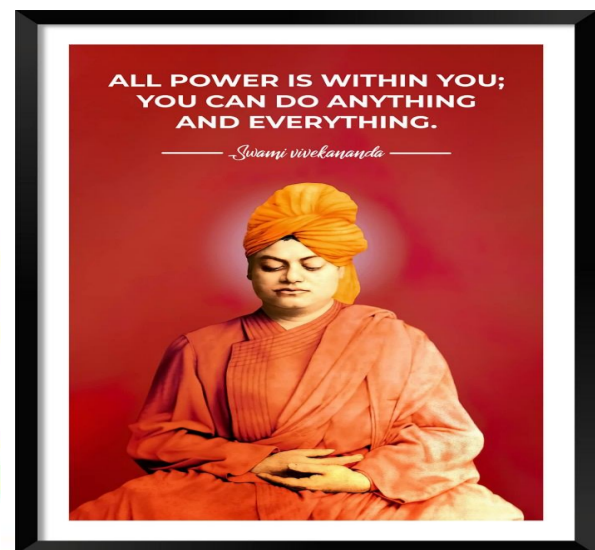


# YOUTH SPIRIT

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## Sajjanar Advises Gau Rakshaks To Obey Law

**Hyderabad:** Ahead of Id-ul-Zuha, police commissioner V.C. Sajjanar on Sunday laid down guidelines for 'go rakshak' (cow protection) organisations while assuring them of foolproof measures, including specialised check-posts at commissionerate borders, to prevent smuggling of cattle for slaughter. Sajjanar stressed that 'go rakshaks' must respect the legal process and immediately report information on illegal cattle transport to the police. Under no circumstances should individuals take the law into their own hands or resort to violence, he said. Strict instructions had been issued to register criminal cases against those posting provocative reels or videos on social media that could hurt religious sentiments or incite communal tension. Also Read -



Part Time Job Fraud Tops Cyberabad Crime in 2025. Volunteers were prohibited from joining police personnel at checkposts and from photographing cattle or sharing suspect details on social media. Each organisation must appoint a representative and provide member contact details to the police. Volunteers must carry valid identity cards at all times. "Go rakshaks" are forbidden from carrying weapons or sharp objects. Obstructing or chasing vehicles already in police custody will invite stringent legal action.

Surveillance on illegal cattle transport without veterinary certification will continue year-round. Citizens and organisations can provide information 24/7 via the Police Control Room at 8712661000. Also Read - Golconda Fort Gets Lightning Shield, 24x7 Watch

## Kishan Reddy Credits Modi for Globalising Yoga

**Hyderabad:** Union minister for coal and mines G. Kishan Reddy hailed Prime Minister Narendra Modi's leadership in promoting yoga as India's priceless gift to global health, crediting him with securing UN recognition of June 21 as International Day of Yoga in 2014 with the support of more than 170 nations. He highlighted initiatives such as corruption-free governance and Swachh Bharat, and urged continued awareness from schoolchildren to seniors. Also Read - Part Time Job Fraud Tops Cyberabad Crime in 2025



He took part in the 50-day countdown for the 12th IDY at Kanha Shanti Vanam in Ranga Reddy district, an event organised by the Morarji Desai National Institute of Yoga under the ministry of Ayush. In his address, Reddy emphasised yoga's role in fostering physical

fitness, mental balance and discipline amid modern stresses from pollution, chemicals in food and digital lifestyles. He called for yoga to be integrated into every home, school, village and work-

place across the state to position Hyderabad as a global yoga hub alongside its IT and pharmaceutical sectors. Praising Union minister for coal and mines G. Kishan Reddy hailed Prime Minister

Narendra Modi's leadership in promoting yoga as India's priceless gift to global health. He took part in the 50-day countdown for the 12th IDY at Kanha Shanti Vanam in Ranga Reddy district, an event organised by the Morarji Desai National Institute of Yoga under the ministry of Ayush. Kanha Shanti Vanam as a model of sustainable living and meditation, Reddy thanked Ayush Minister Pratap Rao Jadhav for hosting the event. He said yoga, Ayurveda and cultural revival, including the Ram Mandir, would help realise a healthy, peaceful Viksit Bharat by 2047.

## KTR Warns of Students Stir Over Fee Scheme



**Hyderabad:** BRS working president K.T. Rama Rao has accused the state government of attempting to dismantle the fee reimbursement scheme. He argued that the scheme, introduced by the YSR government and strengthened by then-Chief Minister K. Chandrashekar Rao, remained a crucial support system enabling access to higher education for economically weaker sections. Rama Rao demanded the immediate withdrawal of Government Order

(GO 7), which alters the reimbursement policy for the 2026-27 academic year, and called upon Chief Minister A. Revanth Reddy to issue a public apology to students. Warning of statewide protests, he said BRS would not remain forced to take to the streets, the govee consequences," he cautioned. Also Read - Part Time Job Fraud Tops Cyberabad Crime in 2025

In a letter to Revanth Reddy, Rama Rao described GO 7 as a "dark and deliberate attempt" to dismantle the scheme, terming it "grave injustice" to nearly 14 lakh students, particularly from underprivileged communities. He highlighted that the government has failed to clear dues of nearly 210,000 crore over the past two-and-a-half years, severely impacting over 2,500 educational institutions. Colleges, he noted, are struggling to function, while students face difficulties in accessing certificates and continuing their education.

## Sajjanar Urges Strict Road Safety Measures on ORR

**Hyderabad:** Telangana Director General of Police (DGP) VC Sajjanar has expressed concern over rising accidents on the Outer Ring Road (ORR), urging commuters to follow strict safety protocols. In a post on X, Sajjanar appealed to motorists to avoid stopping their vehicles on the ORR unless it is an emergency, such as a breakdown. He advised that in unavoidable situations, commuters should immediately contact the ORR Helpline at 14449 for assistance and ensure they



move their vehicles to the extreme left lane. Job Fraud Tops Cyberabad

Crime in 2025 "Deeply concerned about the accidents on the Outer Ring

Road (ORR). I appeal to all commuters to strictly avoid stopping your vehicles on the ORR unless it is an emergency like a breakdown. In such unavoidable situations, please call the ORR Helpline at 14449 immediately for safety assistance before moving to the extreme left lane. It is important to remember that these precautions are not limited to the ORR alone; they must be strictly followed while traveling on any National Highway.

I also urge every organisation to sensitize their drivers and employees regarding these safety protocols. Together, we must strive to prevent fatal road accidents," police chief wrote on X. Also Read - Thunderstorms, Gusty Winds Forecast Across Several Telangana Districts "I request your full support in our mission to curb road accidents and save lives. Such acts will not only attract heavy penalties but are also life-threatening. Let's prioritise safety above all," he added.

## Modi Govt Rattled By Rahul's Great Nicobar Visit

**New Delhi :** The Congress on Sunday flagged in detail concerns related to ecology, tribal rights, transparency and security, over the Great Nicobar project, and asserted that these considerations must be debated in a parliamentary forum. The opposition party claimed that the Modi government is "rattled" and in damage control mode after Leader of Opposition in the Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi's visit to Great Nicobar last week. Also Read - Will May 4 Mark A Turning Point For Women In Politics In Tamil Nadu? In a statement, Congress general secretary in-charge communications Jairam Ramesh said, "The Modi Government, clearly in damage control mode after the hugely impactful visit of the Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha, Rahul Gandhi, to Great Nicobar on April 28 2026, issued a press note on the Great Nicobar Island Development Project three days later." This press note does not



address any of the serious concerns that have been raised on it by local affected communities, environmentalists, anthropologists, civil society experts and other professionals, Ramesh said. Chokes, Political Heat Rises In Mathura Ahead Of 2027 UP Elections "These concerns had already been conveyed in detail by me to the Union Minister of Environment, Forests & Climate Change on September 10, 2024 and in a follow-up on September 27, 2024," the former environment minister said. During his visit to Great Nicobar, Gandhi last week alleged that the Great Nicobar project at Campbell Bay in Andaman and

Nicobar Islands was "one of the biggest scams and gravest crimes against the natural and tribal heritage of the country". Abhishek Hold Meeting With All TMC Counting Agents The government on May 1 released a detailed statement with It seeks to balance port-led growth with calibrated environmental safeguards. Protection of indigenous communities remains central to its planning," the government statement had said. "The project combines strategic, economic, and ecological priorities. This ensures that development is sustainable, inclusive, and aligned with national interests," it had said.

## Telangana High Court Dismisses Appeal in Criminal Probe; Warns Officials in Contempt Case

**Hyderabad:** The Telangana High Court has ruled that an intra-court appeal against an interim order passed during a criminal investigation is not maintainable. A Division Bench comprising Chief Justice Aparesh Kumar Singh and Justice G. M. Mohiuddin dismissed, at the threshold, an appeal filed by Operation M obilization India Trust. The Trust had challenged an interim order restraining it from alienating its immovable properties pending investigation into alleged financial irregularities. Also Read - Part Time Job Fraud Tops Cyberabad Crime in 2025 The matter originated from a writ petition filed by Gowripaga Albert, who sought a probe into alleged violations of the Foreign (Regulation) Act (FCRA) and the Prevention of Corruption Act, and requested that the investigation be handed over to the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI).



A Single Judge had earlier directed maintenance of status quo regarding the Trust's immovable properties. Also Read - Thunderstorms, Gusty Winds Forecast Across Several Telangana Districts Challenging this, the Trust argued that the interim order went beyond the scope of the writ petition and was contrary to earlier Supreme Court directions, which were limited to freezing accounts for institutional expenses and did not extend to restraining property. Rejecting these contentions, the Division Bench observed that the core issue in the writ petition concerns allegations of financial irregularities attracting penal consequences under the FCRA framework,

placing the matter within the realm of criminal jurisdiction. It held that such interim orders do not warrant interference in intra-court appellate jurisdiction and dismissed the appeal as not maintainable. Kuk apally: Couple End Life By Suicide Within Two Months Of Marriage In a separate case, the High Court a contempt petition filed by P. Lakshminarayana, who alleged wilful disobedience, contending that as against the Principal Secretary of the Irrigation and other officials. Taking serious note of the inaction, the Court warned that if the order is not implemented, the Principal Secretary to the Government would be directed to appear in person.

## Golconda Fort Gets Lightning Shield, 24x7 Watch



**Hyderabad:** Golconda Fort is now better protected from lightning with the installation of two advanced technology conductors by the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI). The hilltop fort, prone to lightning strikes, can now withstand strikes up to 120 metres.

Archaeological Survey of India es. The 23-metre-high conductors will safeguard the upper areas, including the durbar hall. The works cost Rs 10 lakh. Acting on instructions from ASI superintending archaeologist Dr Nihildas, similar conductors have been installed at Ramappa, Warangal Fort and Thousand Pillar Temple.

## Bathukammakunta Is a Lake: HYDRAA Commissioner A. V. Ranganath

**Hyderabad:** HYDRAA commissioner A.V. Ranganath on Saturday claimed that the existence of Bathukammakunta in Amberpet as a lake was backed with historical, documentary and satellite evidence. Government records, maps and satellite imagery from as early as 1975 clearly showed the lake. Addressing the media on Saturday, Ranganath showed irrigation documents, along with the municipal records from Amberpet from 1975, that Bathukammakunta as a lake. Also Read - Part Time Job Fraud Tops Cyberabad Crime in 2025 He GPMC records, the lake spreads across 9 acres and 19 guntas, existing on Survey No 563/1. The adjoining bund, record-



ed as 'Masan Katta', exists on Survey No. 563/2 over six guntas", Ranganath said. "The court has asked the other party to prove his ownership, and he has nothing but an unregistered sale agreement. Using that document, he claims ownership of that land. He does not have a sale deed, and the court has previously declared that he has no ownership rights. But they appealed

to the High Court, where the case is being heard," Ranganath explained. Also Read - Man Dragged on Car Bonnet for 2 km in Shocking Meerpet Road Rage HYDRAA has showcased Survey of India maps generated in 1971, which showed the area as a water body. It also picNational Aeronautics Administration's (Nasa) Landsat programme r Held For Murder, Body

Found Under Kitchen Platform Ranganath stressed that lakes were public assets and could not be treated as private property, regardless of ownership claims. He said limited farming may be allowed when water levels recede, but the basic nature of a lake must not be altered and no structures should be raised, even on a patta land. Speaking about the enforcement activities, Ranganath said "So far, we have reclaimed 2,093 acres of land, including 296.12 acres within lake's full tank level (FTL) limits, 24.05 acres near and over drain lines, and over 1,600 acres of government land. The total value of the recovered land is estimated at around ₹80,000 crores on average. Over 90 cases have been registered."

## Nampally's Open-air Furniture Market Draws Bargain Hunters

**Hyderabad:** The Nampally furniture market does not stay inside its shops. It spills out onto the road, across Nampally Station Road, Dargah Road and the lanes around, where large showrooms sit next to smaller stores and the rest of the trade spreads into the open. Sofas, beds, office chairs and cabinets line both sides, set out for anyone to stop, check and compare. Prices here drop to levels most retail stores in the city will never match. Traders place the market's beginnings at close to a hundred years, and the structure still shows that long build, old stretches feeding into newer ones, all running as one continuous space where buyers come prepared to spend time, look closely and bargain their way through. Also Read - Part Time Job Fraud Tops Cyberabad Crime in 2025 "This market itself is much older, easily over 100 years. Our smaller shop started in 1931, right next door, where we used to sell folding items," said Feroze, manager at

Leepakshi Furniture, a store that has operated on the stretch since 1973. It is one of the bigger stores in the market selling designer furniture along with customisation options. However the smaller stores are on the other end next to the Intermediate Board office. They call it the old furniture market and there you will find four-seater dining tables quoted at ₹5,000. The seller will lower it further if you bargain. That number says as much about this market as anything else and Sundays change that scale. Furniture moves out of shop interiors and onto pavements and road edges. Buyers walk across both sides of the road, stopping, inspecting, negotiating and the rates are extremely low. Also Read - Man Dragged on Car Bonnet for 2 km in Shocking Meerpet Road Rage Even at bigger shops like Leepakshi, Feroze notes, "Our pricing is close to wholesale, so people can expect roughly a 30 per cent difference compared to regular market rates."



His store also arranges porters and delivery. Smaller stores also offer the same as you could see numerous porter cars around the area so customers do not have to worry about moving large items. Right next to Leepakshi is a section that focuses on office setups. Office chairs and desks line the frontage of these smaller stores. "We've been here since 2000, and we focus only on office furniture, chairs, desks, and work setups," said the manager at Sri Laxmi Narayan Furniture. Also Read - Kamareddy Fire Accident: 12 Shops Guttled at Old Bus Stand Shreya Rao came to the market after moving into

a new house and said that she did not buy a single piece elsewhere. "People usually go to places like these big super markets now, but things here are much more affordable and convenient." She described how the search works here. "If you take your time and look around, you can even find furniture that fits those Pinterest-style aesthetics." She listed what she had already bought. "I got almost everything from here, a sofa set, beds, cabinets, and smaller items all within about ₹50,000 to ₹60,000. And these weren't even the cheapest options."

## 6K Perform Bhujangasana, Set Asia Record

**Hyderabad:** A mass yoga demonstration of more than 6,000 participants performing Bhujangasana in unison at Kanha Shanti Vanam entered the Asia Book of Records on Saturday, kicking off the 50-day countdown to International Day of Yoga (IDY) 2026. Organised by the Morarji Desai National Institute of Yoga under the ministry of Ayush, the event drew participants from more than 20 countries — including the United Kingdom, Canada, Australia, Kazakhstan and Namibia — underscoring yoga's growing global reach. Also Read - Part Time Job Fraud Tops Cyberabad Crime in 2025 Union minister for coal and mines G Kishan Reddy said yoga offers "a practical and cost-effective solution to



modern-day challenges such as stress, unhealthy lifestyles and pollution", adding that a healthy, disciplined society is essential to achieving Viksit Bharat by 2047. He said Hyderabad should grow as a global hub for yoga and well-

ness alongside its technology ecosystem. Minister of state for Ayush and health Prataprao Jadhav said yoga has become a global movement for holistic well-being and strengthens India's position as a centre for wellness and

healthcare. He highlighted the Yoga 365 campaign, under which a 100-day free training programme runs until 21 June, aiming to reach more than 100,000 participants and offer Yog Mitra certification.

## 90,000+ Students to Take EAPCET Agri-Pharmacy Exams; Marks to be Displayed Instantly After Test

**Hyderabad:** Students appearing for the Eapcet in the agricultural and pharmacy streams starting Monday will not be allowed into the centres even if they are late by a minute. The morning session will be conducted from 9 am to 12 noon, and afternoon session from 3 pm to 5 pm. Further, candidates will not be allowed to leave the examination hall until the end of the examination, said Eapcet convener Dr K. Vijaya Kumar Reddy. Also Read - Part Time Job Fraud Tops Cyberabad Crime in 2025 He advised students to visit the centres well in advance to get acquaintance with the location of the test centre. A total of 90,958 students registered for the agriculture and pharmacy stream exams scheduled on May 4 in two sessions and May 5 morning session at 106 centres. After comple-



tion of the examination duration, the marks secured by the candidate will be displayed on their respective screens according to the preliminary key. The rank will be allotted based on the performance (normalised marks according to final key) in the Eapcet. Also Read - Man Dragged on Car Bonnet for 2 km in Shocking Meerpet Road Rage Dr Vijaya Kumar Reddy said the bandwidth of marks vs. rank obtained by the candidates in 2024 and 2025 have been hosted on the website

https://eapcet.tgche.ac.in/. Admissions Open for Young India Institutes of Excellence: 6,600 Seats Up for Grabs via Unified T G R J C - C E T Hyderabad: The school education department has issued India Institutes of Excellence (YIIoE) in Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalyas (3,600 seats) and introduced a single entrance test to streamline the process for students. Also Read - Kamareddy Fire Accident: 12 Shops Guttled at Old Bus Stand The TGRJC-CET now be used for admissions

into both TGREIS Junior Colleges and YIIoE institutions. The department said this would remove the need for separate applications and reduce confusion for students and parents. Around 93 KGBVs have been upgraded as Young India Institutes of Excellence. These institutions will offer residential education along with coaching for exams such as IIT-JEE, NEET, Eapcet and CLAT. Admissions will be based on merit, reservation norms and eligibility criteria, the department said.

## Nimmala Ramanaidu Urges Public Not to Believe YSRC, Flags Debt Burden

**Kakinada:** Water resources development minister Nimmala Ramanaidu on Saturday urged people not to believe the YSRC, alleging that the party had damaged the state during its five-year rule. He was speaking after laying the foundation stone for development works worth ₹7.60 crore in Palakollu constituency. The minister said the previous YSRC government had pushed the state into financial distress, burdening it with a debt of ₹14 lakh crore and placing an estimated liability of ₹2.40 lakh on each individual. Also Read - Over ₹1 Lakh-salaried Govt Staffer Turns Chain Snatcher Held in Kadiri He alleged that state-



ments by YSRC leaders, including party president Y. S. Jagan Mohan Reddy, were provoking violence and were not in the state's int.Y. S. Jagan

Mohan rest. The minister said any political party seeking power should clearly outline its development and welfare agenda. He added

that the present alliance government, led by Chief Minister N. Chandrababu Naidu, is focused on development and welfare.

## Telangana Readies 23 Flights for Haj Pilgrims

**Hyderabad:** The Telangana state Haj Committee has made elaborate arrangements for pilgrims departing on the Haj from May 4. A total of 23 flights have been arranged, the last scheduled for May 21. Pilgrims have been advised to reach the Haj House 24 hours before departure to collect their Haj kits, which include a smart wristwatch and identification stickers. Around 9,900 pilgrims will travel from the Hyderabad embarkation point, including 6,600 from Telangana and the remainder from other states. Also Read - Part Time Job Fraud Tops Cyberabad Crime in 2025 Addressing the media on Saturday, Haj Committee chairman Syed Ghulam Afzal Biyabani said that, as flight ticket prices have risen because of higher aviation fuel costs, the Central Haj Committee had asked pilgrims to



pay an additional Rs 10,000. However, the Telangana committee has requested the government to reconsider, noting that pilgrims from other states have already travelled without this extra charge. Also Read - Man Dragged on Car Bonnet for 2 km in Shocking Meerpet Road Rage Haj inspectors will assist pilgrims and ensure improved facili-

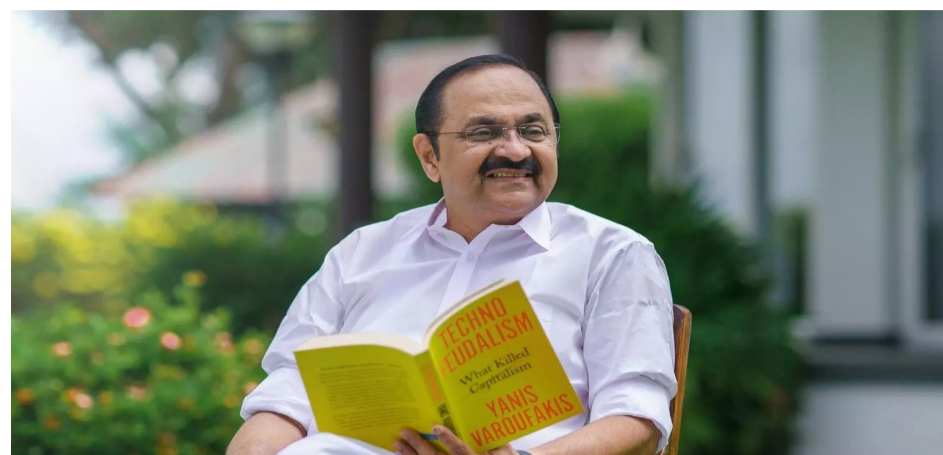
ties. Special care will be taken during the journey, as more than 50 per cent of the pilgrims are senior citizens. Under new Saudi regulations, pilgrims will not be permitted to cook in their rooms; instead they will be given a list of government-approved caterers. Unlike previous years, when men and women sometimes shared rooms, separate accom-

modation will be provided this year. He advised pilgrims to follow the guidelines strictly, especially because of high temperatures, and to avoid going out between 10 am and 3 pm. The committee will provide smart watches and offer guidance on wearing the ihram, with assistance from religious scholars, before departure.

# Kerala Leaders Express Confidence Ahead of Election Results

**Thiruvananthapuram:** Political leaders and candidates across party lines on Sunday expressed confidence of victory ahead of the Kerala Assembly election results on May 4. Polling for the 140-member Assembly was held on April 9. Speaking to reporters, Kerala Minister P A Mohamed Riyas said the situation was favourable for the CPI(M)-led LDF across the state. Riyas, who is contesting against UDF-backed Independent P V Anvar from Bepore in Kozhikode district, said the front would secure a comfortable victory both in his constituency and statewide. Also Read - Kolkata: Security Tightened at Strongrooms Ahead of Election Results "There will be a good victory for the LDF in Bepore as well as across Kerala," he said. He claimed that the state had witnessed development, welfare measures, clean governance, and internal unity within the front during the LDF's 10-year

tenure. "We did not merely make promises but implemented them. The government stood with the people on their issues. There were no communal riots. People have realised this and want the LDF to continue," he said. Also Read - Mamata, Abhishek Hold Meeting With All TMC Counting Agents Leader of Opposition in the Kerala Assembly V D Satheesan, who was present in his constituency on Sunday, declined to comment and said he would speak after the results were announced. Former Union minister and BJP leader V Muraleedharan, contesting from Kazhakoottam constituency, said feedback from voters indicated growing support for the BJP-led NDA. Muraleedharan is in the fray against CPI(M) sitting MLA Kadakampally Surendran and Congress candidate T Sharath Chandra Prasad. Also Read - Bengal Polls: EC Deploys Additional Observers for Vote Counting "Though the



contest was initially expected to be triangular, it later turned into a fight between the LDF and NDA. The BJP has a clear upper hand in the constituency," he said. However, Surendran asserted that he had earned the confidence of voters and that his victory was assured. "The BJP deserves to be hopeful after its campaign. It will not be surprising if they spent Rs 10-20 crore. They also ran fake narra-

tives," he told a news channel. Also Read - Top 10 Candidates Everyone Is Watching This Election Senior Congress leader Ramesh Chennithala said the UDF would emerge victorious in the election. "Our assessment is that the Congress-led UDF will emerge victorious," he said. Apu John Joseph, son of Kerala Congress (Joseph) leader P J Joseph and contesting from Thodupuzha, said the UDF was headed for an easy victory. "The UDF fought this election as a united team, and that was reflected during the cam-

paign. The result of that effort will certainly be seen in the counting. We expect a comfortable-margin victory," he said. Senior BJP leader K u m m a n a m Rajasekharan, contesting from Aranmula, said the party was confident of winning the seat. He also said the BJP expected to open its account in the state. "Our estimate is that Kerala may deliver a hung Assembly as people are fed up with both the UDF and LDF," he said.

# Anticipatory Bail to Pawan Khera in Alleged Defamation Case Linked to Assam CM's Wife

**New Delhi:** The Supreme Court has granted an anticipatory bail to Congress leader Pawan Khera in matter linked to alleged forgery and defamation case linked to the allegedly making false allegations against the wife of Assam CM Himanta Biswa Sarma, Riniki Bhuyan Sharma. This comes after earlier on Thursday, Supreme Court had reserved its verdict on a plea filed by Congress leader Pawan Khera challenging a Gauhati High Court order denying him anticipatory bail in a defamation and forgery case linked to allegations against Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma. Also Read - Didi: Exit Poll BJP-sponsored, Rigged A bench of Justices JK Maheshwari and Atul S Chandurkar heard submissions by Senior Advocate Abhishek Manu Singhvi for Khera and counter-arguments by Solicitor General Tushar Mehta for the Assam government before reserving judgment. Singhvi strongly criticised statements attributed to the Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma and argued that he is acting like a constitutional cowboy. "Dr



BR Ambedkar would turn over in his grave if he had imagined a constitutional functionary behaving like a 'constitutional cowboy' or a 'constitutional Rambo'," the senior lawyer said. He argued that the custodial arrest of Khera was unnecessary in a defamation case when his client is not a flight risk. "Interrogation is available; there is no flight risk. The question is the necessity of arrest. Why is it necessary to humiliate by custodial arrest?" he said. Also Read - West Bengal Assembly: Will Mamata Banerjee Win a Fourth Term? Singhvi argued that the charges invoked against Pawan Khera areailable, including Section 339 (forgery under BNS), which he claims was wrongly added later and does not even form part of the original FIR. He stated that arrest should be a

last resort, particularly in such offences. He said the Gauhati High Court order states that he (Khera) doesn't deserve the 'privilege' of an anticipatory bail, when the liberty is a matter of right and not privilege. Also Read - LDF, UDF Claim Victory Post Exit Poll Results Singhvi added that it's a case where "venom" and "malice" are spewing out of the prosecution. He stressed the need for a thorough investigation. He also said that the investigation hBail He stressed the need for a thorough such as passport seals, QR codes and other official markers. Mehta submitted that the investigation must uncover who forged the documents, whether Khera acted with accomplices and whether the alleged acts have wider implications, including possible foreign links during an election period.

# Congress Flags India's Press Freedom Rank at 157 on World Press Freedom Day

**New Delhi:** The Congress on Sunday launched a sharp attack over the state of press freedom in India, citing the country's rank of 157 in the World Press Freedom Index 2026, which places it in the "very serious" category. On World Press Freedom Day, the Congress said that a free press is the voice of democracy, but alleged that it is under attack. In a post on X, it expressed solidarity with journalists and voices that "speak truth to power" and strive to protect democratic values. Also Read - 55 AAP MLAs Meet Sunita, Say Jailed Kejriwal Should Not Resign "A free press is the voice of democracy, but today that voice is under attack. India ranks 157 in the World Press Freedom Index



2026, falling into the 'very serious' category. On World Press Freedom Day, the Congress party stands firmly with every fearless voice that speaks truth to power and fights to protect democracy," the party wrote on X. May 3 acts as a reminder to governments

of the need to respect their commitment to press freedom. It is also a day of reflection among media professionals about issues of press freedom and professional ethics. Also Read - UP: Hearing in 2018 Defamation Case Against Rahul Gandhi Postponed

to April 12 The day serves as an opportunity to celebrate the fundamental principles of press freedom, assess the state of press freedom across the world, defend the media from attacks on Press Freedom Day was in their independence, and pay tribute to journalists who have lost their lives in the line of duty. World Press Freedom Day was proclaimed by the UN General Assembly in 1993 following a recommendation adopted at the 26th session of UNESCO's General Conference in 1991. This was in

response to a call by African journalists who, in 1991, produced the landmark Windhoek Declaration. World Press Freedom Day was proclaimed by the UN General Assembly in 1993 following a recommendation adopted at the 26th session of UNESCO's General Conference in 1991. This was in response to a call by African journalists who, in 1991, produced the landmark Windhoek Declaration. The Windhoek Declaration remains a benchmark for ensuring press freedom worldwide. Originating from a seminar in Windhoek in 1991, it encouraged press freedom, independence, and pluralism in Africa and beyond.

# Loud Ring On Phone: Nationwide Cell Broadcast Alert System Launch Evokes Mixed Reactions

**New Delhi:** The Centre's initiative of rolling out nationwide cell broadcast alerts evoked mixed reactions on Saturday particularly from elderly citizens, housewives and those unfamiliar with smartphone technology. "I was alone at home when my phone suddenly made a loud alarm I had never heard before. The message said 'extremely severe alert'—I thought something terrible had happened," said 70-year-old Shanti Devi, a resident of West Delhi. "I was tense and confused as I didn't know it was just a test," she said. However, Shanti Devi was not the only person surprised by the cell broadcast alerts. Even septuagenarian Malay Das was unprepared to receive such a message on his phone. "I was watching TV. Suddenly, I got an emergency siren on my mobile and I thought something bad happened. When I opened my mobile, I saw the alert message," said Das, a resident of Noida. What surprised Das was the fact that several fire incidents had taken place in high rise buildings in the national capital region (NCR) area in the last few days. "I thought something of that sort (fire incident) had taken place," said Das. On paper, the system is designed as a life-saving tool—delivering instant warnings about natural disasters or emergencies



directly to mobile phones, even without internet connectivity. However, recent test alerts labeled "Extremely severe" startled many users, especially those unaware that such messages could be drills. For many elderly citizens, the sudden, high-decibel alarm—of 72, from Noida's Dadri village, described the experience immediately explain it to me." Experts say such reactions highlight a critical gap between technological implementation and public awareness. While the cell broadcast system is globally recognized as an effective emergency communication tool, its success depends heavily on prior public education. Renowned digital expert, Golak Kumar Simili said that technology alone cannot ensure safety. "If people don't understand what the alert means or how to respond, it can create panic instead of preparedness—especially among vulnerable groups like the elderly," he said. In many cases, according to Simili, language and accessibility also play a role. "Though alerts are increasingly

being sent in multiple languages, the formatting and urgency of the message can still be overwhelming for those not accustomed to digital interfaces," he said. In such cases, family memberous," said Diptesh M has maintained that these alerts are essential for building a robust early warning system, paExperts suggest that advance public notices, awareness campaigns, and simpler messaging could significantly, the mixed response from today's drill shows that bile phonAs part of the rollout, a nationwide test was successfully conducted earlier in the day, during which mtry, to save the lives of our people, a confluence of human resources and technology has been done today. C-DOT conducted the Indian governme the cell broadcasting solution, an atmanirbhar solution was sent to all Indians in 21 different languages," said Union Minister Jyotiraditya Scindia against the backdrop of a pan-India testing of an indigenous cell broadcast system for rapid disaster alerts.

# Delhi Judge Dies By Suicide At Safdarjung Home; Family Cries Foul

**New Delhi:** A Delhi Judicial Services officer was found dead under suspicious circumstances at his residence in the Safdarjung area, with family members alleging harassment and raising questions over the circumstances that led to the death, police said on Saturday. The deceased, identified as Aman Kumar Sharma (30), is suspected to have died by suicide, with preliminary inquiry indicating death by hanging, police said in a statement. They said a team rushed to the spot after receiving a PCR call made by Aman's brother-in-law Shivam about the incident and initiated inquest proceedings. The body has been sent for post-mortem. "No foul play has been established so far. However, all angles are being examined as part of the inquest proceedings," a senior police officer said. However, the family has levelled serious allegations, claiming that Sharma had been under



distress and had complained of harassment in the days leading up to his death. Rajesh Sharma, a relative of the deceased, told PTI that Aman's father, Prem Sharma, was inconsolable on learning of his son's death and was "crying profusely" after the family received the information around 1.30 am. "My son, who is Aman's brother-in-law, and my daughter-in-law had gone to Green Park, and Aman's body had been taken to Safdarjung Hospital, where he was

declared brought dead," Rajesh Sharma said. Citing Prem Sharma's purported statement to police, he said Aman had called his father around 10 pm on the night of the incident and expressed distress. "He told his father, 'I am very troubled, and it has become difficult for me to live. I've been harassed for two months,'" Sharma claimed. According to the family, Prem Sharma rushed from Alwar and reached the residence around midnight. "Prem was told that Aman had a

dispute with his wife, who is also a judicial officer. Her sister is an IAS officer posted in Jammu," he said. Sharma alleged that the couple had argued during the night. "His wife was very angry and was shouting, while Aman was crying. Then suddenly everything went quiet," he said. He claimed that when Prem Sharma later tried to find his son, he was not in the room. "When he called Aman's phone, the ringtone came from inside the bathroom. Despite repeated knocking, there was no

response," he said. Neighbours were then alerted, and a rear window was used to look inside. "Someone broke the glass pane and saw Aman hanging with a dupatta. He was brought down and taken to the hospital," Rajesh Sharma said. He also alleged that family members faced difficulties in contacting the woman's relatives and that some persons present at the house left abruptly. Police said statements of concerned persons are being recorded and the circumstances leading to the incident are being examined. According to official records, Sharma joined the Delhi Judicial Services on June 19, 2021. A law graduate from Symbiosis Law School, Pune, he had been serving as Full-Time Secretary of the District Legal Services Authority (DLSA) in the North-East district at Karkardooma Courts since October 2025. Further investigation is underway, police is not a solution

## Police Find Skeletal Remains Of Woman 'Killed' 34 Years Ago In Ahmedabad, Send Them For Forensic Test

**Ahmedabad:** Acting on a tip-off, the Crime Branch on Thursday recovered the skeletal remains of a woman who was suspected to have been murdered in Ahmedabad's Vatva area 34 years ago. The police exhumed the remains from a 20-foot-deep house pit and sent them for forensic examination. ACP (Crime Branch) Bharat Patel said that although this case is very old, important evidence has been found based on technical and scientific investigation. After DNA testing of the human remains, the correct identification and further legal action will be taken. Strict action will be taken against all the accused involved in this matter. Case background According to sources,



the victim, Farzana, was married in Surat, but got divorced after a year. Later, she returned to her father's house at Dholka and then started living in Ahmedabad. She was rumoured to have been involved in prostitution and had relationships with many men. In Ahmedabad, she met Samsuddin and fell in

love with him. Later, the two got married. Sources said even after marriage, when Farzana's behaviour did not change, Samsuddin hatched a conspiracy to kill her and discussed the plan with his brother Iqbal and friend Abdul Karim. Karim's acquaintance Sadia Bibi too was included in this plan.

Since Bibi lived alone, the plan was made to kill her at her house. Farzana and Samsuddin stayed there at night. At midnight, sources said, all four accused allegedly strangled Farzana to death. Before the murder, a pit was dug outside Sadia Bibi's house. After the murder, the body was hidden in the pit and covered with brickwork. During this entire incident, a relative of Sadia Bibi witnessed this scene, whom the accused threatened to kill. ACP Patel said the woman's husband and his brother have been detained for questioning while other suspects are no longer alive. Since the brother of Farzana is alive, the identity will be confirmed through DNA test, the police said.

## SC Grants Anticipatory Bail To Congress Leader Pawan Khera In High-Profile Passport Case

**New Delhi:** In a major relief for the Congress leader, the Supreme Court on Friday granted anticipatory bail to Pawan Khera in a case registered against him related to allegations that Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma's wife possessed multiple passports and undisclosed properties abroad. The apex court had on Thursday reserved its order on a plea of Congress leader Pawan Khera seeking anticipatory bail. A bench of Justices JK Maheshwari and AS Chandurkar reserved its decision on the plea after the Congress leader submitted that if he doesn't get anticipatory bail in a registered case against



him, then the very purpose of pre-arrest bail is gone. Senior advocate Abhishek Singhvi, appearing for Khera, said the allegations against him are a matter of trial, and it was not necessary to humiliate him by arrest. He submitted that out of the total sections invoked against him, some are bailable while others don't require his arrest.

Solicitor General Tushar Mehta, appearing for the Assam government, opposed the plea and said Khera showed fake and doctored copies of passports of the chief minister's wife. He said Khera has been absconding and releasing videos, and all the allegations about the chief minister's wife holding multiple citizenships are false. Khera has chal-

lenged the April 24 order of the Gauhati High Court refusing to grant him anticipatory bail. Following the allegations, the CM's wife, Riniki Bhuyan Sharma, filed criminal cases against Khera and others at the Guwahati Crime Branch police station under various sections of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS). The Telangana High Court had earlier granted Khera a seven-day transit anticipatory bail, but Assam Police moved the Supreme Court against it. The apex court passed an interim order to stay the grant of anticipatory transit bail and asked Khera to approach the Gauhati High Court. (With PTI inputs).

## NEET UG 2026: 22 Lakh Aspirants, Limited Seats, A Defining Test Today

**New Delhi:** The summer heat may be sweeping across India, but for over 22 lakh aspirants, the real test is not outside. It is the battle they are about to fight inside examination halls, as they sit for the National Eligibility-cum-Entrance Test (NEET UG) on Sunday. Lakhs of students across cities, towns and villages are preparing for what is widely regarded as India's most competitive entrance exam. From early-morning revision schedules to late-night mock tests, from coaching hubs to self-study corners in small towns, one aspiration dominates: wearing the white coat. Conducted by the National Testing Agency (NTA), the NEET UG is more than just an exam; it is a gateway to careers in medicine, dentistry, AYUSH and allied health sciences. This year, a staggering 22,79,743 candidates have registered for NEET UG 2026. Yet, the harsh reality lies in the numbers. India currently has around 1.30 lakh MBBS seats, which means only a fraction of aspirants will secure their dream. The rest will either try again or look for alternative paths.



**Exam Day Reality:** Planning. Pressure. Precision. The exam will be held on May 3, 2026, in offline mode across more than 500 cities. The duration remains three hours, and strict guidelines will be followed at all centres. The NTA has clearly stated that entry gates will close at 1:30 PM, and no candidate will be allowed to enter after that. Students have been advised to reach their centres well in advance and not rely solely on digital navigation tools like maps, as discrepancies have been reported in some locations. Weather could also play a role this year, with forecasts indicating possible rain and thunderstorms in several parts of the country. Candidates are advised to factor in

traffic disruptions and plan their travel accordingly. Experts also caution against engaging in last-minute discussions before entering the exam hall. Conflicting answers or doubts raised at the last moment can increase anxiety and affect performance. Additionally, candidates should be mentally prepared to sit continuously for 3 hours, as frequent breaks are not permitted. Given the scale of NEET, maintaining fairness and security is a major challenge. Authorities have implemented strict protocols to ensure the integrity of the examination process. Question papers are prepared by subject experts and transported in radio-frequency-tagged sealed containers, stored securely in designated locations before being

dispatched to exam centres under CCTV surveillance. Though the same paper is used nationwide, question sequences may differ across booklets. The NTA has reiterated that all security measures are in place and dismissed rumours of any paper leak. The Numbers Game: When Competition Defines The Battle NEET is often described as a test of knowledge, but in reality, it is equally a test of endurance, precision and strategy. The competition ratio itself tells the story: nearly 17 candidates for every MBBS seat, and in government colleges, the odds are even steeper, up to 35-40 aspirants per seat. While the number of medical colleges has steadily increased over the years, it has not kept pace with the grow-

## Bengal Elections: ECI Orders Repoll In All 285 Polling Booths In Falta Constituency On May 21

**Kolkata:** The Election Commission of India (ECI) has ordered a fresh election in all polling stations of the Falta Assembly constituency in South 24 Parganas district in West Bengal. The repoll was ordered due to "severe electoral offences and subversion of the democratic process" on April 29, when voting in Falta was held in the second phase of the assembly elections. The Commission said repoll across all the booths, including auxiliary polling stations, will be held between 7 am and 6 pm on May 21, under "stringent security arrangements to ensure a free, fair and transparent" exercise. Counting of votes for the constituency will take place on May 24, an EC official said. The two-phase assembly polls were held on April 23 and April 29, with counting of votes scheduled for May 4. Falta drew attention before the second election. Returning Officer and other field functionaries, along with inputs from observers and available material on record before arriving at the decision. Reports from observers "flagged allegations of voter intimidation, unauthorised presence inside booths and possible tampering", it said. The Commission hereby declares the poll held on April 29 in Falta Assembly Constituency as void and orders a fresh poll in all polling stations," the order stated. The poll panel has directed authorities to make all necessary arrangements, including deployment of adequate central forces, micro-



observers and webcasting facilities, wherever required, to prevent "any recurrence of malpractice". It also directed that the entire poll process be videographed and closely monitored. Sukanta Majumdar welcomed the decision and stated that the repoll was a "victory of the women of Falta" over the "atrocities" of local TMC leader Jahangir Khan.

In Falta, Khan is pitted against BJP's Debangshu Panda and Abdur Razzak Molla of the Congress. CPI(M)'s Sambhu Nath Kurmi is also in the fray. Commenting on the development, BJP leader Amit Malviya wrote on X, "The Diamond Harbour model crumbles."

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## Trump Says US Not Likely To Accept New Iran Peace Proposal

**West Palm Beach:** US President Donald Trump said Saturday he was going to review a new Iranian peace proposal but cast doubt over its prospects, as a senior military officer in Tehran indicated renewed fighting was "likely". The dur outcome came after Iran's Tasnim and Fars news agencies said Tehran had submitted a 14-point proposal to mediator Pakistan. Details included ending the conflict on all fronts and enacting a new framework for the crucial Strait of Hormuz. "I will soon be reviewing the plan that Iran has just sent to us, but can't imagine that it would be acceptable in that they have not yet paid a big enough price for what they have done to Humanity and the World, over the last 47 years," Trump said on his Truth Social platform. In a brief interview with reporters in West Palm Beach, Florida, he declined to specify what could trigger new military action against the Islamic republic. "If they misbehave, if they do something bad, but right now, we'll see," he said. "But it's a possibility that could happen. The war, launched by the United States and Israel in late February, has been on hold since April 8, with one failed round of peace talks having taken place in Pakistan on Saturday, Mohammad Jafar Asadi, a senior figure in the Iranian military's central command, said "a renewed conflict between Iran and the United States is likely." "Evidence has shown that the United States is not committed to any promises or agreements," he added, according to Fars news.



Deputy foreign minister Kazem Gharibabadi told diplomats in Tehran "the ball is in the United States' court to choose the path of diplomacy or the continuation of a confrontational path." Iran, he said, was "prepared for both paths." US news site Axios reported earlier in the week that Trump's envoy Steve Witkoff had asked for Tehran's nuclear program to be put back on the negotiating table. Iran's mission to the UN pointed to the massive US nuclear arsenal, accusing Washington on Saturday of "hypocritical behaviour" towards Iran's own at following evacuation of its citizens from the site. The re was no legal "restriction on the level of uranium enrichment, so long as it is conducted under the IAEA's supervision, as was the case with Iran," it said, using the abbreviation for the UN nuclear watchdog. Iran has maintained a stranglehold on the Strait of Hormuz since the war began, choking off major flows of oil, gas and fertilizer to the world economy, while the United States has imposed a counter-blockade on Iranian

Oil prices are about 50 percent above pre-war. The vice speaker of Iran's parliament, Ali Nikzad, said that under draft legislation being considered for managing the waterway, 30 percent of tolls collected would go towards military infrastructure, with the rest earmarked for "economic development." "Managing the Strait of Hormuz is more important than acquiring nuclear weapons," he said. Fighting meanwhile continued Saturday in Lebanon, where Israel has carried out deadly strikes despite a separate truce with the Iran-backed armed group. The Israeli military said it had struck dozens of Hezbollah targets across southern Lebanon following evacuation warnings for nine villages following evacuation of its citizens. Lebanon's state-run National News Agency (NNA) reported three deaths in the Hezbollah, for its part, claimed several attacks targeting Israeli troops. The Israeli strikes included one in the village of Yaroun on what its military called a "religious building," which

The French Catholic charity L'Oeuvre d'Orient said the troops had "destroyed" a convent belonging to the Salvatorian Sisters, a Greek-Catholic religious order with which the charity is affiliated. Iran's economic toll in Washington, lawmakers were wrestling over whether Trump had breached a deadline to seek congressional approval for the war. Administration officials argue the ceasefire paused a 60-day clock, after which congressional authorisation would be required -- a claim disputed by opposition Democrats. In Iran, the war's economic toll is deepening, with oil exports crimped and inflation surging past 50 percent following evacuation of its citizens. "Everyone is trying to endure it, but... they are falling apart," 40-year-old Amir, a Tehran resident, told an AFP reporter based outside. "We still have not seen much of the economic effects because everyone had a bit of savings. They had some gold and dollars for a rainy day. When they run out, things will change."

## US Warns Shipping Firms They Could Face Sanctions Over Paying Iranian Tolls In The Strait Of Hormuz

**Dubai:** The United States is warning shipping companies that they could face sanctions for making payments to Iran to safely pass through the Strait of Hormuz. The alert posted Friday by the U.S. Office of Foreign Assets Control adds another layer of pressure in the standoff between the U.S. and Iran over control of the Strait of Hormuz.

About a fifth of the world's trade in oil and natural gas typically passes through the strait at the mouth of the Persian Gulf in peacetime. Iran effectively closed the strait to normal traffic by attacking and threatening to attack ships after the U.S. and Israel launched a war on Feb. 28. It later began offering some ships safe passage by detouring them through alternate routes closer to its shoreline, charging fees at times for the service.

That "tollbooth" effort is the focus of the U.S. sanctions warning. The payment demands could include transfers not only in cash but also "digital assets, offsets, informal swaps, or other in-kind payments," including charitable donations and payments at Iranian embassies, OFAC said.

"OFAC is issuing this alert to warn U.S. and non-U.S. persons about the sanctions risks of making these payments



to, or soliciting guarantees from, the Iranian regime for safe passage. These risks exist regardless of payment method," it said.

The U.S. responded to Iran's closure of the strait with a naval blockade of its own on April 13, preventing any Iranian tankers from leaving and depriving Iran of oil revenue it needs to shore up its ailing economy. The U.S. Central Command said 45 commercial ships have been told to turn around since the blockade began. Trump rejects Iranian proposals. The warning came as U.S. President Donald Trump swiftly rejected Iran's latest proposal to end the war between the countries. "They want to make a deal, I'm not satisfied with it, so we'll see what happens," Trump said Friday at the White House. He didn't elaborate on what he saw as its shortcomings but expressed frustration with the Iranian leader-

ship. "It's a very disjointed leadership," Trump said. "They all want to make a deal, but they're all messed up." Iran's state-run IRNA news agency reported Iran handed over its plan to mediators in Pakistan on Thursday night. The shaky three-week ceasefire between the U.S. and Iran appears to be holding, though both countries have traded accusations of violations. The standoff is increasingly putting the U.S. and Iran appears to be holding, though both countries have traded accusations of violations. The stand-off in Israel's Mossad intelligence agency, while Bekrzhadeh was alleged to have sent details about government and religious leaders as well as information about Natanz. The central Iranian city is home to a nuclear enrichment facility bombed by Israel and the U.S. last year. Iran

has hanged more than a dozen people over alleged espionage and terrorist activities in recent weeks. China's U.N. envoy urges Iran to lift restrictions. Fu Cong, the Chinese ambassador to the United Nations, said Friday that maintaining the ceasefire is "the most urgent issue," as well as bringing together the sides to resume good faith negotiations "to make sure that the ground is laid for reopening of Hormuz."

Minister Wang Yi "has been on the phone almost constantly" with representatives from all sides, Fu said, adding that China supports Pakistan's efforts to mediate between the parties. Fu stressed the root cause of the tremendous suffering in Iran and neighboring countries and the growing turmoil in the global economy, especially in developing countries, "is the illegitimate war by the U.S. and Israel."

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## Maritime Diplomacy In Action: Why Indian Navy Chief's Myanmar Trip Matters For The Indian Ocean

**New Delhi:** As Chief of Naval Staff (CNS) Admiral Dinesh K Tripathi begins his four-day visit to Myanmar on Saturday, the timing of the engagement is as significant as the itinerary. Coming soon after a new government assumed office in Naypyidaw, the Indian Navy chief's outreach underscores New Delhi's intent to anchor bilateral ties in maritime cooperation, even as Myanmar navigates political transition. For India, this is less a ceremonial visit and more a strategic signal from the eastern edge of the Indian Ocean. "During the visit, the CNS will engage in bilateral discussions with General Ye Win Oo, Commander-in-Chief, Myanmar Armed Forces, General U Htun Aung, the Defence Minister of Myanmar, and Admiral Htein Win, Commander-in-Chief, Myanmar Navy, along with other senior officials of Myanmar Armed Forces," a statement issued by the Ministry of Defence reads. "These interactions will provide an opportunity to review ongoing bilateral maritime cooperation, enhance operational-level linkages, and explore new avenues for collaboration between the two navies." According to the statement, the visit includes engagements at the Myanmar Navy's Central Naval Command, Naval Training Command and No. 1 Fleet, and laying of a wreath at the Myanmar Armed Forces Fallen Heroes' War Memorial. "These engagements will cover a wide range of defence cooperation matters, with particular focus on maritime security, capacity building, capability enhancement and training," the statement further reads. "The Indian Navy regularly interacts with the Myanmar Navy through defence cooperation meetings, staff talks, training exchanges and operational interactions, including India-Myanmar Naval Exercise (IMNEX), Indo-Myanmar



Coordinated Patrol (IMCOR), port visits and hydrography surveys. In addition, both navies regularly progress training exchanges, engage in multilateral forums and collaborate towards capability enhancement. Myanmar has participated in all recent events conducted by the Indian Navy, such as the Indian Ocean Naval Symposium, MILAN, International Fleet Review, Goa Maritime Conclave/Symposium, IOS SAGAR and the Admiral's Cup. Myanmar's long coastline along the Bay of Bengal and its proximity to India's Andaman and Nicobar Islands make it central to India's maritime security calculus. By prioritising naval engagement at this juncture, New Delhi is reinforcing the idea that continuity in maritime partnerships can provide stability amid political change. Myanmar occupies a pivotal position between the Bay of Bengal and the approaches to the Andaman Sea, sitting astride sea lanes that connect the eastern Indian Ocean with Southeast Asia. For India, Myanmar forms the maritime bridge between the Indian mainland and the Andaman and Nicobar Islands. Its coastline overlooks critical shipping routes used for energy flows and trade. Stability along Myanmar's coast directly affects India's eastern

seaboard security architecture.

Naval cooperation with Myanmar, therefore, is not peripheral diplomacy – it is core to India's layered maritime defence posture in the eastern Indian Ocean.

With a new political dispensation emerging in Myanmar, India's decision to send its Navy chief early is strategically calibrated. Rather than foregrounding political or diplomatic engagement, New Delhi has chosen a military-to-military channel to establish continuity of relations irrespective of regime change, signal that maritime cooperation is a non-political stabilising pillar of bilateral ties, and build trust with the new leadership through professional naval engagement. This approach mirrors India's broader neighbourhood strategy by insulating security cooperation from domestic political transitions. By meeting General Ye Win Oo, General U Htun Aung, and Admiral Htein Win, Admiral Tripathi will be engaging directly with the power centres that shape Myanmar's security policy.

Since the military coup in February 2021, Myanmar has been governed not by a fully civilian administration but by the Tatmadaw (military) under the State Administration Council

## UN Votes To Cut The Peacekeeping Force In South Sudan From 17,000 To 12,000

**United Nations:** The U.N. Security Council voted Thursday to reduce the ceiling for the peacekeeping force in conflict-torn South Sudan from 17,000 to 12,000 troops with a mandate to prevent a return to civil war in the world's newest nation. The vote on the U.S.-drafted resolution was 13-0 with Russia and China abstaining. It extends the mandate of the force until April 30, 2027. U.S. Ambassador Mike Waltz told the council the resolution seeks to get the force "back to basics" — keeping the peace, protecting civilians and supporting access to humanitarian aid. There were high hopes when oil-rich South Sudan gained independence from Sudan in 2011 after a long conflict. But the country slid into a civil war in December 2013, largely based on ethnic divisions, when forces loyal to Salva Kiir, an ethnic Dinka, battled those loyal to Riek



Machar, an ethnic Nuer. More than 400,000 people were killed in the war, which ended with a peace agreement in 2018 and a national unity government with Kiir as president and Machar as vice president. But Kiir's government put Machar under house arrest in March 2025, accusing him of subversive activities, and he now faces treason charges. Machar's removal coincided with a sharp increase in violence and a breakdown of the 2018 peace deal, though a long-delayed

presidential election is still scheduled for December. Waltz said the U.S. is concerned that Kiir's government is "exploiting international support and obstructing those that are genuinely trying to help." For example, Waltz said, between October and March the U.N. force recorded more than 480 incidents where peacekeepers were blocked, humanitarian access was denied, repatriation flights were obstructed, bases were forced to close "and millions of dollars were lost and

wasted." He said the United States is serious when it says the U.N.'s far-flung peacekeeping missions are meant to be temporary to help that Kiir's government is that Kiir's government is governments "navigate peace and security crises." Russia's deputy ambassador Anna Evstigneeva argued for maintaining the mission's ceiling. "mission must be ready for any scenario and security challenges," she said. "It should have a sufficient level of resources for that."

## Iran Says War With US Will 'Likely' Resume

Iran's armed forces say it is "likely" the US-Israel war on the country will resume as "evidence shows the US is not committed to any agreements or treaties". "The actions and statements of US officials are primarily media-driven, aimed first at preventing a drop in oil prices and second at extricating themselves from the mess they have created," Mohammad Jafar Asadi, deputy of the military headquarters, said in a statement carried by Iran's Fars news agency, Al Jazeera reported.

Lebanon's Health Ministry said six people, including a woman and a child, were killed Friday (May 1) in Israeli strikes on a southern town where Israel's army had issued an evacuation order despite a ceasefire. The Ministry statement said eight other people, including a woman and a child, were wounded in the two strikes on Habboush, where an AFP photographer saw clouds of smoke rising after the raids. The state-run National News Agency (NNA) reported unspecified casualties in Habboush after Israeli



warplanes "launched a series of heavy strikes... less than an hour after warning" residents to evacuate. Israel's military had warned it would act "forcefully" against Hezbollah after the Iran-backed group's "violations of the ceasefire agreement", and told residents to flee to open areas at least one kilometre from the town. The United States imposed new sanctions on Friday (May 1) on three Iranian foreign currency exchange firms, in an effort to target Tehran's "financial lifelines" in the West Asian war. The U.S. Treasury Department warned in a separate statement against paying a "toll" to Iran's govern-

ment in exchange for safe passage through the Strait of Hormuz, saying this could also trigger sanctions. Tehran has virtually blocked the Strait of Hormuz, as Israeli strikes on Iran from late February. This has caused oil prices to surge globally and U.S. gasoline prices to spike, putting pressure on American households. Iran's supreme leader, Ayatollah Mojtaba Khamenei, urged his people to wage economic battle and "disappoint" its enemies, as the war with the United States and Israel and years of sanctions take a toll. The Islamic Republic "has proven to the world in a military

battle with its enemies its progress and excellence", Khamenei said in a written statement, but "it must also disappoint and defeat them in the stage of economic and cultural jihad". He went on to call for "prioritising the consumption of domestically manufactured goods". He said, "The owners of damaged businesses should avoid, as much as possible, layoffs and separation of their workforce". Despite a ceasefire in the West Asian war, the U.S. military has blockaded Iran's ports, disrupting oil shipments. At the same time, inflation has risen past 50% in recent weeks, according to the national statistics centre.

## Trump Takes A Dig At Macron, Saying Wife Treats Him 'Badly'

**Washington:** US President Donald Trump made fun of the French president and his wife during a private lunch Wednesday, as he lambasted NATO allies for not joining the war against Iran that has roiled the Middle East. "We didn't need them, but I asked anyway," Trump told a private lunch in a video posted briefly on the White House YouTube channel before access was blocked. "I call up France, Macron --



whose wife treats him extremely badly. Still recovering from the right to the jaw," Trump said. He was referring to a May 2025 news video that appeared to show Brigitte Macron shoving

the French president's face on a trip to Vietnam, which Macron later rejected as part of a disinformation campaign. "And I said, Emmanuel, we'd love to have some help in the

Gulf even though we're setting records on knocking out bad people and knocking out ballistic missiles. We'd love to have some help. If you could, could you please send ships immediately," Trump continued. He then mimics a French accent to give Macron's alleged answer: "No no no, we cannot do that, Donald. We can do that after the war is won," he said. "I said, 'No no, I don't need after the war is won Emmanuel,'" Trump said.

# Hard reality — living with HIV, dying in stigma



Living with HIV in India often unfolds very differently from the optimistic narratives that accompany the country's progress against the disease. National programmes led by the National AIDS Control Organisation (NACO) have made significant strides in treatment and medical management, yet the lived realities of many patients remain shaped by silence, stigma, and social abandonment. A husband and wife rented a room in a private lodge far from their hometown so that the woman, who was in the terminal stages of HIV/AIDS, could spend her final months away from the scrutiny of their community. They lived there in isolation for nearly six months. She eventually died alone, and even her husband disappeared, leaving no one to witness her final moments. As a result, the police registered the case as an unnatural death, and the state assumed responsibility for her unclaimed body. This case is just the tip of the iceberg of what people living with HIV face in our society. Working closely with individuals living with HIV, both during their care and after death, has exposed us to difficult realities within the healthcare system. We have witnessed instances where seropositive individuals face subtle or overt disdain from some healthcare providers, despite the professional obligation to provide compassionate and unbiased care. They also encounter serious challenges in securing employment, and even healthcare workers living with HIV may struggle to find or retain jobs due to fear surrounding the virus. Although India enacted the HIV and AIDS (Prevention and Control) Act in 2017, which explicitly prohibits discrimination in healthcare, employment, education, and housing, the reality on the ground often falls short of the protections envisioned by the law. The gap between legal protections and everyday experiences reveals the persistent stigma that continues to influence how people living with HIV are treated and the opportunities available to them.

Substantial Progress

India has made substan-

tial progress in controlling HIV/AIDS. According to the National AIDS Control Organisation and UNAIDS (2023), about 2.47 million people are living with HIV in India. Since 2010, new infections have declined by nearly 48%, while AIDS-related deaths have dropped by about 82% from their 2004 peak. These reflect the impact of national prevention programmes, expansion of antiretroviral therapy (ART), targeted interventions for high-risk groups, and strong community-based outreach. Regardless of the declining infection rate, the total number of people living with HIV continues to rise slowly because treatment allows individuals to live longer, healthier. ART coverage has reached roughly 76%, with improved viral suppression due to modern regimens such as Dolutegravir-based therapy, which has helped transform HIV into a manageable chronic condition. Healthcare systems in India still lack integrated care models capable of addressing both the physical and mental health complications associated with chronic HIV. Significant progress has also been achieved in preventing mother-to-child transmission of HIV through routine antenatal screening and the use of Nevirapine prophylaxis during pregnancy. Modern ATP not only prolongs life but also suppresses viral replication to undetectable levels. Scientific evidence now confirms the principle of "Undetectable = Untransmittable (U=U)", meaning individuals with sustained viral suppression do not transmit HIV sexually. However, as treatment improves and life expectancy increases, many People Living with HIV (PLHIV) now develop non-AIDS-defining conditions such as Diabetes Mellitus, Cardiovascular Disease, Chronic Kidney Disease, and certain cancers. These conditions may appear earlier or progress more rapidly due to chronic inflammation, long-term antiretroviral therapy, and underlying socioeconomic vulnerabilities like financial and emotional strain. At the same time, mental health concerns, including depression, anxiety and sub-

stance abuse, are highly prevalent among PLHIV. Rejection notwithstanding these evolving needs, healthcare systems in India still lack integrated care models capable of addressing both physical and mental health complications associated with chronic HIV. Employment discrimination remains another persistent barrier. Although the HIV and AIDS (Prevention and Control) Act, 2017, formally bans workplace discrimination, cases of job loss, forced disclosure, and hiring refusal continue to be reported. Healthcare workers living with HIV often face additional stigma, including unnecessary reassignment away from clinical duties, in spite of clear scientific evidence that standard precautions make occupational HIV transmission in healthcare settings extremely unlikely. Stigma remains one of the most powerful forces shaping the experience of HIV/AIDS in India. Much of this stems from a deeply rooted cultural association between HIV and sexual immorality, where the disease is often perceived as a consequence of promiscuity, infidelity, or moral wrongdoing. This moral framing has overshadowed scientific understanding of HIV transmission. Unlike other serious illnesses like TB, which causes over a thousand deaths daily in India, HIV attracts intense social judgment. As a result, many people living with HIV face rejection not only from society but also within their own families. Support Systems People living with HIV often experience isolation, which contributes to higher risks of depression, suicide, and self-harm. Women are particularly vulnerable; widows who test positive are frequently blamed for their husband's illness, expelled from marital homes, or denied custody of their children. Despite these challenges, support systems have emerged in the form of community networks, PLHIV collectives, support groups, and even HIV-positive matrimony platforms. These initiatives foster belonging, enmodels capable of addressing both the physical and mental health complications associated with chronic HIV. Significant progress has also been

achieved in preventing mother-to-child transmission of HIV through routine antenatal screening and the use of Nevirapine prophylaxis during pregnancy. Modern ATP not only prolongs life but also suppresses viral replication to undetectable levels. Scientific evidence now confirms the principle of "Undetectable = Untransmittable (U=U)", meaning individuals with sustained viral suppression do not transmit HIV sexually. However, as treatment improves and life expectancy increases, many People Living with HIV (PLHIV) now develop non-AIDS-defining conditions such as Diabetes Mellitus, Cardiovascular Disease, Chronic Kidney Disease, and certain cancers. These conditions may appear earlier or progress more rapidly due to chronic inflammation, long-term antiretroviral therapy, and underlying socioeconomic vulnerabilities like financial and emotional strain. At the same time, mental health concerns, including depression, anxiety and sub-couraged treatment adherence, and help individuals navigate relationships, parenting, and employment—though they cannot fully offset the broader social exclusion many continue to face.

India's response to HIV must now move beyond simply controlling infection to rebuilding social inclusion. While legal protections exist, meaningful change must occur at three interconnected levels—within families, communities, and society at large. Addressing this requires comprehensive sex education, supportive community initiatives, holistic healthcare that links HIV care with other specialities, and workplace environments that actively show empathy, along with preventing discrimination. At the same time, HIV should no longer be seen only through the lens of viral suppression or terminal care. Families, communities, and institutions must learn to view HIV as a manageable chronic condition much like diabetes or hypertension, ensuring that no individual is made to feel alienated, and that dignity, belonging, and social acceptance remain as central to care as the medicines themselves.

# When the job guarantee disappears — how VB-GRAMG weakens women's work rights



For many rural women, the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) is more than just a government scheme. It is often the only reliable source of income they can access locally, predictably, and without having to negotiate with contractors, landlords, or male intermediaries. In our field engagements, women repeatedly described MGNREGA as their sole means of survival, given their limited social and economic privilege, weak bargaining power in labour markets, and constrained agency within families and communities. It is against this lived reality that the Union government's proposal to replace MGNREGA with a new law, the Viksit Bharat Guarantee for Rozgar and Ajeevika Mission (Gramin) or VB-GRAMG, must be examined. While official communication highlights an increase in guaranteed workdays from 100 to 125, media reports reveal that this numerical expansion is accompanied by a deep restructuring of funding, governance, and entitlement. Together, these changes alter the very character of the programme. What is being presented as reform increasingly resembles a shift from a rights-based employment guarantee to a centrally managed village programme. MGNREGA and Women: A structural relationship Women have consistently formed the backbone of MGNREGA. They account for nearly 60% of total person-days generated nationally, with States such as Kerala and Tamil Nadu recording women's participation levels as high as 85% to 90%. This was not incidental. MGNREGA worked for women precisely because it recognised structural constraints such as limited mobility, unpaid care responsibilities, caste-based exclusion, and weak negotiating power in informal labour markets. By guaranteeing wage employment close to home and on demand, MGNREGA functioned as both a social protection measure and a labour market correction. For Dalit and Adivasi women in particular, it offered rare recognition of their labour as paid work rather than invisible service. Crucially, this recognition was backed by law. If work was demanded and not pro-

vided, workers were entitled to an unemployment allowance. The guarantee was enforceable, not discretionary. Policy Expansion on Paper, Erosion in Practice VB-GRAMG replaces MGNREGA's demand-driven architecture with pre-fixed, normative allocations determined annually by the Centre, alongside expenditure ceilings. Once these allocations are exhausted, the guarantee effectively ends. This shift has far-reaching gendered consequences. Under MGNREGA, demand itself created a legal obligation on the State. Under VB-GRAMG, employment becomes conditional on budgets, ceilings, and administrative discretion. When funds run out, rights run out. For women workers who already face barriers in accessing local power structures, this dilution of justiciability disproportionately weakens their ability to claim work. One Policy, Uneven Consequences Another significant departure lies in work availability. The proposed framework mandates a suspension of public works for up to 60 days during peak agricultural seasons. This is justified as a measure to prevent labour shortages in farming. However, it rests on the assumption that rural workers are uniformly cultivators who can absorb income shocks during these periods. For most women workers, this assumption does not hold. The majority do not own land. Agricultural seasons do not reduce their workload; they intensify unpaid care, subsistence, and household labour. MGNREGA's year-round availability mattered precisely because it allowed women to smooth incomes when other work was unavailable or exploitative. A uniform seasonal pause does not operate neutrally. It redistributes risk onto women whose labour remains undervalued or entirely unrecognised during so-called peak seasons. Fiscal Federalism and Shrinking of Guarantees The fiscal restructuring is equally significant. The shift from 100% central funding of unskilled wages under MGNREGA to a 60:40 Centre-State cost-sharing model for most States under VB-GRAMG is framed as cooperative federalism. In practice, it transfers fiscal stress downward

to State governments. States with constrained finances may be compelled to ration workdays, delay wage payments, or quietly scale back implementation. Employment guarantees that primarily benefit women, especially poor, Dalit, and Adivasi women, are often the first to be compromised under such pressures. What was once a nationally backed right becomes contingent on State budgets and shifting political priorities. Centralised Dashboards, Weakened Local Voice VB-GRAMG also marks a governance shift. While MGNREGA entrusted Gram Sabhas and Panchayats with identifying works based on local needs, VB-GRAMG institutionalises centralised digital stacks, GIS mapping, dashboards, and automated audits. Local priorities are increasingly filtered through national templates. For women workers, this transition is not merely technical. Digital exclusion, biometric failures, and weak grievance redress mechanisms have already been documented under existing welfare architectures. Making such systems statutory risks exclusion without appeal, reducing workers to data points rather than rights-bearing citizens. Decentralisation gives way to central control, even as implementation risks are devolved to states. Social Audits without Enforceable Rights? The new law promises stronger monitoring and transparency mechanisms. Yet the effectiveness of social audits, one of MGNREGA's most significant democratic innovations, depends on the presence of enforceable rights. Under MGNREGA, social audits created collective forums where workers, many of them women, could publicly question denial of work, and Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu through field engagements, and local-level observation—delayed wages, and administrative lapses. These spaces mattered because the law recognised employment as an entitlement. Once employment itself becomes conditional and capped, social audits risk being reduced to procedural exercises, closer to financial audits than democratic accountability. Field Realities Over the past year, we have been studying MGNREGA's impact on the ground across

Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu through field engagements, worker interactions, and local-level observations. These regions, often cited as relatively better-performing States in terms of MGNREGA implementation and women's participation, offer critical insight into what is at stake when the nature of the programme itself is altered. Women we engaged with in Andhra Pradesh were unequivocal. MGNREGA is often the only form of work they can access without migration, indebtedness, or dependence on male intermediaries. Their limited negotiating power within households, labour markets, and village institutions means alternatives are either unavailable or deeply exploitative. For these women, MGNREGA wages are not supplementary income. They are subsistence. Any dilution of the guarantee, therefore, has immediate consequences, pushing women back into economic dependence, unpaid labour, and informal work arrangements that offer neither security nor dignity. What is Truly at Stake Critics argue that VB-GRAMG removes the soul of a rights-based employment guarantee, replacing it with a centrally controlled, conditional scheme that shifts costs to States but allows the Centre to gain political recognition. From a gender perspective, this loss is particularly stark. MGNREGA was not merely an asset-creation programme. It was an acknowledgement that employment itself is social protection, and that women's labour deserves public remuneration backed by law. The move towards VB-GRAMG is, therefore, not just a policy redesign, but a reframing of rural labour, from a right to be claimed to a resource to be managed. In this transition, women risk disappearing from policy imagination, from accountability mechanisms, and eventually from guaranteed paid work. Reclaiming MGNREGA's original intent is not only a question of administrative design. It is a gender justice imperative. As MGNREGA is recast from a legal right into a conditional programme, the question that remains is simple: who absorbs the risk when the guarantee disappears, and why is it almost always rural women?

## India's Thomas Cup title hopes end with semifinal defeat



India's hopes of reclaiming the Thomas Cup title ended in disappointment as they went down 0-3 to France in the semifinals, settling for a bronze medal here on Saturday. The absence of Lakshya Sen proved costly as HS Prannoy joined Ayush Shetty and Kidambi Srikanth in defeat, losing 19-21, 16-21 to world No. 17 Toma Junior Popov, as India failed to win a single game in a one-sided contest. India, champions in 2022, had already assured themselves of a medal by reaching the semifinals, adding to their bronze finishes in 1952, 1955, and 1979. With the win, France became only the second European nation to reach the final after Denmark's maiden title in 2016. Ayush, drafted into the opening singles with Lakshya nursing a swollen right elbow, went down 11-21, 9-21 in 39 minutes to world No. 4 Christo Popov. All eyes were on Srikanth to restore parity, but the former world No. 1 went down fighting 16-21, 18-21 to world No. 10 Alex Lanier in the second singles.

us was then on Prannoy to keep India alive, and though the 2023 World Championships bronze medalist put up a better fight, he could not get past world No. 17 Popov. Srikanth vs Alex Srikanth began evenly, matching his younger opponent at 3-3 in the opening game and mixing his strokes well with tight net play and steep smashes. However, Lanier stepped up the pace to open a lead at the interval. ith rallies kept short, Srikanth struggled with unforced errors and fell behind 9-14. Though he mounted a brief comeback to close the gap to 15-18, a net error halted his charge as Lanier converted his game points. The second game followed a similar pattern. Srikanth recovered from an early deficit to draw level at 7-7 with attacking winners, but Lanier's strategy of injecting pace and pressing the forecourt forced more errors, leaving Srikanth to slip to 10-15. Srikanth attempted another late push, narrowing the margin to 15-16, but errors crept in during the closing exchanges. Lanier earned two match

points and sealed the contest when Srikanth found the net. Ayush vs Christo Earlier, Ayush, who had been on a strong run in this tournament, suffered his second loss to Popov, having gone down in their only previous meeting at the Hylo Open in 2024.

Popov dictated the proceedings from the outset, using deep, probing returns to move Ayush around the court and take early control of the net. The Indian showed initial patience, but a string of unforced errors allowed the Frenchman to surge to an 8-3 lead. Ayush produced a few flashes, including sharp cross-court and body smashes, but could not sustain the pressure as Popov extended his advantage to 11-6 at the interval and then 15-6, controlling the pace with precision. Though a few errors from Popov briefly kept Ayush in the contest, the Indian failed to capitalise, and the Frenchman closed out the opening game comfortably. The second game followed a similar pattern, with Popov taking an early 4-1 lead and

dominating front court exchanges. Ayush looked tentative and struggled to read his opponent, while Popov repeatedly targeted his backhand corner.

The Frenchman raced to an 11-2 lead at the break and never relented, dictating rallies at will. Ayush's occasional winners came too late as Popov surged to 19-8 before closing out the match. "I am a bit disappointed with my performance today, but Christo played solid. His deception got me off guard, and I was not stable on my footwork. His pace and pressure made the difference," Ayush said. Lakshya's absence felt Former India chief coach Vimal Kumar said Lakshya Sen's absence was a major setback.

"France completely overwhelmed India today, and Lakshya's absence was certainly felt at crucial moments. For India, this is a moment to regroup and come back stronger. The potential in this team is unquestionable," he said.

## Petrol, diesel price hike likely soon as global crude surges

An increase in petrol and diesel prices in the near future is not ruled out, government sources said on Friday, as losses mount from a four-year-old freeze in retail rates despite the sharp rise in global crude oil prices. International crude oil prices this week climbed to a four-year high of USD 126 per barrel before cooling down slightly, but remained above USD 110 per barrel as ship transits through the Strait of Hormuz remained restricted and US and Iranian leaders traded barbs amid stalled peace talks. Government sources said the possibility of a petrol and diesel price hike in the near future is not ruled out. Earlier in the day, Indian Oil Corporation (IOC), making a statement on behalf of the industry, said petrooil trade along with sign and diesel price as also domestic LPG rates are not being increased despite a surge in international energy cost. State-owned oil firms hiked prices of commercial LPG, industrial diesel, 5-kg LPG and jet fuel sold to international airlines in keeping with the cost. Analysts had earlier flagged the possibility of price increases of Rs 25-28 per litre after the end of polling for assembly elections in West Bengal



on April 29. International oil prices spiked after the US and Israel attacked Iran on February 28, and Tehran's sweeping retaliation that effectively shut the Strait of Hormuz — one of the world's most critical energy arteries, linking the Persian Gulf to global markets and handling roughly a fifth of global oil trade along with significant volumes of liquefied natural gas. Government sources indicated petrol and diesel price hikes may be imminent as global crude surges and losses mount for oil firms, despite a four-year retail price freeze, with rising tensions in West Asia and restricted Strait of Hormuz supply driving costs higher. Last week, a senior oil ministry official told a news briefing that state-owned fuel retailers were incurring losses of about Rs 20 per litre on e Strait of Hormuz — one of the world's most critical energy arteries, linking the Persian Gulf to global markets and handling roughly a fifth of global oil trade along with significant volumes of liquefied natural gas. Government sources oil trade along with sign petrol and diesel price hikes may be imminent as global crude surges and losses mount for oil firms, despite a four-year retail price freeze, with rising tensions in West Asia and restricted Strait of Hormuz supply driving costs higher. Last week, a senior oil

ministry official told a petrol and roughly Rs 100 per litre on diesel as pump prices remained frozen for nearly four years despite a surge in global oil prices. Yet there is no plan to increase prices, she had said. Crude, which was USD 70 per barrel last year, averaged over USD 114 this month. Retail petrol and diesel prices have remained frozen since early April 2022 — a period during which oil prices rose in some months and fell in other times. When prices fell, state-owned oil firms made handsome profits, which they used to set off losses when rates rose. Petrol is currently priced at Rs 94.77 a litre in Delhi, and diesel comes for Rs 87.67.

## Govt To Sustain Capex Push Despite Fiscal Stress Due To Global Uncertainties:



The government will proceed with the planned Rs 12.22 lakh crore capital expenditure in the current fiscal to maintain the growth momentum despite the fiscal stress arising from the ongoing West Asia conflict, a senior official said on Friday. Expenditure Secretary V Vimalnam said the upcoming few quarters and the coming year would possibly have a "lot of stress points". Tax buoyancy could be impacted by a cut in excise duties on petrol and diesel brought about in late March. "The fiscal stress is indeed very much a reality, but at the same time... the capex would really be a priority item, which we would like to preserve and ensure that it continues at the budgeted level," Vimalnam said at the ICP Growth Conference organised by the Ashoka University. He said highways, rail-

ways, shipping, ports, and urban development sectors would be the focus areas for FY27 capex. Stating that the current global uncertainties have thrown a "very challenging situation" for India with the country being a net importer of petroleum products, he said the government has been "proactive" in trying to tackle each situation with "agility" of the war in West Asia on February 28, Crude oil prices have soared to a four-year high of USD 126 per barrel on Thursday from about the USD 73 level before the war. "The next few months, the next quarter and the coming year are indeed very difficult to envisage, lots of possible stress points," he said. Tax buoyancy will also have been looked out for amidst these conditions, Vimalnam said, which can further squeeze fiscal space. "But, India's fiscal pru-

dence has put the country on a very good stead in the current unpredictable times," he added. "We will, on our part, be committed to see that the required funds are provided in spite of all the stress points that may come up," he said. The FY27 Budget has pegged the fiscal deficit at 4.3 per cent of GDP, which is now seen at 4.5 per cent of GDP, following a downward revision in India's nominal GDP under the new series. To contain retail prices of petrol and diesel from rising amid the ongoing West Asia war, the government has cut excise duties, which poses a risk of fiscal slippage. The excise duty cut is estimated to cost Rs 7,000 crore to the exchequer for a period of 15 days. Since the beginning of the war in West Asia on February 28, Crude oil prices have soared to a four-year high of USD 126 per

barrel on Thursday from about the USD 73 level before the war. "The next few months, the next quarter and the coming year are indeed very difficult to envisage, lots of possible stress points," he said. Tax buoyancy will also have been looked out for amidst these conditions, Vimalnam said, which can further squeeze fiscal space. India imports 60 per cent of its LPG usage, and of that, 90 per cent flows through the now closed Strait of Hormuz, the Secretary said, adding that it would be a "very challenging situation". The government has also levied an export duty of Rs 23 per litre on diesel and Rs 33 per litre on aviation turbine fuel to ensure adequate domestic availability of the fuels. These duty changes are being reviewed by the Centre every fortnight.

## India's Women's T20 world cup squad announced



Hyderabad: The Women's Selection Committee met at the BCCI HQ on Saturday 2nd May, 2026, in Mumbai to select India's squads for the ICC Women's T20 World Cup 2026, the three-match T20I series against England, and the Test against England.

The England tour will commence with a three-match T20I series against the hosts. India

will then compete in the ICC Women's T20 World Cup 2026. The team will begin their World Cup campaign against Pakistan in Birmingham on June 14, 2026 and then face the Netherlands in Leeds in Birmingham on June 14, 2026 and then face on June 17, followed by South Africa in Manchester on June 21. India will next take on Bangladesh at the same venue on June 25 before

moving to Lord's for their final group-stage match against Australia on June 28. an in Birmingham on June 14, 2026 and then fac Amanjot Kaur and Kashvee Gautam were not available for selection due to injury.

India will also play a Test against England at the Lord's Cricket Ground starting July 10.

India's squad for ICC Women's T20 World Cup 2026 and T20I series against England: Harmanpreet Kaur (C), Smriti Mandhana (VC), Shafali Verma, Jemimah Rodrigues, Bharti Fulmali, Deepti Sharma, Richa Ghosh (WK), Sree Charani, Yastika Bhatia (WK), Nandni Sharma, Arundhati Reddy, Renuka Thakur, Kranti Gaud, Shreyanka Patil, Radha Yadav.

## Drishyam 3, Kartavya, Citadel Season 2 And More To Watch This Month

The month of May has begun on an exciting note for cinema lovers, with a wide range of films and series set to release across OTT platforms and theatres. From big-screen spectacles to engaging stories arriving directly on streaming services, filmmakers across the Indian film industry are offering something for every kind of audience this month. There is a mix of genres lined up, audiences can expect everything ranging from action films, crime films to romantic and comedy films. This month, there is a great variety of options for all types of viewers regardless of whether they enjoy watching films at the cinema or at home. The month starts with a strong box office clash featuring Patriot, bringing together Malayalam superstars Mammooty and Mohanlal, going up against Raja Shivaji, led by Riteish Deshmukh. Alongside these, romantic drama Ek Din and the much-talked-about sequel The Devil Wears Prada 2 are also drawing attention, making the opening week of May particularly competitive. As the month progresses, the focus shifts to some highly anticipated releases on OTT platforms as well. One of the major titles is Kartavya, a crime thriller starring Saif Ali Khan. The film is produced under Red Chillies Entertainment, the banner owned by Shah Rukh Khan, and is set to premiere on Netflix. Kartavya (Photo: Film



poster) Meanwhile, theatres will also see the arrival of one of the most-awaited films, Drishyam 3, once again featuring Mohanlal in also see the arrival of one of the most-awaited films, Drishyam 3, once again featuring Mohanlal in a powerful role. The film continues the popular crime thriller franchise and has already created strong buzz among fans.

Apart from these major titles, the May lineup most-awaited films, Drishyam 3, once again featuring Mohanlal in a powerful role. The film continues the popular crime thriller franchise and has already created strong buzz among fans.

month promises a packed entertainment calendar, giving audiences plenty of reasons to stay hooked to both theatres and streaming platforms. Also see the arrival of one of the most-awaited films, Drishyam 3, once again featuring Mohanlal in a powerful role. The film continues the popular crime thriller franchise and has already created strong buzz among fans.

## Can India Now Secure Two Nominations In Best

The Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences has rolled out a fresh set of rules for the 99th Oscars, scheduled to take place on March 14, 2027, and this time, there's a major update that could change the game for Indian cinema. A big boost for Indian films. For years, the Oscars followed a strict rule in the Best International Feature category, and that is, each country could send only one official entry, selected by a local committee. This often led to debates in India, where multiple deserving films competed for that single spot. Now, the Academy has opened a new path. Under the updated rules, a film can still enter through its country's official submission. But here's the big change: films that win top awards at major international festivals will also qualify independently for the category. These festivals include: Cannes Film Festival (Palme d'Or), Berlin International Film Festival (Golden Bear), Venice Film Festival (Golden Lion), Toronto International Film Festival (Platform Award), Sundance Film Festival (World Cinema Grand Jury Prize), Busan International Film Festival (Best Film Award). This means India could now have more than one film competing



for the Best International Feature Oscar - one through the official entry and another via a major festival win. It's a significant shift that gives Indian filmmakers a wider global platform and a better chance at recognition. Another key change: Who gets the Oscar? The Academy has also updated how the award is given in this category. Earlier, the Oscar technically went to the country. For example, when a film won, it was recorded as a win for that nation. Now, the award will be given directly to the film's director. The director's name will appear on the Oscar trophy and in official records. New rules in acting categories. There's also a notable change in the acting cat-

egories. Actors can now receive multiple nominations in the same category if they have more than one strong performance in a year. For instance, if Leonardo DiCaprio delivers two top performances in different films, both could be nominated in Best Actor, something that wasn't allowed before. However, the Academy has clarified that only performances by real actors, credited officially and performed with consent will be eligible. This comes aliceness in upcoming projects. AI rules tightened. With technology evolving quickly, the Academy has also addressed the use of artificial intelligence in filmmaking. It has made it clear that screenplays

must be written by humans to qualify in writing categories. While AI can still be used as a tool, the Academy may ask for details about how it was used and how much of the work was created by humans. The focus remains firmly on human creativity. Other category updates. Several technical categories have also seen small but important tweaks. The casting award will now have up to three winners instead of two. The cinematography category will have a fixed shortlist of 20 films. Voting rules in areas like makeup, hairstyling, and visual effects have been tightened to ensure members actively watch and engage with nominated work.

## Rashmika's birthday post for 13-year-old sister Shiman wins hearts online



Actress Rashmika Mandanna wished her little sister Shiman Mandanna with a lovely social media post as she turned 13 on Saturday. Giving her baby sister a big swishy hug on her special day, Rashmika wrote on the photo-sharing app, "Happiest 13 to you my sweets! 13 is fun so make sure you have fun while you are at it! I love you sweetie!! Biiggggggssstttt swiisssshhhhy hugs! (sic)" The latest post of the 'Animal' actress also included some adorable pictures of her sister posing next to her birthday cake. We also see a

close-up of her cake-smudge face. It must be noted that Rashmika and her sister have a massive age gap of 16 years. On more than one occasion, the 'Pushpa' actress has revealed that she sees Shiman as her own daughter. Shiman was recently captured attending Rashmika's wedding to actor Vijay Deverakonda in February this year in Udaipur. Talking about her professional commitments, Rashmika will soon be seen leading Rawindra Pulle's eagerly awaited action thriller "Mysaa". Recently, the team com-

menced a 15-day action schedule in Kerala. IANS had previously reported that Rashmika underwent rigorous training at an intensive stunt and combat bootcamp in Bangkok, Thailand, to perform in the sequences that were to be filmed during this action-packed schedule. According to the sources, 'The Girlfriend' actress trained for more than eight hours every day for "Mysaa" in Bangkok. Rashmika will be seen essaying the role of a tribal Gond girl in her next. Along with Rashmika, the core cast of "Mysaa" further

includes Eshwari Rao, Guru Somasundaram, and Rao Ramesh in pivotal roles, along with others. Over and above this, Rashmika will also be seen sharing the screen with Shahid Kapoor and Kriti Sanon for the first time in the highly anticipated "Cocktail 2". Directed by Homi Adajania and produced by Dinesh Vijan under Maddock Films, the film is a sequel to the 2012 romantic comedy "Cocktail", starring Saif Ali Khan, Deepika Padukone, and Diana Penty as the lead.

## Sathi Leelavathi trailer launched by Ram Charan



The makers of 'Sathi Leelavathi', starring Lavanya Tripathi Konidela and Dev Mohan in lead roles, unveiled the film's trailer on Saturday, with Mega Power Star Ram Charan launching it. Presented by Anandi Arts and produced by Naga Mohan under the Durgadevi Pictures banner, the film is directed by Tatineni Satya. It is slated for a grand worldwide release on May 8. Speaking at the trailer launch event, Lavanya Tripathi expressed confidence in the film, stating that the audience would appreciate the hard work and effort put in by the team. She thanked director Satya and writer Uday for bringing an

engaging story and appreciated producer Naga Mohan's dedication. She also acknowledged the support extended by the team during her pregnancy and thanked Ram Charan for releasing the trailer and boosting its reach. Dev Mohan said he was happy to reconnect with Telugu audiences and expressed satisfaction with the trailer. Calling his role unique, he thanked the director and producers for the opportunity and said working with Lavanya was a pleasant experience. Director Tatineni Satya thanked the entire team for their support and said the film would appeal to all sections of the audience. Producer Naga

Mohan expressed hope that viewers would enjoy the film and appreciated the cast and crew for their contribution. Actors Jeevan Botimala, Binendra Menon, Abhinaya Srinivas, Tagubothu Ramesh and Saptagiri also spoke on the occasion, sharing their experiences of working on the film and urging audiences to support it in theatres. Writer Uday said he enjoyed working on the script and was happy with the response to the promotional content so far. The team expressed confidence that 'Sathi Leelavathi' would entertain audiences and emerge successful upon its release.