likely to be signed in the presence of both defence ministers.

LeT member, 6 others sentenced in 2023 Bengaluru prison radicalisation case

Bengaluru

A special court of the National Investigation Agency (NIA) has sentenced seven accused, including mastermind and Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) member T Naseer, in the 2023 Bengaluru prison radicalisation case linked to the LeT. Apart from Naseer, the court has sentenced accused Syed Suhail Khan, Mohammed Umar, Zahid Tabrez, Syed Mudassir Pasha, Mohammed Faisal Rabbani and Salman Khan. All seven have been awarded seven years of rigorous imprisonment along with a fine of Rs 48,000 under various sections of the IPC, the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, Arms Act and Explosives Substances Act. The accused had earlier pleaded guilty of the charges filed by the NIA in the case relating to a LeT-linked terror conspiracy hatched inside the Parapanna Agrahara Central Prisons, Bengaluru, by Naseer. The conspiracy involved identifying, recruiting, training, converting and radicalising of gullible youth lodged in the prison to execute terror activities in India. The case was initially registered by the Bengaluru Central Crime Branch (CCB) in July 2023 following the seizure of arms, ammunition and digital devices from habitual offenders. The offenders had planned to carry out terror strikes in Bengaluru City in furtherance of the violent anti-India agenda of the proscribed LeT terror outfit.

West Bengal elections: 294 candidates in phase 1 face criminal charges, 98 accused of crimes against women

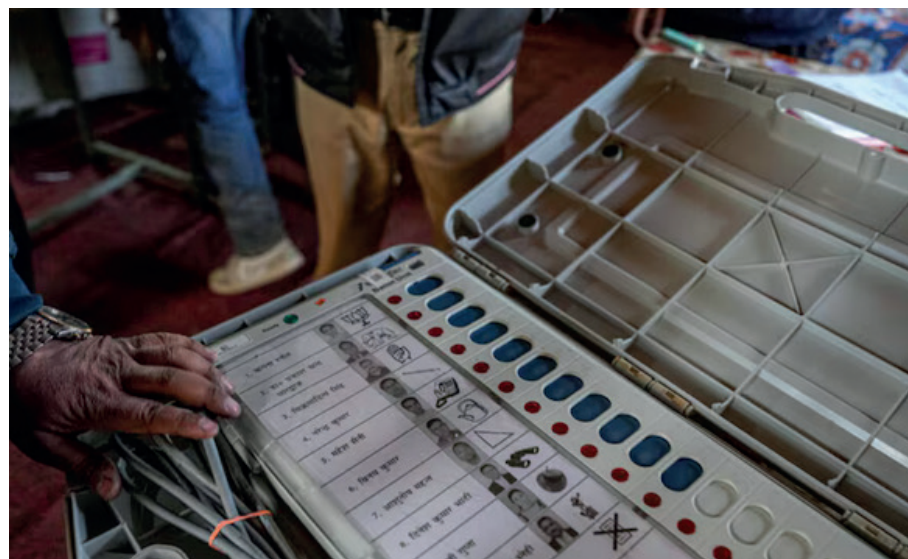
Kolkata

Nearly 20% of the candidates contesting the first phase of the West Bengal Assembly elections, i.e. 294 out of 1,475, have disclosed serious criminal charges in their affidavits. According to a report by the Association for Democratic Reforms (ADR), 345 candidates which translates to about 23% of those in the fray have declared that they face criminal cases.

The ADR report states that 98 of those in the fray are accused of crimes against women, even as women make up only 11% of the total candidates. It also notes that 19 candidates have declared murder cases against them, while 105 face charges of attempt to murder.

Among the key parties, 106 of the 152 candidates analysed from the BJP (70%) have declared criminal cases in their affidavits. From the ruling Trinamool Congress (TMC), 43% of its candidates (63 of 148) have disclosed criminal cases, while the figure stands at 26% for those fielded by the Congress i.e. 39 out of 151 candidates.

According to the ADR report, 96



out of 152 candidates (63%) from BJP, 48 out of 148 candidates (32%) from TMC, 36 of 98 candidates (37%) from CPI(M) and 33 of 151 candidates (22%) from Congress have declared serious criminal cases against themselves in their affidavits.

As many as 66 of the 152 constituencies (i.e. 43%) have been classified as 'red alert' constituencies, the report further reveals. 'Red alert' constituencies are seats where three

or more candidates have declared criminal cases against themselves.

The organisation classifies serious criminal cases as those involving a maximum punishment of five years or more, non-bailable offences, or those leading to losses to the public exchequer. This category of criminal cases covers crimes such as assault, murder, kidnapping, rape, and offences against women, as well as those listed under the Representation

of the People Act. It also includes cases registered under the Prevention of Corruption Act.

Creopati Candidates

Out of the 1,475 candidates contesting polls in the first phase, 309 i.e. 21% are creopatis. Among the major political parties, 106 (72%) out of 148 candidates analysed from TMC, 71 (47%) out of 152 candidates analysed from BJP, 50 (33%) out of 151 candidates analysed from Congress have declared assets valued more than Rs 1 crore.

West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee has declared assets worth Rs 15.37 lakh in her affidavit, marking a slight dip from the Rs 16.72 lakh she reported five years ago. According to the affidavit, the TMC supremo also reported no liabilities and criminal cases, same as in 2021.

Voting in West Bengal will take place in two phases — on April 23 and April 29. A total of 152 constituencies will go to polls in the first phase, while the remaining 142 seats will vote in the second phase. The counting of votes is scheduled for May 4.

What's at stake in Tamil Nadu polls: Welfare politics, BJP expansion, and TVK factor in focus

Chennai

The stage is set for a high-stakes electoral battle in Tamil Nadu, with polling scheduled in a single phase on April 23 and counting on May 4. All the 234 seats in the Tamil Nadu Legislative Assembly are up for grabs, with 118 required to attain a majority. The outcome will determine the political direction of one of India's most industrialised and economically significant states.

A multi-cornered contest takes shape

Traditionally a bipolar contest between the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) and the All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (AIADMK), the 2026 election has evolved into a more complex, multi-cornered battle.

DMK-led Secular Progressive Alliance (SPA): Led by chief minister MK Stalin, the ruling alliance includes the Congress, Desiya Murpokku Dravida Kazhagam (DMDK), Viduthalai Chiruthaigal Katchi (VCK), Left parties and others. The DMK, which currently holds 133 seats, is contesting the bulk of constituencies and is campaigning on its "Dravidian model" centred on welfare, social justice and Tamil identity.

AIADMK-led NDA: Headed by Edappadi K Palaniswami, this alliance includes the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), Pattali Makkal Katch (PMK) and other partners. With around 60 seats currently, the AIADMK is positioning itself as the principal challenger, focusing on governance lapses and anti-incumbency.

Tamilaga Vettri Kazhagam (TVK): The new entrant, led by actor-turned-politician Vijay, is contesting all seats independently. The party is targeting youth and urban voters, projecting itself as a "people's alternative" and campaigning on jobs, administrative reforms and tech-driven development.

Others: The Naam Tamilar Katchi, led by Seeman, continues to contest independently and could influence margins in closely fought constituencies.

Key issues driving the election

1. Welfare vs governance debate

The ruling DMK has put its welfare track record at the forefront, citing initiatives such as free bus travel for women, the school breakfast scheme, financial aid for women, distribution of laptops, and loan waivers, while promising to expand these benefits



with increased monetary support.

The opposition, however, has criticised what it calls a "freebie culture," pointing to fiscal strain, rising costs and alleged gaps in delivery. Rival parties have countered with their own promises -- from direct cash transfers to subsidised household goods.

2. Economy, jobs and development

Employment generation, rising cost of living, and rural distress remain central concerns. While the DMK has highlighted investments and industrial growth, critics question job creation and fiscal sustainability.

TVK has attempted to tap into youth aspirations by pitching ideas such as an "AI City" and innovation-led development, while opposition parties have focused on economic management and inflation.

3. Law and order, corruption and social equations

Opposition parties have targeted the government over alleged corruption, crime, and concerns around women's safety.

Caste dynamics -- including the influence of Kongu, Vanniyar, Dalit and Thevar communities -- continue to play a decisive role, particularly in western and northern Tamil Nadu.

4. Dravidian identity and federal politics

A defining theme of the election is the assertion of Tamil identity and state rights. The DMK has framed the contest as a defence of the "Dravidian model" against perceived

central interference, raising issues such as language policy, NEET and delimitation.

The debate over delimitation has emerged as a flashpoint, with concerns about representation of southern states shaping political messaging.

Leadership stakes and political narratives

For MK Stalin, the election is a bid for a rare second consecutive term, anchored in continuity and welfare delivery.

Edappadi K Palaniswami is seeking to revive the AIADMK and reclaim political ground after the post-Jayalalithaa phase.

Meanwhile, Vijay's entry adds a new dimension, testing whether cinematic popularity can translate into electoral success.

Current dynamics and outlook

Pre-poll surveys present a mixed picture. Some project a comfortable win for the DMK-led alliance, citing welfare outreach and organisational strength. Others suggest a tighter contest, pointing to anti-incumbency and the impact of vote-splitting by TVK.

According to a CNN-News18 Vote Tracker poll by VoteVibe, the AIADMK led by Edappadi K Palaniswami holds a slight edge with 41 per cent of the vote, ahead of the DMK's 39 per cent. The survey projected the AIADMK winning 130-140 seats, while the DMK was estimated at 90-100 seats.

However, a separate Lok Poll survey painted a different picture, projecting a decisive win for the DMK-led alliance with 181-189 seats and a 40.1 per cent vote share. It estimated the AIADMK at 38-42 seats and Vijay's TVK at 8-10 seats.

Vijay's entry into politics has added a new dynamic, with surveys indicating his popularity among younger and first-time voters.

Regionally, the DMK is seen as stronger in northern and urban areas, while the AIADMK retains influence in the western and southern belts. The performance of smaller parties and independents could prove decisive in close contests.

Tamil Nadu polls 2026: What's at stake

- The continuity or shift in Tamil Nadu's welfare-driven, Dravidian political model

- The scope for the BJP to expand its footprint in southern India

- The long-term impact of TVK as a third force

- The state's role in shaping national debates on federalism and representation

With voter turnout, last-minute swings, and vote distribution among smaller players expected to play a crucial role, the 2026 Tamil Nadu election is among the most closely watched political contests in the country.

'Nagrikdevo Bhava' must be at heart of every decision: PM writes to over 1 crore civil servants

New Delhi

Prime Minister Narendra Modi has written letters to over a crore civil servants telling them that the principle of 'Nagrikdevo Bhava' (citizen is god) must be at the heart of every decision and the government must serve the people to the best of its abilities.

The Prime Minister also conveyed to the civil servants that governance must be grounded in compassion and that those who bear the responsibility of public service must themselves be the finest examples of lifelong learning.

The letters, written on April 20, a day ahead of Civil Services Day, were issued in 12 languages — Hindi, English, Marathi, Odia, Gujarati, Bengali, Kannada, Punjabi, Assamese, Malayalam, Telugu and Tamil — ensuring wider reach across Ministries, Departments, States and Union Territories.

Modi said the 21st century was a time of great challenges as well as opportunities and trends are changing every day, new technologies are emerging and new innovations are constantly happening.

He said both the citizens and the world have great expectations from the country.

"It is important that the government's services and work culture are tuned to make the maximum out of this historic era. Making learning a lifelong habit through the use of platforms such as the iGOT Karmayogi platform is important in this regard. You are choosing to be better so that Bharat can be better," he said.

Addressing the civil servants as 'Karmayogi', the Prime Minister said he has written the letter to them at a



very special time, as in many parts of India, it is a festive season.

He said the atmosphere is filled with the enthusiasm of Rongali Bihu, Vishu, Puthandu, Poila Boishakh, Maha Bishuba Pana Sankranti and Baisakhi.

Modi said these festivals are about hope, renewal and new beginnings.

"At such a time, you have become a part of a festival of learning and growing - the 'Sadhana Saptah'. I congratulate you for being a part of this unique effort that brings together civil servants across the length and breadth of India," he said.

The Prime Minister said he would like to express his deepest appreciation for the civil servants' passion for service, which enabled them to be a part of this effort.

He said it reflected an unwavering faith, remarkable spirit and unparalleled dedication to strengthening the journey towards a 'Viksit Bharat'.

"I have always believed that such platforms are essential for personal growth and for enhancing our professional capacities," he said.

Modi said discovering something new is among the finest things in life, and one has to keep that spirit of enquiry alive.

"It is with this principle that we launched Mission Karmayogi. Yes, on one hand, it was about training and learning new things.

"But, at the same time, it was a reaffirmation that a government must serve the citizens to the best of its abilities, that governance must be grounded in compassion and that those who bear the responsibility of public service must themselves be the finest examples of lifelong learning," he said.

The Prime Minister said all civil servants must remember that earlier the yardstick was to be better than the past, but now, it should be to evaluate all the efforts based on the aim of creating a developed nation by 2047.

"The speed, scale, direction and intensity of our efforts must be guided by this vision...The principle of 'Nagrikdevo Bhava' must be at the heart of every decision," he said.

Modi said the iGOT Karmayogi platform, on which the civil servants are learning now, is India's largest and most ambitious effort to "transform the human capital of our government and you are at its core."

"I was told that the three objectives of Sadhana Saptah were: becoming tech ready, understanding our traditions and achieving tangible outcomes grounded in citizen centricity," he said.

The prime minister said these are indeed noble principles and when these threads are woven into a single fabric, governance becomes modern, rooted in culture and firmly rooted in 'Jana Seva'.

"I have experienced that commitment to continuous learning is a source of positive energy. I am sure you will agree that we live in an era where keeping oneself updated

and upskilled is no longer optional," he said, adding that committing to constant learning is the only way to be ahead of the curve.

"Over a period of one week, your zeal and Sadhana have been commendable. I am confident that this collective learning movement has ignited a new energy within our civil services. What has made me very happy is the scale of Sadhana Saptah 2026," he said.

During Sadhana (Strengthening Adaptive Development and Humane Aptitude for National Advancement) Saptah (April 2-8), civil servants across the country participated in structured capacity-building programmes designed to build competencies required for achieving the vision of Viksit Bharat-2047.

The Prime Minister said it was a delight to see this being marked on an unprecedented scale of engagement, recording over 3.1 crore course completions by over 46 lakh learners, of whom about 33.4 lakh learners completed more than four hours of learning.

"I urge you to continue breaking the silos within your departments. We must move away from the old mindset of working in isolation and embrace a 'whole-of-government' approach," he said.

Remember, Modi said, the progress of India is the sum of the collective victories across every state and every department.

"Let the spirit of team building you practised this week become the permanent culture of your office. Use the digital tools and data-driven insights you have explored to make governance more efficient and citizen-centric. My best wishes for your journey ahead," he said.

TMC not giving due respect to ancestral place of Tagore: UP CM Adityanath in West Bengal

Kolkata

Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath on Wednesday said over 7,000 large industries were shut during TMC rule in West Bengal and claimed that the state, once a leader in multiple sectors, has slipped to the bottom.

Addressing an election meeting at Burrabazar here, the senior BJP leader referred to the ancestral residence of Nobel laureate Rabindranath Tagore in Jorasanko locality in Burrabazar and accused the TMC of failing to accord due importance to its heritage status.

"Bengal, which was once a beacon of knowledge, has now witnessed the closure of



7,000 big industries, thousands of MSME units, and loss of jobs for 30 lakh youths," he said.

Alleging that "TMC goondas" had put up images of Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee at Tagore's ancestral house, where the poet spent

much of his life and created numerous literary works, Adityanath said the act amounted to an insult.

"Ideally, apart from Tagore, only the idol of Bharat Mata should have been placed there. But TMC does not give due respect to Bharat Mata as it has no love for Bharatiya 'sanskriti'. It is a shame that TMC has brought Bengal, a forerunner of the Renaissance, to such a pass," he said.

Adityanath said to "restore the lost glory of West Bengal" on the 150th year of the composition of Vande Mataram, the TMC government should be dislodged, and the BJP brought to power.

'Check politicians phones, 70-80 per cent of them watch porn': Pappu Yadav after comments on woman politicians

Patna

Bihar MP Rajesh Ranjan, Pappu Yadav, has once again sparked controversy with his remarks on women in politics, drawing sharp criticism from political leaders and a formal notice from the



Bihar State Women's Commission.

The Independent MP from Purnea, who is supported by the Congress, came under fire after a video of his comments on the Women's Reservation issue went viral on social media. In the clip, Yadav allegedly stated that "90 per cent of women cannot do politics without going into a leader's room," a remark widely condemned as misogynistic and demeaning.

Following the backlash, the Women's Commission took suo motu cognisance of the statement and issued a notice asking Yadav to explain why further action should not be recommended, including approaching the Lok Sabha Speaker for possible disqualification. Commission Chairperson Apsara said the remarks were objectionable and warranted scrutiny.

Rather than retracting his statement, Yadav intensified the

controversy while responding to the notice. He claimed that "70-80 per cent of politicians watch porn" and challenged authorities to check everyone's mobile phones, including his own. He questioned the credibility of the Commission and accused it of selective action, suggesting that those issuing the notice were themselves not beyond reproach.

The remarks triggered strong reactions from leaders of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP).

Party spokesperson Shehzad Poonawala called the statement shocking and said it undermined efforts to promote women's empowerment.

BJP leader Tuhin Sinha also criticised Yadav, describing his comments as "despicable" and accusing him of insulting self-made women in politics.

Yadav, however, defended his remarks, arguing that he was highlighting systemic exploitation faced by women. He claimed that many women, including students and professionals, face harassment in institutions and workplaces, and that politicians and other powerful figures are often responsible. He also cited historical figures such as Guru Gobind Singh and Raja Ram Mohan Roy, who advocated for women's rights, to support his argument that Indian society has long struggled with gender inequality.

'Outraged, hurt': BJP petitions EC against Kharge's 'terrorist reference' for PM

New Delhi

Parliamentary Affairs Minister Kiren Rijiju and Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman speak to the media after a high-level BJP delegation meeting with the Election Commission of India (ECI), at Nirvachan Sadan, in New Delhi, Wednesday, April 22, 2026. PTI

A high-level BJP delegation met Chief Election Commissioner Gyanesh Kumar on Wednesday and complained against Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge's "terrorist" reference for Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

"We are hurt and anguished,

we are outraged. With a very heavy heart we met the EC today and demanded strictest possible action against the Congress president. While the EC will take its call, we pledge to eradicate every single terrorist under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi," Parliamentary Affairs Minister Kiren Rijiju said.

He was flanked by Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman and Law Minister Arjun Ram Meghwal.

Rijiju said the Congress pattern of abusing the prime minister goes back to 2007 when Sonia Gandhi used the words

"Maut ka saudagar".

"Thereafter the Congress leaders made it a habit to call PM names. He was called "neech" (lowly), poisonous snake, and what not. The people of India will give a befitting reply to the Congress, which had crossed all limits of decency," said Rijiju.

The BJP wants Kharge booked under relevant sections of the Bharatiya Nyaya Samhita besides being given a warning not to repeat the conduct and an order to all social media platforms to take down the offensive post.

EC issues show-cause notice to Kharge

New Delhi

A day after the BJP lodged a complaint with the Election Commission of India (ECI) over Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge's "terrorist" remark on Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the poll body on Wednesday took serious note of the matter. The ECI asked the veteran leader to explain his stand within 24 hours.

The BJP had on April 21 lodged a complaint with the poll body against Kharge over his "terrorist" remark on PM Modi, seeking his public apology and immediate removal of the comment from all social media platforms. The complaint was filed by Union minister Kiren Rijiju.

"Election Commission of India has taken a serious note of Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge calling Prime Minister Narendra Modi a 'terrorist' and has issued a stern notice to him, asking him to explain his stand within 24 hours," an ECI official said.

In a post on X on Tuesday evening, he had said, "We have filed a strong complaint against Congress President Mallikarjun Kharge for his shocking and disgraceful

remark calling PM Narendra Modi a 'terrorist'. This is not just derogatory, it is a dangerous & unprecedented attack on democratic institutions. A blatant violation of the Model Code of Conduct. Immediate action is non-negotiable."

In the letter to the ECI, Rijiju had sought an immediate public apology from Kharge and urged the poll body to initiate suitable proceedings under relevant sections of BNS, mainly under sections 175 and 356(1) of the BNS, 2023, with Section 175 addressing false statements about a candidate's character and Section 356(1) concerning defamation. "Direct immediate cessation of further dissemination of the impugned statement and also direct media and social media to take it off," the BJP had urged the ECI in the letter. The controversy arose on the last day of the Tamil Nadu election campaign on April 21 after Kharge, highlighting opposition unity in defeating the Delimitation Bill linked to the Women's Reservation Bill, criticised the AIADMK for supporting the BJP and labelled Modi a "terrorist who does not believe in equality".

E-sports must register, real-money games face strict curbs under Gaming Rules 2026

New Delhi

In a move to tame the booming and controversial digital gaming sector, the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY) on Wednesday officially notified the Online Gaming (Promotion and Regulation) Rules, 2026.

Set to take effect on May 1, the new framework promises to overhaul how digital games are classified, monitored, and monetised in India, effectively drawing a hard line between legitimate e-sports, social gaming, and real-money wagering.

Industry experts say the next few months will see a flurry of activity as gaming unicorns and startups alike scramble to align their operations with the new legal reality before the May 1 deadline.

At the heart of the new regime is the creation of Online Gaming Authority of India, a powerful new watchdog headquartered in the National Capital Region (NCR). Designed as a modern, digital-first office, the Authority will rely heavily on techno-

legal measures to conduct its proceedings. It will be steered by a top MeitY official and backed by an inter-ministerial panel featuring heavyweights from the Ministries of Home Affairs, Finance, Law, and Information and Broadcasting.

The new Authority will be mainly responsible for formal "determination" of what constitutes an online money game.

Under 2026 rules, gaming companies must open their platforms to scrutiny. The Authority will evaluate the games based on strict criteria, including whether players are required to pay fees or deposits, expectation of monetary wins and how in-game assets are traded outside the platform. Regulators are mandated to complete this determination process within a 90-day window. Games determined to be online money games will be subject to a distinct and stringent set of regulations under the Act, while others will be processed for standard registration.

Iran state TV says three ships attacked by Revolutionary Guard in Hormuz, taken into force's custody

Tehran

In a significant development amid ceasefire from Donald Trump, two ships were attacked Wednesday by Iran's paramilitary Revolutionary Guard and are now in the force's custody and being taken to Iran, Iranian state television reported. It identified the vessels as the MSC Francesca and the Epaminodes. The ship's owners could not be immediately reached for comment. The seizures represent an escalation after the US earlier seized two Iranian vessels as ceasefire talks were due to take place in Islamabad.

Iran's Revolutionary Guard attacks third ship in Strait of Hormuz

Iran's Revolutionary Guard also attacked a third ship in the Strait of Hormuz, AP reports quoting semi-official Iranian news agencies. The attacks, which Iranian media said were carried out by Iran's paramilitary Revolutionary Guard, came after President Donald Trump said the US would indefinitely extend the ceasefire with Iran, due to expire on Wednesday.



But Trump said the US would continue to blockade Iranian ports, and the attacks reinforced the dangers to traffic in the strait, through which 20% of the world's oil and natural gas pass in peacetime.

That means that even if the ceasefire largely holds - and Iran and the US do not resume major attacks - the war will continue to weigh heavily on the global economy.

Conflict has sent gas prices skyrocketing far beyond the region

Already the conflict has sent gas

prices skyrocketing far beyond the region and raised the cost of food and a wide array of other products. The longer the strait remains closed, the more severe and widespread the effects will be - and the longer it will take the economy to bounce back.

Iran has offered no formal acknowledgment of Trump's extension, but an Iranian diplomat said talks would not resume until the blockade is lifted. Iran opened fire on a container ship in the strait on Wednesday morning, and a second

was attacked a short time later, according to the British military's United Kingdom Maritime Trade Operations Centre.

All three ships are in Revolutionary Guard's custody

Iranian state television reported later reported that the ships were in the Revolutionary Guard's custody and being taken to Iran. It identified the vessels as the MSC Francesca and the Epaminodes. The ship's owners could not be immediately reached for comment.

It should be noted that a 10-day ceasefire went into effect in Lebanon on Friday, but there have been several Israeli strikes and Hezbollah claimed its first attack on Tuesday. Since the war started, at least 3,375 people have been killed in Iran, according to authorities. More than 2,290 people have been killed in Lebanon, 23 people have died in Israel and more than a dozen have died in Gulf Arab states. Fifteen Israeli soldiers in Lebanon and 13 US service members throughout the region have been killed.

Nepal Home Minister Sudhan Gurung resigns amid financial scrutiny: 'Ethics hold more weight...'

Kathmandu

Nepal's Home Minister, Sudan Gurung, resigned on Wednesday (April 22), citing moral responsibility and the need for a fair investigation into concerns raised over his financial holdings. His resignation comes just 26 days after assuming office. He announced his resignation in a social media post.

In a Facebook post announcing his resignation, Gurung said he had taken public criticism seriously and chose to step down to uphold ethical standards in public life. "I, Sudan Gurung, have been performing my duties as the Home Minister with utmost honesty since Chaitra 13, 2082 (March 26, 2026). Recently, I have taken the questions, comments, and public concerns raised by citizens regarding my shares and related matters very seriously," he said.

Emphasising the importance of integrity, he said public trust must come before holding office. "For me, ethics hold more weight



than any position, and there is no power greater than public trust. Today's 'Gen Z' movement, which demands good governance, transparency, and accountability, carries the same message: public life must be clean, and leadership must be accountable," he said.

Gurung also referred to the broader political context and sacrifices made in the country's past, saying accountability was essential when questions arise. "When questions are raised against a government built on the blood and sacrifice of my 46 brothers and sisters, the only answer is morality," Gurung said.

Announcing his decision to step down, he said the move would ensure transparency and avoid any conflict of interest. He said, "Therefore, to ensure a fair investigation into the matters concerning me and to prevent any conflict of interest while holding office, I have resigned from the post of Home Minister effective today.

He urged the citizens, media, and youth to commit to honesty and accountability in public life. "I have fulfilled my moral responsibility. Now, I appeal to my dear media friends, all Nepali brothers and sisters, and the youth: if we truly desire change, we must all stand on the path of truth, honesty, and self-purification. Information regarding where certain media personnel hold 'sweet shares' will eventually come to light. Those who aspire for 'Ram Rajya' (ideal governance) must also possess the courage to sacrifice and show moral strength," the former Nepali Home Minister said.

India, Germany deepen defence ties; sign Industrial Cooperation Roadmap, UN Peacekeeping Training pact in Berlin

Berlin

India and Germany on Wednesday signed and exchanged the Defence Industrial Cooperation Roadmap and an Implementing Arrangement for Cooperation in UN Peacekeeping Training here, marking a significant step forward in strengthening the strategic defence partnership between the two countries.

The agreements were signed during Defence Minister Rajnath Singh's three-day official visit to the European nation.

According to a release from the Ministry of Defence, the agreements are expected to strengthen institutional

collaboration between the two sides and broaden opportunities for joint training, capacity building, and capability development in the defence sector.

Singh and his German counterpart, the Federal Minister of Defence Boris Pistorius, were present during the agreement signing and exchange.

Earlier, both leaders held bilateral talks in Berlin, during which both sides reviewed a broad spectrum of bilateral security and defence cooperation, including priority areas for co-development and co-production of defence equipment, with a special focus on niche technologies.

Student suicides: India's young talent falling prey to stress

THE deaths of four students by suicide in two months have rocked the National Institute of Technology (NIT), Kurukshetra, sending shock waves across the country's academic circles. The institute has set up a five-member inquiry panel, while Rajya Sabha MP John Brittas has sought the Union Education Minister's urgent intervention. The NIT has also formed separate committees to look into issues faced by students. However, the response reveals a troubling lack of preparedness. Ordering hostellers to go home may defuse tensions for the time being, but it won't be helpful in addressing the underlying concerns.

The unrest on the campus has exposed a deep disconnect between the students and the NIT authorities. Allegations of inadequate psychological support and an ineffective mechanism to redress grievances point to



systemic gaps that demand independent scrutiny. India's premier institutions have long been associated with intense pressure both inside and outside the classroom. Around three years ago, the Ministry of Education told Parliament that 98 students died by suicide in

higher education institutions between 2018 and 2023; IITs accounted for the highest number of deaths, followed by NITs and Central universities.

These disturbing incidents underline the dire need for a nationwide framework to ensure the well-being of students. It must go beyond counselling to include early-warning systems, peer support networks and faculty sensitisation. It is vital to restore confidence among students and their families. Ultimately, the question is not whether institutions can respond to tragedies, but whether they can prevent them. The NIT probe must be marked by transparency; its findings should lead to a paradigm shift from reactive crisis management to proactive care. The loss of young lives that could have been saved shames the nation. India cannot afford to let talent be sacrificed on the altar of stress.

// sātyāsyā pārāmāṃ nidhānām //

“SUCCESS IS NOT FINAL; FAILURE IS NOT FATAL: IT IS THE COURAGE TO CONTINUE THAT COUNTS.”
-WINSTON CHURCHILL

Manipur's woes: Violence poses new threat to stability

THE recurrence of violence in Manipur, just two months after an elected government was reinstated, is an alarming sign that peace in the northeastern state must not be taken for granted. Two persons, including an ex-serviceman, were shot dead by suspected militants in an ambush in Ukhrul district on Saturday, while two kids were killed in a bomb attack at Tronglaobi in Bishnupur district on April 7. Clashes between protesters, who are seeking the arrest of the perpetrators, and security forces have rocked districts of the Imphal valley. The ambush comes amid appeals for dialogue and reconciliation. The fact that renewed calls for peace are being ignored reflects the depth of mistrust and the volatility of the situation.

The state government's prompt decision to hand over the Ukhrul and Bishnupur cases to the National Investigation Agency indicates a sense of urgency, but it is not a solution in itself. There is a



dire need to address the underlying causes that continue to trigger cycles of violence. Competing narratives, mutual suspicion among communities and the quick spread of misinformation have created an environment where even isolated incidents risk triggering wider unrest. Public anger is palpable, but it is also apparently being fuelled by rumours and inflammatory rhetoric.

The government's assertion that the law-and-order situation is “sensitive but under control” seems divorced from the lived reality of people on the ground. Manipur's path forward must rest on sustained

dialogue, accountability and community engagement. Security operations are necessary to curb immediate threats, but they must be complemented by efforts to rebuild trust and address grievances. Peace cannot be imposed — it should be negotiated, nurtured and protected by all stakeholders. Until then, each new incident of violence will continue to erode hope, pushing the state further away from lasting stability. Manipuris have suffered untold misery over the past three years; the onus is on the “double-engine” government to give the healing touch right now.

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Women's Reservation Entangled in Politics

Even though the amendment bill related to women's reservation has fallen in Parliament, the claims by both the ruling party and the opposition of their own victory and of being champions of women's interests are hardly surprising. Only time will tell when and how 33 percent reservation for women in the legislature will now be implemented, but it is certain that the country's politics will increasingly revolve around half of its population. Signals from the protest by BJP women MPs just minutes after the bill's defeat were reinforced the next day by Congress MP Priyanka Gandhi Vadra's press conference and Prime Minister Narendra Modi's address to the nation.

Modi's remark that "women do not tolerate insult" was clearly a political call to punish the opposition. While describing the Congress as "anti-reform," the Prime Minister also did not forget to cite examples from the past. From Leader of Opposition Rahul Gandhi to Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M.K. Stalin, opposition leaders countered that the Women's Reservation Bill had already been passed unanimously in 2023, and that now the BJP wanted to redraw the country's political map under the pretext of a delimitation bill. Clearly, both sides have avoided some natural questions and chosen arguments that suit their political interests.

The government felt that half of the country's population



could no longer be denied participation in policymaking. That is why, instead of ending the Budget Session of Parliament, a three-day special session was convened and an attempt was made to pass the amendment bill on women's reservation. Women's growing participation in elections and their increasingly decisive role have made the political establishment realize that granting them reservation in the legislature soon could also help secure its own power. However, the male-dominated political system, while appearing concerned about greater participation of women in the legislature, is unwilling to give them a share in existing seats. That is why a "safe route" was found by increasing the number of parliamentary seats from 543 to 850 and then providing 33 percent reservation.

The opposition, a seasoned player in power politics for decades, quickly understood that this exercise could benefit the NDA in the assembly

elections of five states. Despite broad agreement on women's reservation, the clash between the ruling party and the opposition over removing the condition of delimitation based on the latest census is rooted not only in politics but also in concerns over balance of power. Until now, delimitation has been based on census data. This is why southern states fear losing Lok Sabha seats and, consequently, influence in national politics. Certainly, with population control and better literacy rates, South India has outperformed North India on the economic front as well.

Their contribution to the country's revenue has also been comparatively higher. They should not be politically punished for this. At the same time, northern states cannot be politically punished for failures in leadership and governance on these fronts. It is not logical that the population of a Lok Sabha constituency in North India should be twice that of one in South India. In

a vast and diverse country like India, only thoughtful policymaking can address such complex challenges and create balanced policies for the future. But our politics has often been accustomed to avoiding difficult issues. During the Emergency in 1976, Indira Gandhi's government froze Lok Sabha seats at 543 until 2001 through the 42nd Constitutional Amendment, and the Vajpayee government later extended it until 2026.

Amit Shah sought to allay fears of southern states losing representation by assuring that seats in all states would increase by 50 percent, so the proportional balance would remain unaffected. Even so, the opposition continued to insist on implementing women's reservation without delimitation and on retaining the constitutional requirement of delimitation based on the latest census, for valid reasons. First, even under the 50 percent seat increase formula, more seats would be added in BJP-dominated North and West India, making it easier to secure a majority in the Lok Sabha. Second, this formula was not mentioned in the constitutional amendment bill. That meant delimitation could be done on the basis of the 2011 census. Shah reportedly sought one hour to amend the bill, but the opposition did not agree.

The opposition's concerns about removing the constitutional requirement of delimitation based on the latest census and leaving it

to an ordinary parliamentary majority—that is, the will of the government—can be understood. But the solution to the complexities of delimitation lies not in political maneuvering but in national thinking. The Constitution gives every voter one vote, and every vote carries equal value. Therefore, ignoring population in delimitation merely for political balance would be undemocratic.

Telangana Chief Minister Revanth Reddy's demand that seats for states be determined on the basis of tax revenue, GDP, and social development indicators is divisive for national unity. Likewise, demands for OBC and Muslim reservation within women's reservation are dangerous for social harmony.

The battle of narratives between the ruling party and the opposition has already begun. Despite lacking the required two-thirds majority for a constitutional amendment, the BJP's decision to risk a special parliamentary session in the middle of elections is seen as rooted in its past success in winning narrative battles. However, the first indication of who has the upper hand this time may come from the results of the ongoing assembly elections. Voting is still pending in Tamil Nadu and West Bengal, where women voters are relatively more influential.

Humanity first: Heed Pope's warning on AI misuse

POPE Leo XIV's recent warning that artificial intelligence can fuel "polarisation, conflict, fear and violence" deserves global attention. At a time when AI is celebrated for speed, convenience and innovation, the Pope has reminded the world that technology without ethics can become dangerous. AI is not inherently evil, but neither is it neutral. Its impact depends on how humans choose to design, deploy and regulate it. Recent events validate his concerns. Across elections worldwide, AI-generated deepfakes and cloned voices have been used to spread falsehoods, confuse voters and weaken trust in democratic institutions. Fraudsters have also used voice-cloning tools to impersonate family members or officials, tricking victims into handing over money. What once required skill and resources can now be done cheaply and at scale.

The anxiety is no longer confined to misinformation. Warnings surrounding Anthropic's advanced AI model Mythos show that the next frontier may involve threats to financial systems

and cybersecurity. If powerful AI can identify vulnerabilities, automate attacks or enable fraud on banking networks, the consequences could extend far beyond the digital world. Financial panic, disrupted payments and shaken public confidence can destabilise societies as surely as political propaganda can. There is also an environmental price. AI's rapid expansion depends on vast data centres and minerals such as cobalt and lithium, often extracted at heavy ecological and human cost.

Yet rejecting AI is neither possible nor wise. Used responsibly, it can revolutionise medicine, education, disaster response and productivity. The real challenge is governance. Governments must create robust laws, companies must embed transparency and safety into their systems and citizens must build digital literacy. International cooperation is equally essential. The defining question of this age is not whether machines can think, but whether humans can act responsibly.



A Strong Front Against Terrorism

India has been facing direct and indirect terrorism for decades. This fight is not new for us. One example of how horrific terrorism can be was the terrorist attack in Pahalgam last year, in which people were killed after being asked about their religion.

Since the anniversary of the Pahalgam attack is approaching, we must remain alert to the dangers of terrorism. Earlier, terrorism was limited to border areas and conventional methods, but now it has become a rapidly expanding global threat supported by high technology, the internet, and international networks.

Today, terrorists operate not only through weapons, but also through digital platforms, secret financial networks, and ideological propaganda. Without understanding this changing nature, it is impossible to deal effectively with terrorism. In this context, the Union Home Ministry has launched a timely initiative called “PRAHAR” (Proactive Response Against Hostile Acts). This move could prove to be a game-changing strategy in combating terrorism.

India has gained considerable experience in fighting terrorism. In this regard, the “SAMADHAN” concept adopted to tackle Maoism is an excellent example. Through firm political will, clear strategy, better coordination, and a strong intelligence system, extremism was controlled to a large extent.

This proved that if policy is clear and coordination among agencies is strong, concrete results can be achieved on the ground. However, today’s challenges in dealing with terrorism are far more severe. Terrorism is mainly nurtured by external forces. It is now expanding through scattered small groups, lone individuals, and online networks. In this way, it operates simultaneously at three levels—ground operations, internet platforms, and financial systems. In such a scenario, separate and uncoordinated efforts will not be sufficient.

The PRAHAR concept has been designed



keeping all these aspects in mind. It ensures coordination in technology, intelligence gathering, law enforcement, financial monitoring, and international cooperation. Its objective is clear—to identify threats, prevent them from growing, and take immediate and strict action when necessary. The greatest strength of this policy is its comprehensive approach.

Terrorism is not merely about guns or bombs; it is part of an ideology, a vast network, and a planned conspiracy by hostile forces. Therefore, the solution must also be multidimensional. PRAHAR is based on seven main pillars, making it a balanced and effective policy. The first pillar is prevention, meaning timely action based on intelligence inputs. The second is response, involving swift and coordinated action after any incident. The third is analysis, which focuses on decision-making based on accurate information and assessment. The fourth is human rights compliance, meaning action within the framework of law and the Constitution. The fifth pillar is to break the backbone of terrorist financing so that funds do not reach them. The sixth is awareness and de-radicalization, which involves taking society along and countering propaganda in time. The seventh is resilience and recovery, meaning restoring normalcy quickly after an incident. Together, these pillars create a strategy capable not only of stopping terrorism but also of strengthening society.

Today, terrorists are rapidly using new technologies. In such circumstances, traditional policing is no longer enough. PRAHAR addresses

this gap by incorporating cyber capabilities, modern technology, and financial surveillance into its framework. In recent years, India has also made its anti-terror stance clearer.

From the Balakot air strike to Operation Sindoor and continuous action against terror networks within the country, it is evident that India is no longer limited to a defensive policy. When needed, it has both the capacity and the determination to take decisive and pre-emptive hard measures.

PRAHAR ensures that such actions do not depend merely on circumstances but are carried out under a systematic policy. The central foundation of this policy is prevention. Its main aim is to identify threats at an early stage and neutralize them. For this, it is essential to strengthen intelligence-based policing, ensure real-time information sharing among agencies, dismantle recruitment networks in time, and eliminate support systems for terrorism.

At the same time, monitoring radical activities on digital platforms and strictly controlling sources of terrorist funding are major components of this framework. Measures such as predicting threats through AI, identifying suspicious patterns using big data, drone surveillance at borders, and tracking encrypted communications through cyber forensics make it more effective.

Given the digital nature of modern terrorism, expanding cyber capabilities has now become essential, especially as the growing use of deepfake-based propaganda has made this challenge more complex. It must also be understood that radicalization cannot be controlled only through security forces. The participation of society, teachers, religious leaders, and civil organizations is equally necessary.

PRAHAR symbolizes a major shift in India’s anti-terrorism strategy. Its framework is strong, and the government’s intent appears clear, but its success will depend on implementation. Formulating policy is only the first step; making it effective on the ground is the real challenge.

Energy in an Era of Conflict

The destructive US-Israel conflict against Iran has disrupted energy supplies across the world. Governments of both rich and poor nations are warning their people about a difficult period ahead, unlike anything this generation has seen before. There are fears of severe shortages of energy and fuel, rationing, and even cars and airplanes running out of fuel. The key question is: what will the future energy map look like?

Destruction and Human Suffering

As I raise this question, I would urge you not to take lightly the killings, the loss of thousands of lives, and the brutal destruction we witness on our screens. Nor should we underestimate the real pain this energy disruption is causing around the world. Many countries are facing shortages of cooking fuel (LPG), and families are being forced to spend a large share of their income just to obtain it at any cost. Long queues at fuel stations are becoming common again, adding to costs that people can barely afford.

Impact on Economies

In most countries, especially in the developing world, fuel imports are among the heaviest burdens on trade deficits. In such a situation, rising oil prices have



a crippling effect on economies. At the same time, an impending shortage in global fertilizer supplies threatens to hit farmers hard—those who are already struggling with extreme weather caused by climate change and distorted global food prices. Overall, the world is being brought to its knees—not by choice, but because of its timid and weak response to this reckless US-Israel conflict against Iran. The so-called rules-based order and all its moral claims stand shattered.

The Pace of Energy Transition

This leaves us with an important question: what impact will this shock have on energy systems? Even before this troubling conflict, the world was already in the middle of an energy transition—gradually replacing coal in electricity generation with renewable energy, and displacing petrol and diesel in transport. According to the International Renewable Energy Agency’s March 2026 report, by the end of 2025 renewable energy accounted for nearly 50 percent of the world’s installed electricity generation capacity.

Leadership from Developing Countries

Interestingly, this transition was not happening only in expected places such as China or Europe. A report by the think tank Ember found that 74 of the most climate-vulnerable countries were rapidly adopting “electro-tech,” not primarily out of concern for climate change, but because it was faster, cheaper, and more reliable. These countries are able to leapfrog fossil fuels and move directly toward renewable energy. The report noted that Namibia and Togo were leading in solar generation, Jordan

and Kyrgyzstan in battery sales, and Nepal and Sri Lanka in electric vehicle adoption.

Future Energy Security

The current disruption has raised the cost of energy imports and reminded countries of the urgent need for energy security. A new race has begun to secure oil and gas supplies. This may encourage nations to rely more heavily on their own resources—from coal to charcoal—both of which are highly polluting. The closure of the Strait of Hormuz has disrupted nearly 20 percent of global energy flows. This may signal that the era of cheap and abundant fossil fuels is coming to an end.

Now, the logic of the clean energy transition will be rooted in national energy security. As I write this, I must sadly acknowledge that the future is not going to be easy. The present moment tells me that, as a global society, we have moved backward. It will be difficult to gather the pieces from these ruins of human destruction and collapse. In such a broken and divided world, it will be extremely difficult for us to solve global challenges like climate change.

Realty firm BPTP to invest Rs 1,100 crore in Greater Faridabad with 'Skynest' launch in



New Delhi
 Realty firm BPTP Limited will invest around Rs 1,100 crore in Greater Faridabad with the launch of its premium residential project 'Skynest' in Sector 80. The development will feature twin towers and 325 luxury 3 and 4 BHK apartments. Located in Greater Faridabad-also known as the Neharpar region- the area is emerging as

a key real estate hub due to its connectivity via the Faridabad Bypass Road (NH-148NA), linking Delhi, the KMP Expressway and the Delhi-Mumbai Expressway. Advertisement U p c o m i n g infrastructure like the FNG Expressway and proximity to the Noida International Airport is further boosting its growth prospects.

Tim Cook to step down as Apple CEO in September; John Ternus named successor

New Delhi
 Apple Inc on Monday announced that Tim Cook will become executive chairman of the company's board of directors and John Ternus, senior vice president of Hardware Engineering, will become Apple's next CEO from September 1, 2026.

Cook will continue in his role as CEO through the summer as he works closely with Ternus on a smooth transition. As executive chairman, Cook will assist with certain aspects of the company, including engaging with policymakers around the world, according to the press release issued by Apple.

The transition, which was approved unanimously by the Board of Directors, follows a thoughtful, long-term succession planning process.

Cook said it has been the greatest privilege of my life to be the CEO of Apple and to have been trusted to lead such an extraordinary company.

"John Ternus has the mind of an engineer, the soul of an



innovator, and the heart to lead with integrity and with honour. He is a visionary whose contributions to Apple over 25 years are already too numerous to count, and he is without question the right person to lead Apple into the future," said Cook.

Cook joined Apple in 1998. He became CEO in 2011 and has overseen the introduction of numerous products and services, including new categories like Apple Watch, AirPods, and Apple Vision Pro, and services ranging from iCloud and Apple

Pay to Apple TV and Apple Music. He was also instrumental in expanding existing product lines.

Under Cook's leadership Apple has grown from a market capitalisation of approximately \$350 billion to \$4 trillion, representing a more than 1,000 per cent increase, and yearly revenue has nearly quadrupled, from \$108 billion in fiscal year 2011 to more than \$416 billion in fiscal year 2025. The company has expanded its global footprint substantially, particularly in emerging markets; it is now in more than 200 countries and territories.

Meanwhile, Ternus said, "having spent almost my entire career at Apple, I have been lucky to have worked under Steve Jobs and to have had Tim Cook as my mentor. It has been a privilege to help shape the products and experiences that have changed so much of how we interact with the world and with one another. I am filled with optimism about what we can achieve in the years to come."

Frozen shrimp powers Indian seafood exports to record Rs 72,000 crore in FY26

New Delhi
 Frozen shrimp has led Indian seafood exports to an all-time record high of Rs 72,000 crore.

The top export destinations for Indian seafood were the European Union (EU), which saw a 37.9 per cent rise; China, which saw a 22.7 per cent gain; Southeast Asia, with a 36.1 per cent rise; and Japan, with a 6.55 per cent rise.

The provisional data released by Marine Products Export Development Authority (MPEDA) on Tuesday said the country's seafood exports touched an all-time high of Rs 72,325.82 crore (USD 8.28 billion) in FY 2025-26.

Export volumes also reached 19.32 lakh metric tonnes, showing strong global demand for Indian marine products.

This is a historic milestone for the sector, a pillar of the blue



economy. The biggest growth driver continued to be frozen shrimp, which contributed Rs 47,973.13 crore, accounting for more than two-thirds of total export earnings.

Shrimp exports also grew by 4.6 per cent in volume and 6.35 per cent in value, proving its dominant role in India's seafood basket. The US remained India's largest seafood market, with imports worth USD 2.32 billion.

However, shipments to the

US declined due to tariff-related challenges. This drop was balanced by strong growth in other markets such as China, the EU, Southeast Asia, and Japan.

Exports to China rose 22.7 per cent in value, while the EU recorded 37.9 per cent growth in value. Other products like frozen fish, squid, cuttlefish, dried seafood, surimi, fishmeal, and fish oil also showed positive momentum, indicating diversification beyond shrimp.

India's top five seafood export ports — Vizag, JNPT, Kochi, Kolkata, and Chennai — handled nearly 64 per cent of total export value, highlighting their importance in the supply chain. "This achievement reflects India's rising strength in global seafood trade and growing competitiveness across multiple markets," Union Fisheries Secretary Abhilaksh Likhi told

Infra investments to grow 45-50% over next two fiscals: Crisil Ratings

Mumbai

Investment in key infrastructure sectors in India is expected to grow sharply by 45-50 per cent over the current and next fiscals, supported by strong policy push and domestic demand, according to a report by Crisil Ratings.

The key infrastructure sectors include renewables, roads, real estate and the new-age ones, and they account for around half of India's total infrastructure investments and provide strong support to India's GDP growth trajectory.

"Investment growth is likely to remain strong at 45-50% over the current and next fiscals... Consequently, investments in these sectors should rise to Rs Rs 23-24 lakh crore," said Krishnan Sitaraman, Chief Ratings Officer, Crisil Ratings.

However, while largely insulated from the direct impact of the West Asia conflict, they do face indirect inflationary pressure if the conflict is prolonged.

The report highlighted that sectors such as renewables, roads, real estate, and emerging areas like data centres and green hydrogen together account for around half of India's total infrastructure investments.

India should aim to achieve 100% ethanol blending, says Nitin Gadkari

New Delhi

Road Transport and Highways Minister Nitin Gadkari on Tuesday said India should aspire to achieve 100% ethanol blending in the near future, as vulnerabilities in oil exports amid the West Asia crisis have made it necessary for the country to become self-reliant in the energy sector.

Gadkari further said the Corporate Average Fuel Efficiency III standards, which will be implemented from April 1 next year, will have little impact on electric and flex-fuel vehicles.

"In the near future, India should aspire to achieve 100% ethanol blending... Today, we are facing an energy crisis due to the war in West Asia, so it is necessary for us to become self-reliant in the energy sector," he said, while addressing the Indian Federation of Green Energy's Green Transport Conclave.

In 2023, Prime Minister Narendra Modi launched petrol blended with 20% ethanol.

Currently, Indian vehicles can run on E20 petrol with minor changes to the engine to prevent corrosion and other issues.



Countries like Brazil have 100% ethanol blending.

Gadkari said India relies on imports to meet 87% of its oil requirement.

"We import fossil fuels worth Rs 22 lakh crore, which is also causing pollution... so

we need to work on increasing production of alternative fuel and bio-fuel," he said.

Noting that green hydrogen is the fuel of the future, Gadkari said there is a need to reduce the cost of running a hydrogen fuel station to make it financially viable.

"Transport of hydrogen fuel is a problem. Also, we need to produce 1 kg of hydrogen at USD 1 dollar, to make India an exporter of energy," he said.

The minister said that there is a need to produce hydrogen from waste.

He also pointed out that by focusing on the circular economy, India can create more employment opportunities.

While observing that there is a need to discourage the use of petrol and diesel vehicles, Gadkari said, "But we can not force people to stop buying petrol and diesel vehicles." On growing concern on social media about E20, Gadkari said the petroleum sector is lobbying against this move.

He asked automobile companies to focus on quality, not on cost, as it would help them penetrate new markets.

Indian agrochemicals industry to see 6-8 per cent growth in FY27: CareEdge Ratings

New Delhi

The Indian agrochemicals industry (excluding fertilisers) is expected to witness stable growth of approximately 6-8 per cent in FY27, supported by steady domestic demand, improving crop intensity, and expanding distribution reach, according to a report by CareEdge Ratings.

The Indian agrochemicals sector continues to benefit from strong underlying agricultural fundamentals, with domestic demand providing a stable base for sustained growth. Despite global volatility, India remains a structurally growing market, supported by increasing agricultural activity and improving farm economics, the report explains.

It stated that agrochemical demand in India continues to be supported by structural drivers. Cultivated area increased to about 29.5 million hectares in FY25. At the same time, food grain production rose to around 369 million tonnes, reflecting higher cropping intensity and a growing need for crop protection inputs.

In addition, policy support and



expansion in distribution networks remain key enablers, with the number of pesticide sale points increasing steadily to over 3 lakhs by FY25, thereby improving last-mile accessibility and supporting deeper market penetration.

The report pointed out that India continues to maintain a strong position in global agrochemical exports. Export volumes have expanded to nearly 0.7 million tonnes in FY25, reflecting sustained global reliance on Indian manufacturers.

"In FY26, export volumes stabilised, supported by steady demand in the United States and gradual recovery in select European and LATAM markets, even as some regions continued to adjust from previously elevated inventory levels," as per the report.

It further highlighted that entering FY27, export growth is expected to remain gradual and largely volume-led, supported by normalised channel inventories, stable global demand, and improving traction in key export regions.

However, pricing pressures are likely to persist amid continued global oversupply. The export mix reflects a balance between scale and value. Fungicides contribute significantly to volumes, supporting capacity utilisation, while herbicides and insecticides generate relatively higher value per unit, the report outlines.

This balanced product mix supports operating efficiency and earnings stability, particularly during periods of pricing pressure, it added.

India's economy projected to grow at 6.4% this year: United Nations

New Delhi

India's economy is projected to grow at 6.4 per cent this year and 6.6 per cent in 2027, according to a report by the United Nations.

The United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) said in the report released Monday that economies in South and South-West Asia grew by 5.4% in 2025, compared to 5.2% in 2024, driven largely by strong growth in India.

India's growth edged up to 7.4% in 2025, "supported by robust consumption, especially from the rural economy along with goods and services tax rate cuts, and export frontloading ahead of the United States' tariffs," the report, titled Economic and Social Survey of Asia and the Pacific 2026, said.

It said in India, economic activities moderated in the second half of 2025 as exports to the United States declined by 25 per cent following the introduction of 50 per cent tariffs in August 2025. The services sector remained a key growth driver.



The report projected India to register a 6.4 per cent growth rate in 2026 and 6.6 per cent next year. Inflation for the country is projected to be 4.4 per cent this year and 4.3 per cent in 2027.

The report said that FDI inflows to developing Asian and Pacific economies declined amid trade tensions and geopolitical uncertainty. After an increase of 0.6% in 2024, FDI to the region declined by 2% in 2025, even as global flows increased by 14%.

"Within the Asia-Pacific region, the countries that attracted the largest share of greenfield FDI in the first three quarters were India,

Australia, the Republic of Korea and Kazakhstan with USD 50 billion, USD 30 billion, USD 25 billion and USD 21 billion in announced investments, respectively," it said.

It further said that personal remittances, sent by Asian and Pacific workers employed outside of their home countries, continued to rise, cushioning the impact of vulnerable domestic employment conditions.

Remittances have helped sustain the consumption of many households, but are facing headwinds.

In India and the Philippines, about 40 per cent of the transfers are

used for essential spending, including medical expenses, of recipient households.

"However, as the world's largest remittance recipient of USD 137 billion in 2024, India could face a sizeable loss as the United States has levied a 1% tax on all remittances since January 2026," it said.

The report also cited estimates by the International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA) that suggested that there were around 16.6 million green jobs globally, with annual job creation of around 0.8 million between 2012 and 2024, 7% annual growth.

Out of these 16.6 million jobs, 7.3 million were in China, 1.3 million in India and 2.5 million in the rest of Asia – 44%, 8% and 15% of the global total, respectively.

"Governments can leverage the energy transition to an environmentally sustainable economy to foster new domestic industries and build supportive constituencies," it said.

It noted that public investment and targeted

industrial policies can accelerate the emergence of beneficiaries such as renewable manufacturers, grid developers, storage providers and green industrial clusters.

The report cited India's production-linked incentive scheme, saying it illustrates how macroeconomic policy can foster green industrial development through incentives for domestic manufacturing of solar photovoltaic, batteries and green hydrogen, reducing import dependence while creating new industrial beneficiaries with a vested interest in sustaining the transition.

"Across developing economies in Asia and the Pacific, targeted industrial policies are being used to scale clean technology manufacturing and accelerate the energy transition. Initiatives include India's Production Linked Incentive scheme for high-efficiency solar modules, China's strategic subsidies for electric vehicle battery manufacturing," it said.

India, South Korea to fast-track CEPA upgrade, target 18% growth to double trade by 2030

New Delhi

India and South Korea have agreed to fast-track and upgrade the Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA) by addressing issues around non-tariff barriers and rules of origin to move towards a more balanced partnership, not one defined by "large trade deficits," Commerce Minister Piyush Goyal said on April 20.

Goyal said bilateral trade between India and South Korea is currently about \$27 billion, with leaders from both sides aiming to double it by 2030, implying a steep growth trajectory over the next few years.

"India and South Korea have agreed to fast-track and upgrade the CEPA, addressing several non-tariff barriers, easing rules of origin, making it easier to do business between the two nations, expanding market access....bilateral trade



between the two nations is about 27 billion dollars, we have been tasked by our leaders to double this by 2030, that's four years, so we are looking at an about 18 percent (annual) growth," Goyal said.

South Korean President Lee Jae Myung said the current trade volume does not reflect the full potential of the relationship, especially given the

scale of India's economy.

He called for expanding trade and investment cooperation, noting there is "significant room for growth" and expressing confidence that bilateral trade could "more than double very soon".

"I hope progress will be made in negotiations to upgrade the CEPA," he added.

The Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement between India and South Korea was signed on August 7, 2009 in Seoul and came into force on January 1, 2010.

Negotiations to upgrade the deal have been ongoing with the two countries working towards achieving a \$50 billion trade target by 2030.

Goyal also flagged plans to set up a dedicated Korean industrial enclave in India to boost investments and encourage more firms from South Korea to tap into the South Asian nation's domestic demand and its expanding network of trade agreements. Both sides highlighted opportunities to collaborate in sectors including semiconductors, electronics, electric mobility, green energy, shipbuilding and digital trade, combining India's software and AI capabilities with South Korea's manufacturing strengths.

From Hormuz to Jharkhand: India needs supply chain sovereignty, not another five-year scheme

India imports approximately 88% of its crude oil, 60% of its LPG (nearly all from West Asia), over 90% of its methanol, and 93% of its rare earth magnets from China. When Iran closed the Strait of Hormuz on March 2, 2026, these dependencies ceased to be abstract risk factors. They became operational realities with ripple effects across our economy.

Domestic cooking gas prices rose Rs 60 per cylinder within days. Iran's drone strikes on Qatar's Ras Laffan complex disrupted gas supply to fertiliser production across the region. India invoked the Essential Commodities Act to ration natural gas distribution, prioritising households over industry. Asian LNG prices surged over 140%. The International Energy Agency called it the largest supply disruption in the history of the global oil market.

Lead indicator of a volatile energy environment

Within the same quarter, the United States had intervened militarily in Venezuela, signalling that energy-rich nations aligned with rival powers now face direct intervention risk. These events are not anomalies. They reflect a reality shift in which energy and critical materials function as instruments of coercion.

Every major external shock in India's modern economic history, from the 1991 balance-of-payments crisis through 2008 and 2020 to the present, originates in similar vulnerabilities: concentrated import dependence on chokepoints controlled by others. The question is whether India responds this time with institutional architecture or, as after every previous shock, with reactionary announcements that fade as prices stabilise.

China built an industry from coal. Indian PSUs are stuck on the regulatory carrom-board

China has few gas fields, yet it faces this crisis with composure. The reason is simple. China invested in coal gasification as a national strategic objective over decades, persisting through hydrocarbon price cycles without losing focus.

It now produces more than 90% of its ammonia from coal gasification. It uses synthetic gas derived from coal to produce 40% of the world's urea and 54% of the world's methanol, around 70% of it from coal. Its gasification output stands at approximately 80 million metric tonnes per annum.

India and China started discussing coal gasification around the same time. India's National Coal Gasification Mission, launched in 2020, targets 100 million tonnes per annum by 2030. Six years in, total production is around 5 million tonnes. Of this, 1.8 million tonnes comes from a single private sector plant: JSPL's facility at Angul, Odisha.

Seven projects worth Rs 64,000 crore have been approved, mostly as public sector joint ventures with Coal India. Almost all are stalled in regulatory purgatory. For instance, the underground coal gasification project at Kasta in Jharkhand's Jamtara district is caught in a dispute between the coal ministry and the environment ministry



over drilling depth: one insists on 300 metres, the other wants 150 to 160 metres, according to ThePrint. India sits on 378 billion tonnes of coal reserves, and limits extraction to opencast mining. China mines three kilometres underground.

The consequences of these delays are direct. Over 30% of all natural gas India produces or imports feeds fertiliser plants. China produces more than 90% of its ammonia domestically through coal gasification; India imports most of its ammonia. As kharif planting approaches, the consequences of a lack of priority implementation by government officials and PSU operators exposes the nation's farmers. This is much more than a temporary disruption. It is the downstream result of a 16-to-1 output gap between two countries that identified the same opportunity at roughly the same time.

The divergence is not in resources or technical capability. It is in institutional implementation and the lack of continuity between government and private industry. India's policy cycle is driven by commodity prices: when crude is expensive, coal gasification becomes urgent; when prices fall, somebody in a ministry questions the investment's viability, and private sector enthusiasm dissipates. The government's over-reliance on PSUs and the difficulty in meeting overbearing tenders leads to further lack of interest from the private sector. China treated the same objective as a permanent national strategy and delivered results.

The energy transition is introducing new dependencies

The dependency problem extends beyond hydrocarbons. As the global energy order shifts from petrostates to electrostates, China dominates the supply chains of the new energy economy with the same structural concentration that the Gulf held over oil.

India imports nearly 100% of its silicon wafers from China. In the first half of 2025, India's solar cell imports nearly doubled, accounting for more than half the growth in Chinese cell exports globally. China holds a 94% share of lithium-ion battery imports into India. As of March 2026, one Indian company manufactures lithium-ion cells, with quarterly output of 72,000 cells. The flagship battery manufacturing incentive scheme has delivered 2.8% of its capacity target and disbursed zero incentives.

China supplies 96.6% of India's portable computers and 87% of its antibiotics APIs.

Dependencies are widening into agriculture (combine harvester imports up 180%), construction, and fertiliser blends.

Even India's green transition is structurally underwritten by Chinese supply: solar, electric vehicles, and energy storage all depend on Chinese components and materials. India's energy import profile is migrating from Middle Eastern oil to Chinese-dominated renewable energy supply chains. This is not diversification. It is the substitution of one concentrated vulnerability for another.

National Champions - The institutional implementation architecture India needs

No Indian governmental institution has published a comprehensive whole-chain analysis of the country's import dependencies across energy, fertilisers, rare earths, semiconductors, batteries, solar components, pharmaceutical APIs, and industrial-grade materials like metals and gases. Individual ministries track individual commodities. The coal ministry manages coal. The petroleum ministry manages gas. The environment ministry manages clearances that determine whether either can act. The National Critical Mineral Mission and the Rare Earth Corridors announced in Budget 2026-27 are useful, but they operate in isolation from energy and fertiliser supply chain planning. Nobody owns the whole chain from resource to finished product.

Japan's sogo shosha experience

Japan addressed an analogous problem through its sogo shosha, the general trading companies that control entire value chains from upstream mines to downstream distribution. Mitsubishi, Mitsui, Itochu, Sumitomo, Sojitz, and Marubeni handled 65% of Japan's imports and 50% of its exports at their peak. They originated in the Meiji era, when the government recognised it lacked the managerial expertise to run strategic enterprises and partnered instead with private companies that had demonstrated capability. The government set strategic direction. Private enterprise executed. The partnership persisted across decades and led to the creation of National Champions - companies that delivered on critical sovereign priorities.

India attempted something structurally similar when Nandan Nilekani was appointed from the private sector in 2009 to build Aadhaar. He had a one-page directive, cross-departmental authority, direct reporting to the Prime Minister across multiple governments, and delivered the

world's largest biometric identity system to cover 1.4 billion Indians.

India urgently needs a national mission

India's sovereign resilience challenge demands a comparable institutional design. A National Supercritical Whole-Chain Mission, led by a private sector leader of demonstrated capability, reporting directly to the Prime Minister's Office, with authority to cut across ministry boundaries, break interdepartmental deadlocks in real time, end nanny-state overregulation, and infuse cutting-edge market-aligned talent and competence into implementation. -The mission should begin with a comprehensive vulnerability audit, then partner with private sector companies, Reliance, Tata, L&T, JSW, JSPL among many others, that have the capital and engineering capacity to execute projects for the PSUs. The leader must have a fixed term of at least ten years, insulated from political cycles. The commitment must extend to 2047 and survive changes in government and commodity prices.

PSUs need to play a funding role

PSU joint ventures spiralling in regulatory wormholes for decades are not an execution model. They are a symptom of the problem the mission must solve. PSUs must be compelled to distribute projects to National Champions. These Champions must each cultivate their own universe of step-down vendors that execute components of each project. Startups can bring innovation and unique IP into these projects and build strategic partnerships with the Champions. Just like DARPA initiated technologies that eventually led to the internet and GPS, entire ecosystems can be built under the irrigation of funding from each PSU.

The structural risk of persistent hesitation

India has the raw materials for sovereign resilience: 378 billion tonnes of coal reserves, 7.23 million tonnes of rare earth oxides, and a private sector that built Aadhaar, UPI, Jio's national 4G and 5G network, and the logistics for the world's largest vaccination drive. Industrial groups with the capital and engineering capacity to execute at scale already exist. What is absent is the institutional architecture to convert these into deliberate and coordinated strategic capacity.

The Iran war will pass. Oil prices will stabilise. India's consistent pattern after previous shocks has been to announce missions, constitute committees, and allow urgency to dissipate as prices normalise. Norway converted a depleting resource into compounding national wealth through sustained institutional commitment across political cycles. Japan built the sogo shosha over decades of unbroken government-private partnership. India has advantages larger than another oil field and a resource-poor island combined. Whether its leadership builds the institutional architecture to deploy them, or defaults to another cycle of crisis and amnesia, will determine whether the \$10 trillion aspiration is a plan or a slogan.

Digitising Consciousness and Cognitive Sovereignty

In March 2026, computational neuroscientists and artificial intelligence experts at Eon Systems PBC made a breakthrough by demonstrating the mapping and reconstruction of a fruit fly brain and “uploading it” into a high-fidelity virtual simulation platform, often likened to the Matrix. This demonstration required them to digitally recreate the fruit fly’s neural connectome to mimic its behaviour, without physically transferring any part of its body into the computer-based system. In light of World Creativity and Innovation Day, such innovative progress often blurs the line between fact and fiction. While the creative process determines the direction of scientific innovation, it is the responsibility of policymakers to anticipate and manage its future impacts by preparing appropriate governance tools. Such developments demand not only scientific ingenuity but also institutional innovation in the governance of emerging technologies.

The development of whole-brain emulation (WBE), neural decoding, and brain connectome construction raises questions regarding basic premises about identity, autonomy, and the integrity of the self. If the self can be copied, altered, or replicated in several versions, then the very idea of personal identity and individual agency starts to fall apart. The use of WBE techniques may enable the recreation of cognitive functions from neural information. Still, they would pose ethical challenges to how such data is preserved and protected, what indicates personhood, the possibility of behaviour modification, and unauthorised cognitive replication.

Current AI systems already leverage large-scale behavioural prediction models based on data trails, but with more sophisticated neuro-digital interfaces, these predictions can evolve into complete cognitive reconstructions.

Current AI systems already leverage large-scale behavioural prediction models based on data trails, but with more sophisticated neuro-digital interfaces, these predictions can evolve into complete cognitive reconstructions. Similar to “harvest now, decrypt later” paradigms, neural signal data generated through BCI may be subject to a similar risk, wherein sensitive cognitive information is captured in the present and later reconstructed as analytical and decoding capabilities improve, particularly given existing evidence of reconstruction and inference vulnerabilities in neural data systems.

In addition to technical weaknesses, the rise of digitised cognition could create systemic problems for sensitive data (whether biometric, biological, or cognitive) sovereignty in countries where AI technologies have been incorporated

without appropriate policy protection. The cognitive decision-making may also be at risk beyond data privacy. When identical cognitive systems are available across multiple computational environments, what is defined as personal and held accountable comes into question. Such difficulty in accountability and attribution will complicate the future of WBE. In military, governmental, or economic infrastructure, digitised cognitive actors can be used to make decisions faster than humans, thereby shortening decision-making cycles. However,



this will compromise the attribution if cognitive sovereignty is extended beyond the individual and increase escalation potential.

Cognitive Emulation and Identity Security Architecture

WBE has created excitement in the fields of Brain-Computer Interfaces (BCI) and Artificial Intelligence (AI). The success of such innovations on a larger scale could mean creating digital backups of one’s cognitive functioning, protecting against biological and neurological extinction. However, this would also make us vulnerable to involuntary cloning, exploitation of digital consciousness, or forced simulations.

The success of such innovations on a larger scale could mean creating digital backups of one’s cognitive functioning, protecting against biological and neurological extinction.

As a means of achieving cognitive immortality and even greater simulation, WBE requires the development of new forms of cybersecurity that would control identity authenticity, memory integrity, and cognitive access. The architecture of cognitive emulation systems may need to implement identity verification mechanisms that will guarantee the integrity of the cognitive state and prevent unauthorised copying and manipulation of digitally recorded brains, thus creating a completely new type of “neurodigital security protocols.” Marcello Ienca and Roberto Andorno, in their paper, argue that this should include the right to cognitive liberty, the right to mental

privacy, the right to mental integrity, and the right to psychological continuity.

While these rights primarily focus on the individual, they do not fully address the systemic governance implications of large-scale neural data use

Addressing The Regulatory Lacunae

As part of its national innovation policies, India is prioritising AI and digital neurotechnology to implement an effective infrastructure for digital public governance. Though WBE on a massive scale remains a distant reality for present-day researchers, preparatory work has been done in neuroscience, AI, cybersecurity, and digital governance for the emerging era.

Presently, partial and proto-emulation methodologies are being explored globally, with projects such as the Human Brain Project in the EU, providing platforms such as The Virtual Brain, which succeeded the Human Brain Project, for massive-scale simulation of network brain dynamics, and other models like BOLD signal reconstruction methods to enable cellular-to-system-level brain network dynamics. While all these do not yet comprise the concept of full WBE, they are steps towards realising the possibility of multiscale modelling of brain activities computationally.

In India, similar groundwork can be seen, Amrita Vishwa Vidyapeetham establishing the Amrita Mind Brain Center (AMBC), where advancements have been made concerning brain-cognition-computation interface research and neuroengineering projects. Within a framework of collaboration such as the BOLDsim project, researchers are creating computational technologies to simulate brain functional signals at the cellular level.

Nevertheless, the intersection of neuroscience and artificial intelligence leads to the development of an emerging regulatory gap, especially concerning neural data security, cognitive identity, and the possibility of reconstructing mental conditions from brain signals. Here, one critical organisational issue that falls under the responsibility of the Department of Biotechnology (DBT), which is increasingly engaged in neuroscience and brain research applications, may need to play an increasing role in shaping standards for. With the advent of neurotechnology, the regulatory and financing mechanisms of DBT would have to take into consideration certain protective measures in terms of neural data management, dual-use evaluation, and limitations to brain modelling through artificial intelligence.

To address these new challenges, the nation must develop an innovative form of governance. In such an environment, it is necessary to coordinate among CERT-In, the Department of Biotechnology (DBT), and the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO). Such coordination, especially in the form of a framework, can help manage potential dual-use threats that may arise in the future. To achieve this innovation-oriented governance system, the country can start by focusing on the following four aspects of governance:

Incorporating cognitive privacy standards in existing privacy laws, or formulating new laws to ensure cognitive data is categorised as special category data, would ensure that neural and cognitive data are kept safe from abuse, noting that neural signals can contain sensitive information about an individual, such as intention, emotional state, and even personal identity. This will involve prohibiting non-consensual data collection and further exploitation of neural datasets, including secondary use for behavioural profiling.

Cognitive and neural data security policies to ensure that cognitive data is secure when transmitted, stored, and processed in BCI ecosystems. This will require the three organisations to develop encryption standards for neural signal traffic, secure access credentials for cognitive devices, and threat modelling against potential adversarial attacks.

Transparency of algorithms that interact with cognitive or neural inputs, especially in such high-risk sectors as healthcare, defence, and governance. This will include establishing an auditing process that tracks how neural inputs are handled and used in machine learning.

Institutionalising Regulatory Sandboxes at a national level to enable controlled experimentation in BCI technologies will ensure innovation proceeds within defined ethical boundaries. These sandboxes should explicitly incorporate the aforementioned standards for when AI systems interface directly with neural or behavioural data streams.

The achievement of digitally emulating a neural system at a fly level represents an early step towards the prospect of digitised consciousness. Although digitising the human mind is a way away, current progress in neuroscience and artificial intelligence makes the possibility more real each day. This possibility of digitising the brain brings both benefits and risks to humanity. The potential for cognitive preservation is matched by risk. The most important issue to be addressed today, then, is not just how governments can encourage innovation, but how they can innovate governance itself.

Designing Out Dependence- Demand-Side Innovation for Critical Mineral Security

Export restrictions and energy transitions have brought critical minerals to the forefront of policy debates. The market value of critical minerals for the energy transition was US\$325 billion in 2024 and projected to more than double to US\$770 billion by 2040. Their significance is primarily the result of their role in energy systems and strategic technologies. While critical mineral competition is not inherently a zero-sum game, policy choices like the securitisation of resources taking place today can make it seem like one. Countries are actively accelerating efforts for self-sufficiency and chokepoint mitigation through increased mining, processing, and diversified sourcing. However, these supply-side strategies are constrained. New mining projects have lead times of over 17 years, which gives them no short-term or medium-term utility. Moreover, the geographic concentration of mineral reserves means that complete supply security may remain structurally unattainable. In this context, demand-side innovation, such as material substitution, efficiency improvements, and recycling, provides an underappreciated lever for supply chain resilience. Innovating to reduce demand is not a silver bullet, but it has a very important role to play in limiting exposure in a volatile geopolitical landscape.

Lessons from Global Experience

In September 2010, during a dispute over the Senkaku Islands, China halted REE exports to Japan. Japan imported nearly 90 percent of its REEs from China at the time, and despite the ban being short-lived, prices spiked tenfold within a year. The crisis led to concerted action. Japan sanctioned a supplemental budget of US\$1.2 billion to protect itself from future disruptions. Along with diversifying with alternative suppliers like Australia, Vietnam and Malaysia, it simultaneously invested in reducing demand for the materials it could not reliably source. Companies like Honda, Toyota, and Daikin pioneered technologies to reduce and reuse rare earth content in their products or substitute it entirely. By 2025, Daido Steel and Proterial (formerly Hitachi Metals) had developed heavy REE-free neodymium magnets for hybrid and EV motors, respectively.

Twenty years into Japan's multipronged effort, it had managed to reduce imports from China to less than 60 percent. Although its reliance has not been fully eliminated, by managing the level of its dependence, Japanese firms were much better placed to contend with China's recent critical mineral curbs than the rest of the world.

But mineral substitution has a long history. When molybdenum prices



increased sixfold in the 1970s, steel makers reduced the molybdenum content in alloyed steels by 25% through more heat treatment. Demand for indium-tin-oxide (ITO) films exploded with the proliferation of flat-panel displays. The rise in price led to manufacturers increasing the efficiency of their processes by 50% by recycling indium that previously was discarded in manufacturing waste. Even though the amount of indium in each product remained the same, less needed to be purchased per product.

The frontier of substitution has since expanded. The rise in solar PV deployment in the last decade was enabled in part by a 40-50 percent reduction in the silver and silicon content of solar cells. In battery chemistry, lithium iron phosphate (LFP) is arguably the most consequential demand-side success story of the decade. It has grown to account for over half of EV batteries and over 90 percent of battery energy storage systems globally, cutting out cobalt, manganese, and nickel. This reduced costs from roughly US\$128/kWh for nickel-manganese-cobalt batteries to US\$81/kWh. The next step is sodium-ion batteries, one of the few commercially viable battery chemistries that do not rely on lithium. The catch is that manufacturing for both these batteries is dominated by China. But together, these cases demonstrate that when manufacturers have both economic incentive and a policy mandate to innovate, the results can be transformative.

Trade-Offs and Constraints

Despite the promise of demand-side innovation, they are not perfect solutions. Recycling and substituting will limit the quantity of supply needed and therefore provide a buffer, but they are not alternatives to upstream activities. Recycling alone cannot fully meet the rapidly increasing demand, and complexities in disassembly and

collection can limit the economic viability of formal sector activities.

The central issue with eliminating or reducing a critical raw material will require trade-offs. For instance, technology substitutions that eliminate REEs in EV motors typically have lower energy densities. While prototypes can be promising, there is also a disparity between inventions at laboratory scale and their commercialisation. Iron nitride magnets theoretically have an energy product of 130 MGOe, exceeding neodymium-iron-boron magnets, but commercially available versions deliver only about 10 MGOe. The other concern is that many substitutions trade one critical mineral for another rather than eliminating the problem of scarcity. As a result, the focus needs to be on what solutions are most appropriate for a given application and context.

India's Exposure to Supply Disruptions

India's vulnerability to supply disruptions is driven by its heavy import dependence and limited domestic processing capacity. India is 100 percent import dependent for a third of its critical minerals. This includes germanium, which China introduced export controls on in 2023, and cobalt, which the DRC announced a four-month export suspension to curb falling prices. India's 2070 net-zero target and push for indigenous manufacturing in technology and defence will require stability in these markets over the coming decades.

For some elements, like light rare earth elements (REEs) and graphite, India has significant reserves it can tap into, and for others, it is engaging internationally to access resources. But in both scenarios, China is a chokepoint in midstream refining. In 2024, China accounted for 91 percent of global rare earth element processing, 70 percent of lithium processing, and exported over

half of the global supply of graphite. Even if other countries can bridge the processing gap, for certain minerals like heavy REEs, tungsten, and antimony, both reserves and industrial capacity are concentrated in the same country, making the dependence on supply structurally irreducible.

India's Emerging Demand-Side Efforts

The National Critical Minerals Mission has outlined INR 34,300 crore over seven years to strengthen the domestic value chain. While recycling and beneficiation are mentioned in the policy, major investments and announcements have focused on sourcing, exploration, mining, and processing.

India's demand-side efforts, albeit nascent and fragmented, are beginning to take shape through innovation in recycling and substitution. Most activity is at the research or early-startup stage, and the policy architecture only began emerging in 2024-25. In September 2025, the Centre approved a ₹1,500 crore Incentive Scheme for promotion of Critical Mineral Recycling, signalling a shift toward circularity.

In the same year, the Battery Waste Management Rules were amended to mandate stricter Extended Producer Responsibility, digital traceability, and higher material recovery targets. Despite the regulatory ambition, India's collection and sorting rate of discarded lithium-ion batteries is 1 percent and the informal sector still handles almost 90 percent of battery waste. Infrastructure is gradually growing and catalysing new models of formal-sector participation and technological processes.

On the substitution side, public and private actors are exploring ways to design around critical dependencies. The Department of Science & Technology has supported research to fabricate improved low-cost heavy rare-earth-free high neodymium-iron-boron magnets. Automobile companies such as Ola and MATTER are advancing rare-earth-free ferrite-based magnets for the switch to more abundantly available materials. Sodium-ion battery research is the most developed cluster of demand-side activity in India, with national-level industry-academia exchanges at IIT Bombay, upgrades in charging, and the first commercial rollout by Naxion Energy. However, the commercial scale is very nascent. These efforts indicate some recognition of the problem but also highlight the absence of a coherent strategy to translate individual efforts into systemic impact.

Strengthening MSME Resilience in an Era of Geoeconomic Turbulence

The micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs) segment in India has battled through a rough year, compelling it to adapt to a shifting geopolitical landscape. First, trade restructuring and US tariffs dampened India's export competitiveness and posed a serious threat to livelihoods, affecting millions of low-skilled and semi-skilled workers. More recently, the US-Israel conflict with Iran has sent tremors through the heart of the Indian economy, manifested in disruptions in the supply of commercial LPG cylinders and increases in freight, fuel, and raw material prices.

For instance, Morbi in Gujarat, one of the country's largest ceramic clusters, has witnessed the closure of 100 ceramic units due to disruptions in propane supply. If the situation fails to ease, 400 additional propane-based units are likely to shut down operations. India's textile industry, which is dependent on petroleum byproducts, has seen a rise in raw material prices, labour shortages, and increased freight costs, resulting in a reported loss of INR 100 crore per day. Similarly, the plastics and polymers sector, where most industries are characterised as MSMEs, is facing acute raw material shortages. Several associated industries, such as agricultural equipment, toys, and healthcare, have sought government support in response to rising manufacturing costs.

Indian MSMEs are particularly vulnerable to external shocks because of their thin capital margins, high input dependence, weak market access, low technology adoption, and fragmented infrastructure.

To enable assistance for the MSME segment, the Centre has responded to rising crude prices by reducing excise duty on petrol, fully exempting diesel from excise duty, and imposing an export duty on aviation turbine fuel to strengthen domestic supplies. To support trade, the government has launched RELIEF (Resilience & Logistics Intervention for Export Facilitation) under the Export Promotion Mission. The scheme is time-bound and aims to shield Indian exporters from high freight costs, increased insurance premiums, and export risks due to disruptions in the Strait of Hormuz. Additionally, the Directorate General of Foreign Trade has extended the RoDTEP scheme until 30 September 2026 to offset embedded taxes and duties in exported goods. Further, the government is considering a 3-6-month loan repayment moratorium for industries affected by war-related disruptions. This temporary relief would help borrowers manage economic stress as input costs, logistics



expenses, and market uncertainty rise. A similar moratorium was implemented during the COVID-19 crisis to help businesses absorb external shocks and avoid widespread distress. The central bank has also announced an extension of the enhanced export credit period up to 450 days for pre-shipment and post-shipment finance.

Addressing Indian MSMEs' Vulnerability to Global Shocks

Even as these external shocks remain unprecedented, they expose a deeper fault line: the enduring vulnerability of MSMEs to disruption. Indian MSMEs are particularly vulnerable to external shocks because of their thin capital margins, high input dependence, weak market access, low technology adoption, and fragmented infrastructure. The imperative question now is how these enterprises can be made resilient enough to withstand and absorb such shocks.

First and foremost, it is crucial to enhance the working-capital resilience of MSMEs, as day-to-day cash flow serves as a critical liquidity buffer to cushion the blow of rising input prices. This transformation should take the form of a long-term policy shift, with stronger enforcement of faster settlement regulations, wider use of invoice receivables-based finance, and deeper adoption of Trade Receivables Discounting System (TReDS) through the expansion of the pool of buyers, financiers, and public procurement flows.

It is crucial to enhance the working-capital resilience of MSMEs, as day-to-day cash flow serves as a critical liquidity buffer to cushion the blow of rising input prices.

Currently, labour-intensive manufacturing in India remains widely dispersed, resulting in fragmented supply chains and weak localisation that can drive up production costs. The policy focus must shift towards building supply chains that enable smoother raw material sourcing, stronger supplier networks, and more efficient logistics and warehousing. Cluster-based models, anchored in shared infrastructure and localisation, can create more integrated value chains and help India move up the manufacturing ladder by offering end-to-end production capabilities. Such concentration and coordination can serve as a buffer during geopolitical shocks by reducing dependence on distant or vulnerable supply routes, improving access to alternative suppliers, and enabling production networks to adjust more quickly when supply chains are disrupted.

Agility through technology adoption is another characteristic that can make MSMEs more competitive and better prepared to handle global shocks. AI can be especially useful in anticipating inventory needs, forecasting demand, tracking orders, and managing delivery timelines across global markets. It can

support MSMEs in keeping pace with changing international demand patterns, shipment schedules, and logistics disruptions, allowing them to plan production and delivery more effectively. AI-based applications can enhance MSMEs' logistics performance by enabling route optimisation and reducing delivery timelines by 15-20 percent. A stronger digital presence can also open more doors for enterprises through e-commerce and the building of brand reputation.

AI can be especially useful in anticipating inventory needs, forecasting demand, tracking orders, and managing delivery timelines across global markets.

Other measures to ease market access include trade facilitation through procedural simplification. A study by the Central Board of Indirect Taxes and Customs (CBIC) found that the simplification of processes through digital application systems and assistance increased MSME participation in voluntary World Customs Organization-based compliance certification for businesses engaged in international trade.

With this long-term agenda in place, MSMEs must be equipped not just to compete, but to withstand the mounting uncertainties of an increasingly volatile geoeconomic landscape. It is time to position MSMEs not as small and outdated, but as small, agile, adaptive, and pivotal to India's next growth story.

Sadhvi Satish Sail crowned Femina Miss India World 2026, calls win "surreal"

Sadhvi Satish Sail was crowned Femina Miss India World 2026 at the grand finale of the prestigious pageant held in Bhubaneswar, marking a defining moment in her journey. Overwhelmed with emotion, Sail described her victory as "surreal," expressing deep gratitude for the opportunity and the experience that shaped her path to the crown. Her win not only highlights her individual excellence but also reflects the spirit of determination, authenticity and camaraderie that defined this year's competition.

Who is Sadhvi Satish Sail?

Sadhvi Satish Sail hails from Goa and represented the state at the Femina Miss India World 2026 pageant.

A model and budding entrepreneur, she combines academic strength with creative interests.

She has studied Economics and International Relations at the University of British Columbia, reflecting a global outlook alongside her pageant journey.

Known for her diverse skills, she enjoys taxidermy and can speak, read and write in seven languages.



Speaking after her win, Sail emphasised that the journey was not just about competition but about shared growth and meaningful connections. She fondly referred to her fellow contestants as "winners," underlining the strong bond they developed throughout the event. According to her, the experience was filled with learning, friendship, and mutual encouragement, making the victory even more special.

Reflecting on her preparation, Sail revealed that her journey began just three months before the competition, making her achievement even more

remarkable. She acknowledged that the road was not without challenges, but credited the organisers and mentors for their constant guidance and support. Their efforts ensured that all participants remained motivated and cared for, even during the most demanding phases of the contest.

Looking ahead, Sail expressed both excitement and a strong sense of responsibility as she prepares to represent India on the global stage. She stated that this victory is only the beginning of a much larger journey and that she aims to carry forward her role with honesty, integrity and

compassion. With a clear vision, she hopes to make the country proud while embracing opportunities for personal and professional growth.

Sail also shared an inspiring message for young people, encouraging them to believe in themselves and stay true to their individuality. She stressed the importance of authenticity, noting that one should never compare themselves to others. According to her, self-belief and dedication are key to achieving one's goals, regardless of how late the journey begins.

The event also celebrated the diversity and cultural richness of India, with participants from across the country showcasing their unique identities while representing a unified national spirit. It was not just a beauty pageant but a platform for empowerment, self-discovery, and transformation. Judges and guests praised the contestants for their poise, intelligence and stage presence, highlighting that true beauty lies beyond appearances.

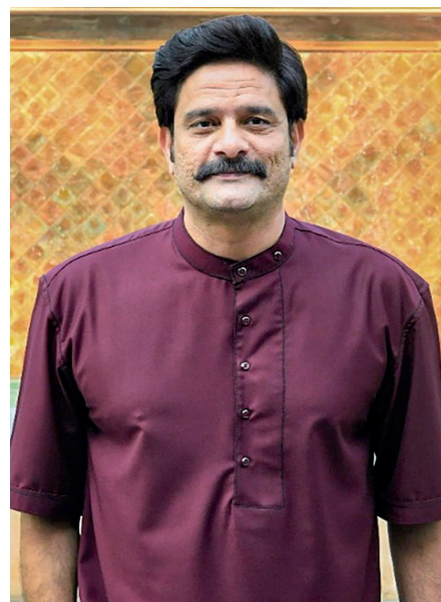
Jaideep Ahlawat says layered roles, not 'vanilla characters', make acting more interesting

Actor Jaideep Ahlawat says he always looks to go beyond the tropes of a typical hero and villain role by adding layers to even "vanilla characters".

Known for his work in titles like "Gangs Of Wasseypur", "Raees", "Pataal Lok", "Broken News", "Three of Us", "Jaane Jaan", and "The Family Man 3", said he has little interest in playing one-dimensional roles.

"I've not got to play a vanilla character yet. I feel when the character has more layers than it becomes much more interesting to essay that role, as compared to single dimensional character. So, if there aren't any layers, I try to put elements or layers in a character to make it look believable as an actor," the actor told PTI in an interview on the sidelines of the book launch event of journalist-turned-author Hussain Zaidi's latest book, "Mafia Queens of India".

The "Pataal Lok" star said his other aim is to make his characters



look believable.

"The emotion with which the character is written must be conveyed so that the story makes sense; otherwise, it becomes flat. As an actor, I feel the more layering in a character, be it positive or negative character, then it will be fun to play such a part," he said.

ED seeks time to file reply on Jacqueline Fernandez's plea to turn approver in money laundering case

The Enforcement Directorate (ED) on Monday sought time to file its reply on a plea by actress Jacqueline Fernandez seeking to turn approver in a Rs 200 crore money laundering case involving alleged conman Sukesh Chandrashekar.

Special Judge Prashant Sharma posted the matter for further proceedings on May 8.

The court had earlier on April 17 issued notice to the agency after the actresses' counsel filed the application.

Fernandez, who was summoned by the ED several times in connection with the investigation, was named as an accused for the first time in a supplementary charge sheet filed by the agency.

On July 3, last year, the Delhi High Court dismissed her petition for quashing the Enforcement Case

Information Report (ECIR) in the money laundering case.

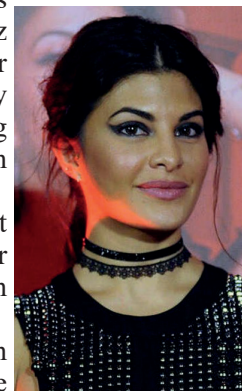
Two months later, the Supreme Court refused to interfere with the high court's order.

Delhi Police had booked Chandrasekhar for allegedly duping the spouses of former promoters of Ranbaxy, Shivinder Singh and Malvinder Singh, of Rs 200 crore.

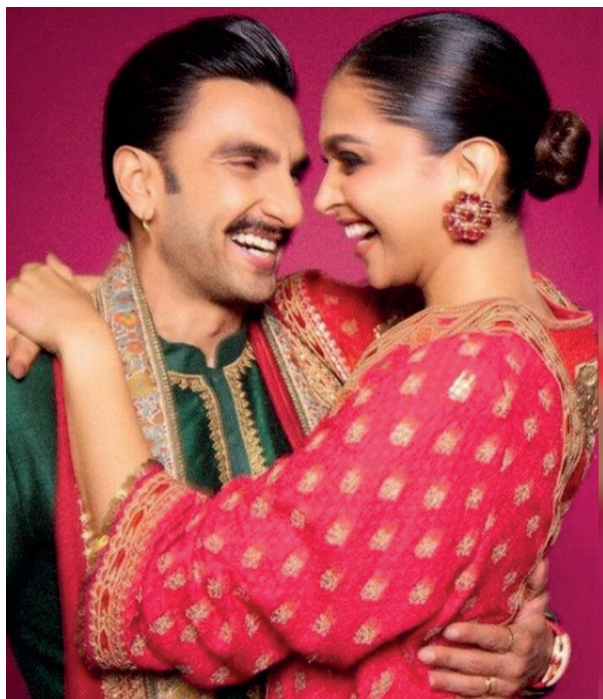
There are other ongoing investigations against him in several cases across the country.

Chandrasekhar and his wife, Leena Paulose, facing proceedings in a money laundering case, were arrested by Delhi Police along with others.

The police invoked the Maharashtra Control of Organised Crime Act (MCOCA) in the case.



Deepika Padukone, Ranveer Singh announce second pregnancy



Bollywood icons Deepika Padukone and Ranveer Singh have officially announced they are expecting their second child. The couple shared the news via a joint Instagram post on Sunday.

The announcement featured a photograph of the couple's first daughter, Dua, holding a positive pregnancy test kit. Padukone accompanied the post

with a brief caption consisting of two evil eye emojis. The couple, who married in a grand ceremony at Lake Como in 2018, welcomed Dua on September 8, 2024.

The news arrives as Singh celebrates the box-office success of "Dhurandhar 2", while Padukone is slated to appear in Siddharth Anand's "King" alongside Shah Rukh Khan.

Shibani Dandekar ventures into jewellery design with Irasva Collaboration

Television personality and actor Shibani Dandekar is stepping into a new creative space, embracing her role as a jewellery designer through a collaboration that reflects both her personality and evolving style.

Partnering with Leshna Shah, Founder and Creative Director of Irasva Fine Jewellery, Dandekar is exploring a design journey that feels deeply personal and refreshingly unconventional.

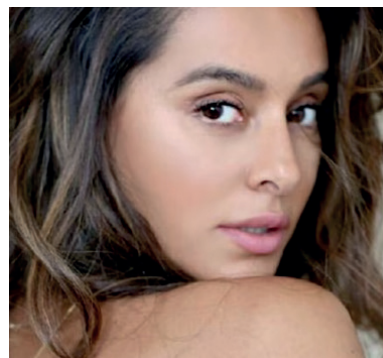
In a candid conversation with HELLO! India, the duo opened up about what makes this collaboration special. For both women, the brand is not just about creating jewellery—it's about expressing individuality.

Their shared approach leans towards breaking traditional fashion rules and redefining how jewellery is worn and perceived today. Shibani, in particular, embraces a fluid styling philosophy.

Rather than choosing between minimalism and bold pieces, she admits she is "more of a stack-it kind of girl." At the same time, she doesn't shy away from experimenting with statement pieces, noting that she enjoys styling "statement pieces every now and then."

What stands out in her

approach is the emphasis on freedom and identity. "It is about enjoying it, and it is about having an identity," she says, reflecting a mindset that goes beyond trends. This spirit is also evident in the duo's shared love for mixing metals—a styling



choice they both wholeheartedly support with an enthusiastic "yay" whenever the opportunity arises.

The collaboration is also rooted in a strong personal bond. Working closely with Leshna Shah, whom she considers a close friend, made the process feel seamless. "I think when you're working with your best friend on something that you are so passionate about, you're so in sync with, it just came very easily to us. And it just felt very natural to do," Shibani Dandekar shared.

She added that their differing

personalities bring versatility to the collection, as each of them styles the pieces in unique ways depending on their lifestyle and mood.

When it comes to favourites, Shibani Dandekar was quick to point out a piece she holds close—a modern interpretation of a classic. "It's a really beautiful take on a tennis necklace. It's something that you can keep on and stack with other things."

Also Read: BAFTA 2026: Farhan Akhtar and Shibani Dandekar shine on the red carpet, watch here

Meanwhile, Leshna Shah highlighted a horse pendant inspired by the Year of the Horse, praising its versatility: "It allows you to actually stack different things on it. Like it can actually add on charms, remove charms, wear it in different ways. I think that would be one of my favourite pieces."

On the personal front, Shibani Dandekar tied the knot with Farhan Akhtar on 19 February 2022 in an intimate, non-religious ceremony held at his father's farmhouse in Khandala. Following the wedding, she publicly chose to adopt her husband's surname, dropping her maiden name on social media.

Farah Khan agreed to act in Toaster after friends Rajkummar Rao and Patralekhaa reached out, reveals Vivek Daschaudary

Filmmaker and choreographer Farah Khan is back on screen in a fun, unexpected acting avatar with the new film *Toaster*, where she plays Nandini, the sharp, slightly intimidating but humorous owner of a small-town orphanage.

It's a role that leans heavily into her natural comic timing, and she slips into it with ease.

In the film, her character ends up entangled in a quirky situation involving a toaster and Rajkummar Rao's character, Ramakant, whom she constantly chases down to return it.

What could have been a simple premise turns into a playful cat-and-mouse dynamic, with Farah Khan's character bringing a lot of personality and punch to the story.

Farah Khan has dabbled in acting before. She first took on a lead role in *Shirin Farhad Ki Toh Nikal Padi* (2012) opposite Boman Irani, and over the years has popped up in memorable cameos in films like *Kuch Kuch Hota Hai* (1998), *Kal Ho Naa Ho* (2003), and *Om Shanti Om* (2007). But *Toaster* gives her a more defined space to play with



humour and character quirks rather than just brief appearances.

According to director Vivek Daschaudary, the casting happened very naturally. Speaking to *Hindustan Times*, he shared that the team always felt Farah Khan was the perfect fit. "The credit

goes to Rajkummar and Patralekhaa completely. They have been friends all their lives and Farah ma'am has been very gracious enough to accept to be a small part of our film."

He also added that the character felt tailor-made for her. "As soon as we saw this character, we knew that this was meant for her. She could play it bang-on! She just had to be herself!"

After Rajkummar Rao and Patralekhaa reached out, Farah Khan came on board quite quickly, making the process smooth and collaborative.

Outside films, Farah Khan has also found a new wave of popularity through her 2025 vlogs, where her easy chemistry with her cook Dilip has become a surprise internet favourite thanks to their playful, unscripted humour.

Toaster, also featuring Sanya Malhotra, Archana Puran Singh, Abhishek Banerjee, Upendra Limaye, and Seema Pahwa, released on Netflix on April 15 and follows a miserly man whose obsession with saving money leads to chaos after a seemingly simple wedding gift spirals out of control.

8-year-old Gurnoor Kaur becomes youngest Taekwondo black belt in J-K

Poonch

Eight-year-old Gurnoor Kaur expressed her joy after she became the youngest Taekwondo black belt holder in the entire Jammu and Kashmir region, marking a remarkable milestone in her sporting journey.

Expressing her joy over the achievement, Gurnoor said she is delighted with the recognition and credited her success to years of consistent practice and dedication.

"I am delighted with this achievement... I have been practising for 4 years... I want to become a national player and bring a gold medal for the country," she told ANI.

Her coach, Zaira Bukhari, hailed the feat as a moment of pride not just for the district but for the entire Union Territory. She highlighted Gurnoor's discipline and hard work over the past four years, calling her an inspiration for other young girls.

"It is a proud moment for the district as well as the entire Union Territory that Gurnoor Kaur became the youngest black belt holder of J&K UT. She has been working hard for 4 years, and it is an inspiration for other girls as well," Bukhari said.

He further expressed confidence in Gurnoor's future prospects, stating that with continued dedication, the young athlete has the potential to represent India at the international level.



"With this pace, she will definitely become an international player and represent India on a global level one day," he added.

In February, in a significant push to strengthen India's combat sports pipeline, the Mission Olympic Cell (MOC) gave a go-ahead to customised international exposure and coaching support for athletes in taekwondo and karate, ahead of the Asian Games 2026, according to a release.

In taekwondo, Rodali Barua has been backed for participation in five international competitions - Bulgaria Open 2026, Slovenia Open 2026, Dutch Open 2026, Oceania Championships 2026 -

which are G2 level competitions as recognised by the World Taekwondo Federation (WTF).

She is also scheduled to participate in the fourth Mount Everest International Open Taekwondo Championship in Nepal, 2026, a G1-level tournament.

The Target Asian Games Group (TAGG) has recommended the proposals for a financial amount of Rs 21.20 Lakh, and the tourneys are scheduled over the months of February and March for Barua, who has been a bronze medalist at the President's Cup, Oceania Region, Gold Coast, in 2025

Maradona's daughter assails doctor in negligence trial over soccer great's death



Buenos Aires

One of Diego Maradona's daughters lashed out at neurosurgeon Leopoldo Luque, who was considered her father's primary physician at the time of his death, during a negligence trial on Tuesday.

Gianinna Maradona, in a court in the Buenos Aires town of San Isidro, testified in the trial of seven medical professionals accused of negligence in her father's death in 2020.

"I heard on television that he said he wasn't his doctor, and it makes me very angry that he won't take responsibility," Gianinna said.

Luque and six others are standing a new trial because last May the court declared a mistrial after Julieta Makintach, one of the original three presiding judges, stepped down over criticism about her participation in a documentary on the case.

The negligence case accuses Maradona's medical team of failing to provide adequate care in the weeks leading up to his death at a home

outside Buenos Aires. Maradona died at age 60 from cardiac arrest while recovering from surgery for a blood clot on the brain.

The defendants, who deny all accusations, were charged with culpable homicide, a charge similar to involuntary manslaughter in that it implies the accused were aware of the risk caused by their alleged reckless conduct and ignored it.

Maradona's daughter said that Luque, psychiatrist Agustina Cosachov and psychologist Carlos Diaz were responsible for Maradona's health and the home confinement where, she said, the star's health deteriorated day by day without anyone apparently remedying it.

Luque's defence alleges that Gianinna and her sister Dalma - the former soccer star's eldest daughters from his relationship with Claudia Villafane - were responsible for not acting with the necessary speed to care for their father during a long process of declining health.

Former PCB CEO Wasim Khan to step down as ICC General Manager

New Delhi

Former Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) CEO Wasim Khan will step down as the International Cricket Council's (ICC) general manager after serving four years in the role, according to ESPNcricinfo.

According to the report, Wasim took over from Geoff Allardice in May 2022, after Allardice

assumed the CEO role at the ICC. Wasim had arrived at the ICC after nearly three years as the PCB's CEO.

The report further added that the former PCB CEO is expected to relinquish the role at the end of June and take up another from July.

Wasim Khan's exit follows the departure of many senior ICC officials over the last

two years, including Allardice - replaced by Sanjog Gupta as CEO - Chris Tetley (head of evens) and Alex Marshall, who led the anti-corruption unit. Tetley has been replaced by Gaurav Saxena, and Marshall by Andrew Ephgrave.

Wasim Khan, who was born in England, featured in First-Class cricket between 1995 and 2001 and played List

A matches from 1998 to 2002. He was also the first British-born Muslim to play county cricket. He played for Warwickshire in the mid-to-late 90s. In List A cricket, he represented Warwickshire, Sussex and Derbyshire. He was part of Warwickshire's county title-winning campaign in 1995, averaging nearly 50 through the season.

Abhishek Sharma has a lot of maturity: SRH bowling coach Varun Aaron

Hyderabad

Sunrisers Hyderabad (SRH) bowling coach Varun Aaron credited Abhishek Sharma's growing maturity and clarity of approach for his match-winning performance against Delhi Capitals (DC), saying the young opener has evolved into a player who understands conditions and takes responsibility.

Speaking after SRH's comfortable win, Aaron said Sharma has carried forward the form he found towards the latter stages of the World Cup, adding that the familiar surroundings of the Rajiv Gandhi International Cricket Stadium have further boosted his confidence.

"He has done so well here over the years. When he comes to Hyderabad and is around the team, it becomes his safe space. He believes he is the man to take the game forward, and that intent is really important," Aaron said during the post-match press conference.

The SRH bowling coach also highlighted the role of the team's

support staff in shaping Sharma's approach. He noted that consistent efforts by the batting coaches, including detailed discussions around match situations, have helped the



opener refine his game.

"He had a simple plan today--to bat till the last over. The batting staff has put in a lot of work with him, and that is clearly visible now," he added.

Aaron emphasised that Sharma's success is not just about aggressive

strokeplay but also about reading conditions and adapting accordingly. He pointed out that the surface did not allow reckless hitting, and Sharma's ability to pace his innings stood out.

"You cannot be the number one T20 batsman in the world without maturity. He assesses the opposition and the surface before deciding how to play. Today was not a pitch where you could go hard at every ball, and he respected that," Aaron said.

While acknowledging Sharma's high-risk style, Aaron said such an approach requires patience and backing from the team when results do not always

go his way.

"He has shown glimpses of this before. When you play a high-risk, high-reward game, it may not always come off. But a player like Abhishek deserves that leeway," he added.

Sharma shattered multiple records

as he slammed his second-highest score in the IPL. Sharma was in sensational form on Tuesday. He brought up his second IPL century off just 47 balls, smashing 9 fours and 10 massive sixes in a breathtaking display of power-hitting.

The SRH opener finished unbeaten on 135 off 68 deliveries, as Hyderabad piled up a formidable 242/2 in their 20 overs. The knock marked Sharma's second IPL century.

With this effort, Abhishek moved to nine T20 centuries, drawing level with Virat Kohli among Indian batters.

In the all-time list, Chris Gayle leads with 22 centuries, followed by Babar Azam (12) and David Warner (10), while Abhishek now joins a group featuring players such as Quinton de Kock, Rilee Rossouw and Sahibzada Farhan.

Defending a massive total of 243, Eshan Malinga produced a superb four-wicket haul to power Sunrisers Hyderabad to a convincing 47-run victory over Delhi Capitals.

SAI and ICMR organise workshop on good clinical practice to strengthen ethical sports science research

New Delhi

A one-day Workshop on Good Clinical Practice (GCP) was successfully conducted at the Return to Play Division, Indira Gandhi Stadium, New Delhi, in a hybrid mode by the Sports Science Division (Erstwhile NCSSR), Sports Authority of India (SAI), in collaboration with the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR).

The workshop brought together researchers, support staff, and key stakeholders involved in sports and clinical/sports science research to enhance their understanding of ethical and regulatory frameworks governing human studies, according to a press release.

Scientific sessions led by experts from ICMR covered critical areas such as ICH-GCP (E6) principles, ICMR Ethical Guidelines, provisions of NDCTR 2019, roles and responsibilities of investigators and Institutional Ethics Committees (IECs), informed consent processes, and management of serious adverse events (SAEs).

Highlighting the importance of Good Clinical Practice, Dr. Stuti Bhargava, Scientist-E, ICMR,

emphasised that "Good Clinical Practice (GCP) is an international ethical and scientific quality standard for designing, conducting, recording, and reporting clinical trials involving human subjects.

It ensures the protection of participants' rights, safety, and well-being, while guaranteeing the credibility and integrity of trial data. Compliance with these standards is essential for regulatory submissions and adherence to globally accepted guidelines."

Emphasising the significance of such capacity-building initiatives, Brig. (Dr) Bibhu Kalyan Nayak, Executive Director, Sports Science Division, SAI, stated, "As sports science research increasingly involves advanced interventions and athlete-centric studies, adherence to Good Clinical Practice is not merely a regulatory requirement but a moral responsibility. Ensuring ethical compliance, participant safety, and data integrity is fundamental to building trust and generating credible, high-quality evidence that directly contributes to athlete performance and well-being."

Former Italy star backs Guardiola to bring "radical change" in national side after hat-trick of FIFA WC misses

Madrid

Former Italy and Juventus defender Leonardo Bonucci has called for Manchester City Pep Guardiola to become the national side's head coach and bring in a "radical change" following Azzurri's failure to qualify for a FIFA World Cup for the third time in a row.

In a shocker, earlier in April, Italy failed to make it to their third FIFA WC in a row following a 4-1 loss to Bosnia and Herzegovina on penalties. The four-time champions, who last won the World Cup in 2006 and last competed in the marquee tournament back in 2014, miss out on competing with some of the football's best yet again despite the World Cup's expansion to 48 teams. The tournament is set to take place from June 11 to July 19 and will be co-hosted by the USA, Mexico and Canada.

What is even more baffling is that during this time period, Italy found their first-ever qualification to a T20 World Cup in cricket, where Italy



enjoys an associate nation status and is ranked world number 26. Italy competed in the T20WC, co-hosted by India and Sri Lanka, securing their first-ever win against Nepal and almost chasing down 203 runs against two-time champions England, falling short by 24 runs.

Now, after another World Cup qualifier debacle, head coach Gennaro Gattuso has stepped down, and Italy is looking out for a new head coach.

Bonucci, who worked as a technical coach in the national team, said, as quoted by ESPN, "If we want a radical change in the national team, I would say the right man for the job is Pep Guardiola. It is very difficult, but dreaming costs nothing."

Flamingos arrive in MMR, months later than expected



Mumbai

After a long time, flamingos have begun making their pilgrimage to the MMR in the past week. Months after their usual arrival time in winter, the pink flocks of Greater Flamingos and Lesser Flamingos are arriving in far fewer quantities than usual, with environmentalists and bird enthusiasts attributing the stray from the latter to climatic changes and the threats to their habitats.

The flamingo flocks have been spotted in Mumbai in the past week. In the last week, the pink flock has been spotted in the Thane Creek Sanctuary and the Bhandup Pumping Station. As the tide becomes high, the birds fly to the higher altitude wetlands in Navi Mumbai where there are waters like the TS Chanakya, NRI and DPS wetland, said environmentalist

BN Kumar, director of the NGO NatConnect Foundation.

“Typically, the flamingos arrive from Gujarat in October-November in search of shallow waters and away from parts in Kutch which experience severe winters. But this time around, due to the extended monsoon, the flamingos spread themselves around Gujarat and stayed there,” said Kumar. “Now, as it has started getting warmer there, the flamingos have started arriving here where they have access to shallow waters and the microorganisms they feed on.”

Vidyasagar Hariharan, who runs the Instagram account @flamingosofMumbai noted this was the second time in a decade since he has been documenting the birds, that their arrival was so late. The last time they were late was in

2018, similarly due to an extended monsoon.

Both noted that the flamingos were far fewer in number. With over 2 lakh birds arriving in the MMR typically, this time around, Kumar estimated the number arriving were at 25,000. Hariharan noted a 30-40% drop in numbers than usual.

Another reason, however, for the flamingos’ aversion to the MMR is the rampant destruction of the wetlands and mudflats, the habitat of the flamingos. The environmentalists note pollution of waters, land filling of the wetlands, causing stagnation and excessive moss and algae.

“Wetlands in Navi Mumbai have increasingly been polluted, landfilled, and blocked, which has led to stagnant water and moss forming. When flamingos are

not able to identify mud flats as they fly above, they tend to avoid those spots. This has led to fewer and fewer flamingos coming to the MMR,” said environmentalist Nandkumar Pawar, from the NGO Sagar Shakti. Kumar and Hariharan repeated this, although Kumar noted the Forest Department is currently doing a clean up of the DPS Lake.

Hariharan added, “In the last few years, as the wetlands in Navi Mumbai have started becoming more and more inhospitable to the birds, they have been going as far as Malad for the wetlands there.”

Most of the flamingoes will now depart in June, as the monsoon descends. “Navi Mumbai has been crowned as Flamingo City. If this trend continues, we’ll be left only with flamingo statues,” said Kumar.