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YEFi YouthAid Entrepreneurs Federation of India

Democratizing Grassroots Entrepreneurship in India

Prof. Ujjwal K. Chowdhury argues that entrepreneurship must be democratized, moving beyond boardrooms to the hands of women in bastis, artisans in forgotten lanes, farmers' children, and first-generation learners. India's future, he asserts, will be shaped not only by venture-funded startups but by barefoot entrepreneurs whose work brings dignity, resilience, and a new architecture of hope.

On the occasion of Global Entrepreneurship Week, as the world celebrates innovation across 200 nations, India witnesses a quiet but historic shift. On November 22, 2026, Pune hosts the launch of the YouthAid Entrepreneurs' Federation of India (YEFI)—a rising collective of grassroots entrepreneurs.

Every year in November, the world pauses to celebrate a powerful force that shapes economies, livelihoods, and communities: entrepreneurship. Global Entrepreneurship Week (GEW)—celebrated in over 200 countries including the US, UK, and India—is not just another event on the calendar. It is a reminder that innovation, aspiration, and enterprise are not the property of a few but the right of many.

This year, GEW is observed from 17th to 23rd November 2025, with the theme "Together We Build." And in this significant week, India witnesses a historic step—the launch of the YouthAid Entrepreneurs' Federation of India (YEFI) in Pune on 22nd November 2026, marking the beginning of a new grassroots entrepreneurship movement.

Rethinking the Indian Entrepreneur

In India, when people hear the word "entrepreneur," the image that often comes to mind is predictable: glass towers, pitch sessions, venture capital, English-speaking founders, and tech startups born in metros. But this picture is not just incomplete—it is misleading. India's real economic engine lies elsewhere.

Across India's bastis, tribal belts, small towns, and rural settlements, young women, farmers' children, artisans, street vendors, and first-generation learners are already hustling, producing, and selling. They are entrepreneurs in every sense, yet society rarely views them that way. Our systems rarely support them. And our narrative rarely celebrates them.

If entrepreneurship continues to stay in the hands of a privileged few, India risks leaving behind millions of capable minds right at the moment when the country needs inclusive growth the most.

YEFI enters precisely to change this story.

Why Grassroots Entrepreneurship Matters Now

India's employment landscape has been shifting rapidly. While overall unemployment has declined, the nature of work itself has become more fragile. Nearly 80% of India's workforce remains in the informal sector without safety nets or predictable incomes. Meanwhile:

- Self-employment has grown from 52% in 2017–18 to almost 58% in 2023–24.
- Large numbers of youth are absorbed into low-margin survival enterprises without pathways for growth.
- Educated youth continue to face much higher unemployment than the national average.
- The gig economy—drivers, delivery workers, freelancers—is expanding and could cross 2.35 crore workers by 2029–30. But this form of work is uncertain, with platforms changing terms frequently and workers struggling to build long-term assets.

This moment calls for a new approach. India cannot rely on formal jobs alone to absorb its population. Nor can it depend on unstable gig work to build a secure future.

What India needs is the rise of local entrepreneurs—small, stable, rooted in their communities, and capable of generating local jobs that keep families together and local economies strong. This is where the idea of democratizing entrepreneurship becomes essential.

Collective Power Over Individual Survival

When thousands of micro-entrepreneurs come together, they can:

- Bargain better with suppliers
- Build common brands
- Reach bigger markets
- Influence policy

Democratized entrepreneurship is ultimately a social and economic project: it shifts who gets to dream, who gets to take risks, and who gets recognized as a wealth creator.

Why Entrepreneurship Cannot Stay an Elite Space

For decades, entrepreneurship in India has largely belonged to people with:

- Family assets
- Social status
- English and digital access
- Business networks

This excludes the very people who form the majority of India's workforce. More importantly, it is economically inefficient. When only 10–20% of the population participates in entrepreneurship, the ideas, energy, and creativity of the remaining 80–90% remain untapped.

In reality:

- It is the tailor in the slum,
- The food vendor,
- The agro-processor,
- The neighbourhood logistics operator,
- The artisan selling on WhatsApp,

who create stable local employment, reduce distress migration, and keep local economies circulating.

India cannot build a prosperous future if entrepreneurship remains a privilege instead of a pathway for all.

YEFI: A National Start-Up Family for the Grassroots

YEFI stands at the beginning of a major shift. It envisions building a federation of 10,000 nano and micro-entrepreneurs across India—each running a real, verifiable business and aiming to grow beyond ₹5 lakh annual turnover.

How YEFI Makes Entrepreneurship Democratic

1. Lowering Entry and Growth Barriers

YEFI is not for those with fancy presentations. It supports real businesses already proving viability and helps them grow. Members receive:

- Collective raw material bargaining
- A shared marketplace called YEFI Bazaar
- A YEFI Certified quality seal to build trust
- Direct connections with banks, MFIs, and impact investors

2. Building Leaders from Within

Through this model, high-performing entrepreneurs become local mentors. They lead district chapters, solve problems, create peer groups, and earn additional income by guiding others. This ensures the movement stays grounded in reality.

3. Technology as an Equaliser YEFI 's AI and digital tools:

- Deliver personalized learning in local languages
- Map opportunities district-wise
- Track business data to generate a funding readiness score

This creates a credible, de-risked pool of enterprises for lenders.

What Does Democratizing Entrepreneurship Really Mean?

Democratization is not the same as distributing more loans or conducting short-term training. It is much deeper, and includes three core principles:

Opening the Doors of Opportunity

Entrepreneurship must become possible not only for those with connections or capital but also for:

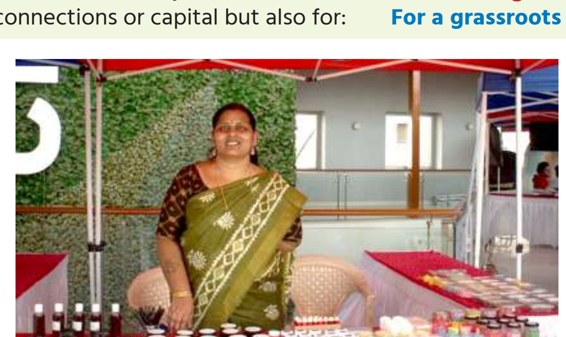
- Young women with small home-based skills
- Youth in slums and remote villages
- Dalits, adivasis, minorities, and first-generation learners

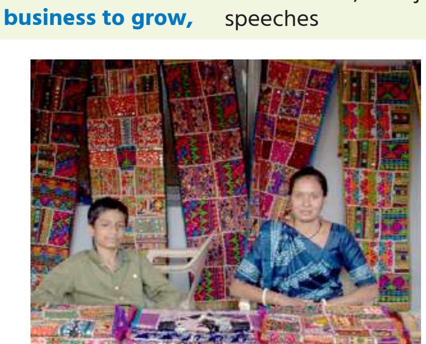
It means moving the centre of entrepreneurship from metros to the margins.

Reducing Structural Barriers

For a grassroots business to grow, three things matter:

- Access to affordable capital, seed money, and timely credit
- Basic digital and financial literacy, enabling entrepreneurs to market, sell, and manage through their phones
- Access to real mentors, networks, and markets, not just motivational speeches





A Movement Whose Time Has Come

If YEFI succeeds in federating 10,000 entrepreneurs by 2030, India will gain:

- A new definition of who can be an entrepreneur
- Proof that serious businesses can emerge from the grassroots
- A strong internal network that shifts small businesses from survival to growth
- A voice for nano and micro enterprises in shaping economic policy

For CSR leaders, policymakers, banks, and investors, the message is clear: supporting grassroots entrepreneurship is not charity—it is nation-building.

Democratizing entrepreneurship is about democratizing hope itself. In tomorrow's India, every young person—whether in slippers or in suits—must believe that they too can build a business, shape a future, and claim their dignity.

YEFI's mission is simple: to make this belief real, thousands of times over

Large-Scale Errors Detected in Draft Voter List

52 Objections Filed So Far

Pune, Correspondent
After the Pune Municipal Corporation (PMC) released the draft ward-wise voter list for the upcoming civic elections, widespread discrepancies have come to light. By Friday, 52 objections had already been filed, with several voters' names appearing in wrong wards across geographical boundaries. The hearings on these objections are expected to play a crucial role in rectifying the list.

Growing Demand for Voter Lists

The sale of ward-wise voter rolls has already begun. The price varies depending on the number of pages, binding, and GST. In the last two days, PMC has earned around ₹6 lakh from voter list sales.
Most expensive list: Ward 38 – ₹40,266
Next: Ward 41 – ₹34,099; Ward 9 – ₹32,285
Least expensive: Ward 26 – ₹11,118

The draft list, published on Thursday and made available on the PMC website, is currently being scrutinized by aspirants who have been purchasing copies from the election department. However, major errors have been detected in names and addresses. Similar complaints had surfaced earlier from Manikbag, Warje, Karvenagar, central Peth areas, and Hadapsar.

Despite the administration's claim of using technology to prepare the rolls, political influence on health inspectors and other staff during compilation has allegedly led to manipulation of voter data. Complaints in previous years had highlighted this issue, and the recurrence of such mistakes has again raised questions over PMC's functioning.

In the last two days alone, 49 objections were filed at regional offices and three at the main election office. Officials expect this number to rise as more copies of the draft list are received and examined.

The organisation Aaple Pune, Aapla Parisar alleged that assistant commissioners unfamiliar with Pune's geography have been appointed, resulting in confusion during the ward restructuring process. Representatives Ujwal Keskar, Prashant Badhe, and Suhas Kulkarni claimed that voters who do not belong to certain wards have been intentionally added there. Calling it a "large conspiracy", they vowed to fight against the irregularities.

Major Errors Identified

Ward 20 (Shankar Maharaj Math–Bibwewadi): Hundreds of voters from Dias Plot, Senadatt Peth, Panmala, and Chaitraban Society shifted to another ward. Meanwhile, sections of Ramya Nagari, Prem Nagar, Gururaj Society, and parts of Satara Road have been moved out of Ward 20.

Ward Swap Between 6 and 28: Voters from Shahu College, Parvati Police Station, and Panchami Hotel areas (Ward 6) have been shifted directly to Ward 28 (Navi Peth–Parvati), affecting candidates' electoral strategies.

Ward 1 (Kalas–Dhanori–Lohgaon) and Ward 3 (Viman Nagar–Lohgaon): Voters interchanged between both wards.

Ward 7 (Gokhalenagar–Wadkewadi): Several voters' names shifted to Ward 12 (Shivajinagar–Model Colony).

List Number Errors: Voters from Jawaharnagar, ICS Colony, Bhoslenagar, Sinchan Nagar, and Sayali Society in Lists 135 and 153 may also have been wrongly moved.

Administration Under Scrutiny

"We have invited suggestions and objections to correct the errors in the draft list. After the objections are reviewed, hearings will be conducted and issues will be resolved."
— Prasad Katkar, Deputy Commissioner, Election Department

"Even If We Stand Together, Vote Only for BJP"

Says Minister Chandrakant Patil in Bhor

BHOR, RUPESH JADHAV
Maharashtra's Higher and Technical Education Minister Chandrakant Patil has urged voters in Bhor to support the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in the upcoming municipal elections, stating that even if political leaders appear together publicly, votes must go to the BJP.

Patil launched the BJP's election campaign for the Bhor Municipal Council on Friday (21st) with a ceremonial coconut-breaking ritual at the Wagajai Mata Temple. He said the BJP is a party built on ideology, symbols, and committed workers, and "such a party can never end."

Referring to former MLA Sangram Thopte, who recently joined the BJP, Patil said Thopte is focused on community development, and with Narendra Modi and Devendra Fadnavis in power, "the future belongs to the BJP." He added that Thopte has joined the party for public welfare and therefore criticism against him is baseless.

In a striking political message, Patil remarked,

"Even if Ajit Pawar heads the government here, the Chief Minister is Devendra Fadnavis. Even if we sit together and share the same plate, you must vote only for Devendra Fadnavis."

Thopte: "Those Calling Us 'Thopte BJP' Should Self-Reflect"

Addressing the gathering, former MLA Sangram Thopte said those mocking him as "Thopte BJP" should introspect about how many times they themselves have switched parties.

He highlighted his family's 40–50-year political history marked by honesty and loyalty.

Thopte added that the people of Bhor are trustworthy and stand by their word. He recalled that whenever he offered a coconut at Wagajai Mata's temple, his wishes were fulfilled and he received 100% public support.

He noted that the Bhor Municipal Council is the first in the state where elections will be contested entirely on the BJP's lotus symbol. A total of 126 aspirants expressed interest in contesting, but with only 21 seats available, candidates were selected through consultations. All chosen candidates are strong, well-respected, and socially credible, he said.

The event was attended by several BJP leaders and workers, including Rajendra Shilimkar, Balasaheb Garud, Shekhar Wadne, Pallavi Fadnis, Santosh Dhavale, Akash Kamble, Dipali Shete, Swati Gandhi, as well as councillor candidates and local citizens.

The program was compered by Rajendra Shete, and Jeevan Konde delivered the vote of thanks.

Mahar Heir Statements Recorded in Mundhwa Land Scam Case

PUNE, CORRESPONDENT
In the alleged Mundhwa land scam, Pune Police on Friday recorded the statements of the Mahar Watan heirs after questioning Sheetal Tejwani for two consecutive days. Ten heirs were summoned for statement-recording, of whom eight appeared before investigators, senior officials confirmed.

A case has been registered at Khadak Police Station against Amedia Company in connection with the Mundhwa land deal, and the investigation is being handled by the Economic Offences Wing (EOW).

According to police, the disputed Mahar Watan land in Mundhwa was acquired by Sheetal Tejwani in 2006 through powers of attorney obtained from 275 individuals. In 2025, she entered into an agreement with Amedia Company and transferred the land rights to them. An attempt was reportedly made to take physical possession of the land in June.

Pune Police have been probing the case and questioned Tejwani on Wednesday and Thursday before formally recording her statement and examining the documents in her possession.

Following this, the first group of ten Mahar Watan heirs was called in to record their statements. Eight of them provided their testimonies on Friday, with the process continuing late into the night.

Anjali Damania Records Statement Before Kharge Committee

Questions Its Impartiality

Pune, Correspondent
Anti-corruption activist Anjali Damania on Friday recorded her statement before the committee headed by Additional Chief Secretary (Revenue) Vikas Kharge, which is currently probing the alleged ₹300-crore scam linked to land dealings in Mumbai.

Damania submitted nearly 98 pages of evidence and documents, along with a nine-page detailed written statement to the committee. However, she has strongly questioned the committee's neutrality and raised concerns about its composition.

According to Damania, the

names of the six officials appointed to the inquiry panel were allegedly communicated in advance to the offices of Ajit Pawar and the Revenue Minister. She argued that such prior intimation casts serious doubt on the fairness and independence of the investigation.

Damania has demanded that the committee be reconstituted, insisting that senior officers with an unblemished track record—such as Pravin Dixit, Meera Borwankar, and Swati Sathe—should be included to ensure credibility and transparency.

She also raised objections to one of the committee members, District Collector Jitendra Dudi, alleging that he has deliberately delayed action in a case involving the illegal possession of 40 acres of government-owned land.

Damania stated, "If a Limited Liability Partnership (LLP) is involved in the illegal use or unauthorized transactions of government land, then the LLP and all its partners must bear equal civil and criminal responsibility."

Emphasizing the seriousness of the case, she maintained that any investigation into government land, its valuation, transfer of ownership, and the political connections surrounding it must be completely impartial.

11 Students from Pune's Zilla Parishad and Municipal Schools Selected for Robotex International 2025

PUNE, CORRESPONDENT
Momentum is building in Pune's education community as 11 students from Zilla Parishad and Pune Municipal Corporation schools prepare to represent India at Robotex International 2025, one of the world's leading robotics and technology festivals taking place on December 5 and 6 in Tallinn, Estonia. Their selection marks a proud moment for both rural and urban government schools that have been

steadily strengthening their STEM capabilities.

These young innovators earned their place after showcasing exceptional talent at the Robotex India National Championship 2025, held on September 20–21 at MIT ADT University in Pune. The event drew over 5,000 competitors from across India, with more than 1,000 participants from government schools alone. Despite the scale and intensity of the challenge, the selected 11 stood out for their creativity, coding skills, strategic thinking, and teamwork across categories such as entrepreneurship, water rally, folk race, girls' firefighting, and line follower events.

State Registration Department Initiates Action Against Amadea Enterprises

Parth Pawar-Linked Land Deal

PUNE, CORRESPONDENT
The Maharashtra State Registration Department has initiated major action against Amadea Enterprises LLP in connection with the purchase of 40 acres of land in Mundhwa, Pune. The company's partners include Digvijay Patiland Parth Pawar, son of Deputy Chief Minister Ajit Pawar.

The department has issued a notice to the company over a ₹21 crore stamp duty shortfall, directing it to either pay the dues or submit a detailed explanation by Monday. Officials stated that the deficit should have been cleared at the time of land registration.

According to senior officials, the notice pertains only to the stamp duty discrepancy and has no connection with cancelling or acquiring the land.

"We are simply demanding the recovery of unpaid stamp duty. If the company's response is unsatisfactory, recovery orders will be issued. Delayed replies may also lead to immediate action," officials said.

Sheetal Tejwani Questioned for Six Hours

The controversy over the 40-acre Mundhwa land parcel has intensified in recent days. The Economic Offences Wing (EOW) of Pune Police is investigating discrepancies related to the land's previous ownership and documentation.

Sheetal Tejwani, a key figure in the case, was questioned for six hours. Police officials said she submitted all documents—from powers of attorney to ownership papers—which are now being scrutinized. Tejwani has claimed that she has held possession of the land since 2006.

Investigators said her statements will be cross-verified with the land documents. The probe will examine every angle, including the land's history, changes in ownership, registration records, powers of attorney, and dates of each transaction.

Pune Police Commissioner Amitesh Kumar stated:

"We questioned Tejwani for six hours and recorded all information related to the land transactions. No piece of evidence will be overlooked."

BJP's Rising Star

Pramod Haribhau Bankhele

RAMESH JADHAV, PUNE (RANJANI)
In the absence of any political background at home, a young and dynamic leader from Manchar (Nighotwadi) in Ambegaon taluka—Pramod Haribhau Bankhele—has steadily built his path from grassroots social work to becoming a promising political face of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP).

For the past 15–20 years, Bankhele has been active as a dedicated BJP worker. During this period, he consistently worked to address the issues of the poor and underprivileged, extending a helping hand wherever needed. Widely known for keeping his word and standing firmly by the common people, Bankhele has earned respect across the region.

Guided by Revenue Minister Chandrashekhar Bawankule and shaped under the leadership of key BJP figures such as MLA Maheshdada Landge, MLA Pradipdada Kand, District General Secretary Dr. Tarachand Karale, District Vice President Sandeep Bankhele, and senior leader Jaysingrao Erande, Pramod Bankhele has emerged as a strong aspirant for the upcoming Zilla Parishad elections from the Pimpalgaon–Avasari Khurd group.

Bankhele has played a crucial role in resolving various civic issues in Manchar town and its neighboring villages, often extending personal support where necessary. Recognizing his commitment, party leaders are believed to have given him the green signal to contest the Zilla Parishad elections. Currently serving as an expert director of the Manchar Vividh Karyakari Society, Bankhele is a familiar name throughout Manchar and Ambegaon taluka.

Bankhele's father, the late Haribhau Genuji Bankhele, served in the Indian Army, instilling in him a deep sense of patriotism and service to the nation. Coming from an agrarian family, Pramod Bankhele is known for his energetic and grounded personality. After completing his education, he entered the medical business, which he has been running successfully for the past 25 years, alongside his continuous involvement in social and political activities.

Beginning his public life in 2005 as a Bajrang Dal activist, Bankhele gradually adopted the principle of "Nation first, then the party", which led him to the BJP. His work connected him strongly with the economically weaker sections of the taluka, where he took up both social and political responsibilities with equal dedication. Over the last 10–15 years, he has executed numerous public welfare initiatives through the BJP.

Impressed by his unwavering commitment, the party appointed him President of the Ambegaon Taluka BJP Yuva Morcha, where he carried out several impactful community projects. He subsequently served as District Secretary, and later as a Member of the Mahavitaran (Electricity Board) for Ambegaon Taluka. As District President of the Atal Bihari Vajpayee Vichar Manch, he has actively contributed to social and healthcare services. Currently, he holds the position of District President, Industry Front (North Pune District) in the BJP. Over the years, Bankhele has worked tirelessly to address key local issues related to electricity, roads, water supply, and other essential services. Through the Atal Bihari Vichar Manch, he has been providing vital healthcare services in the taluka for over a decade. He has also played a key role in delivering Central and State Government schemes to common citizens, including Ayushman Bharat cards, Ladki Bahin Yojana, labour welfare schemes, and farmer-centric initiatives, strengthening his bond with the people.

A dedicated BJP worker, Pramod Haribhau Bankhele is known for fostering intellectual growth among citizens, reducing animosity, and expanding friendships. His positive mindset, strong work ethic, and ego-free leadership style make him a valuable asset to the BJP. The party's confidence in him reflects the promise he holds as one of its emerging leaders.

Sharad Pawar Questions MVA, "If You Stand Together in Morchas, Why Fight BMC Elections Separately?"

MUMBAI, CORRESPONDENT

Sharad Pawar, chief of the Nationalist Congress Party (Sharadchandra Pawar faction), has posed a crucial question to leaders of the Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA): "If you walk together in the 'Satyacha Morcha', then why contest the municipal elections separately?"

The reaction of MVA partners to this pointed remark is now a matter of keen interest.

Earlier, Congress leaders — Maharashtra in-charge Ramesh Chennithala, state president Harshavardhan Sapkal, and Mumbai Congress chief Varsha Gaikwad — had already given a clear call for a solo fight ("Ekla Chalo Re"). However, Varsha Gaikwad recently met Sharad Pawar and sought cooperation for the upcoming Mumbai civic elections.

In this backdrop, Pawar's question becomes even more significant.

Municipal elections in Maharashtra, especially the Mumbai Municipal Corporation polls, are expected to be a matter of prestige for the ruling alliance and a battle for survival for the opposition. With these elections in mind, the Thackeray brothers reunited a few months ago, emphasising that Marathi votes must not split.

However, the Congress has refused to accept MNS into the MVA fold, citing earlier criticism that the party and its chief Raj Thackeray promote hatred and intimidation.

After Sharad Pawar's latest remarks, several new questions have emerged:

Will Shiv Sena (Thackeray faction) stand with Pawar and the Congress as MVA?

Or will they choose to align with the MNS?

Will Sharad Pawar insist on the MVA contesting elections together?

Or will he explore a completely new political equation?

The coming days are likely to offer clarity on these evolving political dynamics.

99 Villages Declare Themselves Plastic-Free in a Single Day

WAI / SATARA, CORRESPONDENT

In a remarkable display of public participation, 99 gram panchayats in Wai taluka collected plastic waste and unanimously declared a permanent plastic ban on Tuesday, November 18. The initiative, conceptualized by Block Development Officer (BDO) Vijaykumar Parit, has received widespread appreciation for achieving such a large-scale impact in just one day.

The campaign was carried out under the framework of the Chief Minister's Samruddha Panchayat Raj Abhiyan and the Majhi Vasundhara Abhiyan, with guidance from Satara Zilla Parishad CEO Yashni Nagarajan and Deputy CEO (Water & Sanitation) Pragya Mane. The Panchayat Samiti, Wai, has been conducting a series of innovative weekly activities to promote sanitation and environmental conservation across the taluka.

BDO Vijaykumar Parit, widely recognized for his socially driven work in water conservation, tree preservation, education, and health, led the initiative with notable enthusiasm. Collaborating with organisations like Paani Foundation, Naam Foundation, and various government departments, Parit has ensured effective execution of government schemes and community projects.

Senior officials including Additional Deputy CEO Rahul Gawade, Project Director Vishwas Sid, Deputy CEO (Panchayat) Rahul Desai, and Deputy CEO (Water & Sanitation) Pragya Mane have been actively guiding programmes such as the Wai Swachhta Cup, One Day for Housing & Cleanliness, My Village – My Responsibility, and One Hour for Cleanliness, all of which have helped raise sanitation standards in the taluka.

On Tuesday (Nov 18), plastic collection drives and a full plastic ban were implemented across all 99 gram panchayats.

Anti-Addiction Oath Under Nasha-Mukt Bharat Campaign

Taluka-level department heads, officers, and employees were appointed as village liaison officials. Under their supervision, villagers took an anti-addiction pledge, notices of the plastic ban were issued to shopkeepers, and warnings of penalties for plastic usage were given. Boards with cleanliness instructions and penalty notices were installed to curb open dumping of garbage.

Bhoomipujan for Sanctioned Housing Units

Plastic waste collected through shramdaan (voluntary labour) was handed over to scrap dealers. Parallelly, the Housing Completion Drive received a major push with bhoomipujan for newly sanctioned homes, foundation digging for others, and distribution of final instalments for houses nearing completion.

These consistent and innovative initiatives have drawn attention across the state. The campaigns have seen enthusiastic participation from sarpanches, local representatives, officials, employees, villagers, and youth volunteers. Maharashtra's Minister for Relief and Rehabilitation Makrand Patil has also praised the efforts.

Minister Lodha Accuses MLA Aslam Shaikh of Threatening Him, Seeks Police Action

Mumbai, Correspondent

Mangal Prabhat Lodha, the Guardian Minister of Mumbai Suburbs, has alleged that Malad–Malvani MLA Aslam Shaikh threatened to eliminate him and his family during a public meeting. Lodha claims the threat was issued because he opposed Shaikh's alleged support for illegal activities involving Rohingya and Bangladeshi infiltrators.

Lodha has filed a written complaint with Mumbai Police Commissioner Deven Bharati. BJP Mumbai President MLA Amit Satam has also condemned the alleged intimidation and demanded strict action against Shaikh.

According to Lodha, Shaikh has been backing illegal constructions in Malvani and providing shelter to infiltrators. Lodha said he followed up with the administration, leading to the clearing of nearly 9,000 square meters of government land so far. The demolition drive is still ongoing.

Lodha further alleged that Shaikh is resisting the anti-encroachment action and issuing threats to obstruct the process. He said that encouraging illegal settlements of infiltrators in a metro city like Mumbai—already on the radar of terrorists—poses a serious threat to national security.

He described this alleged strategy of land encroachment, illegal construction, and sheltering Rohingya and Bangladeshi infiltrators as the "Malvani Pattern", warning that he would dismantle it completely.

Yashomati Thakur Likely to Join BJP Within Six Months, Claims MLA Ravi Rana

AMRAVATI, CORRESPONDENT

Senior Congress leader and former Maharashtra minister Yashomati Thakur is likely to join the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) within the next six months, claimed independent MLA Ravi Rana.

Rana stated that Thakur had earlier shown willingness to join the BJP and had also held discussions with Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis. According to him, Thakur had expressed readiness to switch sides if she was assured a BJP ticket from the Tivsa Assembly constituency.

However, in a recent development, Yashomati Thakur launched a strong attack on Chief Minister Fadnavis. She alleged that his cousin was elected unopposed in the Chikhaldara Municipal Council due to pressure tactics and misuse of power. Thakur also accused Fadnavis of using money and influence to ensure the unopposed victory and remarked that he would be remembered as "the most ruthless Chief Minister of Maharashtra."

Against this backdrop, Ravi Rana's latest claim has sparked significant political discussion in the state.

Public Anger Erupts as Accused in Child Assault-Murder Case Produced Before Court via Video Link

NASHIK, CORRESPONDENT

A massive wave of public outrage swept through Malegaon taluka after news spread that Vijay Khairnar — accused of sexually assaulting and murdering a three-year-old girl — was to be brought to court following the expiry of his police custody.

As soon as citizens learned this, a large and furious crowd gathered outside the court premises. In an attempt to storm inside, they broke the court gate, forcing the police to intervene. Officers used mild force to disperse the mob and bring the situation under control.

Considering the tense situation, police deployed additional forces and tightened security around the court. Fearing that the mob might break in and attack the accused, authorities made a crucial decision: instead of bringing the accused physically to court, he was presented through video conferencing. This step helped prevent further escalation.

The horrific incident occurred in Dongarale village and has sparked intense anger among locals. Many are demanding that the 24-year-old accused be given capital punishment immediately. Maratha reservation activist Manoj Jarange-Patil has even demanded that the accused be killed in an encounter.

Public sentiments remain extremely high, and the region continues to be tense following the brutal crime.

Students Must Learn From Failure, Says Ankur Warikoo

PUNE, CORRESPONDENT

Students should learn from failure and develop a success mindset rooted in consistency and character, said bestselling author, entrepreneur, and motivational speaker Ankur Warikoo.

He was speaking at an engaging and inspiring session held at Delhi Public School (DPS), Hinjawadi, as part of the school's Inspire 2025 series.

During the event, Warikoo also discussed and unveiled his newly released book, "Beyond the Syllabus." The book encourages young learners to look beyond traditional academic achievements and focus on self-awareness, decision-making, and purpose-driven growth.

Warikoo emphasized that the education system should help students recognise their strengths, confront setbacks, and build resilience—qualities that shape long-term success.

The session was organised under the leadership of Gautam Rajghadia and Siddharth Rajghadia, with academic guidance from Principal Dr. Jaya Parekh. The school, which carries forward the 75-year legacy of the DPS Society, continues to strengthen its vision of providing transformative education.

The leadership team reiterated that DPS Hinjawadi aims to create an environment where every child grows with capability, strong character, and a success-oriented mindset.

Raigad Politics Heat Up: MLAs Dalvi and Gogawale Target Sunil Tatkare

RAIGAD, CORRESPONDENT

Despite multiple reviews in the coordination committee meeting, the Shiv Sena (Shinde faction) in Raigad district is leaving no opportunity to target Sunil Tatkare. Alibag MLA Mahendra Dalvi has once again launched a direct attack on Tatkare. Dalvi reiterated that Sunil Tatkare played a key role in implicating Parth Pawar in the land case. "You malign the son of the very party you want to stay with. Tatkare's political journey is clearly heading towards the BJP," Dalvi claimed. He further said that to protect Roha's reputation, such people will have to be shown the door. MLA Bharat Gogawale also strongly criticized Sunil Tatkare. "We got your only Lok Sabha seat elected. Yet, you failed to acknowledge our support. If you dare to challenge us now, we accept that challenge," Gogawale said. He also alleged that Tatkare worked against him during the Assembly elections.

Police complaint filed after BJP leader assaults Shinde Sena leaders in Thane

MUMBAI, AGENCY

A former Thane corporator and BJP leader, Narayan Pawar, allegedly assaulted Deputy Chief Minister Eknath Shinde-led Shiv Sena leaders Haresh Mahadik and Mahesh Lahane, who filed a complaint at the Naupada police station, in Thane.

The development comes even as serious differences between the BJP and Deputy CM Eknath Shinde have become evident.

The Thane incident is alleged to have taken place on Thursday night while Eknath Shinde Thane-branch chief Haresh Mahadik was celebrating the decision to reduce registration fees for houses under the Basic Services for Urban Poor (BSUP) scheme, which aims to rehabilitate slum dwellers in government-provided housing.

The alleged incident happened due to competitive efforts to take credit for the recent reduction in registration fees for houses under the BSUP scheme. Such competitive efforts to claim credit have increased since local civic body elections in Maharashtra are scheduled to take place from December 2.

BJP MLA Sanjay Kelkar has been claiming that he was the first to raise the issue of BSUP flat holders, while Eknath Shinde-led Shiv Sena MP Naresh Mhaske has claimed that that the 1 per cent discount on stamp duty was given according to a government resolution (GR) issued on November 18, due to his efforts.

Eventually, competitive efforts to take credit for the reduction in BSUP house registration scheme, is said to have resulted in the alleged physical assault by former corporator and BJP leader Narayan Pawar on Eknath Shinde-led Shiv Sena leaders Haresh Mahadik and Mahesh Lahane on Thursday night, while they were celebrating.

Allegedly former corporator and BJP leader Narayan Pawar along with around 50 of his supporters near Laxmi Nagar Society in Panch Pakhadi area, where the Eknath Shinde-led Shiv Sena leaders were celebrating and asked "How dare you (Eknath Shinde-led Shiv Sena) celebrate and take credit for the work which we (the BJP) have done," after which Shinde-led Shiv Sena leaders Haresh Mahadik and Mahesh Lahane were beaten up.

"While we were celebrating, former BJP corporator Narayan Pawar came and abused us. After that he started beating up sub-division head (shakha pramukh|) Mahesh Lahane. When we went to ask him for an answer, he beat me as well," Haresh Mahadik said.

Later, late Thursday night, both of them went to Naupada police station and lodged a complaint after the police registered a non-cognisable offence. Yet, when asked about the incident, BJP leader Narayan Pawar claimed that he never thrashed anybody. "We went to congratulate the residents since the 1 per cent stamp duty that was supposed to be levied on them has now been reduced to just Rs 100. I worked hard for those 185 families. Nobody helped me while I did all the work. Now some people (Eknath Shinde-led Shiv Sena) have come to try stunts. There was no celebration there and I did not even beat anyone. Some people have filed police cases by giving wrong information. We are also in the Mahayuti alliance. We will never get into arguments," BJP leader Narayan Pawar said.

The Eknath Shinde-led Shiv Sena leaders are upset that the Naupada police filed only a non-cognisable offence which is considered a minor charge, when they had demanded that a First Information Report (FIR) must be registered.

Meanwhile, sources said that there are signs that the dispute between the Eknath Shinde-led Shiv Sena Shinde and BJP in Thane will escalate further, since neither the Shinde-led Sena top brass nor the BJP leadership are friendly to each other. Sources also said that the distance of the Maharashtra BJP top brass and Deputy CM Eknath Shinde is likely to only increase after union Home Minister Amit Shah told Shinde in Delhi that BJP is a national party which is in power and hence recruitment of new members would continue.

Rape and Murder of a three-year-old girl in Malegaon

Maha Cong chief demands death penalty for accused

Mumbai, Agency

Maharashtra Pradesh Congress Committee president Harsh Vardhan Sapkal has strongly condemned the rape and murder of a three-year-old girl in Malegaon, saying the incident reflects the lack of safety for women and girls in the land of Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj.

He demanded that the case be tried in a special fast-track court and that the accused be given the death penalty to instil fear among criminals about legal consequences.

Sapkal said law and order in Maharashtra is steadily deteriorating while the Chief Minister and Deputy Chief Minister remain preoccupied with election rallies and internal political disputes. He asserted that the state needs a strong and decisive Home Minister, describing Devendra Fadnavis as a "failed, passive and ineffective" occupant of the post.

He alleged that groups such as the Quetta gang, the drug mafia and the sand mafia operate under protection from the ruling party, creating fear and helplessness among citizens.

He said recent events show hooliganism is receiving government backing, with corrupt elements and mafia figures being legitimised through induction into ruling circles, thereby boosting criminal morale. Sapkal accused the administration of deploying police personnel primarily to intimidate opposition leaders and conduct phone-tapping operations.

Referring to the Dr Sampda Mande suicide case, Sapkal alleged that political pressure and police harassment drove him to end his life. He claimed that although former BJP MP Ranjit Singh Nambalkar's name surfaced in the case, the Chief Minister and Home Minister cleared him without proper investigation.

He said Dr Mande has still not received justice while the accused individual moves freely.

Sapkal warned that public anger following the Malegaon tragedy indicates that government inaction could trigger mass agitation that may destabilise the ruling establishment. He demanded immediate, strict and effective measures to protect women and girls across the state.

Later, the Congress leader addressed party workers on municipal elections in Phulambari, Pethan and Bhukardan, in the presence of MP Dr Kalyan Kale, former MP Tukaram Ringe Patil, and several state and district-level officials and leaders.

BJP gets Home in Bihar portfolio distribution

PATNA, AGENCY

BJP's Samrat Chaudhary got the vital Home Department as Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar allocated portfolios among the ministers of the new NDA coalition government on Friday.

This is the first time that Kumar has handed over the Home department to the BJP. Until now, the department has always been with the chief minister.

Samrat Chaudhary and Vijay Kumar Sinha of the BJP were accorded the state of Deputy Chief Ministers in the Cabinet.

According to a cabinet secretariat notification, Deputy Chief Minister Samrat Chaudhary has been given the responsibilities of Home.

Sinha has been assigned Land and Revenue, Mines and Geology.

The other ministers from the BJP quota whose portfolios were allotted include Mangal Pandey who has been given the responsibility of Health and Law, Dilip Jaiswal (Industry), Nitin Nabin (Road Construction and Urban Development and Housing), Ramkripal Yadav (Agriculture), Sanjay Singh Tiger (Labour Resources), Arun Shankar Prasad (Tourism, Art, Culture and Youth Affairs), Surendra Mehta (Animal and Fisheries Resources), Narayan Prasad (Disaster Management), Rama Nishad (Backward and Extremely Backward Class Welfare), Lakhendra Paswan (Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe Welfare), Shreyasi Singh (Information Technology and Sports), Pramod Chandravanshi (Cooperatives, Environment, Forest and Climate Change).

From JDU, Vijay Kumar Chaudhary got Water Resources, Parliamentary Affairs, Information and broadcasting and Building Construction, Bijendra Prasad Yadav (Planning and Development, Excise and Registration, Finance and Commercial taxes), Shrawan Kumar (Rural Development and Transport), Ashok Chaudhary (Rural Works), Leshi Singh (Food and Consumer Affairs), Madan Sahni (Social Welfare), Sunil Kumar (Education Science and Technology and Technical Education) and Jama Khan (Minority Welfare).

Sanjay Kumar of Lok Janshakti Party (RV) has been given Sugar Cane Industry, while and Sanjay Kumar Singh of the same party got Public Health Engineering, and Santosh Kumar Suman of Hindustani Awam Morcha (HAM) was given the Minor Irrigation portfolios.

Deepak Prasad of Rashtriya Lok Morcha (RLM), son of RLM Rajya Sabha MP Upendra Kushwaha, will look after the Panchayatiraj department.

In the Nitish Cabinet, the BJP has 14 ministers, the JDU (including the chief minister) has 9, Chirag Paswan's LJP-R has 2, and Jitan Ram Manjhi's HAM as well as Upendra Kushwaha's RLM have received 1 ministerial post each.

Four Labour Codes come into effect, rationalising 29 existing Labour Laws

PM welcomes move

New Delhi

Four Labour Codes on Wages, Industrial Relations, Social Security and Working Conditions, rationalising 29 existing labour laws, came into effect on Friday, an official spokesman said.

"The Code on Wages, 2019, the Industrial Relations Code, 2020, the Code on Social Security, 2020 and the Occupational Safety, Health and Working Conditions Code, 2020 are being made effective from November 21, 2025," the spokesman said.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi welcomed the implementation of the Four Labour Codes, describing it as one of the most comprehensive and progressive labour-oriented reforms since Independence. He said these reforms greatly empower workers while significantly simplifying compliance and promoting 'Ease of Doing Business.'

The Prime Minister said the Four Labour Codes will serve as a strong foundation for universal social security, minimum and timely payment of wages, safe workplaces and remunerative opportunities for the people, especially Nari Shakti and Yuva Shakti.

He said the reforms will build a future-ready ecosystem that protects the rights of workers and strengthens India's economic growth and that they will boost job creation, drive productivity and accelerate the nation's journey towards a Viksit Bharat.

The spokesman said that by modernising labour regulations, enhancing workers' welfare and aligning the labour ecosystem with the evolving world of work, this landmark move lays the foundation for a future-ready workforce and stronger, resilient industries driving labour reforms for Aatmanirbhar Bharat.

Many of India's labour laws were framed in the pre-Independence and early post-Independence era (1930s–1950s), at a time when the economy and world of work were fundamentally different.

While most major economies have updated and consolidated their labour regulations in recent decades, India continued to operate under fragmented, complex and in several parts outdated provisions spread across 29 Central labour laws.

These restrictive frameworks struggled to keep pace with changing economic realities and evolving forms of employment, creating uncertainty and increasing compliance burden for both workers and industry.

The implementation of the four Labour Codes addresses this long-pending need to move beyond colonial-era structures and align with modern global trends. Together, these Codes empower both workers and enterprises, building a workforce that is protected, productive and aligned with the evolving world of work — paving the way for a more resilient, competitive and self-reliant nation, the spokesman added.

Today's new world needs a new United Nations: Rajnath Singh

LUCKNOW

Defence Minister and Lucknow MP Rajnath Singh on Friday said ,"respect, justice and peace are behind India's stability" and advocated for a new United Nations (UN).

Speaking at the 26th International Conference of Chief Justices of the World, underway at City Montessori School, Kanpur Road Branch here, this evening, Rajnath Singh said, "Today's new world needs a new United Nations.

"Not a new institution. We need to strengthen and build upon the same institution in a new way."

He said, "Where there is respect, there will be peace."

"Where there is peace, prosperity and justice will automatically follow."

Later, Rajnath Singh at the event met astronaut Shubhanshu Shukla and enquired about his health. He also patted him on the back.

Chief Justices from 52 countries, former Vice Presidents, former Prime Ministers, Speakers of Parliament, and jurists are attending the event.

Earlier, Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath inaugurated the conference in the morning.

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh joined the program in the evening. He offered flowers at the statue of the CMS founder late Jagdish Gandhi and also read out the conference's declaration.

CM Yogi had said, "The lack of dialogue with each other is the real problem facing the world. This conference will become a medium for dialogue. The declaration made 80 years ago at the founding of the UN still holds relevance today. Today, we need to focus not only on those old issues but also on today's pressing issues, including cybersecurity, environmental protection, and global terrorism."

Odisha unveils ambitious GCC Policy to become a global business hub

BHUBANESWAR

In a decisive move to strengthen its standing in the global business arena, the Odisha Cabinet on Friday approved the Odisha Global Capability Centre (GCC) Policy 2025.

The policy is designed to attract top multinational corporations (MNCs) to set up and scale their Global Capability Centres in the state by offering world-class infrastructure, a skilled talent base, and forward-looking incentives.

Over the past decade, Odisha has emerged as a promising destination for Information Technology (IT) and IT-enabled Services (ITES), supported by progressive policy reforms and a rapidly growing talent pool.

This progress aligns with the wider national trend of GCCs expanding into Tier-II cities for cost efficiency and access to regional expertise.

With its strategic location, rising urban infrastructure, and

proactive governance, Odisha is well-positioned to evolve into a preferred hub for global capability centres.

Anchored to the state's long-term vision under Viksit Odisha 2036 and 2047, the new policy seeks to facilitate Rs.1,000 crore in investments, develop at least five modern GCC hubs across major economic regions—including Bhubaneswar–Cuttack–Paradeep and Bargarh–Jharsuguda–Sambalpur—and create over 50,000 direct and indirect jobs statewide.

The policy also supports balanced regional development by encouraging investors to explore opportunities beyond Bhubaneswar and into emerging Tier-II cities.

The Odisha GCC Policy complements the recently launched Odisha IT Policy 2025, acting as an additional incentive layer for eligible GCC units.

Benefits include concessions on land rates and lease rentals, support for human capital development, power tariff incentives, interest subsidies, marketing assistance, and SGST reimbursement.

Siddaramaiah losing majority, Cong on verge of split: LoP Ashoka

BENGALURU

Karnataka Assembly leader of Opposition R Ashoka on Friday warned that Chief Minister Siddaramaiah appears to be losing majority support within the Congress, describing the state government as divided and unstable, and cautioning that if the conflicts are not resolved, the party could face further splits in the next 15-30 days.

"Siddaramaiah has no majority now, so he has to resign. Otherwise, he is a one-party MLA, not representing the combined Congress. Within 15 days or one month, Congress could split because the war has reached its peak," he told media.

Ashoka alleged that internal conflicts within the ruling party have intensified, with several Congress MLAs reportedly travelling to Delhi to meet party leaders and demand Siddaramaiah's removal. "Two-and-a-half years into the Congress-led government, there has been no development, only division," he said.

Ashoka said Siddaramaiah is controlling a section of MLAs and ministers through threats, while Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar remains largely inactive in managing the legislative assembly.

Senior BJP leader and legislative Council LoP Chalavadi Narayanaswamy said the current crisis reflects a recurring pattern in Congress power-sharing agreements.

He said that despite a two-and-a-half-year arrangement for leadership rotation, Siddaramaiah continues to cling to power, creating a "puzzle" for the party high command.

Narayanaswamy also criticised the lack of decisive intervention from the AICC, highlighting that key governance issues, including law and order, farmers' concerns, and Dalit and labour welfare — remain neglected amid the factional struggle.

"This could be the last resort for the Congress party; if the puzzle between the groups continues, they risk destroying their own party," he said, underlining the severity of the internal crisis.

ED launches massive raids on coal mafia in Jharkhand & Bengal

NEW DELHI : The Enforcement Directorate (ED) today conducted a massive coordinated raid at over 40 premises across Jharkhand and West Bengal as part of its crackdown on the illegal coal mining and smuggling nexus.

In a major operation, the ED's Kolkata zone searched 24 locations in Durgapur, Purulia, Howrah and Kolkata districts in a case related to illegal coal mining, transportation and storage.

Simultaneously, the ED's Ranchi zone carried out searches at 18 locations in Jharkhand. These operations are linked to several major coal theft and smuggling cases, including those involving entities such as Anil Goyal, Sanjay Udhyog, LB Singh, and Amar Mandal. The collective scale of the cases involves massive coal pilferage, causing a financial loss to the government estimated to run into hundreds of crores.

The action has led to significant seizures. "Total seizure of cash and gold/jewellery so far is more than Rs. 8 crores with respect to premises in West Bengal," said an ED Official.

From the premises raided in Jharkhand, the agency reported the recovery of "cash of more than Rs. 2.2 crore along with 120 land deeds".

The twin-state operation marks one of the largest actions against the alleged coal mafia in recent times.

Rahul Gandhi expresses condolences over IAF pilot's death in Tejas crash

NEW DELHI

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi today expressed his condolences to the family of the Indian Air Force (IAF) pilot killed in a Tejas fighter jet crash at the Dubai Air Show.

"Deeply saddened by the loss of our brave IAF pilot in the Tejas crash at the Dubai Air Show. My heartfelt condolences to his family. The nation stands with them, honouring his courage and service," Gandhi said in a post on handle X.

The crash occurred today during an aerial display at the Al Maktoum International Airport, where the IAF was showcasing the Tejas jet's capabilities. The pilot, whose identity has not been disclosed, was the sole occupant of the aircraft.

The IAF has announced a Court of Inquiry to investigate the cause of the accident, the second involving a Tejas aircraft in less than two years.

ED files chargesheet against ex-Cong MP & others in alleged bank fraud case

Kolkata

The Enforcement Directorate (eastern region) has filed a chargesheet against former Congress MP Kuldeep Rai Sharma (Andaman and Nicobar Island) and others in alleged money laundering case of Rs 500 crore in Andaman and Nicobar State Cooperative Bank (ANSCBL).

The fraud allegedly occurred when Sharma was the chairman at the cooperative bank in the island. The chargesheet also includes 39 others and entities in the special PMLA court in Port Blair, the ED said.

The ED also named in the chargesheet are K. Murugan, Managing Director (ANSCBL), and K. Kalaivanan, Loan Officer, Sanjay Lal, Sanjeev Lal among others.

The ED began investigation on the basis of an FIR registered by the crime & economic offences cell, Andaman & Nicobar Police, against various suspects and officials of the bank in the fraud allegedly committed for sanctioning bank loans.

The accused in connivance with their accomplices floated several shell companies and sanctioned large loans to them as well as to their regular entities in flagrant violation of the rules and laid down procedure of the bank with the sole intent of not repaying the funds, causing losses to the bank and generating corresponding gains for themselves.

Investigation has revealed that loan facilities were sanctioned through more than 100 loan accounts in the names of various firms and shell companies, in complete disregard of the laid-down procedures and guidelines of the bank and the amount involved in the fraud/NPA exceeds Rs 500 crore, ED said.

The investigation has also revealed that Kuldeep Rai Sharma and others fraudulently availed of loans from the bank in the names of companies incorporated in the name of relatives and associates.

The bank officials also helped their associates namely Sanjay Lal, Sanjeev Lal and others to obtain multiple loans in lieu of 5 per cent commission on the instructions of Kuldeep Rai Sharma.

The commission amount was taken either in the form of cash or through associates by using the accounts of shell companies. The ED had earlier arrested Kuldeep Rai Sharma, K. Murugan, K. Kalaivanan and Sanjay Lal during investigation under the provisions of the PMLA, 2002.

All the four accused are currently in judicial custody.

Akhilesh Yadav attacks BJP over Daal Mandi demolitions

Terms it 'political vendetta'

LUCKNOW

Samajwadi Party (SP) National President Akhilesh Yadav on Friday attacked the ruling BJP over the demolition drive underway in the Daal Mandi area of Varanasi, terming it as "political demolition" allegedly due to the locals' "non-support" to BJP in the elections,

Akhilesh Yadav termed the proposed widening of Varanasi's historic market, Dal Mandi, for which the demolition is taking place, as "narrow-minded" and a "political conspiracy."

He said that Daal Mandi is not just a market, but a place of cultural and heritage value, where trade has been going on for generations.

Attacking the BJP, he said, "How can you take away people's shops when they're not ready to give? You can give them shops elsewhere, but how can you give them customers? Daal Mandi wasn't built in a day. It takes ages to establish a shop."

He claimed, "When all the countries in the world are preserving their heritage and culture, BJP people are bent upon to demolish the old heritage. The entire demolition of Daal Mandi in Varanasi was due to non-support of the people to BJP of the area in the elections," he claimed.

Addressing a press conference on Friday, the Samajwadi Party (SP) leader said the BJP's policies have created such an environment in the state that people are unable to do business openly. "Their policy is to scare people so much that they can't speak their mind. Does any government do this? Everyone has the right to express their views."

He said that the BJP has no plans of "heritage conservation" but adopts only "political vendetta." Yadav claimed that "the BJP has been losing there continuously, hence this action".

The SP President also accused the government of pressuring the traders through officials. He warned that "the manner in which the demolition took place will be recovered from the officials when the time comes."

He said that his party stands with the traders of Daal Mandi and that the BJP's "widening" is actually "narrow-minded politics."

"The BJP should not crush the people of Daal Mandi like lentils. This government is going to fall. The BJP also gave a 'return gift' of demolition to the traders of Meerut."

"BJP should not forget what they received a return gift in Ayodhya during the Lok Sabha polls only due to traders and demolition," he warned.

Akhilesh Yadav said that the BJP government is abusing its power and, just as the Mall in Lucknow was sold, the future of Daal Mandi is being compromised. The entire metro system currently in operation in UP is the contribution of the Samajwadi Party, he claimed.

He said that his government allocated Rs 50 crore and DPR for the metro in Varanasi, and if the Samajwadi Party had come to power, the metro would have been operational.

"BJP had claimed to turn Varanasi into Kyoto but they do not know that Kyoto is a historical city in Japan and they have preserved the heritage", said Yadav. He said that this political demolition must stop. The Samajwadi Party stands with the traders there and will do something.

Akhilesh Yadav said that the entire Akbarnagar area in Lucknow was demolished. He asked, "Is a riverfront being built over a drain somewhere?" He said that the BJP should compensate its own people in the same way as others have.

Some traders from Varanasi also presented their views before the media during the press briefing.

Trump urges Zelenskyy to accept Draft Peace Plan 'Right Now'

WASHINGTON, D.C

US President Donald Trump is demanding that Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy accept a proposed draft peace plan on Ukraine "right now," the RBC Ukraine news agency reported, citing a senior US official.

"If you've been watching President Trump, you should feel that when it comes to an aggressive timeline, it means tight deadlines on his terms. It means right now, it means as soon as possible," the official was quoted as saying by the news agency on Thursday.

On Wednesday, Axios reported that Washington has been holding secret consultations with Moscow to develop a new peace plan for settling the conflict. The Financial Times newspaper reported that the 28-point US peace plan includes reductions in US military aid, official recognition of the canonical Ukrainian Orthodox Church, granting Russian state language status in Ukraine, reducing Ukraine's armed forces, and banning foreign troops and long-range weapons on Ukrainian soil.

The plan assumes that the United States and other countries recognize Crimea and Donbas as legitimate Russian territories, as per Axios report. On Friday, Axios reported that the US also presented Kiev with another draft agreement, according to which a possible attack on Ukraine would be "regarded as an attack threatening the peace and security of the transatlantic community." The agreement will reportedly be valid for an initial 10 years and requires the signatures of Ukraine, the US, the European Union, NATO and Russia.

US President welcomes delegation of freed Israeli hostages to White House, hails them as heroes

WASHINGTON

US President Donald Trump hosted nearly all of the former Gaza hostages freed under last month's ceasefire deal, calling them "heroes" as he welcomed the Israeli delegation to the White House.

"You're not a hostage anymore... today you're heroes," Trump told the group in brief remarks released by the White House. Twenty-six former hostages took part in the visit on Thursday, including 17 of the 20 living captives released in the October agreement brokered by Washington.

"It's an honour to get to know all of you," Trump said. "We love you all, and our country loves you all... you're amazing people." He also presented each former hostage with a special presidential coin.

The Israeli delegation of the former captives, arrived in Washington on Tuesday and met on Wednesday with a bipartisan group of Congressional lawmakers on Capitol Hill.

The former hostages had said ahead of the visit that they hoped to thank Trump for securing their freedom and urge him to continue pushing for the return of the remains of three hostages still held in Gaza, reports Channel 12.

Thursday's event marked Trump's third-time hosting the delegations of the recently freed Israelis, following the two deals he brokered — the first reached in Jan 2025, when he was president-elect, and the second in October after eight months of renewed fighting.

Several members of the delegation brought personal gifts to the president. Among them was Matan Angrest, whom Trump singled out for praise, noting the excessive brutality he had to endure by the Hamas terrorists due to his service in the IDF.

"Matan was subjected to severe beatings... he went through hell. Matan never broke, and today he's a living testimony to the toughness, heart, and faith of the Jewish people," said Trump, hailing him.

The twin brothers Gali and Ziv Berman presented Trump with a mezuzah that survived the fire Hamas-led gunmen had set in their Kfar Aza home during the Oct 7, 2023 massacre that triggered the Gaza war. They retrieved the mezuzah during their first return to the community since their release on Oct 13.

"To our great hostages who now carry a weight, a story and experience that you never asked for... We will be your friends for life. We will be your advocates for life. We will continue to wear our pins, and we will continue to tell your story," Democratic Representative Haley Stevens said during the meeting, according to a readout from the Israeli embassy.

"Today we were able to bring both sides of the House, Democrats and Republicans, together into one room," said Danny Miran, the father of recently released hostage Omri Miran, who was also part of the delegation.

"This is an opportunity to thank you, American Jewry, and all those who took the trouble and laboured and made efforts to bring these wonderful children home. In less than a month, we will be celebrating Hanukkah – the Festival of Lights – thank you very much for all these lights you have lit for us."

Netherlands urges EU to hit Russia's 'shadow fleet' with new sanctions

AMSTERDAM,

The Netherlands called for additional sanctions targeting Russia's "shadow fleet" and oil companies during a meeting with EU foreign ministers in Brussels, Dutch Foreign Minister David van Weel said.

Emphasising the importance of intensifying pressure on Moscow, Weel wrote on X, "We reaffirmed the need to increase EU support to Ukraine and ramp up pressure on Russia to stop its war of aggression. I called for urgent financial, military and energy support, as well as additional sanctions against Russian shadow fleet vessels and oil companies."

The call comes after the EU adopted its 19th sanctions package against Russia at the end of October. That package targeted 117 vessels linked to the Russian shadow fleet, bringing the total number of vessels under EU sanctions to 564, Weel noted.

This comes a month after the US has announced new sanctions targeting Russia's two largest oil companies in an effort to pressure Moscow to negotiate

a peace deal in Ukraine.

US President Donald Trump said a planned meeting with his Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin in Budapest would be shelved indefinitely.

"Every time I speak to Vladimir, I have good conversations and then they don't go anywhere," Trump said.

While the economic impact on Russia is expected to be minimal, the move marks a major shift in Trump's foreign policy. He had previously said he would not impose sanctions until European nations stopped buying Russian oil. The Kremlin responded by saying Russia was "immune" to the measures.

The development follows the UK's decision just days earlier to sanction the same two Russian oil companies, Rosneft and Lukoil. European union member states have also introduced new sanctions that will ban the import of Russian liquefied natural gas starting January 2027.

Trump had repeatedly threatened tougher US measures against Moscow but had held back until now in the hope of brokering a peace deal in the three-and-a-half-year-long invasion.

Trump removes 40 pc tariffs on over 200 Brazilian products

WASHINGTON

President Donald Trump has rolled back a 40 percent tariff on more than 200 Brazilian agricultural and livestock products, including beef, coffee, cocoa, vegetables, and some ammonia-based fertilizers.

The tariffs were originally part of a broader trade dispute, but they have been reduced as part of the Trump administration's effort to lower consumer costs for Americans. The move follows negotiations with Brazilian President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva.

The White House issued an executive order to eliminate punitive tariffs on some agricultural products from Brazil on Thursday.

The refund of the duties collected since April 13, when the executive order took effect, will be handled by the U.S. Customs and Border Protection. The newly added exemption list covers around 250 categories in the 8-digit subheadings of the Harmonized Tariff Schedule of the United States, including coffee, bovine meat, tomatoes, tea, spices, fruits and nuts.

Trump initially imposed a 10 percent tariff on nearly all countries and later added a 40 percent penalty specifically on Brazil, bringing

some goods' total tariffs to 50 percent.

The punitive tariffs were imposed in response to the prosecution and 27-year prison sentence of former Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro, a Trump ally, for attempting a coup after losing the 2022 election to Lula.

Last week, the general 10 percent tariff on Brazilian agricultural goods was already lifted.

Trump had signed the original executive order on July 30, citing "politically motivated persecution" of Bolsonaro and labeling Brazil's actions a "threat to U.S. national security and the economy."

PM Modi arrives in Johannesburg for G20 Summit

JOHANNESBURG

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Friday arrived in Johannesburg to attend the G20 Summit being hosted by South Africa where he will present India's perspectives on critical topics.

In a post on X, the Prime Minister said he looks forward to holding productive discussions with world leaders on key global issues.

"Landed in Johannesburg for the G20 Summit related engagements. Look forward to productive discussions with world leaders on key global issues. Our focus will be on strengthening cooperation, advancing development priorities and ensuring a better future for all."

The MEA spokesperson said in a post that the PM arrived to a warm and ceremonial welcome.

The PM's three-day visit will

focus on strengthening India's engagement with the Global South and advancing discussions on key global challenges.

This is PM Modi's fourth official visit to South Africa.

He is expected to speak in all the three sessions of the Summit.

These sessions are on: i. Inclusive and Sustainable Economic Growth Leaving No One Behind : Building our economies; the role of trade; financing for development and the debt burden

ii. A Resilient World – the G20's Contribution: Disaster Risk Reduction; Climate Change; Just Energy Transitions; Food Systems

iii. A Fair and a Just Future for All: Critical Minerals; Decent Work; Artificial Intelligence

On the margins of the G20 Leaders' Summit, Prime Minister Modi is expected to hold bilateral meetings with some of the leaders present in Johannesburg.

Prime Minister will also be participating in the India-Brazil-South Africa (IBSA) Leaders' Meeting being hosted by South Africa.

Bangladesh's 5.7 quake may be a 'foreshock', experts warn

Dhaka

The deadly 5.7-magnitude earthquake in Bangladesh on Friday morning may have been a "foreshock" signalling the possibility of a much stronger quake in the future, experts warned, pointing to the region's long-overdue seismic cycle and the country's widespread structural fragility.

Professor Mehedi Ahmed Ansary, a seismic engineering specialist at the Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology (BUET), said historical patterns show the region experiences magnitude-7 earthquakes every 100–125 years and magnitude-8 events every 250–300 years.

"Since no such major earthquakes have occurred after 1930, a risk has developed," he noted.

He cited the area's history of devastating quakes since pre-Independence, including the 7.6 Cachar earthquake (1869), the 7.1 Bengal earthquake (1885), the 8.1 Great Indian earthquake (1897), and the 7.6 Srimangal earthquake (1918).

Against that backdrop, he suggested that Thursday's tremor could be an early indicator of a more powerful seismic event.

The quake, which lasted roughly 20 seconds, exposed serious vulnerabilities in Bangladesh's infrastructure, particularly in Dhaka, where numerous buildings developed cracks or structural damage. Ansary said the failures stemmed from long-standing violations of building codes, poor construction materials, and a lack of regulatory oversight.

"There are about 2.1 million buildings in Dhaka. After the Rana Plaza collapse (on May 13, 2013, due to a structural failure) we repeatedly called for inspections. These buildings need to be examined urgently," he said, urging the government to direct the Rajdhani Unnayan Katripakkha (Capital Development Authority) to begin mandatory assessments and require owners to certify code compliance.

He warned that if a magnitude-7 quake struck within 100 kilometres of the capital, Bangladesh could face 100,000–200,000 deaths and the collapse of 35% of Dhaka's buildings. Ansary called for a three-tier safety classification — green (safe), yellow (requires retrofitting), and red (immediate evacuation)—as practised in the US, Japan and India.

Rubayet Kabir, head of the Earthquake Observation and Research Centre at the Meteorology Department, said Bangladesh is inherently vulnerable due to its position at the convergence of the Indian and Eurasian plates, with major nearby fault lines such as the Assam Fault, the Dauki Fault, and Myanmar's Sagaing Fault.

"Since digital monitoring began in 2007, this is the strongest earthquake recorded around Dhaka," he told The Daily Star, adding that aftershocks remain possible.

Kabir echoed the call for strict enforcement of building codes to ensure new structures can withstand future quakes, stressing that seismic activity in the region is both routine and potentially deadly if preparedness continues to lag behind known risks.

White House drafts order to challenge state AI laws as Trump pushes for single federal standard

WASHINGTON :

In its bid to centralise AI regulations, the White House is touting an executive order, actively challenging state regulations by conditioning all federal grants in compliance with a national framework, according to a draft reviewed by Axios.

The move follows President Donald Trump's public call on Tuesday for a single federal standard on AI, cautioning that the excessive divergence among states concerning the use of AI was posing a direct threat to the country's technology-driven economic growth.

Marking one of the Trump administration's most aggressive attempts to centralise US's AI policy, it would also give AI and crypto advisor David Sacks a central role in shaping cross-agency efforts, according to the draft summary, which officials noted was still in flux and open to many more changes.

Trump's intervention comes as Republicans in Congress debate whether to back federal pre-emption of state AI rules — an idea that has repeatedly failed on Capitol Hill amid bipartisan opposition.

House Majority Leader Steve Scalise is currently attempting to attach such a provision to the must-pass annual defence policy bill due in the coming weeks.

Writing on Truth Social on Tuesday, Trump said that investment in AI, while on one end was helping to make the US economy "the hottest in the world", was simultaneously being endangered by this very overregulation of states, adding that it was "threatening to undermine this growth engine".

He further accused several states of attempting to "embed DEI ideology into AI models" and argued that only a national standard could prevent what he called "woke AI".

The draft executive order, titled Eliminating State Law Obstruction of National AI Policy, directs federal agencies to move quickly to counter state regulations that conflict with what it describes as a "minimally burdensome" federal approach.

Within 30 days, it instructs the attorney general to establish an AI Litigation Task Force to challenge state laws, including on grounds that they improperly regulate interstate commerce.

It also requires federal agencies to identify state measures that contradict the order's objectives, particularly those that could force AI developers to disclose information in ways the administration says may violate First Amendment protections.

Within 90 days, Federal Communications Commission chair Brendan Carr would have to consider creating a federal reporting and disclosure framework for AI models that could override state rules.

Federal Trade Commission chair Andrew Ferguson would be asked to issue guidance on how the FTC Act's prohibition on unfair or deceptive practices applies to AI systems.

Sacks and the White House Office of Legislative Affairs would also be tasked with drafting legislative recommendations for a national regulatory framework that explicitly pre-empts state law.

States that refuse to align with the framework could risk losing federal funds.

The draft directs the Commerce Department to outline eligibility conditions for states seeking remaining Broadband Equity, Access and Deployment funding and asks all agencies to assess whether state AI legislation conflicts with federal policy when distributing grants.

While ultimately it does not have any legal authorisation to override state regulations directly — a power reserved for Congress —Washington's validation is a significant factor, as it can instruct the agencies concerned, who in turn can move to apply pressure, coordinate litigation and build momentum for a national standard.

A White House official, responding to questions about the draft, said any discussion of executive orders was speculative until formally announced.

Meanwhile, Republicans in Congress are racing to determine whether a pre-emption clause can be added to the defence bill, though previous attempts have been firmly rejected.

Senate Majority Whip John Thune, commenting on these developments, noted that lawmakers are looking for an approach that respects state authority while recognising the importance of protecting interstate commerce.

The debate has also caused fissures within the Republicans beyond Capitol Hill, as the GOP officials, such as Florida governor Ron DeSantis, Arkansas governor Sarah Huckabee Sanders, and conservative activist Mike Davis have all opposed federal pre-emption, calling it a concession to Big Tech.

Shefali says she's made to feel guilty for asking fixed hours

Only after 'Delhi Crime' became a hit was she able to ask for a fixed working time on her projects

Many actors have shared their two cents on Deepika Padukone's debate about an eight-hour shift for actors. In a recent interaction, Shefali Shah shared her experience and how only after her web show 'Delhi Crime' became a hit, she was able to ask for a fixed working time on her projects.

Speaking to 'News18', she said, "After all this time, after 'Delhi Crime', after me headlining a show, now I get what I ask for. Earlier, it was out of the question. For the longest time, I haven't had any agent. Now, I have someone with me who is very fierce and she goes all out to protect me. Also, now there is a thing that says, 'If this is not possible, then I will not do the project'. Earlier, whatever they said, I agreed."

The Bollywood actress revealed that she is called out for showing tantrums

"Recently, Vipul Shah (her husband and producer) was talking to my assistant and told her that she has to get me out of the set after the agreed time because I can't shoot for 24 hours. He told her, 'She has to be taken out of there. She has to be physically moved out'. I am still made to feel guilty about it in certain ways," she added.

The actress admitted that though her requests from makers are very basic, like providing a suite and clean toilets, she is called out for showing tantrums. "I believe I am a very reasonable person. I ask for basic things and there is logic when I ask for things. You need a good room or a suite. But they ask, 'Why do you need a suite?' Because my hair, makeup and everything is set up over there. In a hotel room, where is the space beyond the bed? So, where will I keep all of these things? You want to do creative meetings with me? Where will I sit? On my bed? Would you allow it? It's a basic thing. But people see it as a luxury. If not, then give me an office space where I can do my trials."

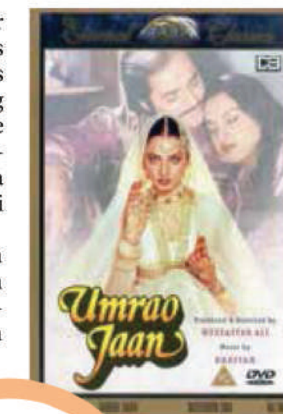
Talking about how many actors ignore the comfort of their team members, Shefali said, "When I'm asking for a vanity van, I am asking it not just for myself, but also for my team. I don't like my team standing outside in the heat or the rain. A lot of actors don't care, but I don't like it. You are asking for a decent van and a toilet and not just for yourself. I also speak for my team." AGENCIES

IFFI 2025

'Umrao Jaan' & other restored classics to be screened

'Umrao Jaan' and 'Gaman' are two of the Muzaffar Ali films that have been restored and will be screened on November 21 and 22

PANAJI: Rekha-starrer 'Umrao Jaan', Guru Dutt's 'Pyaasa' and Ritwik Ghatak's 'Subarnarekha' are among the 10 restored classics to be screened at the 55th International Film Festival of India (IFFI), taking place in Panaji till November 28.



Prasad, global leader in film preservation, restoration and post-production, collaborated with NFDC-NFAI on their restoration initiative to meticulously revive these films that represent some of the most powerful creative voices of Indian cinema, a release said here.

'Party' and 'Pyaasa' will be screened at the festival on November 24

'Umrao Jaan' and 'Gaman' are two of the Muzaffar Ali films that have been restored and will be screened on November 21 and 22. Restored version of Kalpana Lajmi's 'Rudaali', starring Dimple Kapadia, will also be screened on November 22. Ritwik Ghatak's 'Subarnarekha' will be screened on November 23 along with the 1951 movie 'Murliwala'. Govind Nihlani's 1984 film 'Party' and Guru Dutt's 1957 classic 'Pyaasa' will be screened at the festival on November 24. In contrast, Shyam Benegal's 1987 film 'Susman' and Sibi Malayil's 'Kireedam' will be shown on November 27. Hrishikesh Mukherjee's 1957 film 'Musafir' will be showcased on the final day of the festival. PTI

Paused work on two films for 'The Family Man': Raj & DK

Raj Nidimoru and Krishna DK said they decided to take a leap of faith by venturing into the long format with 'The Family Man' and are now happy that the risk paid off in a big way.

Looking back, the directors, who also wrote the horror-comedy hit 'Stree' in 2018, are happy that they took the risk

Known for hits such as crime comedy '99', 'Shor in the City' and 'Go Goa Gone', the filmmaker duo, collectively known to audiences as Raj & DK, were working on a film and prepping for another but decided to pause them for the 'Prime Video' series, which became a runaway hit on the platform after its premiere in 2019. The second season came out in 2021 and was also universally praised.

Looking back, the directors, who also wrote the horror-comedy hit 'Stree' in 2018, are happy that they took the risk.

"We had to pause on the film we were working on at that time and the next film and said we want to do long format. We wanted to do this story. We even had 'Farzi' at that time, but we chose this and said to ourselves, 'We should go into this'. Not many filmmakers were venturing into long format." AGENCIES

'HOMEBOUND' to release on Netflix on November 21

Karan Johar said 'Homebound' is the kind of story that reminds one why stories matter

NEW DELHI: Homebound', India's official entry for the 98th Academy Awards, is now set for its streaming release on 'Netflix' on November 21 after completing its theatrical run.

Directed by Neeraj Ghaywan, 'Homebound' follows childhood friends Shoaib (Ishaan Khatter) and Chandan (Vishal Jethwa) whose shared dream of joining the police force shapes their lives, with Janhvi Kapoor adding emotional depth to a story grounded in friendship, duty and the pressures facing young India.

The film is produced by Karan Johar, Adar Poonawalla, Apoorva Mehta, Somen Mishra and co-produced by Marijke D'Souza and Melita Toscan Du Plantier, along with Martin Scorsese and Pravin Khairnar acting as the executive producers.

"Inspired by a true story of friendship, 'Homebound' explores the universal themes of connection and compassion as forms of quiet resistance. After screening in

The film is directed by Neeraj Ghaywan and produced by Karan Johar

competition at some of the world's most prestigious festivals and being loved by everyone, it has now found a home on 'Netflix', reaching audiences in 190 countries. I am truly excited for this opportunity and deeply value my long-standing relationship with 'Netflix' throughout my career," Ghaywan said.

Johar said 'Homebound' is the kind of story that reminds one why stories matter. "As producers, supporting a film like this has been a privilege. Seeing the film reach 'Netflix' allows it to connect with audiences far beyond its immediate world and that journey is incredibly special for us at 'Dharma,'" Johar added.

Monika Shergill, Vice-President, Content, 'Netflix India', said they were delighted to welcome 'Homebound' to 'Netflix' after its acclaimed theatrical run. "It is a film that explores an extraordinarily nuanced emotional landscape - one that only a storyteller like Neeraj Ghaywan could bring to life with such empathy and honesty. His voice continues to redefine the grammar of contemporary Indian storytelling." PTI

Vivek Oberoi says the world will forget superstars by 2050

The Bollywood actor believes that youngsters don't know legendary actor Raj Kapoor

Shah Rukh Khan has been a star in the movies for over 30 years now and in the last few years, many have said that Shah Rukh is the last of the stars, but Vivek Oberoi believes that there is a possibility that the world might forget SRK in the next couple of decades. In a recent interview, Vivek said that after a while, one is just reduced to a footnote in history and added that while someone like Raj Kapoor is like a god to cinephiles, the current generation might not even know about him.

'In 2050, people might ask, 'Who is Shah Rukh Khan?' says Oberoi

In a chat with 'Pinkvilla', Vivek said, "Which film, starring who worked in the 1960s, you ask anyone about that today, nobody cares. You will anyway be relegated to history."

"In 2050, people might ask, 'Who is Shah Rukh Khan?', perhaps," he added.

Oberoi then quickly brought in Raj Kapoor into the conversation and said that fans of Ranbir Kapoor might not know much about his grandfather. "Like people today might ask, 'Who is Raj Kapoor?' You and I, we call him the god of cinema, but if you ask any youngster who is a fan of Ranbir Kapoor, they might not even know who Raj Kapoor was. So maybe history relegates you into nothingness," he said.

Shah Rukh Khan is one of the biggest superstars of the last few decades. The actor was last seen in three films in 2023 - 'Pathan', 'Jawan' and 'Dunki'. The three films made over Rs 2,600 crore worldwide. AGENCIES

I just thought the world of Sarah Snook, says Jake Lacy

NEW DELHI: The White Lotus' star Jake Lacy, who is currently starring in 'All Her Fault', said he was really keen to work with 'Succession' star Sarah Snook and that was part of the reason he decided to do the show.

In 'All Her Fault', Snook's Marissa Irvine goes to pick up her son Milo from his first playdate with a boy at his school, only to realise that he has been kidnapped. Marissa and her husband, Peter (Lacy), accompanied by a fellow parent, Jenny (Dakota Fanning), begin a search that unravels many family secrets. The series is currently streaming on 'JioHotstar' in India.

"Sarah was attached when they started speaking to me about doing it and I'm a huge fan of her work and we had met prior, so I just thought the world of her. And I was very excited to get to work with her," the actor told PTI.

Lacy said he had also worked with directors Minkie Spiro and Kate Dennis in the past and really liked their work. "I didn't know the full scope of my character in the story when I signed on," the 39-year-old said, adding that he was lucky to be part of a show with talented actors like Fanning, Sophia Lillis, Jay Ellis, Daniel Monks, Duke McCloud and Michael Pena.

The actors currently star in the 'Peacock' series 'All Her Fault'

He added, "It's a wonderful group. I've been very lucky to work on projects where I like the people on the product; it makes this work very easy, because you don't have to lie. You just get to go like, 'I really love these people'. I'm super proud of what we made. And they're all as advertised, like good people and very talented."

The 'Peacock' series is based on the 2021 novel of the same name by Andrea Mara. The actor admitted that he went through the book several times to put the pieces together. PTI

DEFENCE EXPORTS HAVE ALSO SEEN AN UNPRECEDENTED RISE

India posts highest-ever defence output of ₹1.54 lakh crore in FY25

OUR CORRESPONDENT

NEW DELHI: The government on Thursday said that India recorded its highest-ever defence production of Rs 1.54 lakh crore in FY 2024–25, setting a new benchmark in the country's pursuit of self-reliance in the defence sector. This growth is supported by the record indigenous production of Rs 1,27,434 crore in FY 24, a staggering 174 per cent increase from Rs 46,429 crore in FY15.

Similarly, once negligible defence exports have also seen an unprecedented rise. From under Rs 1,000 crore in 2014, India's defence exports touched Rs 23,622 crore in FY25, reflecting a 12 per cent year-on-year growth. India is now supplying a wide range of military platforms, ammunition, sub-systems, and hardware to 80–100 countries, including technologically advanced nations such as the US and France, as well as strategic partners like Armenia.

The government attributed this surge to a "fully digital export authorisation framework, simplified licensing, and the rollout of Open General Export Licences." Defence PSUs or DPSUs alone recorded a 42.85 per cent increase in export volumes in FY25 — a sign, officials said, of "growing global confidence in Indian defence capabilities."

The Ministry of Defence, on its part, in an official communiqué, vaunted the self-reliance policy, stating that "the initiative has fundamentally reshaped the defence industrial landscape." It further lauded the fact that India's defence budget has almost tripled over the last decade — rising from Rs 2.53 lakh crore in FY14 to Rs 6.81 lakh crore in FY26 — demonstrating, according to the ministry, an "unambiguous commitment to strengthening military infrastructure through modernisation and local manufacturing."

From under Rs 1,000 crore in 2014, India's defence exports touched Rs 23,622 crore in FY25, reflecting a 12% year-on-year rise

Highlights

- India is now supplying a wide range of military platforms, ammunition, sub-systems, and hardware to 80–100 countries
- Defence PSUs alone recorded a 42.85% increase in export volumes in FY25
- The most notable transformation is rising contribution of private players, whose share increased from 21% in FY24 to 23% in FY25

The government attributed this growth to the performance of both public and private sectors, more liberal foreign investment norms and an accelerated shift towards indigenisation. "The public sector entities, including DPSUs, continue to dominate, accounting for around 77 per cent of total output," ministry officials said, adding that "the most notable transformation is the rising contribution of private players", whose share increased from 21 per cent in FY24 to 23 per cent in FY25.

A network of close to 16,000 MSMEs is becoming a vital driver of innovation, providing drones, avionics, components, and advanced electronic systems. The government said that before 2014, India's procurement processes were crippled by delays, restrictive policies, and heavy reliance on foreign suppliers, which resulted in capability gaps across the Armed Forces. It added that with defence exports standing at only Rs 686 crore in FY14, India was widely regarded as a major importer rather than a competitive manufacturer.

The government terms the launch of the Defence Production and Export Promotion Policy (DPEPP) as a big "game-changer." Positive indigenisation lists, liberalised FDI norms — up to 74 per cent under the automatic route and 100 per cent through government approval — and a strong push toward R&D have collectively accelerated domestic capability-building. The rollout of a Rs 1 lakh crore Research, Development and Innovation (RDI) Scheme has further strengthened collaboration among DPSUs, private companies, MSMEs and start-ups.

A set of reforms at the institutional level, notably the Defence Acquisition Procedure (DAP) 2020 and the Defence Procurement Manual (DPM) 2025, has streamlined procurement processes while embedding transparency and faster decision-making. According to the ministry, DAP 2020 has been particularly transformational insofar as it accords topmost priority to the Buy (Indian–IDDM) category to ensure preference for systems that are indigenously designed, developed and manufactured. It has also opened up avenues for emerging technologies like AI, robotics, advanced sensors, cyber warfare systems and space-based assets.

DPM 2025, in turn, standardises and simplifies rules for revenue procurement, reduces liquidated damages for indigenisation projects, removes outdated No Objection Certificate requirements, and introduces digital tools for e-procurement and monitoring.

The momentum is evident in major acquisition approvals: government data shows that over the past two years, the Defence Acquisition Council has cleared record numbers of indigenous procurement proposals, ranging from medium-altitude long-endurance drones and torpedoes to missile systems, radars, naval guns, electronic warfare systems and autonomous underwater platforms.

In FY25 alone, the Ministry of Defence signed 193 contracts worth Rs 2,09,050 crore — the highest ever in any single financial year — with 177 of these awarded to domestic industry. India's two Defence Industrial Corridors, one each in Uttar Pradesh and Tamil Nadu, have also emerged as powerful catalysts for growth. Together, they have attracted over Rs 9,145 crore in actual investments, backed by 289 MoUs promising over Rs 66,423 crore in potential opportunities.

These corridors are emerging as high-value manufacturing, testing, and industrial collaboration hubs. The ministry went on to highlight how the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) has grown beyond research to emerge as a "strategic enabler." It now leads from the front on technology transfers, supports start-ups, and encourages linkages between industry and academia through 15 Defence Industry–Academia Centres of Excellence.

A dedicated Rs 500 crore Technology Development Fund is promoting deep-tech projects, while the restructuring of the Ordnance Factory Board into seven defence companies has allowed for greater autonomy and efficiency in production.

India's growing defence exports are increasingly becoming instruments of strategic diplomacy. Training programmes, logistics partnerships, joint development efforts and supply of equipment now complement India's defence relations with partner nations.

The widening export basket, including bulletproof jackets, surveillance systems, radars, lightweight torpedoes, Dornier aircraft and Chetak helicopters, underlines the breadth of domestic technological advancement.

Looking ahead, the government has set ambitious targets of Rs 3 lakh crore in defence manufacturing and Rs 50,000 crore in exports by 2029.

City Gas operators set for 8–12% margin recovery in current fiscal

OUR CORRESPONDENT

NEW DELHI: City gas operators, selling CNG to automobiles and piped cooking gas to household kitchens, are expected to post an operating profit of Rs 7.2–7.5 per standard cubic metre (scm) in the current fiscal, an 8–12 per cent recovery from the sharp margin erosion seen in the second half of last year, Crisil Ratings said Thursday.

The rebound comes as city gas distributors (CGD) operators secure higher volumes of contracted gas to counter last year's steep cut in administered price mechanism (APM) allocation for the compressed natural gas (CNG) segment.

A sudden drop in APM supply during the latter half of 2024-25 had forced CGD players into the spot market, where gas was 80–100 per cent costlier than APM-linked volumes.

Spot purchases surged to over 15 per cent of total supply, from about 5 per cent in the first half of the year, pushing up procurement costs. Companies have since shifted towards medium- and long-term contracts to stabilise supplies and reduce volatility.

"CGD companies will clock an operating profit of Rs 7.2–7.5 per scm this fiscal, up 8–12 per cent compared with the second half of last fiscal," Crisil Ratings said in a note.

With the sharp decline in allocation of cheaper APM gas, which is turned into CNG for supply to automobiles and piped to households and industries, CGD companies had to take recourse to the spot gas market for supply, which exerted upward pressure on cost. The companies have thereafter transitioned to contracted supplies, which is expected to burnish margins.

An assessment of seven CGD companies - together accounting for around 70 per cent of industry volumes - indicates that stronger earnings will keep leverage contained despite ongoing capital expenditure in existing and newly awarded geographical areas.

The rebound comes as city gas distributors secure higher volumes of contracted gas to counter last year's steep cut in APM allocation for CNG

CGD operators receive priority APM gas from legacy fields for the domestic CNG and piped natural gas (PNG) segments. The balance is met through high-pressure, high-temperature (HPHT) gas and imported regasified liquefied natural gas (R-LNG) under both contracted and spot arrangements.

"Against the 30 per cent cut in APM allocation, companies secured 15–20 per cent long-term domestic new-well gas towards the end of last fiscal and early this one," said Ankit Hakhu, Director, Crisil Ratings.

"They have also added medium- and long-term HPHT and R-LNG contracts. This will lift gas security and cut exposure to spot markets, where prices remain 25–30 per cent higher. Overall procurement costs should fall about 5 per cent this fiscal versus the second half of last year."

Realisations have stayed stable this year, following price hikes implemented late last fiscal to partly pass on increased costs. Some savings from lower gas procurement will, however, be offset by rising operating expenses due to continued network expansion.

"The combination of lower procurement costs and steady realisation should take operating profit back to Rs 7.2–7.5 per scm—levels seen before the APM cut - from about Rs 6.7 per scm in the second half of last fiscal," said Ankush Tyagi, Associate Director.

He added that CGD demand is set to grow 8–10 per cent this year, after a 15 per cent rise last year, supported by expanding networks, favourable fuel economics - CNG remains 20–40 per cent cheaper than petrol or diesel - and a potential demand lift from lower GST rates on automobiles.

Improved margins and higher volumes are expected to boost cash accrual by roughly 10 per cent, helping fund capex while keeping leverage near 1.0x Ebitda. Most CGD companies continue to operate with minimal external debt, backed by mature geographical areas that contribute steady volumes.

Mahindra group aims 8-fold rise in auto sector revenue by FY30

NEW DELHI: Mahindra Group is aiming for an eight-fold growth in consolidated revenue of its auto sector by FY30, betting big on SUVs and light commercial vehicles.

The group's auto sector had clocked a consolidated revenue of Rs 90,825 crore in FY25, growing 3.2 times from FY2019-20, it said in its investor presentation.

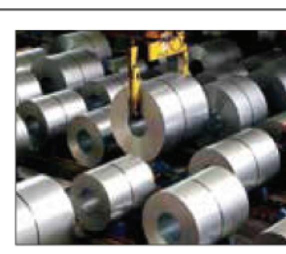
Spelling out its ambition "to be the world's fastest growing SUV brand", the group said its "authentic 'adventure-ready' products" will not only tap the 70 per cent of the Indian passenger vehicles market but will also "go global" targeting right hand drive markets in the United Kingdom, Australia, New Zealand and South Africa besides left hand drive market in Europe.

The automaker said it aims to electrify India's last mile mobility with a million EVs on road by 2031.

Mahindra & Mahindra also plans to expand the electric commercial vehicle exports to over 10 markets globally, it added. PTI

Govt extends exemption from QCO for certain steel grades until March

NEW DELHI: The government has extended the deadline for the rollout of mandatory quality norms for the import of certain steel and stainless products until March 2026, in a bid to ensure the availability of critical steel products.



The Ministry of Steel had earlier granted exemption from mandatory compliance with the Quality Control Order (QCO) for specified steel products for imports until October 31, 2025.

In a statement on Thursday, the ministry said, "The exemption has been extended to imports with Bill of Lading having shipped on board date on or before 31.03.2026."

Exemption has also been extended on three Indian Standards (IS) applicable to stainless steel flat products—IS 6911, IS 5522 and IS 15997, till March 2026 from December 31, 2025.

The move is aimed at preserving the interests of stakeholders and ensuring steady market availability of critical steel products as domestic production capacities scale up in line with national self-reliance objectives, it stated.

The Ministry said it has taken the move after reviewing the concerns of industry participants.

In a separate statement, the Ministry announced easing rules for the import of grades which are not covered under the QCOs after recommendations of a high-level committee.

"Based on the recommendations of the High-Level Committee on Non-Financial Regulatory Reforms (HLC-NFRR), it has been decided that steel grades not covered by any QCO will no longer require clarification or NOC from the Ministry of Steel," the statement said. PTI

India, Israel ink ToR to formally launch FTA talks

TEL AVIV: India and Israel on Thursday inked terms of reference (ToR) to formally launch negotiations for a free trade agreement, Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal said. The ToR include market access for goods by eliminating tariff and non-tariff barriers, investment facilitation, simplification of customs procedures, increasing cooperation for innovation and technology transfer, and easing norms to promote trade in services.

"We have signed the ToRs today. Now we will soon finalise the dates for starting the negotiations for that," Goyal said here. He will meet leaders and businesses to discuss ways to boost bilateral trade and investments. The TOR was signed by Goyal and Israeli Economy and Industry Minister Nir Barkat. Goyal said that the Israeli side has conveyed that they will not seek market access in sensitive areas such as dairy, rice, wheat and sugar.

He also informed that Israel has come out with a pre-qualification for a metro project. It's a $50 billion worth project and Indian companies can participate in this, Goyal said.

India and Israel had earlier engaged in negotiating a similar agreement and eight rounds of talks were held. During FY25, India's exports to Israel dipped 52 per cent to $2.14 billion from $4.52 billion in FY24. Imports, too, fell 26.2 per cent to $1.48 billion last fiscal year.

India is Israel's second-largest trading partner in Asia. Though bilateral merchandise trade is dominated mainly by diamonds, petroleum products, and chemicals, recent years have witnessed an increase in trade in areas such as electronic machinery and high-tech products, communications systems, and medical equipment.

Major exports from India to Israel include pearls and precious stones, automotive diesel, chemical and mineral products, machinery and electrical equipment, plastics, textiles, apparel, base metals and transport equipment, and agricultural products.

Imports include pearls and precious stones, chemical and mineral/fertiliser products, machinery and electrical equipment, petroleum oils, defence, machinery, and transport equipment.

In September, both countries inked a Bilateral Investment Agreement (BIA), under which India has cut down the local remedies exhaustion period for Israeli investors to three years from the earlier five years. During April 2000 and June 2025, India received $337.77 million FDI from Israel. PTI

TCS & TPG to invest ₹18K cr in data centre biz

MUMBAI: Tata Consultancy Services (TCS), the country's largest IT services firm, on Thursday announced a partnership with global private equity major TPG for its upcoming AI-focused data centre venture, 'Hypervault'. The two partners will jointly infuse around Rs 18,000 crore in equity into the new business.

TPG will be the sole equity partner, investing $1 billion (about Rs 8,820 crore) for a 27.5–49 per cent stake. The tie-up comes just weeks after TCS unveiled its foray into the data centre space with plans to build 1 GW of capacity requiring about $6.5 billion (Rs 57,600 crore) in investment.

The company plans to set up facilities in Navi Mumbai, Hyderabad and Chennai over the next five years. The land parcels may come from TCS, the Tata Group, or be newly acquired. TCS CEO and MD K Krithivasan told PTI that the partners will contribute a combined $2 billion in equity, while the remaining requirement will be financed through debt. He reiterated that TPG will remain the only equity investor.

TCS said the partnership will help reduce capital intensity, enhance shareholder returns and strengthen the value proposition of the Hypervault platform. Tata Sons Chairman N Chandrasekaran said the collaboration will allow TCS to tap soaring AI demand and bolster its partnerships with hyperscalers and AI companies. The company believes its existing relationships with cloud providers, including AWS, and its AI capabilities position it strongly to capture market demand.

India's data centre sector has been drawing significant interest due to data localisation requirements and rising digital consumption, prompting major conglomerates such as Reliance and Adani to announce GW-scale plans. Krithivasan stressed that TCS views the venture not as a real estate play but as a synergistic business that leverages the Tata Group's strengths in renewable energy, real estate, construction and security infrastructure.

TPG Executive Chairman Jim Coulter said data centres sit at the intersection of green energy, technology and real estate, making them a multi-faceted asset class. TPG's investment will be channelled through TPG Rise Climate and its Global South Initiative, alongside support from its Asia Real Estate business. AGENCIES

ITC voluntarily delists its shares from Calcutta Stock Exchange Ltd

NEW DELHI: Diversified conglomerate ITC on Thursday said it has completed the process of voluntary delisting of its shares from the Calcutta Stock Exchange Limited (CSE).

The Calcutta Stock Exchange has granted its approval for voluntary delisting of the ordinary shares of ITC from its "official list of exchange" with effect from November 20, 2025, said ITC in a regulatory filing.

"It may be noted that the ordinary shares of the company will continue to remain listed on the National Stock Exchange of India Limited and BSE Limited," said ITC.

Earlier on October 30, the board of ITC in its meeting had approved voluntary delisting of the company's ordinary shares from CSE, pursuant to Regulations 5 and 6 of the SEBI (Delisting of Equity Shares) Regulations, 2021.

Following that, it had written a letter to CSE informing its decision to delist.

On November 19, 2025, CSE, through a letter, informed approval for the voluntary delisting of its shares.

CSE, founded in 1908, is one of India's oldest bourses. Trading at CSE was suspended by SEBI in April 2013 following regulatory non-compliance. After years of efforts to revive operations and contest SEBI directives in courts, the exchange has now decided to back out of the business and seek a voluntary exit from its stock exchange licence. PTI

Reliance stops Russian oil use at its only-for-export refinery to comply with EU sanctions

Reliance is India's largest buyer of Russian oil, which it processes and turns into fuel, such as petrol & diesel, at its giant oil refining complex at Jamnagar

NEW DELHI: Reliance Industries Ltd on Thursday said it has halted the use of Russian crude at its export-only refinery in Jamnagar, Gujarat, as the company moves to comply with European Union sanctions.

Reliance is India's largest buyer of Russian oil, which it processes and turns into fuel, such as petrol and diesel, at its giant oil refining complex at Jamnagar. The complex is made up of two refineries - one SEZ unit from which fuels are exported to the European Union, the US and other markets, and an older unit that caters to the domestic market.

The European Union - a big market for Reliance - has imposed wide-ranging sanctions targeting Russia's energy revenues, including measures that restrict the import and sale of fuels produced from Russian crude oil.

To comply with these, Reliance has stopped processing Russian crude oil at its only-for-exports (SEZ) refinery. "We have stopped importing Russian crude oil into our SEZ refinery with effect from November 20," a company spokesperson said in a statement.

As is the case with any large industrial factory, the refinery must have past raw material (crude oil) inventories, which it is currently processing and turning into fuels. Once the old inventory runs out, newer products will only be made from non-Russian oil.

"From December 1, all product exports from the SEZ refinery will be obtained from non-Russian crude oil," the firm said. "The transition has been completed ahead of schedule to ensure full compliance with product-import restrictions coming into force in January 2026." Last month, when the US sanctioned Russia's largest oil exporters - Rosneft and Lukoil, the firm had stated that it would meet all applicable restrictions and would adjust its refinery operations to meet compliance requirements.

"We have noted the recent restrictions announced by the European Union, the United Kingdom and the United States on crude oil imports from Russia and export of refined products to Europe. Reliance is currently assessing the implications, including the new compliance requirements," Reliance had said on October 24.

Reliance, which operates the world's largest single-site oil refining complex at Jamnagar in Gujarat, purchased about half of the 1.7-1.8 million barrels per day of discounted Russian crude being shipped to India.

The company refines the crude into petrol, diesel and aviation turbine fuel (ATF), a large share of which is exported to regions such as Europe and the United States, at market prices, generating strong margins. All this may change after US President Donald Trump imposed sanctions on Open Joint Stock Company Rosneft Oil Company (Rosneft) and Lukoil OAO — Russia's two largest oil companies that he accuses of helping fund the Kremlin's "war machine" in Ukraine.

Additionally, the European Union has barred the import of fuel made from Russian crude, starting January 2026. "We will comply with the EU's guidelines on the import of refined products into Europe," Reliance had said. On Thursday, the firm said the crude oil import in SEZ is a fully segregated facility catering to the production line in SEZ.

"All pre-committed liftings of Russian crude oil as of October 22, 2025, are being honoured, considering all transport arrangements were already in place." "The final such cargo was loaded on November 12. Any (Russian) cargoes arriving on or after November 20 will be received and processed at our refinery in the domestic tariff area," it said. PTI

How Grassroot Women Rebuilt Their Own Destiny

From Lab Technician to "Nutri Health" Queen

Prajakta Kapile grew up in a modest family of five in Sinnar, Nashik. Like many young people from small towns, she chose a secure career path. With a B.Sc. and a diploma in medical laboratory technology, she secured a lab technician position and earned Rs. 30,000 per month. The job brought stability, but it also brought monotony. Day after day, she worked inside the lab, following the same routine. Deep inside, Prajakta longed to do something different.

Managing household expenses was not easy for her. Her salary was insufficient to cover the expenses. At the same time, she noticed a shift around her. People were becoming health-conscious. They made informed choices by carefully reading labels, avoiding processed snacks, and opting for healthier alternatives. Prajakta seized the opportunity and turned her dream into reality.

She launched a small home-based bakery. She taught herself through practice and numerous trials, despite not having any formal training. Her first products were simple but innovative. She produced dry fruit chocolates, millet-based sugar-free cookies, and laddus made from nuts and seeds. Customers liked the taste, but the journey was not smooth.

Running a business from a rented space came with many hurdles. Prajakta had to pay rent, courier charges, and even staff salaries from her limited earnings. As orders grew, a bigger challenge appeared-packaging. The pouches would tear during delivery, and cookies often turned soft. She knew she had to solve this if she wanted her brand to survive.

At this stage, Prajakta came across YouthAid Foundation's Entrepreneurship Development Program. This introduced her to the basics of business growth. She learned how to choose durable packaging, use social media for branding, gather customer feedback, and scale production with small machinery. A seed fund of Rs. 10,000 helped her buy a packing machine. This modest investment turned out to be a significant turning point. Her products now looked professional, stayed fresh, and built trust among customers.

With new confidence, Prajakta launched her brand, NutriHealth. She promoted her products on Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube. She created short videos explaining the health benefits of her cookies and laddus. People in gyms, yoga centers, offices, and even schools started talking about her snacks. Local journalists, ASHA workers, and friends became her first loyal customers and brand ambassadors.

Under NutriHealth, Prajakta focused on making food both healthy and tasty. Her products are high in protein and fibre, rich in calcium, 100% natural, sugar-free, oil-free, and gluten-free. She targeted busy professionals, students, fitness enthusiasts, and families who wanted nutritious food without compromising on taste. Prajakta's message is simple: "Eat only what is right for your health."

What began as a home experiment has now become a flourishing business. Today, Prajakta earns between Rs . 1 lakh and Rs . 1.5 lakh every month. More than income, she has gained confidence and respect. She showcased her products at the 2025 YESummit in Bengaluru, addressing a larger audience about her mission. For her, the most significant achievement is the ability to inspire others, especially rural women who want to step beyond traditional roles.

The Carpenter Who Rewrote Gender Roles in Her Village

When people hear the word "carpenter," they often imagine a man. However, here's a story that challenges this stereotype. Meet Anita Eknath Shelke from Shingote village in Nandurbar, Maharashtra, a woman who entered the male-dominated field of carpentry and carved her own path to success with the support of the YouthAid Foundation.

Anita's journey as a carpenter was marked by numerous difficulties. Despite her hard work, she struggled to earn a steady income and grow her business. Limited financial resources made it hard for her to invest in better tools or expand her reach. Competing with others was tough, especially since she lacked knowledge about modern business practices. Her income would drop during the off-season, and her customers were mostly from her village. Without proper marketing, it was hard to attract new clients. One of the biggest challenges she faced was learning to use digital tools to promote her work. As a woman in a male-dominated field, she also had to prove herself constantly, which added extra pressure.

In 2020, Anita's situation began to change when YouthAid Foundation (YAF) launched its Entrepreneurship Development Program in her village in collaboration with the local Gram Panchayat. The three-day training helped Anita and others learn about business planning, saving, financial management, marketing, and government schemes. The program also introduced her to the Vishwakarma Scheme, through which she received a voucher worth Rs. 15,000 and became eligible for a loan of up to Rs. 3 lakh at a lower interest rate.

With this support, Anita bought high-quality tools and materials, which helped her improve the quality of her work. Increased customer satisfaction boosted her confidence. Initially unsure about using digital platforms, she was guided by the facilitators of YAF, who taught her how to use social media to promote her carpentry work. Slowly, she learned how to post about her services, reach out to new customers, and make her business visible beyond her village. She also began managing her money better and quoting her prices smartly. These small steps brought significant changes.

Anita's monthly income doubled and grew from Rs. 7,000 to Rs. 15,000. Her work became more efficient. This enabled her to take more orders and deliver them on time. Due to her online presence, she now gets orders from nearby towns as well, which has helped her avoid income drops during the off-season. Most importantly, Anita now feels confident, skilled, and in control of her business. Her journey shows how guidance and support can empower women to succeed in fields where they are often overlooked.

Unleashing Entrepreneurial Spirit: Shashikala's Journey to Success

Shashikala Chauhan, a resident of Kanhe village in Pune district, embodies the spirit of entrepreneurship and resilience. Her journey, marked by struggles and triumphs, serves as a testament to the power of determination and the support it provides.

Shashikala's life took a dramatic turn during the COVID-19 pandemic. The lockdown left her struggling to make ends meet, and she even contemplated abandoning her family. However, fate had other plans. She stumbled upon an entrepreneurship training program organized by the YouthAid Foundation, which ignited a spark within her.

With the training and support from YouthAid Foundation and Mahindra Accelo, Shashikala mustered the courage to start her own business. She began by selling fruits and operating a tailoring shop from her home. Her hard work paid off, and she soon found herself earning a steady income of ₹10,000 to ₹12,000 per month.

Shashikala's story is a shining example of the 'Start-up India' initiative, which aims to promote entrepreneurship across the country. Her success demonstrates that education is not the only key to unlocking one's potential. Despite having limited formal education, Shashikala turned her talent for tailoring into a thriving business.

The entrepreneurship training program taught Shashikala essential skills such as financial literacy, strategic thinking, marketing, leadership, and digital technology. She also gained access to support networks of women entrepreneurs through the YAF's online platform "YesTalk." These networks provided a safe space for Shashikala to share her experiences, receive guidance, and connect with like-minded women.

Shashikala's journey is a beacon of hope for aspiring women entrepreneurs. She refuses to be held back by societal stereotypes and encourages young girls to pursue their dreams. Her motto, "Dream Big, Start Small, Scale Fast," serves as a reminder that success is within reach with determination and the proper support.

As Shashikala continues to grow and learn, she remains committed to her entrepreneurial journey. Her story serves as a testament to the impact of organizations like YouthAid Foundation, which provide critical support to entrepreneurs from marginalized communities. Shashikala's success is a shining example of the power of entrepreneurship and the importance of empowering women to take control of their lives.

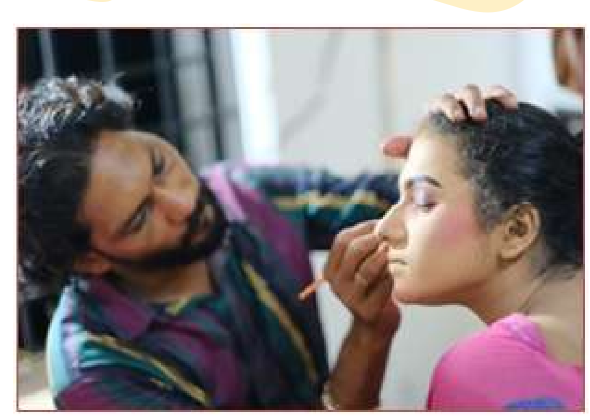
Shashikala's journey is a powerful reminder that entrepreneurship can be a catalyst for social change. Her story inspires us to believe in the potential of women entrepreneurs and the impact they can have on their communities. As we celebrate Shashikala's success, we must also recognize the importance of supporting marginalized entrepreneurs and providing them with the resources they need to thrive.

Empowered by Identity

In today's world, being accepted for who you are is still not easy. It takes real courage to live openly and honestly. Shyam's story shows how confidence and hard work can turn struggles into strength. Even after facing rejection and many challenges, he built an independent and hopeful life – proving that everyone deserves to live with dignity and pride.

Shyam realized he was gay when he was 15 years old. As he reached the age when families usually start planning marriages, his relatives began to suspect his truth. Instead of accepting him, they began to distance themselves. For many LGBTQIA+ youth in India, this is a familiar experience – the National Human Rights Commission reported in 2019 that over half of queer youth face rejection from their own families.

Even while facing loneliness, Shyam found comfort in dance and makeup. These creative outlets gave him strength and a sense of identity. At 17, he left his studies to start working and support himself. But the outside world did not accept him. Teachers in his dance and makeup classes treated him unfairly, and students bullied him. Clients often assumed that since he lived alone, he didn't need money. Without savings, he couldn't invest in makeup products in advance, which made it difficult for him to grow his business in a fast-changing industry.



Things began to change when Shyam came across YAF's Entrepreneurship Development Program through a WhatsApp group for the gay community. With guidance from Sandhya, a YAF staff member in Kerala, he joined the program. The sessions were simple, practical, and offered him a safe and welcoming space to learn. He gained knowledge in managing finances, setting prices, understanding market trends, and handling competition. YAF also supported him with a grant of Rs. 10,000 to expand his business. Shyam used it to buy makeup products in bulk, which allowed him to take on more clients and work independently. He joined a chit fund valued at Rs. 50,000 annually, which provided him with financial stability and confidence. During festivals and weddings, he now takes two to three makeup jobs each week.

Although the beauty industry continues to evolve and challenges remain, Shyam now faces them with confidence. Some people still judge him, but he no longer lets that stop him. The support and knowledge he gained from YAF have given him both skills and self-belief. Reflecting on his journey, Shyam says, "One of the biggest lessons I've learned is that we must define our own worth. I've shown my capabilities through hard work to those who once doubted me. Change begins with us, and when we rise, society takes notice. People now understand that our work and our lives are no different from those of others."

Building Dreams – A Transwoman's Rise from Margins to Meaning

Dhanya, a transwoman, lives in Kannur, Kerala. Her story shows that she is much more than her gender. It is a journey from rejection and poverty to dignity and independence. Like many LGBTQIA+ people in India, Dhanya faced exclusion from society. At 20, she was forced to leave her home because of her identity, with no education and no money.

For nearly ten years, she moved between cities, staying in shelters and doing small jobs. Wherever she went, people judged her- co-workers made fun of her, employers refused to hire her, and suppliers did not trust her. Still, Dhanya never gave up or turned to unsafe work. She held on to her dream of living with dignity through honest work.

When Kerala introduced a transgender policy to support inclusion, Dhanya returned to her hometown and took charge of a small, petty shop. She worked hard, but wholesalers would not give her credit, and customers did not prefer to buy from her.

During this difficult time, a local priest introduced her to Sandhya, an outreach worker from YAF. Sandhya encouraged Dhanya to join YAF's Entrepreneurship Development Program (EDP).

The training helped her in acquiring all the essential skills required to operate a business successfully. With better supplies and skills, Dhanya's shop began to grow. She now saves ₹400 every day and has hired two helpers. The same community that once doubted her now respects her as a hardworking businesswoman.

Her most significant achievement was when her mother, who once could not accept her, began to recognize Dhanya's courage and determination. Today, Dhanya is more than a label. She is a leader, a provider, and an inspiration. Her story shows that with support and opportunity, people from marginalized communities can build lives of dignity and independence."We do not need sympathy, we need opportunity. We do not want to be hidden; we want to be heard. We are more than what the world thinks of us," says Dhanya.