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Draft stricter parole laws for sexual offenders, Maharashtra CM tells law department

Mumbai

Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis on Tuesday directed the law and judiciary department to draft stringent laws to ensure sexual offenders do not misuse parole.

The chief minister's directives to law and judiciary department comes in wake of rape and murder of a minor girl in Pune allegedly by a 65-year-old man.

Sources in the CMO said, "Fadnavis, during the cabinet meeting, expressed serious concerns over such incidents. He directed the law and judiciary department to draft stringent laws to ensure accused don't misuse the parole provisions." He directed the department to put in place strictest laws to make parole impossible for individuals who commit heinous crime and indulge in



sexual offences.

According to sources, "CM also said that data indicates that, in 90 per cent cases of sexual offences, accused are repeated offenders who often seek recourse of parole."

The chief minister said that in cases of sexual abuse, almost 80 to 90 per cent accused were arrested for similar crimes in the past. They availed parole and got out of prisons. They had no fear nor repentance in many cases, he said.

Therefore, the CM said, "We have to plug the loopholes. Make stricter laws to ensure sexual offenders were not misusing parole provisions to get out of prisons."

According to sources, majority of the ministers in cabinet gave their approval for the same.

A senior BJP minister said, "There is unanimity on making laws stringent for parole. Everybody in the cabinet was of the view that government needs to give a stern message that incidents like in Pune will be dealt firmly."

Maharashtra pauses Hindi exam for officers after MNS, language groups protest

Mumbai

The Maharashtra Government Wednesday stayed the proposed Hindi-language examinations for its gazetted and non-gazetted officers and employees after strong opposition from Marathi groups and the Maharashtra Navnirman Sena (MNS).

Marathi Language Minister Uday Samant announced that the examinations scheduled for June 28 have been put on hold and said the government would review whether such examinations were necessary at all.

"If it is found that there is no need for such an examination, then it will never be conducted again," Samant said.

Marathi-language activists and political groups had questioned the need for Hindi testing in a state where Marathi is the official language.

The development comes weeks after the Maharashtra Government pushed for auto-

rickshaw drivers to know Marathi, reviving wider debates around language, identity and regional politics in the state.

The MNS and the language body, Marathi Abhyas Kendra, argued that even though the Hindi exams are old, continuing or actively conducting them sends a message that Hindi is being prioritised in a Marathi-speaking state.

Reacting strongly to the decision, MNS leader Sandeep Deshpande earlier accused the government of attempting to impose Hindi "through the backdoor" and warned of agitation at examination centres if the June 28 test is conducted.

While speaking to reporters, Deshpande said, "We are already insisting that Marathi should be spoken and respected in Maharashtra. Marathi is the state language. Then why should officers here be forced to appear for a Hindi

examination?"

He alleged that the government was trying to "please leaders sitting in Delhi" and claimed the move reflected a larger political attempt to promote Hindi in non-Hindi-speaking states.

Issuing a direct warning to the government, Deshpande said the MNS would strongly oppose the examination if it were made compulsory for officers. "If the government forcibly conducts this examination, then whatever happens at the examination centres on June 28, the state government will be responsible for it," he said.

He further questioned why officers in Maharashtra should be required to learn Hindi when Marathi itself was still not being fully implemented in administration and official communication. "This is an indirect attempt to impose Hindi. We will not allow such efforts in Maharashtra," he said.

In a statement, the Marathi Abhyas Kendra's president, Dr Deepak Pawar, questioned the need for Hindi examinations in a Marathi-speaking state and said making Hindi testing part of service conditions for government employees was unnecessary.

"Marathi is Maharashtra's official language. Government employees should be able to work and communicate in Marathi. But when Marathi is already the language of administration, why is there a need to test employees' Hindi knowledge every year?" Pawar said.

The organisation argued that Marathi-speaking people generally do not face difficulty with basic Hindi communication and questioned whether similar Hindi examinations were conducted for government employees in other non-Hindi-speaking states, such as Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Gujarat, or West Bengal.

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Digital Media Editors and Journalists' 3rd National Convention Held with Grandeur at Goa's Kala Academy



Panaji (Goa)

The Digital Media Editors and Journalists Association, one of India's leading organizations representing digital media professionals, successfully hosted its third National Convention at the prestigious Kala Academy in Panaji on Monday.

The convention began at 10 a.m. and was inaugurated by Goa Chief Minister Dr. Pramod Sawant. The event was attended by several prominent dignitaries from both the Central and State governments.

In his inaugural address, Chief Minister Dr. Sawant highlighted the growing importance of digital journalism in the modern era. He stated, "Digital media has emerged as a powerful platform for public awareness, transparency, and the rapid dissemination of information. However, maintaining accuracy, ethics, and accountability in this medium is equally important." He stressed the principle of "Accuracy First" and urged digital journalists to stay vigilant against the spread of fake news.

The convention was also graced by Union Minister of State for Power Shripad Naik, Goa Social Welfare Minister Subhash Phaldesai, Industries

Minister Uday Samant, Rural Development Minister Jaykumar Gore, along with several other distinguished guests. The delegates were warmly welcomed by the organization's National President and Founder Raja Mane, Goa State President Anil Patil, National Secretary Tejas Raut, State General Secretary Vikas Bhosale, Maharashtra Vice-President Sanjay Bhaire, Mumbai President Prashant Kashid, Nagesh Kals Gaunde, and other office-bearers. Thousands of digital editors and journalists from Maharashtra, Goa, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, Punjab, Delhi, and several other states participated in the convention. On the occasion, the organization also released its annual magazine. During the event, the National Honour Awards 2026 were presented to distinguished personalities for their outstanding contributions across various fields. Among the awardees were Gomantak breeder Kamalakanth Tari, scientist Dr. Mahua Saha, MLA and yoga promoter Kamlesh Bandekar, noted administrator Deepak Narvekar, several social activists, agriculturists, and poetess Chitratai Kshirsagar.

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Digital Media Editors and Journalists' 3rd National Convention Held with Grandeur at Goa's Kala Academy



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The afternoon sessions featured insightful panel discussions on important topics such as “Changing Phases and Challenges of Journalism,” “Constitutional Aspects of Freedom of Expression,” “Social Media’s Interference in the Judicial Process,” and “Effective Use of AI in Digital Media.” Senior editor Sanjay Dhavalikar’s special interaction and Industries Minister Uday Samant’s exclusive interview were among the highlights of the day.

Several issues and demands concerning the digital media sector were also discussed during the convention, and resolutions were passed for submission to both the Central and State governments.

The convention is being regarded as a landmark event that not only outlined the future direction of digital journalism in India but also successfully brought together digital media professionals from across the country. Set against the scenic backdrop of Goa, the event infused fresh energy, inspiration, and unity within the digital media fraternity.

The organization’s office-bearers expressed heartfelt gratitude to all participants, guests, and organizers for contributing to the grand success of the event.

Simhastha Kumbh Mela Preparations Begin with Dharma Flag Hoisting at Kalaram Temple



Nashik

Against the backdrop of the upcoming Simhastha Kumbh Mela 2027–28, the Dharma Flag Installation Ceremony was held today at the historic Kalaram Temple in Panchavati. A saffron religious flag was ceremonially hoisted by former President Ram Nath Kovind and Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis on a 21-foot-tall Panchdhatu (five-metal) Dharma flagpole, constructed on the lines of Ayodhya. The flagpole was formally worshipped before the flag was raised.

Also present on the occasion were Kumbh Mela Minister Girish Mahajan, School

Education Minister Dadaji Bhuse, Food and Drug Administration Minister Narahari Zirwal, Textile Minister Sanjay Savkare, Chairperson of the National Commission for Women Vijaya Rahatkar, Mayor Himgauri Adke-Aher, Treasurer of the Ayodhya Trust Swami Govinddev Giri Maharaj, and Mahant Sudhirdas Pujari.

The Dharma flagpole, made of Panchdhatu, carries an 11-by-5-foot saffron flag. The flag features an image of Hanuman along with the sacred 'Om' symbol representing the Sun God. The temple premises were beautifully decorated with decorative lighting, floral arrangements, and

traditional ornamentation. During the ceremony, it was expressed that this event marked the formal religious beginning of preparations for the Simhastha Kumbh Mela.

Among those attending the event were MLA Pankaj Bhujbal, MLA Seema Hire, President of FICCI Milind Kamble, Divisional Commissioner Dr. Praveen Gedam, Police Commissioner Sandeep Karnik, Kumbh Mela Authority Commissioner Shekhar Singh, Municipal Commissioner Manisha Khatri, District Collector Ayush Prasad, along with several saints, mahants, trustees, and dignitaries.

Repeated Road Excavations Cause Significant Public Inconvenience !!!

Frequently, we encounter unpleasant road excavations at critical junctions or key locations on our main roads, causing significant inconvenience to the general public. The politicians, civil engineers, and laborers involved seem to be in sync, allowing citizens to face daily hardships. Individuals heading to work, children on their way to school, parents dropping off their kids, and entrepreneurs with business obligations are all affected. Recently, I had to visit my maid's residence in a slum area located near my home. When I began my journey by auto rickshaw, we encountered a site with ongoing excavation work. Subsequently, we looked for another auto, but none were willing. All the



**I Say
As I See**

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domestic workers are arriving at the buildings for their daily duties and, regrettably, these underprivileged workers are being forced to pay triple the shared amount they pay on regular days, which is quite unfortunate. Students of various age groups are constantly facing different situations as they have to appear for exams, reach school or college on time, and working women encounter numerous

difficulties. Moreover, if there is a need for fire brigade services, police assistance, or ambulance services, such roads will lead to fatal consequences, which is already happening on a daily basis.

Why does the public have to endure incessant roadworks in cities, especially in developing areas, despite funding good governance through taxes? The lack of coordinated planning and departmental silos leads to repeated disruptions, highlighting poor planning, overlapping responsibilities, and the need for infrastructure upgrades to accommodate population growth. This situation exemplifies the inefficiencies that arise when

different agencies work in isolation, digging up the same road sections multiple times. As vibrant metropolises flourish, aging infrastructure gets a transformative upgrade, paving the way for a brighter future. Many cities are embarking on ambitious projects, moving overhead wires and cables underground, beautifying urban landscapes and enhancing safety, albeit with extensive excavations. Frequent strategic decisions are made to install innovative infrastructure, such as state-of-the-art stormwater management systems or modern gas pipelines, and to upgrade walkways with premium materials.

Won't quit, it was a conspiracy, not people's mandate: West Bengal CM Mamata Banerjee

Kolkata

A day after suffering a major setback in the West Bengal Assembly elections, outgoing Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee struck a defiant tone on Tuesday, asserting that she "will not resign", citing "large-scale irregularities" in the poll process.

"I want to say that we didn't lose the elections. It was not a people's mandate but a conspiracy. Officially, through the Election Commission, they defeated us, but morally we won the elections," Mamata said while addressing a press conference in Kolkata.

The Trinamool Congress (TMC) chief accused the EC of bias, alleging that the party's real contest was not against the BJP but against the poll body. "We did not fight the BJP; we fought the EC, which worked for the saffron party," she claimed.

Mamata alleged that nearly 100 seats were "forcibly taken away", raising questions over counting procedures and claiming that early trends were manipulated to



demoralise TMC workers.

She criticised what she described as the strategic deployment of national media during counting phases, suggesting it influenced public perception.

While withholding the details of her party's next steps, Mamata indicated that her party was preparing to move against the EC.

"Our fight was not just against the BJP; we also had to contend with what we believe was a biased EC. We have decided our course of action regarding the EC and the mechanisms it has used, but we will not disclose our strategy right now. We will discuss it later," Mamata said.

Citing attacks on party offices and alleged attempts to capture key

premises, including those linked to TMC national general secretary Abhishek Banerjee, she warned against "intimidation and violence". "If people are subjected to such harassment across party lines and communities, they may respond with equal resistance," she cautioned, signalling a hardening political stance.

Mamata expressed gratitude to leaders of the opposition INDIA bloc for their support, saying their outreach reinforced unity within the alliance.

She specifically thanked Sonia Gandhi, Akhilesh Yadav, Tejashwi Yadav and Uddhav Thackeray for calling her up and extending their support. Mamata said she now felt like a "free bird", and emphasised her commitment to working towards strengthening the alliance. She said she would contribute to the bloc's efforts with humility, describing herself as a "small person" dedicated to its larger goals.

Amit Shah to oversee election of Bengal CM, Nadda to handle Assam with Nayab Saini as co-observer

Kolkata

A day after Assembly poll results were declared, the BJP shifted its focus towards government formation, appointing Union Home Minister Amit Shah as its central observer for the election of West Bengal CM. Shah will be assisted by Odisha CM Mohan Charan Majhi as co-observer, with the CM's oath-taking ceremony scheduled for May 9.

The appointment of Shah, BJP's top strategist who personally led the Bengal campaign, to oversee the CM's election process mirrors the importance Prime Minister Narendra Modi attaches to the eastern state.

In Assam, Union Health



Minister JP Nadda has been tasked as the central observer for the election of CM, with incumbent Himanta Biswa Sarma expected to be re-elected. Haryana CM Nayab Saini will be the co-observer in Assam.

In Puducherry, Sports

Minister Mansukh Mandaviya will be the observer for the BJP legislature party meet to elect the leader. The outgoing CM, N Rangaswamy of the All India NR Congress, is likely to retain the top spot.

In Bengal, Leader of Opposition in the outgoing Assembly Suwendu Adhikari remains the top favourite for the CM's job, say sources. However, they have not ruled out surprises, as has been the case in the past with CM candidates in Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Rajasthan and lately Odisha.

The names of former BJP Bengal chief Dilip Ghosh, incumbent state chief Samik Bhattacharya and Agnimitra Paul (should PM decide to have a woman chief minister) are also doing the rounds.

Bengal CM to be sworn in on May 9

Kolkata

West Bengal's Chief Minister will be sworn in on May 9, the state unit of the BJP said on Tuesday, a day after the party's sweep of the eastern state which delivered a shock upset for Mamata Banerjee-led TMC.

Samik Bhattacharya, BJP Bengal chief and a long-time RSS hand, today said the oath-taking ceremony of the new CM will be on May 9.

With this, the focus has shifted to the hopefuls with former Mamata aide Suwendu Adhikari topping the list alongside former state chief of the BJP Dilip Ghosh. A section of BJP leaders say the party may also install a woman CM to power Prime Minister



Narendra Modi's women's empowerment pitch which resonated deeply with the women voters of Bengal.

But overall, Suwendu Adhikari appears to be topping the list of BJP CM hopefuls in Bengal. Like former Congressman Himanta Biswa Sarma who turned around the northeast for the BJP after joining in 2015, Suwendu has aided BJP's quick rise to power in a formerly electorally barren state.

Assam Polls: BJP's 4.6 Percentage Points Rise In Vote Share Results In Gain Of 22 Seats

Guwahati

An analysis of the vote share data from the Election Commission shows that a 4.6 percentage point shift in the BJP's favour helped it pocket 22 more constituencies in the Assam Assembly elections this time compared to 2021 and win 82 seats.

The Congress, on the other hand, saw a marginal 0.17 percentage point increase in its vote share even as its seats fell by 10 from the last Assembly polls to settle at 19 this time. The National Democratic Alliance (NDA) bagged 102 seats, its highest ever, way ahead of the halfway mark of 64 in the 126-member Assam Assembly.

According to information shared by the Election Commission, the ruling BJP received 37.81 per cent of the total votes polled in 2026, translating into 82 wins. Its vote share was 33.21 per cent in 2021, when it had won



60 seats. For the opposition Congress, its vote share increased to 29.84 per cent this year from 29.67 per cent five years ago, but its number of MLAs went down to 19 from 29 in the outgoing Assembly.

For the BJP's ally Asom Gana Parishad (AGP), the vote share decreased to

6.47 per cent from 7.91 per cent in 2021, but it bettered its tally of MLAs by one to have 10 MLAs this time. The Bodoland People's Front (BPF), another ally of the ruling NDA, got 3.73 per cent of the total votes polled on its way to winning 10 seats. It had won four seats in 2021, but the EC had not shown its

vote share separately in 2021.

In the opposition camp, the AIUDF saw its vote share erode to 5.46 per cent as it won only two seats. In 2021, it had 16 MLAs and 9.29 per cent vote share. Of the total people who voted this time, 1.23 per cent chose the None of the Above (NOTA) option this time, a slender rise from

the 1.14 per cent voters who chose it five years ago, the EC data showed.

The Jharkhand Mukti Morcha did not win any seat but managed to corner 1.16 per cent vote share this time, signalling an expansion of the party to the Northeast. The EC said that in the 'others' category, comprising all other contesting parties and candidates, the vote share stood at 10.17 per cent. It was 13.7 per cent in 2021.

In the 126-member Assam Assembly, the ruling BJP won 82 seats, and its allies BPF and AGP pocketed 10 seats each in the results declared on Monday. The Congress and the Rajgor Dal, who were part of a six-party opposition alliance, won 19 and two seats respectively. AIUDF and Trinamool Congress fought separately as single entities and will have two and one MLAs, respectively, in the new Assembly.

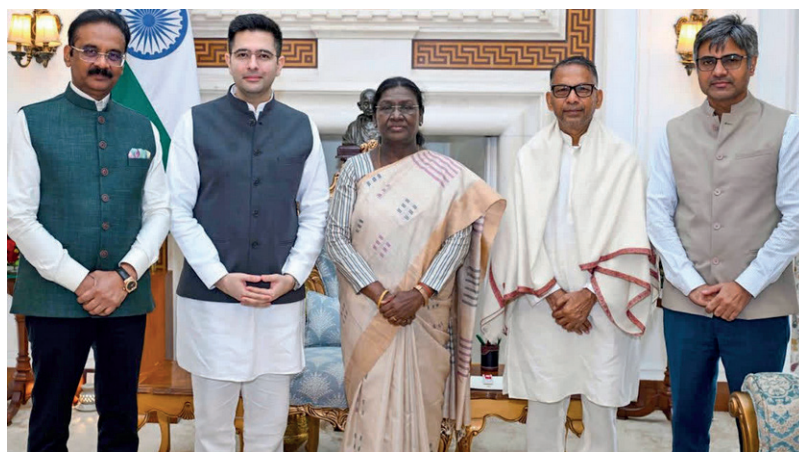
AAP Behaves Like An Obsessed, Jilted Ex, Bitter, Vindictive, Unable To Move On: Raghav Chadha After Meeting President

New Delhi

Raghav Chadha on Tuesday met President Droupadi Murmu along with fellow Rajya Sabha MPs Sandeep Pathak, Rajinder Gupta and Ashok Mittal — all of whom recently defected from the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) in Punjab to the BJP — and raised concerns over alleged misuse of state machinery by the AAP-led Punjab government, following their decision to merge with the BJP.

In a statement after the meeting, Chadha said the delegation conveyed to the President that two-thirds of their MPs had exercised their constitutional right to leave AAP and join the BJP, but were now facing what he described as targeted harassment.

"We conveyed how the AAP's Punjab government is misusing state machinery to target us for exercising our constitutional rights, after two-thirds of MPs



chose to merge with the BJP. The party that once cried vendetta is now practising its most toxic form," he said.

"We left the Aam Aadmi Party on April 24, 2026, and merged with the BJP. Since then, harassment of our MPs has begun. First, World Cup-winning cricketer Harbhajan Singh had "traitor" written outside his house. Stones were thrown at his residence with the help of Punjab Police, and offensive slogans

were raised targeting his family," he alleged.

"Then, our colleague Rajinder Gupta, a Padma Shri awardee and an industrialist running a major factory in Punjab's Malwa region — providing livelihood to around 30,000 people — had his factory targeted. The Punjab government allegedly cut off its water supply, and the Pollution Board conducted raids to initiate its closure," he said.

Election Commission calls for zero tolerance towards violence amid TMC-BJP clashes

Kolkata

The Election Commission of India on Tuesday directed West Bengal Chief Secretary, state DGP and Central Armed Police Forces (CAPFs) in West Bengal to ensure zero tolerance towards post poll violence by anyone in the state.

The directive came after several incidents of clashes between supporters of TMC and BJP were reported from across the state soon after declaration of Assembly elections results.

Last week, the poll body had announced that even after completion of elections in West Bengal, 700 companies of the CAPFs will continue to remain deployed in the state for security arrangements and law & order duties, till further orders.

Meanwhile, the EC on Tuesday sent notifications for constituting new Assemblies in Assam, Kerala, Puducherry, Tamil Nadu and West Bengal to the respective Governors.

The tenure of the outgoing West Bengal Assembly is ending on May 7. The outgoing Tamil Nadu Assembly's tenure is to end on May 10, Kerala's outgoing assembly's tenure is till May 23, while that of the Assam Assembly is ending on May 20.

Rahul Gandhi Sharpens 'Vote Chori' Attack On BJP, Says Mandates Are Being Stolen

New Delhi

Senior Congress MP and Lok Sabha Leader of Opposition Rahul Gandhi has intensified his attack on the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and Prime Minister Narendra Modi, alleging widespread "vote chori" (vote theft) and manipulation of the electoral process.

In a strongly worded post on X (formerly Twitter) on Wednesday, Gandhi claimed that electoral mandates are being 'stolen', asserting that "out of the 240 BJP MPs in the Loka Sabha, roughly every sixth MP has won through vote theft".

Taking a sharp jibe on the BJP, he asked whether such MPs should be termed 'infiltrators'. Referring to



Haryana, he added that "Seats are sometimes 'the entire government is stolen through vote theft, sometimes entire government

(is hijacked). Out of the 240 BJP MPs in the Lok Sabha, roughly every sixth MP has won through vote theft. It's not hard to identify them - should we call them 'infiltrators' in BJP's own language?" he asked in the social media post.

Without naming Election Commission of India or the Supreme Court, Gandhi further alleged that key institutions responsible for safeguarding elections are functioning under "remote control", and are tampering with voter lists and the electoral process. "Their real fear is the truth. Because if fair elections were held, even today they couldn't win 140 seats," he asserted.

The Congress leader has

been consistently raising the issue of vote theft in recent months, turning it into a central plank of his political offensive against the BJP.

Earlier, reacting to Assembly election results in West Bengal and Assam, Gandhi termed the outcome a "theft of the mandate" and warned that such developments marked a dangerous step towards the "destruction" of Indian democracy.

At the same time, he urged political parties and Congress members to "put petty politics aside", stressing that the issue transcends party lines. "This is not about one party or another. This is about India," he said.

Congress Extends Support To Vijay's TVK For Govt Formation In Tamil Nadu

Chennai

In a major development, the Tamil Nadu Congress Committee (TNCC) has unanimously decided to extend support to TVK leader Vijay in forming a "secular government" in the state.

The decision to support the Tamilaga Vettri Kazhagam (TVK) was taken at an urgent meeting of the Political Affairs Committee (PAC) of Tamil Nadu Congress late on Tuesday night, PTI reported, quoting sources.

AICC in-charge for Tamil Nadu Affairs of the party, Girish Chodankar, had called the meeting of the Committee to decide on extending support to TVK. The meeting, sources said, was convened on Zoom, and senior members expressed their views in favour of supporting the actor-turned-politician, whose party scripted history in its debut elections this year.

The PAC of Tamil Nadu Congress unanimously decided to support TVK leader Thiru Vijay to form a secular government in Tamil Nadu, sources confirmed.

Earlier in the day, Congress claimed that Vijay had sought its support for government formation



in the state and informed that its leadership has directed the state unit to take a final decision on the matter, keeping in view the state's sentiments.

The party, which fought the assembly election in alliance with the DMK, asserted that the mandate in the southern state is for a secular government and that it is determined "not to have the BJP and its proxies run the government of Tamil Nadu in any manner."

Top Congress leaders

held a meeting at party chief Mallikarjun Kharge's residence on Tuesday evening that was attended by Leader of Opposition in Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi and Tamil Nadu in-charge Girish Chodankar, among others. Addressing the media after the meeting, Congress general secretary, Organisation, KC Venugopal, had said the party leadership discussed the post-election scenario in the southern state.

Left loses foothold in final bastion Kerala

Thiruvananthapuram

The sun has set on an era of Indian political history with the Left suffering a humbling defeat in the Kerala Assembly elections. With this loss, the Left has effectively ceased to be in power anywhere in the country, a first for the past six decades. More significantly, it now faces the spectre of total marginalisation in the national political scene.

The electorate's verdict on Monday was overwhelming. The Congress-led United Democratic Front (UDF) surged to a dominant position, securing 102 seats — well beyond the majority threshold of 71. In stark contrast, the ruling Left Democratic Front (LDF) was reduced to a mere 35 seats. The National Democratic Alliance, spearheaded by the BJP, also carved out a significant space, putting on a strong performance by securing three seats and signalling a changing tri-polar reality in segments of the state.

The scale of the UDF's victory suggests a deep-seated churn within the electorate. This victory could not have been achieved without traditional Left sympathisers crossing the aisle, voting for the Opposition as a "corrective force". This exodus of voters signals clear exhaustion with a decade of perceived administrative decay, allegations of nepotism and a growing sense of political arrogance within the ruling establishment.

The political casualties were extensive, reflecting the depth of public dissatisfaction. As many as 13 ministers were defeated, highlighting an anti-incumbency wave that transcended individual candidate merit. Within the LDF, the CPM was restricted to 26 seats, while the CPI managed only eight, and the RJD held on to one.

Vijay's Tsunami Ends Seven-Decade Dravidian Binary In State

Chennai

Actor-turned politician C Joseph Vijay does an MGR in his debut breaching the Dravidian citadel and ending the rule of the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam.

His party Tamilaga Vettri Kazhagam(TVK) finished at the top in a three-cornered contest to Tamil Nadu Legislative Assembly, like how the All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (AIADMK) founder and matinee idol MG Ramachandran swept to power unseating the DMK. MGR became the Chief Minister for the first time in 1977 after his party swept the Assembly polls by winning 144 seats.

For Tamil Nadu's most loved celebrity, campaigning was not easy. It remained difficult to manuevere bureaucracy and political hurdles thrown at him.

The Campaign

During the campaign, the ruling parties at the state and at the Centre did their best to prevent Vijay from campaigning as they had control over the official machinery until the model code of conduct for the elections kicked in.

Some senior police officials who expected a DMK return showed their loyalty by throwing spanners into Vijay's campaign schedule. The caveat they used was the court direction on regulating the crowd after the Karur stampede that left 41 dead at a rally in Karur, where the actor addressed in September 2025.

The case was handed over to the CBI from the state police on the orders of the Supreme Court. The Central probe team summoned the actor multiple times, which many dubbed an arm-twisting attempt by the ruling BJP at the Centre to coerce the actor into an electoral alliance. The party fought on its own in 233 constituencies. It extended support to an independent candidate in Edappadi--where former Tamil Nadu Chief Minister Palaniswami is in the race--after the nomination of their party candidate, who went incommunicado, was rejected.

On the campaign front, the alleged hindrances including scorching heat and official rejections to hold meetings, led to a string of



cancellations. As for the policies, Vijay has adequately signalled that his party will be a Pro-Tamil party.

The Numbers

Vijay contested and won from two seats--Perambur in the state capital and Trichy East from the Cauvery delta--by huge margins. His party's VS Babu defeated incumbent Chief Minister MK Stalin in the Kolathur constituency, marking one of the biggest upsets in the electoral history of the state. Only the second time in history that a sitting CM has faced defeat. In 1996, J Jayalalithaa was defeated by DMK candidate EG Sugavanam in the Bargur constituency.

As the postal ballot counting began on May 4, 2026, the TVK opened its tally with single digits. It climbed slowly, constituency after constituency, moving to double digits on par with the DMK and its arch-rival AIADMK, for some time, only to outnumber both.

As the counting concluded, the party won 108 seats, followed by the DMK with 59 seats and the AIADMK won 47 seats. The TVK's vote share stood at about 35 per cent while that of the DMK and the AIADMK was 24 and 21 per cent.

This means the tinsel superstar was able to slice up the voters from the Dravidian parties. In the

previous 2021 Assembly elections, they accounted for 71 per cent of total votes polled while individually, the DMK polled 38 per cent and the AIADMK 33 per cent.

The DMK election managers were touting that the current election will be a repeat of the 1971 Assembly election. Back then, the Dravidian party bagged 184 seats in the 234-Member-House. It also helped Stalin's father and DMK's founding member M Karunanidhi return as CM on the trot after the party's maiden government in 1967.

It did not happen. Yet, there was another similarity and contradiction from that election. The K Kamarajar-backed Indian National Congress (Organisation)--abbreviated to NCO--fought in 201 seats and polled 35 per cent. It translated to the NCO bagging 15 seats, while the TVK today is seen grabbing a three-figure tally. A contradiction. The NCO's figure served as a misdirection for many political pundits who projected the new entrant at about the same level.

Whether the Dravidian parties can get back at the debutant is a story for another day.

Vijay's Narrative

Vijay positioned himself as anti-DMK and termed the party "evil," like how Jayalalithaa used to address it. Most of his posers were to Stalin,

holding him accountable for a host of issues ranging from civic amenities to law and order to women's safety. This helped him position himself as anti-DMK; it worked. The AIADMK had little to counter or wrest out Vijay from the Opposition's space as he kept building the momentum. Palaniswami had to carry the baggage of the BJP in Tamil Nadu and offered little beyond the doles for women and other sections.

Also, Vijay consciously avoided making any reference to the AIADMK during his campaign. At one stage, he quipped "BJP and some others" to refer to the AIADMK, adding that the saffron party is invisible in Tamil Nadu. In a campaign in Madurai long before the elections were announced, Vijay pretended to reel out the list of candidate names in all 10 constituencies. He repeated his name after every constituency, claiming that a vote cast to his nominee is a vote cast to the star himself.

Wishing Vijay Away Did Not Help

The messaging by the DMK patriarch was clear. He declared war on the ruling BJP at the Centre. He billed it as anti-Tamil Nadu. It did not resonate with the voters, except for his core voters. The CM tried to keep Vijay out of the conversation, wishing that he would be able to control the public narrative. His son and deputy in the government, Udhayanidhi Stalin, toed the same line. He kept himself busy engaging with Edappadi K Palaniswami. So much so that the AIADMK leader had to approach the court to bar Udhayanidhi from showing his photograph of prostrating at the legs of the late J Jayalalithaa's aide and co-convict in a disproportionate assets case, VK Sasikala. He didn't get any reprieve, though. The DMK youth wing leader branded Palaniswami as detrimental to the welfare of Tamil Nadu. His logic was that Palaniswami would remain an "ardent slave" of the BJP, which contested in 33 seats and secured only one win. Also, he kept showcasing Palaniswami's photograph, which his team delivered in novel ways including drone delivery.

Trump pauses Project Freedom, claims great progress for final agreement with Iran

Washington

President Donald Trump has suspended 'Project Freedom', to escort ships through the Strait of Hormuz, claiming progress in negotiations with Iran towards an agreement to end the war.

In a post on Truth Social on Tuesday, Trump said, "Great progress has been made toward a complete and final agreement with representatives of Iran."

"Based on the request of Pakistan and other Countries, the tremendous Military Success that we have had during the Campaign against the Country of Iran and, additionally, the fact that Great Progress has been made toward a Complete and Final Agreement with Representatives of Iran, we have mutually agreed that, while the Blockade will remain in full force and effect, Project Freedom (The Movement of Ships through the Strait of Hormuz) will be paused for a short period of time to see whether or not the Agreement can be finalized and signed."



Project Freedom was launched on Monday to escort ships, stranded due to the closure of the Strait of Hormuz, out to safety. Trump had announced the operation on Sunday and the US Central Command began implementing it the next day.

However, the Project led to

friction in the vicinity of the narrow seaway, a key route for transporting one-fifth of the global oil supplies, with the UAE claiming that its ships were attacked by Iran. The US also claimed to have destroyed several Iranian small boats.

Trump's statement on Truth Social

came hours after US Secretary of State Marco Rubio announced that Operation Epic Fury, launched on February 28, had concluded as its objectives have been achieved.

"Operation Epic Fury is concluded. We achieved the objectives of that operation. We're not cheering for an additional situation to occur. We would prefer the path of peace. What @POTUS would prefer is a deal... that is, so far, not the route that Iran has chosen," Rubio told a press conference at the White House on Tuesday.

On Project Freedom, Rubio said the goal was to rescue almost 23,000 civilians from 87 countries who were trapped inside the Persian Gulf and left for dead by the Iranian regime.

"This is not an offensive operation. This is a defensive operation, and what that means is very simple: there's no shooting unless we're shot at first. We're not attacking them, but if they're attacking us or they're attacking a ship, you need to respond to that," Rubio said.

Vietnam President To Lam accorded ceremonial welcome at Rashtrapati Bhavan on maiden State Visit to India

New Delhi

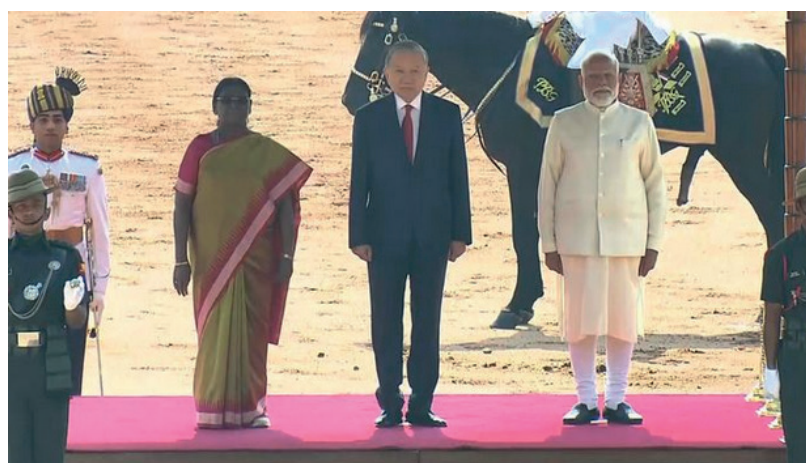
Vietnam's President, To Lam, was accorded a ceremonial reception at the forecourt of Rashtrapati Bhavan on Wednesday during his first State Visit to India.

The Vietnamese leader was received by President Droupadi Murmu and Prime Minister Narendra Modi upon his arrival at the presidential palace.

This visit marks President To Lam's maiden State Visit to the country since being elected President of Vietnam in April this year.

Ahead of the formal ceremony, National Security Adviser Ajit Doval held talks with President Lam on Tuesday to explore ways of bolstering the "comprehensive strategic partnership" shared by the two nations.

The President initiated his three-day state visit by arriving in Gaya, Bihar, on Tuesday morning. He was greeted at the airport by Bihar Chief Minister Samrat



Choudhary and other high-ranking officials before proceeding to offer prayers at the historic Mahabodhi Temple.

Welcoming the Vietnamese leader, Samrat Choudhary remarked that the spiritual city of Gaya "warmly honours" the arrival of the President and expressed his belief that the visit would elevate bilateral ties to "new heights."

Following these spiritual and preliminary engagements, President Lam is slated to hold

extensive discussions with Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Wednesday. According to the Ministry of External Affairs, their dialogue is anticipated to cover bilateral relations alongside pressing "regional and global issues."

The ministry stated that the high-level "engagement between the leaders is expected to provide fresh momentum to the robust bilateral relations and open new avenues for cooperation between India and Vietnam."

US to close Peshawar Consulate in Pakistan, citing safety concerns for its diplomatic personnel

Islamabad

The US Department of State on Wednesday announced the phased closure of its Consulate General in Peshawar, citing safety concerns for its diplomatic personnel and better resource management.

"The U.S. Department of State is announcing the phased closure of the U.S. Consulate General in Peshawar. Responsibility for diplomatic engagement with Khyber Pakhtunkhwa will transfer to the U.S. Embassy in Islamabad. This decision reflects our commitment to the safety of our diplomatic personnel and efficient resource management,"

the department said in a statement. The statement added that while the physical presence in Peshawar is being reduced, the US will continue to engage meaningfully with stakeholders in Pakistan to "advance the interests of the American people". "While our physical presence in Peshawar is changing, the Administration's policy priorities in Pakistan remain steadfast. We will continue to engage meaningfully with the people and officials of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa to foster economic ties, promote regional security, and advance the interests of the American people," it said.

Expected and Unexpected

Among the assembly elections held in five states, while the results in Assam, Kerala, and the Union Territory of Puducherry turned out largely as expected, the outcomes in West Bengal and Tamil Nadu came as a surprise. The results in Bengal and Tamil Nadu shocked many because, in Bengal, despite facing anti-incumbency sentiment, few had expected that the ruling All India Trinamool Congress would struggle even to reach 100 seats while the Bharatiya Janata Party would come close to 200 seats. Similarly, in Tamil Nadu, very few had predicted that the newly formed Tamilaga Vettri Kazhagam would emerge so strongly that it would come close to forming the government.

The defeats of Mamata Banerjee in Bengal and M. K. Stalin in Tamil Nadu indicate that regional leaders who begin treating political power as their personal domain are not tolerated by the public indefinitely. In Tamil Nadu, actor-politician Joseph Vijay achieved what leaders like N. T. Rama Rao in Andhra Pradesh and Arvind Kejriwal in Delhi had done earlier—winning big in their very first major electoral contest.

Vijay's victory is significant for another reason: it is said to have pushed Dravidian parties out of power in Tamil Nadu after nearly six decades.

Similarly, in Bengal, BJP managed to remove the Trinamool Congress from power after its 15-year rule, following long periods of governance by the Indian National Congress and the Left Front. With its emphatic victory in Bengal, BJP is also seen as strengthening its influence across eastern India in addition to the Northeast.

What was expected to be a close contest in Bengal ended in a decisive BJP victory, suggesting, according to this analysis, that Mamata Banerjee's governance had become synonymous with poor administration. It further argues that her politics of Muslim appeasement and the alleged neglect of illegal infiltration from Bangladesh helped consolidate majority community support in favor of BJP. BJP's victory in the home state of Syama Prasad Mukherjee, founder of the Bharatiya Jana Sangh, is also being viewed as a sign that the party's expansion and influence are likely to accelerate further. This victory has also strengthened the political stature of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Home Minister Amit Shah.

The BJP of 2026 is no longer being seen as the same party that appeared weakened after the 2024 Lok Sabha elections, when the opposition, including the Congress, had begun to suggest that their turn

was approaching. Undoubtedly, Bengal is now expected to have a "double-engine government," but with that comes a major challenge for BJP—to fulfill its promises to the people of the state on priority and to restore stability by addressing political violence and infiltration-related concerns.

The election results in these five states are particularly encouraging for BJP because it secured a third consecutive victory in Assam with an even bigger margin. At the same time, it also expanded its footprint in Kerala and Tamil Nadu. The return of a BJP-supported government in Puducherry is also significant, as the party managed to overcome anti-incumbency sentiment there, just as it did in Assam.

This was something that neither Mamata Banerjee in Bengal, nor Pinarayi Vijayan in Kerala, nor Stalin in Tamil Nadu could achieve. The Congress may find some satisfaction in gaining Kerala, but the manner of its defeat in Assam—including the loss of senior leader Gaurav Gogoi—should be a matter of serious introspection. Even if it forms a government in Kerala with its allies, these five state election results suggest that the opposition alliance INDIA Alliance has grown weaker.

// sātyāsyā pārāmām nidhānām //

**"YOU CAN'T CROSS
THE SEA MERELY
BY STANDING
AND STARING AT THE
WATER."
-RABINDRANATH
TAGORE**

Curbing hate speech: Law enforcement beset by partisanship

THE Supreme Court has observed that existing legal provisions are sufficient to deal with hate speech, an offence which poses a threat to public order as well as communal harmony. Putting the onus on the executive, the Court has flagged uneven enforcement of laws as a major concern. The SC has sounded a moral alarm by asserting that hate speech is "fundamentally antithetical" to the constitutional value of fraternity. Its message is clear: the erosion of civil discourse strikes at the very foundation of the republic.

Laws that remain dormant or are selectively applied are as ineffective as laws that don't exist. The executive, particularly law enforcement agencies, needs to act without fear or favour. However, the efforts of governments to curb

hate speech have left a lot to be desired. Powerful politicians often get away with divisive and communal remarks because the police are reluctant to take action

undermined.

The judiciary's refusal to create new legal mechanisms shifts the responsibility to the legislature.

Parliament must now assess whether the current framework of provisions is adequate in an age where speech travels instantly and widely through digital platforms. If gaps exist, they must be addressed through carefully crafted legislation that balances free expression with the constitutional vision of unity, dignity and equality. Public figures, in particular, must exercise restraint as their reckless remarks can fan the flames. Ultimately, combating hate speech requires a collective effort.

The State must enforce the law impartially, the legislature ought to remain responsive and the citizens should uphold the spirit of fraternity. And the judiciary needs to step in whenever the other pillars of democracy falter.



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BJP Pulls Off a Remarkable Feat in Bengal

If the election results of the five states—West Bengal, Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Assam, and Puducherry—are viewed as a whole, a broader political picture emerges. Two developments in this picture appear especially historic: the remarkable rise of the Bharatiya Janata Party in Bengal and the impressive performance of actor-politician Thalapathy Vijay's party, Tamilaga Vettri Kazhagam, in Tamil Nadu. Although BJP's third consecutive victory in Assam is also significant, the developments in Bengal and Tamil Nadu seem likely to have a deeper long-term political impact. In Bengal, despite the organized support of a large Muslim voter base for the All India Trinamool Congress, BJP's gains cannot be considered an ordinary event.

While BJP's victory in Assam, despite the state's sizable Muslim population, also challenged several established political assumptions, the political structure and power dynamics of Assam and Bengal differ fundamentally. In Bengal, Mamata Banerjee had created a political environment and power structure in which it was difficult for any other party to mount an effective challenge. In such a situation, BJP's success is not merely an electoral achievement but a sign of a larger transformation, indicating that a significant shift has begun in Bengal's politics.

Over the past decade, one major electoral trend has become visible across almost every state: a broad cultural and religious resurgence among Hindu voters centered around Hindutva, cultural identity, and religious consciousness.



This has created a stable voter base that, despite satisfaction, dissatisfaction, or partial resentment, continues to lean toward BJP or its allies in one form or another. In some cases, in BJP's absence, this support even shifts toward ideologically similar parties.

This trend was visible in the elections of all five states as well. Along with raising local and regional issues, BJP consistently adopted a strategy of linking electoral discourse with national themes. This helped establish a direct emotional and ideological connection with voters. In

Bengal and Assam, BJP strongly highlighted issues such as national security and demographic balance, which remained central to the electoral agenda. Welfare programs of the government led by Narendra Modi, particularly

those related to women's empowerment, also influenced the election atmosphere and played an important role in delivering a positive message among women voters.

In reality, the Bengal results surprised only those who were disconnected from the ground realities and failed to sense the growing desire for change among voters, especially among a large section of Hindus. The Trinamool Congress, according to this perspective, had handed over Bengal's governance and political structure to vested interest groups. As a result, the

direct or indirect protection and encouragement allegedly given to extremist elements created an atmosphere of communal fear and tension across the state. It was increasingly said that voters were expected to vote according to the wishes of Trinamool leaders—or stay at home—or else face violence, repression, harassment, or even displacement.

“Silent rigging” had long been considered a defining electoral trend in Bengal. Earlier, the Left Front was seen as having benefited from this, and later Mamata Banerjee's party was accused of turning even more violent and repressive in its methods. Women are often the biggest victims of violence and displacement, and this is cited as one reason why a large share of women voters shifted toward BJP instead of Trinamool.

Those who accuse BJP of polarizing Hindu voters, according to this analysis, are engaging in superficial interpretation. The political struggle in Bengal was, in essence, about restoring genuine democracy and making the political culture more inclusive. It is argued that much of this responsibility had to be carried by Bengal's Hindu population. If a feeling developed among Hindus that their existence was under threat under the present government, the reasons behind that sentiment are described as deep and serious.

Violent incidents in Bangladesh also reportedly strengthened this psychology among Hindu voters, making them feel that they might have to take significant risks for their security and identity. In addition, the removal of names of deceased, suspicious, and relocated voters from electoral rolls reportedly ended the influence of fake voting. The deployment of over 225,000 central security personnel, announcements that security forces would remain even after the elections, the appointment of officials from other states as election observers, large-scale transfers or temporary removal of state officials during the election process, and strict action against individuals associated with electoral violence—all these measures helped reassure fearful and uncertain voters, significantly changing the election atmosphere.

Under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Home Minister Amit Shah, BJP reportedly adopted a strategy from day one of convincing voters that it was coming to power and that the party would stand firmly with anyone who faced injustice. According to this interpretation, these factors together made what once seemed like an impossible political power shift in Bengal become a reality.

FDI push: Insurance sector faces litmus test

IN a step aimed at liberalising a traditionally cautious domain, the Finance Ministry has notified 100% foreign direct investment (FDI) in the insurance sector. Increased FDI can bring much-needed capital into this industry. India's insurance penetration — the share of premiums in the country's GDP — was just 3.7 per cent in 2023-24 as well as 2024-25. The insurance density (per capita premium) rose marginally from \$95 to \$97 during this period. These figures are low compared to global standards, and foreign investment can help bridge the gap by expanding outreach, improving infrastructure and enabling companies to design more diverse products. Global insurers often bring advanced risk assessment tools, better technology



and managerial expertise, which can enhance efficiency and customer service. This could ultimately benefit policyholders through competitive pricing, faster claim settlement and innovative offerings tailored to

evolving needs.

However, a key concern is the potential erosion of domestic control in a sensitive financial sector. Insurance is closely linked to long-term savings and financial security; excessive foreign

dominance could expose the sector to global market volatilities. There is also an apprehension that profit repatriation by foreign firms could limit the reinvestment of earnings within India. Retaining the 20 per cent FDI ceiling

for the Life Insurance Corporation of India is a good move, but smaller domestic insurers may struggle to compete with large multinational corporations that possess deeper pockets and established global networks. This could lead to market consolidation, reducing diversity in the long run. Regulatory challenges may also intensify, as authorities must ensure robust oversight to protect policyholders while monitoring complex international operations.

Raising the FDI limit from 74% to 100% is a bold reform with the potential to transform the insurance sector. Its success depends on pragmatic regulation, safeguarding national interests and ensuring that greater investment translates into real gains for consumers.

Complex Rules That Deepen Citizens' Problems

The incident in Odisha's Keonjhar District is not just a disturbing piece of news, but also exposes an ugly face of India's administrative and banking system. A tribal man became so desperate to withdraw about ₹19,300 from his deceased sister's bank account that he reportedly arrived at the bank carrying her skeleton. The bank stated that a death certificate and legal heir-related documents were necessary, while the family alleged that they were repeatedly turned away.

Although, after criticism on digital media and intervention by the administration, the family eventually received the money, the issue does not end there. What makes this incident more painful is that India has achieved major milestones in financial inclusion over the past decade. Under the Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana, millions of bank accounts have been opened. A large number of these belong to women, rural households, and economically weaker sections. This means banking is no longer limited to cities, salaried professionals, or educated citizens; it has become directly connected to the lives of the poor, laborers, farmers, tribal communities, women, and workers in the unorganized sector. Yet this very achievement now raises a new question: opening a bank account has become easier, but has accessing one's rightful money truly become easy?

The Odisha incident highlights that the next stage of financial inclusion should not merely be access to banking, but banking justice. Banking rules certainly have their importance. Money from the account of a deceased depositor cannot simply be handed over to anyone. Preventing fraud and verifying the rightful heir are essential to protect banks from future disputes. However, the purpose of rules should be justice, not humiliation of citizens. Rules should provide security, not fear. Procedures should offer guidance, not confusion.

Reserve Bank of India has also emphasized making the settlement of claims related to deceased depositors simpler and time-bound. The problem,

however, is that the humane interpretation of these rules often does not reach branch-level implementation. In cities, bank employees can connect customers with forms, emails, helplines, and customer care. But in rural India, the bank branch itself represents the entire system for a citizen. There, the branch manager, banking correspondent, village secretary, revenue official, tehsildar, and police collectively become the face of the state. If that face lacks empathy, democracy



can begin to look like nothing more than a pile of paperwork.

Today, through UPI, Aadhaar, and Jan Dhan, India has become a global example of financial inclusion. But indices and schemes do not automatically solve the problems of poor citizens. The real test comes when an illiterate person, a tribal citizen, a widow, an elderly person, or someone alone stands at a bank counter and asks, "What should I do now?" That is where systemic reform must begin.

First, a simplified claims process should be created for small claims involving deceased account holders. If the amount in the account is less than ₹100,000, then a preliminary claim should be accepted on the basis of village panchayat verification, local revenue officer confirmation, Aadhaar-based identity, family register records,

local confirmation of death, and testimony from two witnesses. Detailed investigations should be reserved only for larger claims.

Every bank branch should have a deceased claims assistance desk, or at least one trained officer, who can guide family members step by step—explaining which forms need to be filled, where a death certificate can be obtained, when a legal heir certificate is required, what to do if no nominee exists, and how long the claim settlement will take.

There should also be a field verification protocol between banks and local administration. If a poor, illiterate, or remote-area citizen comes with a claim involving a deceased account holder and lacks some documents, the bank should not simply send them away. Instead, it should help resolve the issue. In rural India, verification often depends not just on paperwork, but also on community knowledge. Village heads, ward members, ASHA Worker, Anganwadi workers, and rural employment assistants all understand local realities. If the system formally involves them with accountability, poor citizens would not have to run from office to office.

In addition, the process of obtaining a death certificate should be simplified and made time-bound. Nominee registration should also become part of national financial literacy campaigns. Today, millions of bank accounts have been opened, but how many have properly registered nominees remains an important question.

The issue of unclaimed deposits must also be taken seriously. Thousands of crores of rupees remain in unclaimed accounts in Indian banks. Citizens, too, should be made aware of their responsibilities. At the same time, there should be a single-window system so that when a person dies, their family does not have to separately visit offices for banking, insurance, pension, ration cards, Aadhaar, land records, and social security schemes.

Price politics- Deferred LPG pricing returns fast

THE Supreme Court's enTHE Rs 993 increase in commercial LPG prices, pushing the 19-kg cylinder beyond Rs 3,000, is striking as much for its timing as for its scale. Announced just days after Assembly elections concluded in four states, the move is bound to invite scrutiny. It suggests that price decisions, while driven by global pressures, may also be calibrated around electoral cycles. The hike itself was neither abrupt nor unexpected. Crude oil prices have climbed sharply in recent weeks, crossing the \$100-per-barrel mark amid escalating tensions in West Asia. Supply uncertainties and market volatility had already made a price correction inevitable. In that sense, the increase was anticipated; only its timing raises questions.

The choice of timing — and of the segment — tells its own story. Domestic LPG prices remain untouched, sparing households a



direct burden. Commercial users, however, face a sharp escalation. This distinction shifts the impact away from voters and onto businesses — restaurants, eateries

and small vendors — who are more likely to absorb or pass on the costs. The effect will surface gradually in the form of higher food prices rather than immediate public discontent.

For now, households have been shielded, but this respite may not last. If global crude prices remain elevated, pressure will inevitably build for a revision in domestic LPG and piped natural gas (PNG) tariffs as well. Such increases, if they come, are likely to be staggered and calibrated. But the burden would only have been deferred, not avoided.

When expected economic adjustments follow so closely on the heels of elections, it creates the impression that decisions are being timed as much by political convenience as by market logic. India's energy vulnerability is real, and periodic corrections are unavoidable. But when timing invites doubt, credibility becomes collateral.

Scheduled Commercial Banks records 15.9 per cent YoY growth in FY25-26, signals robust economic activity

New Delhi

Scheduled Commercial Banks (SCBs) recorded a robust year-on-year (YoY) non-food credit growth of 15.9 per cent in FY25-26, indicating strong economic activity and persistent demand for loans across industries.

According to the data released by Ministry of Finance, the total credit outstanding in Mar-2026 reached Rs 212.9 lakh crore, Rs 29.2 lakh crore higher than the previous year.

The credit growth marked a

significant 497 basis points (bps) increase in growth from the corresponding period in 2025 (10.9 per cent).

The credit growth in FY25-26 has been broad-based led by services sector, followed by personal loan segment, agriculture and allied activities, and industry.

In terms of sector wise, the credit growth in the agriculture and allied sector accelerated to

15.7 per cent, 528 bps higher than 10.4 per cent growth registered previous year, reflecting reinforced support for the farm sector.

Sustained rural demand and formalisation of rural credit has been attributing to the positive



momentum in primary sector credit offtake in FY25-26.

For industrial sector, the credit deployment to the industrial sector expanded at almost double rate to 15.0 per cent, vis-a-vis 8.2 per cent growth registered last year. With a 33.1 per cent YoY growth, 'micro and small' industries registered a 3.7 times higher credit growth in FY25-26.

Similar positive trends are witnessed for medium-scale

industries where credit expanded by 21.7 per cent YoY. Key drivers of industrial credit are: infrastructure, basic metal and metal products, chemicals and chemical products, petroleum, coal products and nuclear fuels etc.

Meanwhile, services sector credit, that contributes 28 per cent to the overall credit, recorded a robust expansion of 19.0 per cent YoY (compared to 12.0 per cent recorded during the same period last year).

The surge was primarily driven by high demand from segments like non-banking financial companies, trade and commercial real estate.

Furthermore, the personal loan segment with 33 per cent share in overall credit, expanded by 16.2 per cent in FY25-26, 455 bps higher than credit growth (11.7 per cent) registered a year ago. Growth remained steady in the housing segment, while vehicle loans and loans against gold jewellery continued to show strong momentum.

UIDAI, NFSU sign 5-year pact to strengthen cybersecurity, digital forensics capabilities



New Delhi

The Unique Identification Authority of India (UIDAI) has signed a five-year collaboration agreement with the National Forensic Sciences University (NFSU) to enhance cybersecurity, digital forensics and advanced technology research, the Ministry of Electronics and IT said on Tuesday.

According to an official release, the memorandum of understanding (MoU) provides an umbrella framework for cooperation between the two institutions to strengthen cyber resilience across UIDAI's digital infrastructure, supporting India's digital identity ecosystem.

The MoU was exchanged between UIDAI CEO Vivek Chandra Verma and SO Junare, Director, Gujarat Campus, NFSU, in the presence of Deputy Director General UIDAI Abhishek Kumar Singh and other senior officials.

The collaboration will be structured across six key areas, including academic

and professional development, information security and system integrity, forensic infrastructure, technical support for cybersecurity activities, research in emerging technologies, and outreach initiatives.

It will also cover joint research in areas such as artificial intelligence, blockchain, deepfake detection and cryptographic technologies, along with capacity building and placement opportunities for students.

"This collaboration marks a significant step towards further strengthening the security, resilience, and forensic capabilities supporting India's digital public infrastructure and ensuring further safeguards for India's digital identity systems," Verma said.

The Ministry said the partnership aims to enhance institutional capabilities and support the evolving requirements of cybersecurity and forensic analysis in India's digital ecosystem.

LEMON TREE HOTELS ACHIEVES 100% GREEN CERTIFICATION ACROSS OWNED HOTELS; RENEWABLE ENERGY USAGE REACHES 50%

NEW DELHI

Lemon Tree Hotels Ltd. (LTHL) today announced a defining milestone in its ESG journey, achieving 100% green building certification across its entire portfolio of 41 owned hotels. Complementing this, the company has also reached 50% renewable energy usage (exit rate) as of March 31, 2026. This dual achievement underscores LTH's long-standing commitment to responsible growth and reinforces its leadership position in shaping a more sustainable future for the Indian hospitality sector.

The Indian Green Building Council, IGBC, a part of

the Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) certified these hotels under various parameters - Sustainable Architecture and Design, Site Selection and Planning, Water Conservation, Energy Efficiency, Building Materials and Resources, Indoor Environmental Quality and Innovation and Development.

Since 2012, the company has adopted a design-first approach to sustainability, with all owned hotels developed in line with IGBC GREEN building standards. This has enabled a consistent integration of energy efficiency, water stewardship, sustainable materials and

reduced environmental impact across its portfolio, in line with regulatory mandates. Today, the company's owned portfolio reflects a strong mix of green building certifications, with 2 hotels certified at Platinum level, 22 hotels at Gold level, 6 hotels at Silver level and 11 hotels with Certified level.

The transition to 50% renewable energy usage further underscores a structural shift in operating models within the sector, where energy sourcing, efficiency and long-term cost optimization are becoming central to business resilience, not just environmental responsibility.

CCEA meet: Key decisions on sugar FRP, MSME credit, semi-conductor units likely

New Delhi

CCEA meet today: Key decisions on sugar FRP, MSME credit, semi-conductor units likely

The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs (CCEA), chaired by PM Narendra Modi, is scheduled to meet this evening, with several key proposals expected to come up for approval, according to sources.

Among the major decisions, the Cabinet may clear an increase in the Fair and Remunerative Price (FRP) of sugarcane for the upcoming sugar season from October 2026 to September 2027. The FRP is the minimum price that sugar mills are mandated to pay to sugarcane



farmers.

In addition, the government is likely to approve the next phase of the Emergency Credit Guarantee Scheme for Micro, Small and Medium

Enterprises (MSMEs), aimed at providing continued financial support to the sector.

Sources also indicate that proposals to set up two semi-conductor

manufacturing units in Gujarat could receive Cabinet approval, in line with the government's push to strengthen domestic semi-conductor capabilities.

Sugarcane is grown mainly in Maharashtra, Uttar Pradesh, and Karnataka.

The FRP has been determined on the basis of recommendations of the Commission for Agricultural Costs and Prices (CACPC) and after consultation with state governments and other stakeholders.

India's wheat exports restart after 4-year pause; ITC ships cargo as global buyers test prices

New Delhi

Indian traders have begun exporting wheat for the first time in four years, as ample stocks, higher global prices and firmer freight rates have opened a window for them to make small shipments to buyers in Asia and the Middle East, trade sources said.

Consumer goods conglomerate ITC has started loading 22,000 metric tons of wheat at the western port of Kandla for shipment to the United Arab Emirates, sources said, declining to be identified as they were not authorised to speak to the media.

ITC did not immediately respond to a Reuters request for comment.

India, the world's largest wheat producer after China, has allowed exports of the grain this year, lifting a ban on overseas sales imposed in 2022.

New Delhi extended curbs in 2023 and 2024 after extreme heat shrivelled crops and depleted stocks, pushing domestic prices to record highs and fuelling speculation it might need to import wheat for the first time since 2017.

Last year's favourable weather led to a robust harvest, quashing speculation about imports, helping the government rebuild depleted reserves and giving it the confidence



to allow exports.

Earlier this year, Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government allowed traders to export 2.5 million tons of wheat, before permitting another 2.5 million tons late last month for shipments.

Despite the permission to export, lower global prices and higher Indian rates dissuaded traders from signing export deals.

But the Iran conflict has pushed up freight costs and some buyers who need immediate shipments have turned to India, the trade sources said.

The deal to export 22,000 tons of wheat to the United Arab Emirates was signed at around \$275 per ton free on board, sources said.

Despite the first export deal in four years, India is unlikely to see a surge in wheat exports, as domestic prices have risen in recent days because of crop damage, making Indian wheat more expensive than rival supplies from Australia or the Black Sea region.

Australian and Black Sea supplies are priced at around \$290-\$300 per ton, including cost, insurance and

freight, leaving Indian wheat at least \$20 a ton more expensive in global markets.

Only buyers with immediate supply gaps are likely to turn to Indian wheat, while those with adequate inventories of Australian, Argentine or Black Sea supplies will find it less attractive given its relatively higher prices, the sources said.

Importers with urgent, short-term requirements and seeking shipments within 30-45 days are the most likely to buy Indian wheat, they said.

India's digitalisation reforms improved productivity in MSMEs: IMF paper

New Delhi

India's digitalisation reforms in public administration have improved productivity in micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs) in states that have embraced such changes, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) said in a working paper.

The authors compared the productivity of unincorporated manufacturing firms in states that have undertaken more digitalisation reforms with those having fewer such changes in public administration.

"We find that states that undertake more public administration digitalisation experience higher productivity growth and lower productivity dispersion among firms," economists Somnath Sharma and Kenichi Ueda said.

MSMEs contribute around 35 per cent of manufacturing output in India, employ around 110 million workers and contribute about 45 per cent of the overall exports from India.

Most MSMEs are not formally registered as companies under India's Companies Act of 1956 and only a few studies have been done on the impact of the business environment



reforms on these unincorporated enterprises.

The working paper said that the business environment reforms undertaken in India between 2010-11 and 2014-15 were mainly through digitalisation of business-related public administration.

It observed that the cost of dealing with bureaucratic hurdles is likely negligible for big firms, but may be sizeable for small firms.

"Thus, these reforms can be considered to help improve the

productivities of firms, in particular, small-and micro-manufacturing enterprises," the economists said.

However, the working paper also found that microenterprises were unlikely to move or expand their businesses to other states that underwent more reforms.

"We can, thus, assume no direct spillover effects across different states, except for potential arbitrageurs if prices vary due to reforms," it said.

The reforms were part of a broader

effort to improve the business climate.

In 2014, states agreed to a "98-point action plan" aimed at simplifying regulations and expanding digital systems.

The paper lists reforms into six areas: tax systems, construction permits, environment and labour compliance, inspections, commercial disputes and single-window clearances.

States that implemented more of these reforms recorded higher total factor productivity. Digital tools reduced administrative burdens, especially for small firms.

"Digitalisation of administrative processes can significantly reduce compliance costs," the economists said.

The working paper says digitised systems — including online tax filing and automated approvals — improve transparency and cut delays. They also reduce informal costs and limit discretionary decision-making.

"By automating and making processes more transparent, digitalisation levels the playing field for all businesses," the working paper said.

Mahindra & Mahindra posts 53% YoY rise in standalone PAT in Q4 FY26

Mumbai

Mahindra & Mahindra (M&M) on Tuesday posted a 53 per cent YoY rise in its standalone profit after tax (PAT) at Rs 3,737 crore for Q4 FY26, as compared to Rs 2,437 crore in the same quarter in FY25.

The automobile manufacturer's standalone revenue surged 25 per cent YoY to Rs 39,601 crore in FY26, as compared to Rs 31,609 crore in the same quarter in FY25.

While the standalone EBITDA for Q4 FY26 jumped 31 per cent YoY to Rs 5,509 crore, as compared to Rs 4,219 crore in Q4 FY25.

On a standalone basis, the total number of vehicles the company sold in Q4 FY26 stood at 3,06,508, representing a rise of 21 per cent, as compared to 2,53,028 sold in Q4 FY25.

M&M said it delivered solid results across multiple businesses in FY26 on the back of strong

growth, execution and capital allocation discipline. Auto and Farm maintain market leadership in key segments with 27 per cent revenue growth and profits up 25 per cent.

Financial services AUM grew at 12 per cent. TechM secured key new deal wins across verticals and saw EBIT improvement of 290 bps. Growth Gems demonstrated strong momentum, delivering PAT growth of 50 per cent.

Rajesh Jejurikar, Executive Director & CEO (Auto and Farm Sector), said in Q4 FY26, the SUV revenue share increased by 60 bps YoY, retaining the first position. M&M is now the 5th largest exporter for PV + CV in FY26.

"Tractors gained 90 bps in Q4 YoY, with a full year market share of 43.6 per cent gaining 30 bps.

Tractors achieved highest ever billing of 5 lakh+ in FY26. The market gains have been achieved by delivering strong margin performance," said Jejurikar.

Dr Anish Shah, Group CEO & Managing Director, said, the FY26 has been a defining year marked by strong execution and breakthrough performance across several group companies, despite geopolitical headwinds & several disruptions through the year.

"Auto & Farm further strengthened their leadership, supported by sustained customer demand for our differentiated products & operational discipline. TechM reported healthy traction in key new deal wins despite a challenging global environment," he said.



US gas prices hit four-year high of USD 4.50 as Strait of Hormuz bottleneck persists

New Delhi

New Delhi [India], May 6 (ANI): Average US gas prices topped USD 4.50 a gallon on Tuesday, the highest level recorded in nearly four years, according to an ABC News report.

This price milestone comes as the war in Iran continues and the Strait of Hormuz, a critical channel for international oil trade, remains restricted, impacting global energy flows and driving up costs for American motorists.

Citing data from GasBuddy, the report noted that the average price for a gallon of regular unleaded gas jumped to USD 4.51 on Tuesday. This represented the highest national average since July 17, 2022.

Patrick DeHaan, the head petroleum analyst for GasBuddy, said that he expected gas prices to keep rising in the absence of a peace deal to end the war.

"US gasoline inventories are already at multi-year seasonal lows, which means prices will face even more upward pressure," the report quoted DeHaan. The cost of gasoline across the country rose 21 cents a gallon since last Thursday. Since the war in Iran began on February 28, the national average has increased by a total of USD 1.54 a gallon, according to GasBuddy.

Forging a Phoenix from the Ashes: An Agenda for Bengal's Economic Reset

A decisive electoral mandate emerged from the West Bengal Assembly polls on 4 May, 2026. The victory of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) ends an era of 49 years of conflictual federalism (a conflicting central-state relationship marked by disputes, contradictions, and ideological tensions) that intensified in recent years under the outgoing dispensation in the state. This political transition in West Bengal needs to translate into a structural economic reset, not merely incremental governance corrections. After decades of policy drift, institutional erosion, and missed industrial opportunities, the new dispensation has the chance to reposition Bengal within India's growth story. The potential exists, but the alignment has been missing so far, and needs correction.

West Bengal today is India's sixth-largest state economy, with a projected Gross State Domestic Product (GSDP) of about INR 20.3 lakh crore in 2025-26. Yet, beneath this scale lies a structural imbalance. The services sector accounts for nearly 55 percent of the state's output, followed by industry at about 24 percent and agriculture at roughly 21 percent. While the economy appears service-driven, a significant share of the workforce remains dependent on agriculture, which contributes barely a fifth of output. The result is a classic case of premature tertiarisation, accompanied by disguised underemployment and stagnant productivity.

Any serious revival must begin with a reaffirmation of the rule of law, transparency in land and regulatory processes, and a depoliticised administrative framework.

Further, one needs to note the classic down-sliding of the state in relative economic terms. During the 1960s-70s, West Bengal consistently ranked around third in per capita Net State Domestic Product (NSDP), with income levels at around 115-125 percent of the national average. The erosion of its standing began in the late 1970s, with erstwhile economic mandates leading to deindustrialisation, economic insulation, slower structural transformation, and weaker investment dynamics than those of the Western and Southern states. Today, West Bengal has slid to the mid-20s (roughly 23rd-28th) in per capita NSDP rankings, with per capita income around 80-85 percent of the national average. This marks sustained organic and inorganic damage to its institutions, polity, culture, and governance. Yet a latent potential remains in its endowment of natural capital, initial conditioning, and connectivity. The task ahead, therefore, may not be entirely about building from scratch, but about realigning the economic architecture.

The first and most fundamental priority is restoring law and order and, consequently, economic governance as credible public goods. Investment flows from predictability, not merely economic incentives. While Bengal continues to attract investment proposals and has witnessed improvements in tax collections and industrial growth in recent years, investor sentiment has often been constrained by concerns around corruption, syndicate raj (an entrenched system of organised extortion and corruption), regulatory uncertainty, and institutional credibility. Any serious revival must begin with a reaffirmation of the rule of law, transparency in land and regulatory



processes, and a depoliticised administrative framework. Economic revival in Bengal must begin with the sovereignty of institutional credibility.

Second, the state must engineer an industrial renaissance. Bengal's industrial decline is well documented — from the erosion of its jute sector and engineering base to missed opportunities in modern manufacturing. Today, industry contributes only about a quarter of the state's output, well below expectations. But the potential exists: the industrial sector recorded growth of over 7 percent in 2024-25, marginally above the national average. The way forward lies in cluster-based industrialisation, anchored in sectoral strengths such as metals and heavy industry in the western belt, petrochemicals and logistics in Haldia, and MSME-led manufacturing around Kolkata, South and North 24 Parganas, Murshidabad and Nadia, among others. This must be supported by plug-and-play industrial infrastructure, streamlined clearances, and labour flexibility balanced with social protection. Further, the government needs to create production- and export-linked incentive structures for MSMEs. A recent ORF paper provides that formula. The shift must be from land politics to land productivity economics.

The priority should be to build integrated agro-processing clusters, expand cold-chain infrastructure, and promote export-oriented agriculture.

Third, agriculture must be reimagined as the foundation of agro-industrial value chains rather than a subsistence sector. Bengal is one of India's leading agricultural states: the largest producer of rice and vegetables and among the top producers of fish and potatoes. Yet, despite contributing significantly to national output, agriculture generates relatively low incomes due to fragmented value chains and limited processing capacity. Furthermore, there remains immense potential to scale operations. The ceiling provisions on holdings, under the West Bengal Land Reforms Act 1955 (strengthened in the late 1960s-70s), by redistributing surplus land into smaller ownership units, expanded the base of marginal and smallholdings. This, compounded by subsequent subdivision through inheritance, demographic pressure, and thin land-lease markets, led to operational fragmentation and a lack of scale. This

has impaired resource-use efficiency and productivity. Scaling operations and market access need to be the responses to this. This will include enabling secure land leasing, strengthening Farmer Producer Organisations (FPOs) for aggregation, and expanding shared services such as machinery banks and irrigation systems. The priority should be to build integrated agro-processing clusters, expand cold-chain infrastructure, and promote export-oriented agriculture. Fisheries and aquaculture, with production exceeding 2 million tonnes annually, offer a particularly high-value pathway. So far, the sheer inefficiency in the value chain has held Bengal's agricultural sector back; the response mechanism is to address it.

Fourth, urbanisation — especially the Kolkata metropolitan region — must be positioned as the growth engine of the state. While services already dominate the economic structure, Kolkata has not evolved into a globally competitive urban economy. Yet, its economic potential is evident: even a single cultural-economic event like Durga Puja generates an estimated INR 65,000 crore in economic activity annually, with Kolkata accounting for nearly 70 percent of this. A focused strategy is needed to develop Kolkata as a financial, knowledge, and services hub, supported by urban infrastructure financing mechanisms such as municipal bonds and public-private partnerships. Without a globally competitive Kolkata, Bengal cannot become a nationally competitive state economy. Kolkata has largely remained ignored for decades due to the inherent conflictual federalism, and now the time has come for the Centre and state to work together to create a new Committee on Making Kolkata a Growth Force in the BIMSTEC region, much in line with the High-Powered Expert Committee (HPEC) on Making Mumbai an International Financial Centre.

A focused strategy is needed to develop Kolkata as a financial, knowledge, and services hub, supported by urban infrastructure financing mechanisms such as municipal bonds and public-private partnerships. Without a globally competitive Kolkata, Bengal cannot become a nationally competitive state economy.

Fifth, the State must leverage its geoeconomic position as India's eastern gateway. With exports exceeding INR

1.09 lakh crore annually and proximity to Bangladesh and the Northeast, Bengal is uniquely positioned to anchor a trade- and logistics-led growth strategy. Strengthening port-led development in Haldia and Kolkata, expanding inland waterways, and building multimodal logistics corridors can transform the state into a regional trade hub. Bengal must rediscover its historical identity as a gateway economy.

Sixth, human capital development must underpin this structural transition. The state's population of nearly 100 million represents both an opportunity and a constraint. While labour availability is high, the skill base remains misaligned with emerging economic opportunities. A targeted approach is needed to develop skill ecosystems linked to industrial clusters, enhance employability aligned with national and global labour markets, and strengthen health and education systems as productivity investments. Human capital remains Bengal's most underutilised asset. The state's university system requires significant reform, and the condition and regulatory oversight of private universities warrant deeper examination. A word of caution is also necessary: government transfers, especially those not associated with productive labour, tend to create underemployment. This has been proven to be true for many economies, with unemployment transfers leading to idle labour. Therefore, transfer schemes need to be devised judiciously so as not to cause underemployment; rather, such subsidies should be directed at human capital formation. The perennial problem in Bengal has been the flight of human capital due to a lack of opportunities — a malaise that can only be addressed through industrialisation and growth of associated services.

Seventh, fiscal strategy must shift towards enhancing the quality of public expenditure. While tax revenues have shown steady growth — GST collections, for instance, have risen by double digits in recent periods — the composition of expenditure needs to be recalibrated towards infrastructure and capital formation. West Bengal's fiscal stress, which has deepened over the past 15 years, reflects a structural imbalance — a legacy debt trap compounded by persistent revenue deficits, low revenue buoyancy, and an expenditure shift towards committed and transfer payments under various populist welfare schemes — at the cost of growth-enhancing investment. Rationalising subsidies and aligning them with productivity-enhancing outcomes can create fiscal space for such investments.

The perennial problem in Bengal has been the flight of human capital due to a lack of opportunities — a malaise that can only be addressed through industrialisation and growth of associated services.

Finally, institutional architecture must move from populism to policy credibility. Single-window clearance systems must function in practice, not merely on paper. Governance must become data-driven, transparent, and accountable. Independent regulatory institutions must be strengthened to build long-term investor confidence. In an increasingly competitive federal landscape, credibility itself becomes a critical economic asset.



America vs. Iran: Why Neither Side Can Back Down

With the Islamabad Talks collapsing a couple of weeks ago, the US-Iran war has entered a dangerous phase. The sticking points are as expected: the Strait of Hormuz and Iran's nuclear enrichment programme. President Trump has enforced a full naval blockade of the Strait. Iran's parliament speaker, Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf, declared that American negotiators "failed to gain the trust of the Iranian delegation." Iran has shown limited interest in talks until the blockade is lifted, dashing hopes of a second round of negotiations. Neither side appears willing to concede. While Trump seems keen on striking a deal, he needs to present the deal as a comprehensive victory to his base.

The underlying logic behind this impasse deserves attention because it explains not just why these talks failed but why de-escalation is so difficult.

In his seminal 1994 paper on audience costs, the political scientist James Fearon showed that when leaders make publicly observable commitments in a crisis, the domestic cost of backing down escalates with each round. The mechanism is straightforward: public commitment raises expectations; unmet expectations carry electoral costs. The more precise and publicly visible the commitment, the higher the audience cost of retreat.

Iran acquired its leverage over the Strait during the war, choking tanker traffic only after the US-Israeli strikes began, and has discovered that controlling the world's most important oil chokepoint gives it a bargaining chip disproportionate to its military capabilities.

Both sides of the current conflict have committed to objectives that are binary and verifiable. The Strait is either open or it isn't. On uranium, regardless of what Iran does in reality, in public, it has only two choices: halt weapons-grade uranium or not. These issues are not open to reinterpretation. Iran acquired its leverage over the Strait during the war, choking tanker traffic only after the US-Israeli strikes began, and has discovered that controlling the world's most important oil chokepoint gives it a bargaining chip disproportionate to its military capabilities. Surrendering it now would mean giving up the single most valuable asset the war has produced. For Trump, however, conceding Iranian control over Hormuz would constitute a visible defeat on an issue he has made central.

Fearon's theory further suggests that democracies find it harder to back down compared to autocracies precisely because the costs of concessions are significantly higher for them. With midterm elections looming large, the domestic cost of conceding a defeat on Hormuz is enormous for Trump. At the same time, the Iranian regime is fighting for survival, and thus, any concession by the regime could make it vulnerable at home.

Thus, this is a zero-sum trap. Only one side can win on Hormuz or uranium enrichment. As the historian Niall Ferguson recently observed, "Wars are remarkably easy to start, much harder to stop." The reason, often, is precisely this: once the objectives of a war become sufficiently well-defined and publicly committed to, de-escalation becomes existentially threatening for

whoever concedes.

Pakistan never acknowledged the full extent of its involvement in the first place, preserving a layer of deniability that made concession unnecessary.

The 2025 India-Pakistan conflict is a striking contrast. After the Pahalgam terror attack, India launched Operation Sindoor, striking targets deep inside Pakistani territory. The conflict de-escalated rapidly. Crucially, both sides claimed victory. India released footage and satellite imagery of successful strikes well inside Pakistan, furnishing undeniable evidence of offensive capability. Pakistan, in turn, claimed to have downed multiple Indian Rafale jets, a claim widely disputed, but which its domestic audience largely accepted. This de-escalation was possible only because neither side set binary and verifiable objectives. India's stated goal, punishing the perpetrators of the terror attack, was sufficiently imprecise that any significant military action could satisfy it. Pakistan never acknowledged the full extent of its involvement in the first place, preserving a layer of deniability that made concession unnecessary.

This pattern has a historical precedent. Henry Kissinger coined the term "constructive ambiguity" during the Sinai disengagement talks after the 1973 Yom Kippur War between Egypt and Israel. The idea is simple but counterintuitive: when two sides cannot agree on precise terms, the negotiator deliberately drafts language that is open to interpretation. Each side can then present the agreement to its domestic audience as consistent with its own position. The text of the agreement says one thing; the narrative each side

constructs around it says another. This does not resolve the underlying dispute, but it buys time, eases tensions, and creates space for further negotiations.

The crucial insight, then, is this: when war objectives are vague, the space for mutual face-saving expands; when they are precise and binary, the conflict collapses into a zero-sum game, constructive ambiguity is no longer possible, and one side's victory is the other's political extinction. Vagueness is not a failure of strategic communication. It is, under certain conditions, the precondition for peace.

The idea is simple but counterintuitive: when two sides cannot agree on precise terms, the negotiator deliberately drafts language that is open to interpretation.

This is the trap the US and Iran now find themselves in. Trump is not a leader who concedes defeat. And the Iranian regime, already governing through brute force after crushing nationwide protests in January, will likely face increased chances of being toppled through domestic movements if it surrenders both its nuclear programme and its leverage over Hormuz. With both sides locked into well-publicised, objectively verifiable positions, the game has only two moves: fight or find a back-channel formula so creative that it allows both sides to redefine what victory means. The precedents for such creativity exist. Kissinger demonstrated as much 50 years ago. Whether the current actors possess the strategic imagination to replicate it is the question on which the fate of the global economy now depends.

UAE's exit from OPEC- An Opportunity for India

Cartels die in two ways: Either through a price war or from sudden exits. The UAE has chosen the second. From May 1, OPEC's third-largest producer will leave the cartel and the OPEC+ after six decades. The UAE pumps about 3.5 million barrels per day (mb/d) — roughly 4 per cent of global oil output and around 13 per cent of OPEC's. The announcement landed in the ninth week of the US-Israel war on Iran. Brent is at \$111 a barrel, up roughly 76 per cent in a year, and the Strait of Hormuz is functionally shut.

For Abu Dhabi, the move is overdue. The UAE has spent a decade lifting its capacity past 4.8 mb/d, only to be capped by quotas set largely in Riyadh. By 2027, it is targeting 5 mb/d — a goal flatly incompatible with cartel discipline. According to Energy Minister Suhail Al Mazrouei, they chose this moment because the price effect would be minimal. That has held true so far, with Brent rising under 3 per cent, most of that pinned on Iran.

The UAE has for years pushed for higher production baselines. When that failed, exit was the rational choice. Cartels hold only as long as restraint pays better than defection. With capacity toward 5 mb/d locked under existing quotas, the inside option had become worse than the outside one.

The more serious damage is to signalling. For decades, a single line from a Vienna (OPEC's headquarters) communiqué could move Brent prices up and down, and that mechanism ran on credibility. Strip out the third-largest producer, and the next OPEC statement will have subdued pricing effects. OPEC+'s share of global oil output had already slipped to 44

per cent in March from 48 per cent in February. Iraq, a chronic quota-buster, has the cover to follow. Saudi Arabia will have to bear the burden of price stabilisation almost alone.

The UAE alone accounts for 8-9 per cent of the basket, and along with Saudi Arabia, Iraq and Kuwait, Gulf producers route 45-50 per cent of barrels through the Strait of Hormuz.

India imports around 85 per cent of its crude oil requirement. Russia now supplies about 36 per cent. The UAE alone accounts for 8-9 per cent of the basket, and along with Saudi Arabia, Iraq and Kuwait, Gulf producers route 45-50 per cent of barrels through the Strait of Hormuz. New Delhi has therefore been a quiet beneficiary of OPEC's cohesion. Production discipline kept prices in check even when India was nowhere near Vienna. Gulf proximity also kept freight cheap.

Both anchors are loose now. With the UAE outside the tent, OPEC's discipline might weaken. With Iran's coastline afloat, the freight certainty is gone. A sustained \$10-per-barrel rise adds \$13-14 billion to India's net oil import bill and 0.3 per cent of GDP to the current account deficit. Translated to the pump, every \$10/bbl wave moves retail petrol and diesel by roughly Rs 4-5 a litre under full pass-through and lands as a heavier subsidy bill, or an OMC hit when the state intervenes. The RBI flags a 15-basis-point drag on GDP for every 10 per cent rise above its baseline crude assumption.

But the exit also opens a door. Freed of quotas, Abu Dhabi National Oil Company (ADNOC) needs reliable, scaled buyers for its incremental output. India's refining hubs at Jamnagar, Vadinar and Paradip are viable options.

The bilateral scaffolding is extraordinarily deep already, with a 2022 Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement, a 10 per cent Indian stake in Lower Zakum, and 5.86 million barrels of ADNOC crude already stored at the Mangalore strategic reserve. The IMEC corridor could be leveraged far more usefully when one of its anchor producers is selling outside a quota.

Two moves should follow at the earliest. First, commercial: A multi-year offtake from ADNOC at term pricing, with a slice of volume invoiced in rupees. Term contracts smooth the volatility that OPEC will no longer be able to dampen. Second, strategic: Fill the Strategic Petroleum Reserves (SPR). Indian Strategic Petroleum Reserves Limited (ISPRL) was at 64 per cent capacity in March 2026. Topping up at today's prices would cost roughly \$2 billion, which can be interpreted as modest insurance compared with a \$145 billion annual import bill. This is crucial as India's combined cover of 74 days still trails the IEA's 90-day benchmark.

The UAE's departure marks the slow unwinding of an oil-pricing architecture designed in the 1970s. That world rested on coordinated supply discipline. What replaces it is transactional and more volatile. Price spikes will arrive faster, stay longer and pass through stronger. Cartel statements will be second to geography and economic incentives in moving the fiscal balance. India's defence against this volatility should be term contracts, diversified geographies, full SPRs, and bilateral lifelines such as the ADNOC-ISPRL link. The window to lock in protection is open, and New Delhi should not waste it.

The End of Nuclear Arms Control- What Comes Next

- With the expiry of the New START, and ambitious nuclear modernisation among the United States, Russia, and China, vertical nuclear proliferation will increase.
- The breakdown of the arms control framework has direct implications for the broader nuclear non-proliferation regime.
- The nuclear states must take steps to reaffirm their obligations to Article VI of the NPT. Failure to do so risks undermining the credibility of the treaty and jeopardising the future of the global non-proliferation regime.

For the first time in five decades, there is no nuclear arms control treaty between the United States and Russia. The New Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (New START) expired on February 5, 2026. This development raises significant questions for global security, arms control, and the future of the non-proliferation regime. In the absence of treaty-based guardrails, vertical nuclear proliferation is likely to intensify. Russia, China, and the US have all embarked on ambitious nuclear modernisation programs, a trend that will increase insecurity and reinforce perceptions of vulnerability among these states vis-à-vis each other. Recently, France has announced a forward deterrence posture, which is

expected to result in an expansion of its nuclear forces. This will further compound the proliferation problem being caused by nuclear-armed states. The cumulative effect of these developments places additional stress on the broader non-proliferation regime and risks undermining the credibility of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT).

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The ambitious nuclear modernisation programs of both the US and Russia suggest that an increase in nuclear arsenals might be imminent. The New START Treaty, signed in 2010 and entering into force in 2011, restricted both countries to 1550 deployed strategic nuclear warheads. It also stipulated that each side could deploy no more than 700 intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs), submarine-launched ballistic missiles (SLBMs), and heavy bombers. With these restrictions now expired, the US and Russia are free to expand both the number of deployed strategic warheads and the delivery systems available to them. Russia, China, and the US are actively developing new nuclear systems. In October 2025, Moscow announced that it had tested the Burevestnik

nuclear-powered cruise missile, which reportedly travelled 14,000 kilometers in 15 hours. In the same month, Russia also tested the Poseidon system, an intercontinental nuclear-powered underwater autonomous torpedo designed to be equipped with a nuclear warhead. The US, meanwhile, has a nuclear modernisation program projected to cost nearly two trillion dollars over the next three decades. Within this modernisation, a new generation of land-based intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs) named Sentinel, will replace the Cold War-era Minuteman III ICBMs. Similarly, the B-2 bombers will be phased out in favour of the new B-21 nuclear-capable stealth bombers. In the naval domain, the aging Ohio-class ballistic missile submarines (SSBNs) will be replaced by the Columbia-class SSBNs.

The ambitious nuclear modernisation programs of both the US and Russia suggest that an increase in nuclear arsenals might be imminent.

China's nuclear modernisation is advancing in response to developments in US-nuclear modernisation. China maintains a nuclear triad, with the capability to launch nuclear weapons from land-based, sea-based, and air-based platforms. In 2021, reports indicated that China had constructed three new silo fields for nuclear weapons. Its arsenal has grown to approximately 600

nuclear warheads, and a bipartisan Congressional Commission on the Strategic Posture of the US has projected that this number could rise to around 1500 warheads by the mid-2030s. The impetus for expanding nuclear arsenals among the United States, Russia, and China is driven by mutual uncertainty and strategic competition. The absence of arms control measures to verify warhead numbers contributes to a lack of transparency, which in turn fuels greater nuclear weapons system deployment. The breakdown of the arms control framework has direct implications for the broader nuclear non-proliferation regime. To secure the participation of non-nuclear states in the NPT, the nuclear-armed states committed under Article VI to pursue negotiations on disarmament and to reduce their arsenals. With nuclear powers now expanding their stockpiles, this commitment appears to have been sidelined. As a result, non-nuclear states at the April 2026 NPT Review Conference are likely to question whether the nuclear-armed states have abandoned their pledge to move toward a nuclear-weapons-free world — or at least toward a world with fewer nuclear weapons.

The breakdown of the arms control framework has direct implications for the broader nuclear non-proliferation regime.

The US' recent efforts to prevent the spread nuclear weapons, including actions taken during the

war in Iran, risk being perceived as hypocritical in light of its own nuclear arsenal expansion. For states that have considered nuclear acquisition; most notably South Korea, Japan, and Saudi Arabia, this perceived inconsistency could create openings to justify renewed interest in nuclear capabilities. If nuclear-armed states fail to uphold their disarmament commitments under the NPT, non-nuclear states may begin to question whether they too must continue to abide by their obligations to the non-proliferation regime. With the expiration of the New START treaty in February 2026, the Russian government pledged to unilaterally adhere to its stipulations for one additional year. This commitment entails maintaining 1550 strategic nuclear warheads on no more than 700 nuclear launchers until February 5, 2027. To date, the US has not reciprocated this offer or announced any unilateral arms control measures. Before non-nuclear states that are party to the NPT begin to question the necessity of abiding by their own legal commitments to the non-proliferation regime, the US, Russia, and China must take steps to reaffirm their obligations. This could involve unilateral, bilateral, or multilateral commitments to arms control. Failure to do so risks undermining the credibility of the NPT and jeopardising the future of the global non-proliferation regime.

A STRATEGIC SHIFT IN INDIA-GERMANY DEFENCE TIES

INDIA'S DEFENCE ENGAGEMENT with Germany is entering a qualitatively new phase, one that reflects not only a convergence of interests but also a shared recognition of the changing character of global power politics. Defence Minister Rajnath Singh's recent visit to Berlin underscores this transition—from cautious engagement to a more purposeful and structured partnership.

What was once a peripheral defence relationship is now being recast as a critical component of both countries' strategic outlooks as they evolve. The agreements signed during the visit—a Defence Industrial Cooperation Roadmap and an implementing arrangement on UN peacekeeping training—signal an intent to institutionalise defence ties over the long term.

These are not merely symbolic documents; they provide a framework for both sides to pursue co-development and co-production systematically. For India, which has long sought to reduce its dependence on external suppliers while enhancing domestic capabilities, such frameworks are indispensable. For Germany, they represent an opportunity to reposition its defence industry in a more competitive and geopolitically relevant manner.

Yet, the most telling aspect of the visit was not the paperwork but the optics and substance of Singh's engagement with Germany's naval industrial base. His visit to the ThyssenKrupp Marine Systems shipyard in Kiel, accompanied by Defence Minister Boris Pistorius, and his boarding of a Type 212 submarine, highlight the centrality of maritime cooperation in this emerging partnership. In contemporary strategic discourse, the undersea domain has acquired renewed salience. Submarines are not just platforms of war; they are instruments of deterrence, intelligence gathering, and sea denial. For a country like India, with expanding maritime interests in the Indian Ocean and beyond, strengthening undersea capabilities is imperative.

It is in this context that Project 75(I) assumes critical importance. This ambitious programme, aimed at acquiring six advanced diesel-electric submarines equipped with Air-Independent Propulsion systems, represents one of the largest defence procurements currently under consideration. Valued at approximately US\$8-10 billion, it is as much about capability acquisition as it is about industrial transformation. The selection of Germany's TKMS in partnership with Mazagon Dock Shipbuilders reflects a calculated choice: to combine proven technological expertise with domestic manufacturing



capacity.

The proposed submarines, based on the Type 214 NG design, offer a range of advanced features that would significantly enhance the Indian Navy's operational profile. Air-Independent Propulsion allows submarines to remain submerged for extended periods, thereby dramatically improving stealth and survivability. Coupled with quiet propulsion systems, advanced sensors, and modern combat suites, these platforms would provide India with a credible edge in underwater warfare. In a region where naval competition is intensifying, particularly with China's growing maritime footprint, such capabilities are indispensable.

However, what distinguishes this project from earlier acquisitions is the emphasis on the transfer of technology and local manufacturing. India is no longer content with being a mere buyer of defence equipment; it seeks to become a producer, and eventually an innovator. The partnership with TKMS is expected to involve substantial technology transfer, enabling the Indian industry to absorb and adapt advanced submarine-building expertise. Ancillary agreements, including those related to torpedo production, further deepen this industrial ecosystem. In effect, Project 75(I) is designed to create not just submarines, but a sustainable domestic capability in complex naval systems.

Germany's search for a more assertive global role and India's quest for strategic autonomy are intersecting in meaningful ways. The focus on submarine cooperation is particularly significant, as it addresses one of the most critical domains of modern warfare.

Germany's willingness to engage at this level is itself a reflection of its evolving strategic posture. The watershed moment came in 2022, when

then Chancellor Olaf Scholz announced a "Zeitenwende"—a turning point in Germany's defence and security policy. Triggered by Russia's invasion of Ukraine, this shift marked the end of decades of relative military restraint. Since then, Berlin has embarked on a path of significant defence modernisation, backed by increased financial commitments and institutional reforms. Under its current leadership, Germany is seeking to transform the Bundeswehr into a force capable of responding to high-intensity conflicts. Defence spending is set to rise substantially, with long-term targets that align more closely with NATO expectations. The unveiling of a comprehensive national military strategy further signals a departure from the past. By articulating clear objectives—ranging from immediate readiness to long-term technological superiority—Germany is attempting to redefine its role within Europe and beyond.

Equally noteworthy is Germany's gradual reorientation towards the Indo-Pacific. Traditionally, Berlin's strategic focus was overwhelmingly centred on Europe, particularly in relation to Russia. However, there is now a growing recognition that security challenges are interconnected. Developments in the region, especially China's assertiveness, have direct implications for European stability and economic interests. As a result, Germany has begun to expand its engagement in the Indo-Pacific through naval deployments, defence dialogues, and industry partnerships.

In this evolving framework, India occupies a pivotal position. As a major maritime power with a commitment to a rules-based order, India offers Germany both strategic alignment and operational opportunity. The growing defence cooperation between the two countries is thus not an isolated development; it is part

of a broader recalibration of Germany's global role. For Berlin, partnerships in the Indo-Pacific are no longer optional; they are integral to its long-term strategic calculus.

For India, this engagement provides a valuable opportunity to diversify its defence partnerships. Historically reliant on a narrow set of suppliers, India has increasingly sought to broaden its options. Collaboration with Germany complements existing ties with countries such as the US, France, and Russia, while also introducing new technological avenues. More importantly, it reinforces India's strategy of multialignment—engaging with multiple partners without being constrained by rigid alliances.

The path ahead is not without challenges. The successful implementation of Project 75(I) will depend on a range of factors, including timely approvals, effective coordination between stakeholders, and the smooth execution of technology transfer arrangements. Differences in regulatory frameworks, export controls, and strategic priorities could also pose hurdles. Moreover, the broader geopolitical environment remains fluid, with uncertainties that could impact both countries' policy choices. Nevertheless, the trajectory of India-Germany defence ties appears firmly upward. The recent visit of Rajnath Singh has injected new momentum into the relationship, providing both political direction and operational clarity. If sustained, this engagement could evolve into a comprehensive defence-industrial partnership, with implications that extend beyond bilateral ties. Ultimately, what is unfolding is a convergence driven by necessity as much as by opportunity. Germany's search for a more assertive global role and India's quest for strategic autonomy are intersecting in meaningful ways. The focus on submarine cooperation is particularly significant, as it addresses one of the most critical domains of modern warfare. In doing so, it not only enhances India's defence capabilities but also anchors Germany more firmly in the Indo-Pacific security architecture.

In an era marked by uncertainty and competition, such partnerships are likely to become increasingly important. The India-Germany defence relationship, once tentative and limited, is now poised to become a substantive pillar of both countries' strategic engagements. Whether it realises its full potential will depend on the ability of both sides to translate intent into action—but the direction, for now, is unmistakably clear.

Cannes 2026 Guest List: Ammy Virk, Karan Johar, Ashok Saraf, Ashutosh Gowariker to represent India on global stage

The Cannes Film Festival 2026 is set to see a strong presence from India, with a mix of regional cinema, filmmakers, and actors expected to attend the global event that will take place from May 12 to May 23 in France.

Actor-singer Ammy Virk will mark a key moment for Punjabi cinema as he attends Cannes for the first time with his film 'Chardikala.' He will be joined by his co-star Roopi Gill, making it a notable outing for the Punjabi film industry on an international platform.

Filmmaker Ashutosh Gowariker will also be part of the festival as a member of India's official delegation. He will represent the country in his role as the director of the International Film Festival of India (IFFI).



Marathi cinema will also be seen at Cannes this year. Veteran actors Ashok Saraf and Nivedita Saraf, along with actress Prajakta Mali and producer Kedar Joshi, are expected to attend. The group, as per a release, plans to appear in traditional Marathi attire, presenting their regional identity at the global event.

Gujarati cinema will have representation

through actor-producer Mansi Parekh, who will attend with singer and producer Parthiv Gohil. Their presence reflects the growing interest of Gujarati cinema in reaching wider audiences.

From the Malayalam film industry, filmmaker Chidambaram will take his film 'Balan: The Boy' to the Cannes market. This comes after the recent global attention received by

Malayalam films.

Bollywood will also have a strong presence at the festival. Aishwarya Rai Bachchan will return as a global ambassador for L'Oreal. Actress Alia Bhatt is also expected to attend. Filmmaker Karan Johar, along with actors Tara Sutaria, Mouni Roy, and Pooja Batra, will also be present at the event.

I'm not scared: Kapil Sharma



My character is a green flag: Ayushmann Khurrana on Pati Patni Aur Woh Do

At the trailer launch of Pati Patni Aur Woh Do on Saturday, actor Ayushmann Khurrana addressed concerns around infidelity in the film, asserting that the upcoming comedy does not endorse such themes and is designed as a wholesome family entertainer.

Responding to questions about the storyline, Khurrana clarified that while the narrative revolves around complex interpersonal dynamics, it avoids promoting extra-marital relationships.

He said, "Yeh film inn charun ke beech mein kya chal raha hai uspe hai. At the same time, I think yeh jo mera role hai Prajapati Pandey ka... He is a green flag. He is a complete green flag, uska moral Compass bilkul correct hai... We are not promoting any infidelity because

it is a family film. Everyone will enjoy watching it. It is just a comedy of errors. Ismein aisa kuch nahi hai ke Prajapati ka



kissi ke saath affair hai. Aisa kuch bhi nahi hai..." (This film is about what's happening between these four characters. At the same time, I think my role, Prajapati Pandey... he is a green flag. He is a complete green flag; his moral compass is absolutely correct. We are not promoting any infidelity because it is a family film. Everyone will enjoy watching it. It is just a comedy

of errors. There is nothing in it that suggests Prajapati is having an affair with anyone. There is nothing like that at all.)

When asked about balancing socially sensitive themes with family-friendly storytelling, Khurrana underlined the responsibility he feels as both an actor and a parent.

"It is a very big responsibility. Being a family man, I feel that I should make a film that my kids can watch. In fact, I took my kids to this edit. They really loved it. So, that's my barometer. A benchmark is set there. If the kids like the film, it becomes like a wholesome family film. And Pati Patni Aur Wo Do is the same film. Where everyone will enjoy it. It will be fun. It will be a good, fun, comedy film. People will watch it," he said.

Comic virtuoso Kapil Sharma is under fire. A round of gunfire was reported around Kapil Sharma's Kap's Cafe in Canada. This is the third time Kapil's café in Canada has been attacked. Following the attacks, a viral post allegedly shared on Facebook warned Sharma to "fall in line". Says Kapil, "Such things don't scare me. I've been a fighter all my life."

Right now he is focussed on the release of his new film Dadi Ki Shaadi. "I know this world. It existed before I began my career on television."

Talking about the character he plays, he goes, "I know this character. I've met him.

It wasn't so difficult playing him. My observation powers are very good. If I sit with someone for even a few minutes I catch the accent and mannerisms. So if you ask me, I could tell you that I did no preparation. Or I could tell you that I've been preparing for this all my life."

Kapil says being surrounded by strong women like Neetu Kapoor and Riddhima Kapoor in Dadi Ki Shaadi was not tough at all. "Women have played an important part in my life all my life. Whether it is my mother or my wife or now my daughter. They have all ruled my life, and I am most happy to be ruled by them."

David Dhawan on son Varun Dhawan's comparisons with Govinda, Salman Khan: 'He doesn't like it sometimes'



Bollywood actor Varun Dhawan has often drawn comparisons to Govinda and Salman Khan since his Bollywood debut. David Dhawan, Varun's father and filmmaker, has now revealed that there are times when Varun doesn't fully understand these parallels.

The filmmaker reflected on how Varun reacts to the parallels between his kid and celebrities like Salman and

Govinda.

During a recent interview with Pinkvilla, David Dhawan said, "Varun likes Salman Khan, Govinda and also Akshay Kumar. Some of the scenes that I shoot look like it is a Salman Khan scene, but it is not like that."

The director was asked about how Varun felt about being compared to Govinda and Salman.

Ranveer Singh takes on husband-father duties, cares for daughter Dua as Deepika shoots for King in Cape Town

Ranveer Singh, who is riding on the success of Dhurandhar: The Revenge, is proving to be a doting father and supporting husband.

Deepika Padukone is currently shooting her action film King with Shah Rukh Khan in Cape Town, South Africa and Ranveer is reportedly carrying out his responsibilities as a husband and father with love and care.

According to a source who works with one of the vendors, "It's nice to see how supportive Ranveer and Deepika are to each other. While Deepika Padukone has been busy shooting for King South Africa, even after groundbreaking success and putting together Pralay, he is spending time with his little Dua while mommy is filming, taking care of her. He's being present and hands-on."

"Dua has been his lucky charm with 3 Ds (Deepika, Dua, Dhurandhar) changing his life. There are still few days of shoot left but after giving Dhurandhar, Ranveer has chosen to be away from the spotlight which is surprising," added the insider.



Fans have noticed a sudden shift in Ranveer's priorities since Dua has arrived. The Dhurandhar franchise's popularity, his changing relationship with Deepika Padukone, and his recent parenthood all seem to be coming together in a way that almost seems meaningful.

Deepika, Dua, and Dhurandhar are the three "Ds" that have come to define his current journey. The actor used to fly back for a few hours to meet his wife and daughter while filming Dhurandhar.

Also Read: Deepika Padukone resumes King shoot amid second pregnancy, spotted

with Shah Rukh Khan holding hands in Cape Town - See here

Ranveer has retreated from the spotlight to be at home, while Deepika is still filming in Cape Town, and the two were seen leaving together at the airport.

Ranveer and Deepika welcome their first child, a daughter Dua Padukone Singh on September 8, 2024. The couple has recently announced that they are expecting their second child together. Ranveer is still working but also supports his wife as they prepare to welcome their second child.

Composer Palash Muchhal faces Atrocities Act case after Smriti Mandhana's friend files complaint over casteist abuse

Music composer and director Palash Muchhal has recently landed in legal trouble. Palash's ex-fiancée, cricketer Smriti Mandhana's childhood friend Vigyan Prakash Mane, has filed a police complaint against the music composer in Sangli.

Vigyan alleged in his complaint that the music composer had made casteist remarks against him on November 22, 2025, at the Sangli-Ashta road toll plaza.

Following a complaint from a 34-year-old Sangli resident of Shatri Nagar, police filed an Atrocities Act case against Palash right away. According to a report on TV9 Marathi, the police said that Palash Muchhal had approached Vigyan Mane and demanded Rs 25 lakh from him for the film's development.

Vigyan requested his money back when Palash and Smriti's November 2025 wedding was cancelled.

However, Palash and Vigyan got into a heated dispute on November 22, 2026, when the latter went to seek his money back. Palash allegedly mistreated Vigyan during the dispute by using various casteist

comments.

The Sangli City Police has charged Palash under Section 3(1) of the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, as well as Sections 351(2) and 352, following the filing of a new complaint against the singer. The police have already started the investigation against Palash. Vigyan Made talked to the media and claimed that he believes in the Indian Constitution. He also claimed that Palash gained his trust and received Rs 25 lakh from Mane to make a movie. Smriti's friend alleged, "He had promised me to complete the film in 6 months. However, he turned out to be a fraud. When I demanded my money back, he avoided giving it. When I went to meet him, he abused me by using casteist remarks; I can't even use them on camera. His mindset is very dirty."

For the unversed, Palash and Smriti were expected to get married in Sangli (Smriti's hometown) in November 2025. However, they later called off the wedding, with several reports claiming that Palash had cheated on Smriti.

Salman, Kareena set for reunion in Raj & DK's superhero project

Actor Kareena Kapoor Khan may soon be seen sharing screen space with Salman Khan once again, as she is reportedly in talks for his upcoming untitled superhero film.

The project, directed by Raj Nidimoru and Krishna DK (Raj & DK), could mark Salman Khan's first outing in the superhero genre — and a long-awaited reunion for the popular on-screen pair.

While Kareena Kapoor Khan has not signed on yet, reports suggest that discussions are moving in a positive direction. As per Variety, she has apparently shown strong interest in the role, and

Salman Khan is said to have personally reached out to her, which has helped push things forward.

There was earlier buzz around Samantha Ruth Prabhu being considered for the role, but recent reports indicate that Kareena Kapoor Khan is now the top choice for the film.

If everything falls into place, this will be the fifth time Salman Khan and Kareena Kapoor Khan come together on screen. Their last film was Bajrangi Bhaijaan, directed by Kabir Khan, which remains one of their most loved collaborations. Before that, they worked together in films like Kyon Ki..., Main Aur Mrs Khanna, and Bodyguard.

Days after molestation claim, wrestler Vinesh Phogat ticked off for missed doping test

New Delhi

The International Testing Agency (ITA) has notified wrestler Vinesh Phogat for missing an out-of-competition doping test, which construes as a first "whereabouts failure".

The notice will not affect her chances of taking part in the 2026 Senior Open Ranking Tournament that is scheduled to be held in Nandini Nagar, Gonda, from May 10 to 12 as it is only the first warning.

The notice comes days after she came out in the open as one of the six victims who had lodged a sexual harassment complaint against former BJP MP Brij Bhushan Sharan Singh. In a social media post on Sunday, Vinesh also raised concerns about the neutrality of the referees during the competition.

Related news: 'I am one of the 6 victims': Vinesh Phogat alleges she was sexually harassed by Brij Bhushan, uploads video

Gonda wrestling ranking tourney venue triggers fresh row, Mahavir Phogat backs Vinesh

In the letter dated May 5, the testing agency said the doping control officer could not locate



her during the designated testing window on December 18, 2025. The letter also acknowledged her reply and stated that as an elected member of the Legislative Assembly, she was in Chandigarh for the House proceedings and travelled from Bengaluru to attend the winter session. Athletes who are part of the registered testing pool have to routinely update their whereabouts in the system, where they have to submit information regarding their whereabouts with specific date and time for the next

three months. If the whereabouts change, the athlete has to update the information on ADAMS. The ITA ruled that she failed to update information regarding her whereabouts in time.

"In light of the above, the ITA finds that you were unable to establish that no negligent behaviour on your part caused or contributed to your failure to update your whereabouts filings and be available and accessible for testing. Therefore, the ITA has decided to record this miss test," reads the letter.

Railways runner Jayesh in dope net

Another cross country athlete has been caught in the dope net. Railways runner Jayesh Patil has been served with a provisional suspension by the National Anti-Doping Agency in the latest list released. Jayesh officially finished fifth in the 10km race at the 60th National Cross Country Championships in Ranchi in January. His sample has shown presence of meldonium, which is a non-specified substance and part of a list of prohibited substances as per the World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA). The drug essentially helps athletes in endurance. Railways coach Dinesh Meena was unavailable for comments. The race that was held on January 24 at Namkum, Ranchi, ended on a dramatic note where results had to be revised due to allegations of impersonation. At the finish line, Services' Raghunandan Singh finished second behind Harmanjot Singh. With another athlete, Ankit, finishing fourth, the Services team was declared the overall champions. However, another athlete showed up to collect the silver medal on behalf of Raghunandan at the victory ceremony. The Railways team quickly flagged the impersonation and even filed an official complaint with the Athletics Federation of India (AFI) with video evidence that showed that the man who ran as Raghunandan and the one at the victory ceremony were two different individuals. It was later found out that Raghunandan had sent the same individual for dope testing at the meet. The AFI quickly disqualified his result and then issued a revised list. As per the new list, Harmanjot was declared the winner, followed by Punit, Ankit, Panchanan Bera and Jayesh. Railways were declared as overall champions.

"He completely deserves it": Casemiro feels Michael Carrick deserves Manchester United job permanently

London

Manchester United great Casemiro has shown full support for Michael Carrick to take over as the permanent manager of the club, stating that he "completely deserves" the role.

Speaking to ESPN, Casemiro praised Carrick's qualities as a manager, noting that he has already shown he possesses the necessary attributes to succeed at the helm of one of the world's most prestigious football clubs.

In his 14 games as manager, United have secured 10 wins and two draws, with losses to Leeds United at Old Trafford and Newcastle United.

Their impressive form has seen them overcome title challengers Arsenal and Manchester City, as well as defeating Liverpool and Chelsea, putting the club firmly in third place in the ongoing Premier League, and ensuring their qualification for next season's UEFA Champions League edition.



"In my opinion, Michael Carrick completely deserves it [the Manchester United job]. He's a guy who has already demonstrated that he has very good qualities to be a Manchester United coach," Casemiro said.

While he acknowledged that the decision lies with the club, Casemiro was clear in his endorsement, adding, "If I could

give my opinion, of course, he deserves it, and he deserves the club's total trust."

Carrick was handed the interim role until the end of the season after the club sacked Ruben Amorim in January following a turbulent 14-month spell.

"The season is year-round, but since he arrived, he's been doing an incredible job, and I think that with more time, he has everything to be a great manager of Manchester United," the Brazilian star noted.

Casemiro emphasised Carrick's deep connection to the club, saying, "He's a coach who knows the club, he's a coach who was an idol at the club, he's a coach who played a lot, won titles here, knows what the club is like, he knows what Manchester United is."

The former Real Madrid star also spoke about the challenges Carrick faced when he took over mid-season, facing tough fixtures right away.

"There wasn't much time, that

for me was one of the big surprises, because he entered the middle of a troubled season," Casemiro said.

"The games, when he arrived, were not so much those games that we say to gain confidence, although in the Premier League there were not so many games like that, but those games, so there have already been difficult games," he added.

Casemiro credited Carrick for turning things around at the club and for his personal impact, especially as a fellow midfielder.

"He arrived and managed to change the club and me in particular, even more so because he was a former player, a midfielder," Casemiro said.

Concluding his comments, Casemiro expressed his admiration for Carrick as a person, stating, "I'm happy for the person he is, the guy is a sensational person, an incredible person, and he deserves everything that's happening in his career."

"We don't celebrate our athletes the way we should": Shuttler Chirag Shetty after India's bronze at Thomas Cup 2026

New Delhi

Badminton player Chirag Shetty on Tuesday said that India cannot yet be considered a true sporting nation, pointing out that even major achievements like a Thomas Cup victory don't bring badminton athletes the level of recognition and celebration they deserve.

Chirag Shetty, a part of India's Thomas Cup 2026 contingent who brought home the bronze medal after facing a defeat to France in the semifinals on Saturday, reshared an Instagram story by his double's partner Satwiksairaj Rankireddy.

Satwiksairaj uploaded a group photo of the Indian contingent after they returned home from Denmark, where the Thomas Cup took place. The caption of the photo said, "Back home now. As usual, no one knows what happened over the past two weeks, and it seems like no one really cares."

Chirag Shetty reshared the story on his Instagram profile.

During a press conference organised by the Sports Authority of India (SAI) on Tuesday, Chirag expanded on Satwiksairaj's words in his social media post. He said that despite winning many medals, India still doesn't celebrate its athletes enough and therefore cannot yet be considered a true sporting nation.

"I think we are not a sporting nation as yet. Yes, we win medals, a



lot of medals, but we don't celebrate our athletes the way we should," he said.

Talking about when India won the 2022 Thomas Cup by defeating Indonesia in the finals, Chirag Shetty said that although the win was celebrated by badminton fans, it didn't receive the widespread recognition it deserved from the general public. He noted that while badminton fans understood its significance, many others were unaware of how big the achievement was, which he found disappointing.

"I think the last time when we

won the Thomas Cup, I think a lot of people didn't really share as much. We did get a reception; I landed in Bombay and there were plenty of people around who actually received us. And then we met the Prime Minister and he had a reception at his house. We were felicitated by the BAI (Badminton Association of India) as well. But apart from that, I think the way it should have been celebrated, it didn't get celebrated as much by the fans. The people who actually watch badminton, and know about the sport, they knew how big the tournament was, but the general public still

didn't really know the magnitude of the result, and that sometimes really makes me sad," Chirag said.

Chirag Shetty said that while government support and schemes for badminton have improved significantly, broader change is needed, with society as a whole doing more to celebrate sporting achievements.

"I think there's plenty more that we need to do. I think there's only a little that the government can do, which they are already doing. You know, the schemes and everything, I think for the past 10 years since I've been playing professional badminton has been terrific. But there's only little that the government and the sports bodies can do. I think the ecosystem needs to start celebrating sporting achievements," he added.

India lost to France 0-3 in the Thomas Cup semifinals in Horsens, Denmark, as India's dream of reclaiming the title they won in 2022 ended, leaving them with a bronze medal for the 2026 edition. The semifinal match was heavily impacted before it even began, as Lakshya was ruled out due to an elbow injury sustained during his quarterfinal victory against Chinese Taipei. Without their spearhead, India struggled to match the intensity of the French side, eventually going down 0-3.

Chaminda Vaas hails Wasim Akram as 'complete fast bowler', praises Bhuvneshwar Kumar's swing bowling

New Delhi

Legendary Sri Lanka seamer Chaminda Vaas has hailed Pakistan great Wasim Akram as the "complete fast bowler", while also underlining the continued relevance of swing bowling in modern cricket, including the impact of India's Bhuvneshwar Kumar in limited-overs formats.

Widely regarded as one of the finest exponents of swing, Vaas built a distinguished career on precision and movement rather than raw pace. Across 111 Tests, he claimed 355 wickets and scored 3089 runs, in addition to 400 wickets and 2025 runs in ODIs.

Reflecting on the art of swing

bowling, Vaas placed Akram at the pinnacle of fast bowling excellence. "Wasim Akram, for me, was the complete fast bowler," Vaas told Olympics.com. "He had everything - pace, control and the ability to swing the ball both ways. But what really made him special was how late the ball would move. Batsmen had very little time to adjust."

Often revered as the 'Sultan of Swing', Akram's record backs that assessment, with 414 wickets in 104 Tests and 502

wickets in 356 ODIs, alongside significant contributions with the bat. Vaas also spoke about



Akram's long-time new-ball partner Waqar Younis, highlighting the contrasting yet equally devastating qualities of the duo. "Waqar was different," Vaas explained. "He was quicker through

the air and very dangerous with reverse swing. His yorkers were deadly. When he got the old ball reversing, it was very difficult for any batsman in the world."

Skeet shooters miss out on final spots in ISSF World Cup Shotgun

New Delhi

Indian skeet shooters missed out on a spot in the finals in both the men's and women event in the International Shooting Sports Federation (ISSF) World Cup Shotgun, which got underway today at the Asanov Shooting Club in Almaty, Kazakhstan. Olympians Mairaj Ahmad Khan and Raiza Dhillon finished highest among the Indian athletes.

Mairaj, who started day two in 26th place after shooting 71 out of 75 yesterday, shot 23 and 25 in the final two series to end the qualification stage in 18th place with a total of 119. Bhavtegh Singh Gill, who was competing for ranking points was the next best performer, also with a final score of 119 (24,24,23,24,24) to finish one place below Mairaj in 19th, as per a press release from the National Rifle Association of India (NRAI).

Olympian Anantjeet Singh Naruka, started the fourth series with a perfect 25 and followed it up with a series of 23 to finish his first World Cup of the season in 38th place with a final score of 117.



Mother's Day

10
May

Across State



मराठी
अक्रॉस मुंबई

महाराष्ट्र उपाध्यक्ष-डिजिटल मिडिया संपादक
पत्रकार संघटना महाराष्ट्र

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