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कामाचाच माणूस

गृहीत



A heartfelt tribute

With deep sorrow, we offer our heartfelt tribute to

Hon. Late Shri Ajitdada Pawar Saheb

Deputy Chief Minister of Maharashtra

Our humble prayers for the eternal peace of his departed soul.



In Mourning

Hon. Venkatrao Gaikwad

Former Secretary, Water Resources Department, Government of Maharashtra

Courtesy : Rajesahab Manikrao Agale (Ambajogai)



Hope and Risk

On the eve of every Union Budget, Parliament is presented with the Economic Survey—a document that does more than review numbers. It signals the direction of the economy, frames expectations, and, increasingly, warns of risks ahead. The Economic Survey presented this year offers a nuanced picture of India in 2026: a country standing on strong economic foundations, yet surrounded by global uncertainty. It inspires confidence, but also urges caution.

Bhaga Warkhade

At its core, the Survey acknowledges India's relative resilience in a turbulent world. While international geopolitics, financial market volatility, and trade disruptions dominate the global narrative, India continues to benefit from a large domestic market, improving macroeconomic fundamentals, and a comfortable foreign exchange buffer. These factors provide a protective shield against external shocks. However, the Survey makes it clear that this shield is not impenetrable.

The document outlines three broad global scenarios for 2026. The first, a "managed disorder" scenario, assumes that the world largely continues along the 2025 trajectory, albeit with weakened safeguards. In such an environment, even small economic disturbances

could snowball into larger crises. The probability of this scenario is estimated at 40–45 per cent. The second scenario is more severe, projecting escalating tensions among major powers, leading to a reordering of trade and security frameworks, intensified sanctions, and prolonged conflicts. This scenario, too, carries a similar probability. The third and most dangerous possibility involves an artificial intelligence-related systemic shock. With massive global investments in AI—much of it debt-funded—a failure to deliver expected returns could trigger a financial crisis worse than that of 2008. Though less likely, with a 10–20 per cent probability, its impact would be profound.

Against this backdrop, India's relative stability stands out, but the

Survey warns against complacency. Rising global tensions could dampen foreign investment inflows, put pressure on the rupee, and widen external vulnerabilities. As incomes grow, so will import demand, making export growth and foreign exchange earnings critical. The message is clear: resilience must be actively built, not passively assumed.

The Survey advocates a development strategy that combines long-term endurance with short-term agility—likened to running a marathon while being ready to sprint when crises arise. Policy credibility, administrative discipline, and institutional trust emerge as India's real strengths in uncertain times. Rather than panic, the focus should be on

securing supply chains with strategic intent, diversifying export avenues, and ensuring that Indian consumers and businesses remain globally competitive.

Encouragingly, the Survey notes that despite tariff shocks from the United States and unexpected trade barriers, India's economy has continued to gather momentum.

Structural reforms, GST rationalisation, sectoral policy changes, and liberalisation in areas such as insurance and nuclear energy have contributed to this resilience. Inflation remains under control, providing relief to households, while labour law reforms promise greater efficiency and clarity for industry.

Yet, contradictions persist. India's macroeconomic performance may be among the strongest in decades, but the global system no longer rewards such performance with currency stability or assured capital flows. External risks remain real, particularly in the form of volatile capital movements and rising fiscal populism at the state level, which could push up sovereign borrowing costs.

Ultimately, the Survey delivers a balanced verdict: India's growth story is intact and credible, but the world around it is increasingly unpredictable. Hope is justified—but only if matched with vigilance, discipline, and strategic foresight.



Economic Survey Recasts Climate Action as a Growth Strategy

■ Building Climate Finance from Within: A Domestic Strategy Emerges

■ Public Investment and Cities Drive the New Climate Finance Agenda

By Dr Samar Verma

Climate change has found a distinctive place across many Economic Surveys in the past 10 years, and rightly so. However, unlike in the past years, the most recent Survey frames climate discussion as adaptation, and resilience-led, explicitly sub-national in orientation, and anchored in financing constraints and public investment-led resilience. This is a notable departure from the past, geared more towards a delivery-and-growth-protection framing than earlier editions.

Climate Action as Macroeconomics, Not an Add-On

That climate action, in a country like India, cannot be treated as an "environment add-on" is a striking strength of the latest Economic Survey of India 2025-26. It insists that Climate action must be treated as macroeconomics—a question of investment, risk, productivity, competitiveness, and the cost of capital. In framing environment and climate change as the project of building a resilient, competitive and development-driven economy, the Survey places the debate exactly where it belongs—inside the core growth strategy, not at its margins.

adaptation and resilience-related domestic spending rose from 3.7% of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in Financial Year 2015–16 (FY16) to 5.6% of GDP in Financial Year 2021–22 (FY22).

This matters for at least two reasons. First, it demonstrates fiscal capacity to prioritise resilience when it is seen as development protection—protecting livelihoods, infrastructure, and growth from climate shocks. Second, it reinforces a critical insight for raising finance. Climate action becomes bankable faster when it is embedded in sub-national, service-delivery functions—water, waste, transport, buildings, distributed energy, urban resilience—where benefits are immediate and measurable, and where local institutions can develop repeatable pipelines. The Survey explicitly emphasises that climate risks and solutions are location-specific, making sub-national measures central rather than peripheral.

In economic terms, this is the logic of a "portfolio". Thousands of smaller, standardised, investible projects across states and cities will mobilise domestic savings more reliably than a narrow set of megaprojects.

The Cost of Capital and the Investability Challenge

The Survey notes the familiar barriers: high cost of capital for climate projects, limited long-term institutional investor participation, and underdeveloped risk-mitigation and risk-sharing mechanisms—particularly for emerging technologies and large-scale adaptation.

This is where the domestic agenda must be explicit. Mobilising climate finance is not merely about "more money". Instead, it is about lowering risk and lowering intermediation costs.

That requires three reinforcing levers.

First, deepen the bond market because climate infrastructure is long-duration. The Survey argues that deep and liquid bond markets are essential for climate infrastructure, which requires large upfront capital and long repayment horizons. This point is not technical trivia; it is structural. India's household savings and institutional pools (insurance, pensions, provident funds) are naturally suited to long-duration assets—if

instruments are liquid, transparent, and available in benchmark size.

In this context, two bond-market pathways deserve special focus. One is sovereign green bonds as a market-making instrument. The Survey notes sovereign green bond issuance of ₹15,000 crore in Financial Year 2025–26 (FY26), with cumulative issuance reaching ₹72,697 crore since Financial Year 2022–23 (FY23). Beyond funding, these issuances help build a pricing curve, improve standards, and create signalling effects that reduce greenwashing risk. And two, municipal green bonds as the missing middle of domestic climate finance. The Survey cites Indian examples (Indore, Ghaziabad, Ahmedabad, Vadodara) and estimates that municipal green bonds could unlock United States Dollar (USD) 2.5–6.9 billion over the next 5–10 years. The macro logic is compelling. Cities sit at the intersection of adaptation and mitigation—water, sewage, waste, heat management, transport, building efficiency—yet their capital financing remains constrained.

The agenda here is not simply "issue more bonds". It is to make a reliable municipal credit market by standardising project appraisal, ring-fencing revenues where feasible, improving financial reporting, and using credit enhancement structures selectively to reach domestic institutional investors.

Second, regulation should be re-imagined as a finance policy to reduce uncertainty, price externalities and improve trust. One of the chapter's most important contributions is its explicit grounding of environmental regulation in welfare economics—pollution as a negative externality and a market failure if left unpriced or unchecked. But the Survey goes further by moving beyond a stale command-and-control debate. It recognises the limits of rigid standards and highlights the role of market-based instruments and risk- and outcome-based regulation—approaches associated with better cost-efficiency, innovation incentives, and lower compliance burden when designed well. In economic terms, this is about reducing information asymmetry and agency problems—classic reasons markets underfund long-horizon

public goods.

This is directly relevant to domestic climate finance because capital is allergic to regulatory uncertainty. Predictable, technology-enabled, trust-based governance reduces "policy risk premia"—a real component of the cost of capital. In fact, the Survey's conclusion explicitly points to risk-based regulation, digital compliance, and trust-based governance as key to reconciling environmental protection with improved business operations.

In parallel, sustainable finance regulation—green bond disclosure norms, sustainability reporting, and related frameworks—creates the informational infrastructure domestic investors need to allocate capital confidently. The Survey documents the evolution of India's climate and sustainable finance framework, including green bond disclosure norms, sustainability reporting requirements, and green deposits acceptance frameworks.

Philanthropy and Blended Finance as Catalytic Capital

Third is the catalytic layer. What can philanthropy do that markets and budgets struggle to do? Domestic climate finance will not scale on regulation and bonds alone because the "last mile" constraint is often investability: project preparation, risk allocation, measurement, and aggregation. This is precisely where the literature on blended finance and catalytic capital converges: catalytic funds—often public or philanthropic—can improve the risk-return profile of projects so that commercial capital can participate.

The International Finance Corporation's work on blended finance in India is clear that there is no single instrument; structures can include guarantees, risk-sharing facilities, performance-based incentives, concessional debt/equity, and design-stage support—selected to address the binding risk in each context. Comparable syntheses stress that a recurring barrier is insufficient support for preparing investible projects and weak matchmaking between project supply and investor demand.

For a domestic climate finance

agenda, philanthropy's most productive roles are therefore not as a substitute

lender, but as a market builder, often through innovative financing mechanisms. This means at least four things. Project preparation facilities at the sub-national level [feasibility, Detailed Project Report (DPR) quality, contracting templates, revenue models, Measurement, Reporting and Verification (MRV)], converting "good ideas" into investible assets. Credit enhancement and first-loss support for early issuances and new asset classes (e.g., municipal climate services, distributed resilience infrastructure), used sparingly and transparently to avoid hidden fiscal liabilities—an explicit

caution the Survey itself makes about de-risking tools. Aggregation platforms that pool many small projects into standardised portfolios, enabling bond-market access and lowering transaction costs—especially important for Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSME)

energy efficiency, urban services, and distributed clean energy. And finally, data and integrity infrastructure—supporting robust disclosure, third-party verification capacity, so domestic capital trusts labels and performance claims. This catalytic approach aligns with the broader idea of philanthropic capital as "risk-tolerant" capital used to unlock larger pools of private finance for sustainable development.

Toward a Sub-National Clean Growth Strategy

Putting these threads together yields a pragmatic pathway consistent with the Survey's "development realism" framing.

Build state- and city-level pipelines, not one-off projects. Treat climate investment as a continuous function of economic governance-planning, procurement, delivery, and measurement—because scale comes from repetition.

Use domestic public finance to crowd in, not crowd out. Public capital should fund public goods (adaptation, resilience services, early-stage platforms) and strategically absorb risks that markets cannot price yet.

Make municipal finance a serious

climate finance channel. Standardise municipal green bond readiness, strengthen disclosures, and use targeted enhancements to unlock domestic institutional capital.

Treat regulation as an investment policy. Risk-based, outcome-focused, technology-enabled regulation lowers uncertainty, supports innovation, and reduces the cost of capital—precisely what domestic mobilisation requires.

Deploy philanthropy as catalytic infrastructure. Fund project preparation, aggregation, data integrity, and selective risk-sharing so domestic capital can flow into a new climate asset class.

Climate Finance as a Competitiveness Policy

The Survey's framing is ultimately a competitiveness argument. Climate action must be sequenced, financed, and governed in a way that protects energy security and lowers system costs, rather than raising input costs for firms and households.

Domestic climate finance is therefore not only about meeting environmental targets. It is about building a financial system that can fund long-duration, productivity-enhancing, risk-reducing investments in local currency, especially at the sub-national level where implementation happens. If India can make that shift—through deeper bond markets, credible regulation, and catalytic market-building—then raising climate finance from domestic sources becomes less a heroic exception, and more a routine feature of development.

That is the quiet power of the Survey's reimagined framework. Climate finance is mainstream economics. Institutions, regulators, cities, states, and catalytic capital, too, must reimagine their respective roles.

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Sunetra Pawar Sworn In as Maharashtra's First Woman Deputy Chief Minister

NCP pitches son Parth Pawar for RS MP post

Mumbai, Agency

Late Deputy Chief Minister Ajit Pawar's wife Sunetra Pawar, who was sworn in as Deputy Chief Minister holding the portfolios of sports and state excise, resigned as NCP's Rajya Sabha MP at 3 pm today. Later, Maharashtra Governor Devrat administered the oath of office to her at 5 pm on Saturday at the Raj Bhavan, hours after she was elected by the Ajit Pawar-led NCP as its legislative party leader at the Vidhan Bhavan, at 2 pm.

After she was elected as the NCP's legislative party leader, Sunetra Pawar resigned as NCP's Rajya Sabha MP.

Sunetra Pawar will also contest the bypolls to the Baramati Assembly constituency in Pune district, which has now fallen vacant after her husband's Ajit Pawar's tragic and untimely demise in an air crash on Wednesday morning, sources said. Presently, the Ajit Pawar-led NCP's tally in the Maharashtra Assembly has come down to 40, after Ajit Pawar's demise.

Sources said that Praful Patel will be made the national

president of the Ajit Pawar-led NCP though a large section of party leaders feel that Sunetra Pawar must be appointed as the party's national president instead. According to sources, there are also reservations about the way Ajit Pawar-led NCP leader Praful Patel and union Minister Amit Shah have allegedly been "directing" political events in Maharashtra, in a fait accompli style.

Talking to media persons on Saturday, Ajit Pawar-led NCP MLA Anil Patil said, "Our efforts are that Sunetra Pawar should handle the leadership of the entire party in the state, as well as the nation. We got to know about all this only from the media. Ajit Pawar had all the knowledge about NCP merger related discussions. No open discussions took place on the party platform, and the Pawar family will decide the further course of action. Discussions will also take place with the NDA, and a decision may be taken thereafter, because the person who was supposed to hold these talks is no longer present in this world."

According to sources, it has been decided that the crucial finance portfolio which was held by the late Deputy CM Ajit Pawar will go to Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis "temporarily"



since the Maharashtra budget session is scheduled for March, when Fadnavis will present the Maharashtra state budget. After the budget session, the finance portfolio will be given to the Ajit Pawar-led NCP, sources said, though it is not yet clear whether the crucial finance portfolio will be given to Sunetra Pawar or some other NCP leader.

Meanwhile, elder son of the late Ajit Pawar has been pitched for the post of NCP's Rajya Sabha MP, after his mother Sunetra Pawar who was sworn in as Maharashtra Deputy Chief Minister resigned as NCP's Rajya Sabha MP at 3 pm on Saturday.

It was Ajit Pawar-led NCP leader and Member of Legislative Council (MLC) Idris Naikwadi who said, "Sunetra Pawar will be the first woman Deputy Chief Minister of Maharashtra. Ajit

Pawar's son Parth Pawar should also be given a chance in a statutory position. I will suggest his name for the Rajya Sabha". Sources have confirmed that the Ajit Pawar-led leadership has agreed to push for Parth Pawar to be made the party's Rajya Sabha MP.

In a related development, senior Sharad Pawar-led NCP leader Jayant Patil revealed that senior Ajit Pawar-led NCP leaders like Praful Patel and Sunil Tatkare as well as Ajit Pawar's wife Sunetra Pawar were fully aware that the late Ajit Pawar had planned to merge his party with the Sharad Pawar-led NCP, to form a single united NCP.

"Senior leaders of the Ajit Pawar-led NCP including Praful Patel, Sunil Tatkare and Chhagan Bhujbal knew about Ajit Pawar's plan to merge the two NCPs. The merger was

finalised in mid-January and was scheduled to be announced on February 8, after the Zilla Parishad elections. After meeting with Ajit Pawar on January 16, they all went to meet Sharad Pawar on January 17. A meeting was also held in Baramati. Ajit Pawar informed Praful Patel, Sunil Tatkare, Chhagan Bhujbal and other leaders of his merger plans. Before the merger plan, several discussions were held at my place at least 8 to 10 times. Ajit Pawar wanted to get both NCPs together in the presence of Sharad Pawar and put all differences of the last two and a half years behind," senior Sharad Pawar-led NCP leader Jayant Patil said.

Sources said that Sunetra Pawar's son Parth Pawar who is still at his grand uncle and NCP founder Sharad Pawar's Govind Baug residence in Baramati on Saturday, was not consulted before his name was pitched for the post of NCP's Rajya Sabha MP by the Ajit Pawar-led NCP leadership in Mumbai comprising Praful Patel and Sunil Tatkare, just as Sharad Pawar told media persons in Baramati on Saturday morning that he was never informed about Sunetra Pawar being sworn-in as Deputy Chief Minister.

"I have no information about it. Her party must have decided,"

Sharad Pawar replied to media persons on Saturday morning in Baramati when asked about Sunetra Pawar taking the oath but Maharashtra is still mourning Ajit Pawar's death. Maharashtra has not yet recovered from the grief of Ajit Pawar's death. This is a decision of their party. Praful Patel is a national leader. Sunil Tatkare is also a national leader. Sharad Pawar said on Saturday morning.

Replying to questions about the apparent urgency in taking political decisions so quickly after Ajit Pawar's death, Sharad Pawar told media persons that all discussions were taking place not in Baramati but in Mumbai. "If there is a problem in the family, the family stands together. There are no issues in the family. Praful Patel, Sunil Tatkare and other senior leaders are holding these discussions. Whatever is being seen appears to be their decision. I will not comment on this," Sharad Pawar said.

Responding to Sunetra Pawar's swearing-in, Uddhav Thackeray-led Shiv Sena Rajya Sabha MP Priyanka Chaturvedi said, "What is going on? Whatever is happening, is it moral? Sharad Pawar is not aware of anything. Maharashtra is not happy with what is happening. What is the reason for this haste?"

Uddhav Thackeray-led Shiv

Sena Rajya Sabha MP and chief Sena spokesperson Sanjay Raut said, "I also heard reports about Sunetra Pawar taking the oath but Maharashtra is still mourning Ajit Pawar's death. Maharashtra has not yet recovered from the grief of Ajit Pawar's death. This is a decision of their party. Praful Patel is a national leader. Sunil Tatkare is also a national leader. If these national leaders of the Ajit Pawar-led NCP have made a decision, then it is their choice. The BJP is a party which plays politics over dead bodies. While Ajit Pawar was alive, the merger of both NCPs was possible, but now I don't know".

Commenting on the political developments Uddhav Thackeray-led Shiv Sena Rajya Sabha MP Priyanka Chaturvedi said that the decision was taken due to pressure from the BJP due to the Mahayuti alliance in Maharashtra. "The decision itself seems to be made by the Ajit Pawar-led NCP, but there must have been pressure from the BJP because they are together with the BJP in the Mahayuti alliance. Anyway, I welcome Sunetra Pawar as the first woman Deputy CM of Maharashtra, hoping that in her new role, she will contribute towards the vision, thinking and commitment of Ajit Pawar for Maharashtra".

BJP says decision to appoint Sunetra Pawar taken by NCP

Mumbai, Agency

The Bharatiya Janata Party said on Saturday that the decision to appoint Sunetra Pawar as Maharashtra's Deputy Chief Minister was taken by the Ajit Pawar-led Nationalist Congress Party, and that the BJP was extending support as an alliance partner in the Mahayuti government. Speaking to reporters in Mumbai, BJP state spokesperson Navnath Ban said the choice to name Sunetra Pawar as Deputy Chief Minister in place of Ajit Pawar was an internal decision of the Nationalist Congress Party. He said that since the NCP is part of the ruling Mahayuti alliance, the BJP was only supporting the decision taken by its ally.

Ban said that when a person holding a position of power dies, the appointment to that post is generally decided swiftly in accordance with political circumstances. He cited past instances where successors were sworn in soon after the deaths of prominent leaders, including former Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, former Tamil Nadu Chief Minister Jayalalithaa, and former Goa Chief Minister Manohar Parrikar.

He said that in difficult situations, parties are required to make decisions in the interest of organisational stability. Referring to Ajit Pawar's death, Ban said the Bharatiya Janata Party would support the decisions taken by Ajit Pawar's Nationalist Congress Party regarding the selection of its leader and the appointment to the Deputy Chief Minister's post.

Maharashtra withdraws 'no work, no pay' rule for minority schools

Mumbai, Agency

The Maharashtra School Education and Sports Department has withdrawn the 'no work, no pay' policy applicable to surplus teaching and non-teaching staff in minority educational institutions, providing significant relief to the affected employees. The decision was formalised through a Government Resolution (GR), modifying an earlier government resolution dated July 13, 2016. The 'no work, no pay' provision was introduced through the July 13, 2016 government decision and was applicable to additional teaching and non-teaching staff in minority schools whose adjustment was pending. As a result, such employees had not been receiving salaries for extended periods while awaiting adjustment.

Shiksha Bharati Sangathan had consistently raised the issue over the past several years and pursued the matter at the ministerial level. According to Subhash Savitri Kisan More, the working president of Shikshak Bharati Sangathan, the withdrawal of the policy has brought

major relief to teachers and non-teaching staff in minority institutions.

The working president of Shiksha Bharati Sangathan said that following the revocation of the 'no work, no pay' clause, teaching staff in minority schools would continue to receive regular salaries even after being declared surplus, until their adjustment is completed. The corrigendum, issued from Mantralaya, Mumbai, refers to a series of earlier government resolutions dated December 4, 2012, November 28, 2014, July 13, 2016, October 4, 2017, and March 15, 2024, which together govern recruitment, individual approval, and adjustment of teaching and non-teaching staff in minority educational institutions. These resolutions also regulate the adjustment of surplus teachers between private aided schools and local self-government schools, including zilla parishads, municipal councils and municipal corporations.

The government noted that a consolidated and revised procedure for the adjustment of surplus teachers across all managements

in the state was laid down through the government resolution dated March 15, 2024. Clause 2.13 of that resolution explicitly provides that while adjusting surplus staff, their original pay shall be protected. In this context, the 'no work, no pay' clause contained in paragraph 7 of the July 13, 2016 resolution was found to be inconsistent with the later provisions guaranteeing pay protection during the adjustment process. Accordingly, the GR issued on January 30, 2026, substitutes the earlier condition under which surplus employees of minority institutions were denied salary until adjustment. The revised order stipulates that the adjustment of surplus employees in minority institutions shall be carried out in accordance with the provisions of the March 15, 2024 government resolution on adjustment, or as per prevailing government policy. The order clarifies that except for this specific amendment, all other terms, conditions, and instructions contained in the July 13, 2016 resolution will continue to remain in force.

'They knew': Jayant Patil claims senior NCP leaders knew of merger plans

MUMBAI, AGENCY

Nationalist Congress Party (SP) leader Jayant Patil has claimed that senior leaders of the Ajit Pawar-led NCP, including Praful Patel, Sunil Tatkare, and Chhagan Bhujbal, were aware of plans to merge the two NCP factions well before recent political developments. Patil said the decision to reunite the parties had been finalised in mid-January and was intended to be formally announced after the local body elections. In a video statement shared on the social media platform X, Patil said that a decision was taken on January 16 to announce the merger after the Zilla Parishad elections scheduled for February 8. He said the timeline was discussed internally and that the announcement date was later adjusted to February 12 due to his prior commitment to attend a wedding in Delhi.

Patil further claimed that Ajit Pawar had personally informed senior leaders from his faction about the merger roadmap. According to Patil, Ajit Pawar had conveyed the details of the proposed reunification to leaders, including Praful Patel, Sunil Tatkare, Chhagan Bhujbal, and others within the party. He said these discussions had taken place well before the subsequent political churn within the Nationalist Congress Party.

The claims have triggered renewed political debate, coming days after Ajit Pawar's death and amid ongoing discussions about leadership and the future direction of the party. The remarks surfaced on a politically significant day, as senior NCP (Sharadchandra Pawar faction) leaders met party patriarch Sharad Pawar at his Govind Baug residence in Baramati. According to reports, the delegation that met Sharad Pawar included Member of Parliament Supriya Sule, Member of the Legislative Assembly Rohit Pawar, Yugendra Pawar, and other senior party leaders. While details of the closed-door meeting were not officially disclosed, it is being viewed as crucial in the context of leadership changes and deliberations over the party's future course.

Nashik prepares for Sinhasta Kumbh Mela 2027: Focus on transport and infrastructure

Nashik, Agency

In view of the upcoming Sinhasta Kumbh Mela 2027, extensive deliberations are underway on strengthening transportation infrastructure, bus operations, manpower deployment, and the use of technology to ensure smooth and safe movement of devotees. A comprehensive review of transportation planning was conducted at a meeting of the Nashik-Tribakeshwar Kumbh Mela Authority, chaired by Authority Commissioner Shekhar Singh. The meeting was attended by State Transport Corporation Vice Chairman and Managing Director Dr. Madhav Kusekar, General Manager (Transport) Nitin Mend, General Manager Dinesh Mahajan, Deputy General Manager Chetan Hasbanis,



and other senior officials. During the meeting, it was informed that approximately 4,500 buses are being planned for the transportation of devotees during the Kumbh Mela. Major ST bus stations at Tribakeshwar, Jawhar Phata, Nimani, Vani, and along the Nashik highway will be renovated and upgraded. Administrative approval for these infrastructure works has already been granted, and work orders will be issued shortly. A detailed review

of the proposed infrastructure works under the Sinhasta Kumbh Mela 2027 was conducted. Discussions were held regarding the renovation and concreting of ST bus stations at major locations, including Tribakeshwar, Jawhar Phata, Nimani, Vani, and the Nashik highway. Administrative approval has been received for these works, and work orders will be issued soon. The possibility of issuing tenders with conditions to avoid

delays caused by the land acquisition process at Saptashrungi Gad was also discussed. It is estimated that millions of devotees will visit Nashik and Tribakeshwar during the Kumbh Mela. Bus arrangements will be made for devotees arriving in the city by rail and road.

Instructions were given to establish separate Kumbh Mela cells in each division for the implementation of administrative instructions and the submission of divisional plans.

NCP (SP) leaders meet Sharad Pawar ahead of Sunetra Pawar's swearing-in

BARAMATI, AGENCY

Senior leaders of the Nationalist Congress Party (SP) met party patriarch Sharad Pawar at his Govind Baug residence in Baramati on Saturday. The meeting comes amid political developments in Mumbai ahead of Sunetra Pawar's swearing-in as Maharashtra's Deputy Chief Minister.

He said decisions related to leadership changes were being taken by the Ajit Pawar-led NCP faction and leaders of the ruling Mahayuti alliance, and clarified that whatever information he had was based solely on media reports. Sharad Pawar said he had read in newspapers that leaders such as Praful Patel and Sunil Tatkare had taken the initiative to make certain decisions. He declined to comment on a Nationalist Congress Party meeting scheduled

to be held later in the day in Mumbai, describing it as an internal party matter. He also dismissed speculation regarding a merger between the two NCP factions or the possibility of joining the National Democratic Alliance, saying such claims were confined to media reports. Meanwhile, preparations are underway in Mumbai for the swearing-in ceremony of Sunetra Pawar, who is set to become Maharashtra's first woman Deputy Chief Minister.

According to reports, the oath-taking ceremony is scheduled to be held at 5 pm on Saturday at Lok Bhawan. Her elevation follows the sudden death of her husband, veteran leader and former Deputy Chief Minister Ajit Pawar, who was killed in a plane crash near Baramati on January 28.

NCP merger talks fuel haste for Sunetra oath-taking

Activity intensifies in Ajit Pawar faction

BARAMATI,
CORRESPONDENT

Political circles suggest that the rush to conduct Sunetra Pawar's oath-taking ceremony as Deputy Chief Minister stems from accelerated talks on unifying the two factions of the Nationalist Congress Party (NCP). With discussions gaining momentum on rebuilding a unified party, some leaders are reportedly anxious about their political future, prompting haste in finalising the swearing-in. NCP (SP) chief Sharad Pawar openly stated that, like Ajit Pawar, he too wishes to see both factions come together. He also revealed that Ajit Pawar himself had planned the unification of the two parties on February 12.

Leaders from the Ajit Pawar faction are said to be uncertain about whether a reunited NCP would remain within the National Democratic Alliance (Mahayuti) and, if so, whether key posts such as the Deputy Chief Minister and important portfolios would stay with their group.



There is also apprehension among some leaders about their relevance in a unified NCP party after Ajit Pawar, which is believed to be another reason for the hurried oath-taking. Even as Ajit Pawar's funeral rites were underway, senior leaders from his faction—national working president Praful Patel, state president Sunil Tatkare, Chhagan Bhujbal, Hasan Mushrif and Dhananjay Munde—held meetings in Mumbai to discuss the Deputy Chief Minister's post and portfolio allocation.

Media reports suggest that this haste has caused displeasure within the Pawar family. Without directly expressing anger, Sharad Pawar clarified that Sunetra Pawar's oath-taking is an internal matter of their party, that no

civic bodies like Pune and Pimpri-Chinchwad, Ajit Pawar's criticism of the local BJP leadership, the poor performance of both NCP factions in municipal polls followed by Ajit Pawar's insistence on jointly contesting district council and panchayat samiti elections, and candidates from the Sharad Pawar faction seeking the 'watch' symbol.

These developments are being viewed in political circles as part of a BJP script. Analysts note that while the BJP may not need the NCP in Maharashtra, a unified NCP could reduce the BJP's dependence at the Centre on leaders like Nitish Kumar and Chandrababu Naidu. Hence, the BJP's interest in an undivided NCP is said to be greater at the national level. Credible sources claim that, as part of a possible understanding, the BJP may offer union ministerial positions to Supriya Sule and Praful Patel, a Minister of State post to Rohit Pawar at the state level, and a key cabinet portfolio to Jayant Patil in a unified NCP.

Sharad Pawar unaware of Sunetra swearing-in Remembers Ajit's reunification wish

BARAMATI,
CORRESPONDENT

Nationalist Congress Party (Sharad Pawar faction) chief Sharad Pawar on Saturday, said he was unaware of any swearing-in ceremony involving Sunetra Pawar and clarified that there had been no proposal or discussion within the family on the matter. Speaking at an early morning press briefing in Baramati, Pawar said that the idea of reunification between the two NCP factions was Ajit Pawar's wish and that his party also desired the same outcome.

Pawar said, "The death of Ajit Pawar was a tremendous loss for Maharashtra and that discussions about reunifying the Nationalist Congress Party and the NCP (Sharad Pawar faction) had been taking place for several months before they were halted by the tragic air crash." He added that talks on reunification had been ongoing for the past six months between Ajit Pawar and NCP SP leader Jayant Patil, but those discussions came to a halt following Ajit Pawar's accident. When asked about "decisions being taken in haste" by



Praful Patel and Sunil Tatkare, NCP-SCP chief Sharad Pawar said, "What I know is that a process had begun for our party (NCP-SCP) and Ajit Pawar's party (NCP) to work together, and a decision on this was to be taken soon. However, this unfortunate accident—Ajit Pawar's death—has occurred." Responding to questions about Sunetra Pawar, Pawar said he was "neither informed about nor invited to any swearing-in ceremony and that there had been no discussion within the family" after Ajit Pawar's death.

He said he had only read media reports suggesting that discussions were underway in Mumbai, and added that leaders such as Sunil Tatkare and Praful Patel, who head the other

faction, had the right to take decisions for their party. He said it appeared that they had made a decision, but stressed that he would not comment on it.

Sunetra Pawar, accompanied by her sons Parth Pawar and Jay Pawar, reached Mumbai in the early hours of Saturday. According to sources, the NCP's legislative party meeting is scheduled to be held at 2 pm. in Mumbai, during which the party's legislative leader will be chosen. A small swearing-in ceremony at Raj Bhavan is expected to take place thereafter. When asked whether he was open to joining hands with the Bharatiya Janata Party if reunification talks progressed, Pawar questioned the relevance of

In a Hurry to Become Prashant Kishor?

Naresh Arora's Attempt to Claim Credit for Ajit Pawar's Success Draws Criticism



PUNE, CORRESPONDENT

Self-styled political strategist Naresh Arora is facing criticism in political circles for what is being seen as an attempt to project himself as the next Prashant Kishor and to claim indirect credit for the political success of Deputy Chief Minister Ajit Pawar. Arora's firm, DesignBoxed, was entrusted with handling Ajit Pawar's social media outreach, but the work was awarded purely on a contractual basis. Despite this, Arora is accused of trying to project himself as the official strategist of the Nationalist Congress Party (AP).

With the growing importance of social media in contemporary politics, digital outreach has undoubtedly played a role in strengthening Ajit Pawar's political presence. However, Arora's alleged attempt to appropriate credit for this success has not gone

down well with several political observers. The controversy intensified after Ajit Pawar's landslide victory in the Assembly elections, when Arora was seen posing for photographs with his hand placed on the senior leader's shoulder, an act that sparked criticism.

NCP MLA Arnol Mitkari strongly objected to the incident, accusing Arora of violating political protocol and showing disrespect towards a senior leader by disregarding age and stature.

Political observers point out that digital campaign work for senior leaders, including Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis, is routinely handled by professional agencies.

However, agency heads typically refrain from stepping into the political limelight or claiming personal credit for electoral success. Arora's decision to break from this established norm and

present himself as a political strategist has therefore raised eyebrows.

Discontent reportedly grew further after media reports claimed that Arora had communicated directly with the Chief Minister amid discussions on the Deputy Chief Minister's post following Ajit Pawar's demise. While Arora's contribution in the digital domain is not being dismissed outright, critics argue that his eagerness to claim political credit reflects a larger ambition for a formal political role in the future.

Leaders and observers alike stress that Ajit Pawar's success is rooted in his leadership, political acumen and the trust reposed in him by the electorate. Attempts to reduce that success to mere image-building and to divert its credit are being viewed as unfortunate and inappropriate within political circles.

Parents Object to Caelum High School and Jr College's ₹45,000 'Corpus Fund', Question Legality of Charges

PUNE, CORRESPONDENT

Several parents of students studying at Caelum High School and Jr College, Pune, have raised strong objections to the management's decision to collect a one-time, non-refundable "Corpus Fund" of ₹45,000 per student, calling the demand illegal, arbitrary, and unfair. Parents have taken their complaints to Pune Pulse, stating that schools are not legally permitted to recover institutional liabilities from parents.

Meanwhile, Maharashtra Minister Girish Mahajan said the BJP would be happy if both NCP factions reunited, describing it as an internal matter of the party. Shiv Sena (UBT) MP Sanjay Raut criticised the BJP, calling it an opportunistic party, and said the state was in mourning. He said that if a swearing-in ceremony was taking place on Saturday, he had nothing further to add.

NCP leader Sunil Tatkare

declined to comment on whether Sharad Pawar would be invited to the swearing-in ceremony. Ajit Pawar, who was serving as Maharashtra's Deputy Chief Minister, died in an air crash on January 28, 2026, triggering renewed calls from leaders of both NCP factions for reunification and intensifying political developments in Baramati and Mumbai.

the timing.

He also said he did not know political strategist Naresh Arora, when questioned about reports suggesting his involvement in discussions related to the Deputy Chief Minister's post. Naresh Arora is a political strategist who had assisted in designing Ajit Pawar's political campaign.

According to parents, the demand has caused widespread anxiety and confusion, particularly as the proposed corpus fund is intended to address what the school describes as a "financial crunch." Parents argue that the expenses listed by the school relate to core management responsibilities and should not be passed on to families.

What Parents Are Objecting To

Parents said they recently received an official communication from the school stating that the Parent-Teacher Association (PTA) Executive Committee had approved the creation of a corpus fund. The stated purpose of the fund includes meeting expenses such as:

Pune Municipal Corporation (PMC) taxes

Completion certificate costs

Construction of a new auditorium

Purchase of chairs and audio-visual equipment

Development of a new sports field

The school has asked parents of students up to Std IX to pay ₹45,000 as a one-time, non-refundable amount, payable in one or two instalments by February and March 2026.

Parents contend that these expenses

constitute infrastructure development and statutory obligations, which are the responsibility of the school management. "How can parents be asked to pay PMC taxes or construction costs? These are clearly the school's liabilities," said one parent, requesting anonymity.

Legal and Transparency Concerns

Parents have also questioned the legal validity of compulsory corpus fund collections, pointing out that education regulations do not allow schools to impose arbitrary, non-refundable charges. Several parents disputed the claim that the PTA Executive Committee had unanimously approved the proposal, stating that the broader parent body was neither consulted nor informed.

"Decisions taken behind closed doors cannot justify burdening all parents. There is a complete lack of transparency," another parent said.

Fear of Pressure on Students

While the school's communication does not explicitly mention penalties for non-payment, parents fear indirect pressure on students whose families may be unable to pay. The exemption granted to parents who had earlier paid deposits during the school's shift from Ghorpadi to Undri has further added to resentment and confusion.

Parents have now urged education authorities to intervene, seek clarity on the legality of such collections, and direct the school to withdraw the demand.

Responding to the concerns, Harish Thadaney, President of Caelum High School and Jr College, told Pune Pulse that the charges relate to infrastructure costs incurred by the school in creating facilities for students.



PUNE, CORRESPONDENT

In a significant administrative move aimed at strengthening field-level supervision and improving operational efficiency, Pune City Police has ordered the immediate transfer of 25 police inspectors across the city. The reshuffle, directed by Amitesh Kumar, also includes the promotion of six inspectors from the crime branch to the rank of Senior Police Inspector (SPI).

The transfers, announced on Thursday, span several police stations and specialised wings, including the crime branch, traffic department, economic offences wing (EOW), welfare branch, special branch, and the police control room. Officials said the reshuffle is part of a routine administrative exercise designed

to ensure balanced deployment of officers, enhance accountability, and sharpen supervisory oversight at key police stations.

Among the prominent postings, PI Jayant Rajurkar, earlier attached to the crime branch at Sahakarnagar, has been appointed Senior Police Inspector at Samarth police station. PI Raghavendrasinh Kshirsagar, previously serving in the welfare branch, has taken charge as SPI at Utamnagar, while PI Vinay Patankar has been moved from the police control room to Sinhagad in the same capacity. PI Maruti Patil has been transferred from the traffic branch at Kondhwa to Yeolewadi, and PI Santosh Khetmalis from the Economic Offences Wing has been posted as SPI at Lashkar police station.

Other senior-level changes include transfers of inspectors between Parvati, Wagholi, Lohgaon, Market Yard, Warje, Malwadi, and Shivajinagar police stations, reflecting a broad realignment of leadership across the city. Several inspectors from traffic and crime units have been repositioned to balance experience across police stations with varying operational demands.

At the inspector level, multiple officers have been reassigned within the crime branch, with postings at Laxminagar, Shivajinagar, Sahakarnagar, Mundhwa, Wagholi, and Yeolewadi. Some inspectors have also been shifted between the crime branch, traffic department, special branch, and welfare branch, indicating a comprehensive reshuffle

rather than isolated transfers.

Senior officials noted that such periodic transfers are essential to prevent stagnation, bring fresh perspectives to policing challenges, and ensure effective implementation of law and order strategies across Pune. The changes are also expected to strengthen crime detection, traffic management, and administrative coordination.

All transferred officers have been instructed to assume charge of their new postings with immediate effect. Police officials said the reshuffle is expected to enhance responsiveness and service delivery as Pune continues to deal with growing urbanisation and evolving policing requirements.

Pune City Police Undergo Major Reshuffle as 25 Inspectors Transferred

India's first collaborative animal welfare funding circle introduced at India Animal Welfare Forum



Mumbai : With animal welfare accounting for only 1.5 per cent of India's CSR funding, the India Animal Welfare Forum (IAWF) on Saturday launched the country's first collaborative Animal Welfare Funding Circle, backed by initial Rs 14 crore from Upadhyaya Foundation, India Animal Fund, Caring Friends, Mela Foundation and Coefficient Giving to address long-standing funding gaps in the sector.

According to the details, the national convening brought

together policymakers, philanthropists, NGOs, researchers, legal experts, sector leaders and conservation leaders to deliberate on critical challenges facing animal welfare in India, including chronic underfunding, policy implementation gaps and the need for coordinated, policy-aligned action to position animal welfare as a development priority. The Funding Circle will function as a collaborative platform to channel philanthropic capital towards scalable,

evidence-based animal welfare initiatives, with a focus on long-term impact, accountability and systemic change across regions and species. Led by the family philanthropy Upadhyaya Foundation, the Forum facilitated cross-sector collaboration and dialogue, positioning animal welfare not as a peripheral charitable cause but as a critical development and policy priority intrinsically linked to public health, climate resilience, livelihoods and urban resilience.

Nagpur, Correspondent Union Minister Nitin Gadkari on Saturday congratulated Sunetra Pawar on her swearing-in as the first woman Deputy Chief Minister of Maharashtra. Gadkari praised Sunetra Pawar for stepping into the leadership role amid challenging circumstances following the tragic death of her husband, Ajit Pawar, in an air crash.

Lauding her resolve, he said she had taken on the responsibility with the state's interests at heart. "Congratulations to Smt Sunetra Vahini will effectively carry forward his legacy," Shellar told reporters after the swearing-in ceremony. Shellar declined to comment on criticism that her swearing-in took place in a hurry.

times, keeping the welfare of Maharashtra in mind," the senior BJP leader wrote in a post on X. Meanwhile, BJP minister Ashish Shellar said the state had lost a highly experienced leader, adding that the void left by Ajit Pawar can never truly be filled.

However, he expressed confidence that Sunetra Pawar would continue her husband's legacy of public service. "Given Ajit Pawar's unwavering commitment to the people of Maharashtra, I am confident that Sunetra Vahini will effectively carry forward his legacy," Shellar told reporters after the swearing-in ceremony. Shellar declined to comment on criticism that her swearing-in took place in a hurry.

Wanowrie Police Bust Gang Stealing Batteries From Traffic Signal Control Boxes

Pune, Correspondent Wanowrie Police have arrested a gang involved in stealing batteries from traffic signal controller boxes at major junctions across Pune city. The accused were nabbed following an investigation into repeated thefts that had disrupted traffic signal operations at several busy intersections.

The arrested accused have been identified as Deepak Amol Kamble (32, Ramteki), Chand Usman Sheikh (28), Vikas alias Taklya Vijay Mane (36, residing on the footpath near Aurora Towers, Camp), and Ali Mulla Sheikh (27, Bhagyoday Nagar, near Bhairav Nath Temple, Kondhwa). Police have recovered 34 batteries worth ₹68,000, along with an autorickshaw and an iron cutting tool. The total value of the seized property is estimated at ₹1,68,100. All four accused have been arrested and produced before the court. During interrogation, the accused confessed to stealing batteries from traffic signal control boxes located at Kalubai Chowk, AFMC Chowk, Race Course Chowk, B.T. Kawade Chowk, Shastrinagar, Sandal Baba Chowk, Dhobi Ghat Chowk, and City Pride/Pushpamangal Chowk. The action was carried out under the guidance of Deputy Commissioner of Police (Zone 05) Rajalaxmi Shivankar, Assistant Commissioner of Police (Wanowrie Division) Namrata Desai, Senior Police Inspector Bhausaheb Patil, and Crime Inspector Sangita Jadhav. The investigation and arrests were executed by Assistant Police Inspector Umakant Mahadik, Police Sub-Inspector Alfaz Sheikh, and a dedicated team of police personnel.

Raut accuses BJP of seeking political gain amid mourning

Mumbai, Agency. Shiv Sena (UBT) leader and Rajya Sabha Member of Parliament Sanjay Raut on Saturday accused the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party of attempting to derive political advantage even in the aftermath of the death of Maharashtra's Deputy Chief Minister Ajit Pawar, saying the focus should remain on mourning rather than political manoeuvring. Speaking to reporters in Mumbai, Raut declined to comment on reports related to the swearing-in of Sunetra Pawar, wife of Ajit Pawar, as Deputy Chief Minister. He said that it was not an appropriate time to discuss such developments. Ajit Pawar was killed in a plane crash on January 28 at Baramati in Pune district, along with four others. Referring to the situation, Raut said the Bharatiya Janata Party had no connection with the period of mourning and alleged that it was seeking an opportunity even in death. He said the issue of Deputy Chief Ministership should be discussed only after the mourning period was over. Commenting on Nationalist Congress Party (Sharad Pawar faction) chief Sharad Pawar's statement that he had no idea about Sunetra Pawar's swearing-in, Raut said that information would be known only to the top leadership of the BJP or to senior NCP leaders Praful Patel and Sunil Tatkare.

democracynow Maharashtra

Gadkari congratulates Sunetra Pawar on becoming Maharashtra's first woman DyCM



School peon arrested for beating students over suspected mobile phone theft

Gadchiroli, Correspondent : Gadchiroli police have arrested a peon of a government residential school in Aheri taluka for allegedly assaulting 12 students on suspicion of mobile phone theft, police said. According to police, the incident took place on Saturday afternoon between 12 noon and 1 pm at a government residential school in Wangepalli village.

The students sustained injuries in the assault. After learning about the incident, Piyush's father, Jeevan Talande, a resident of Paima village in Etapalli taluka, approached the Aheri police station and lodged a complaint. Based on the complaint, police registered a case against the accused under Section 118(1) of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sahita, 2023 and Section 75 of the

student, Piyush Talande (13), along with 11 other younger students, accusing them of stealing a mobile phone. When the students denied the allegation, the accused allegedly beat them one by one with a stick.

The students sustained injuries in the assault. After learning about the incident, Piyush's father, Jeevan Talande, a resident of Paima village in Etapalli taluka, approached the Aheri police station and lodged a complaint. Based on the complaint, police registered a case against the accused under Section 118(1) of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sahita, 2023 and Section 75 of the

Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2015 and placed him under arrest.

Parents who rushed to the school after the incident alleged that no responsible school authorities were present at the premises.

As per norms, the superintendent, headmistress, guard and peon are required to remain on duty, but none were reportedly available at the time.

Aheri Police Inspector Harshal Alkare said the assault on students at a residential school was a serious offence and assured that strict legal action would be taken against those responsible.

Court restrains filmmaker Abhinav Kashyap from making defamatory statement against Salman Khan

MUMBAI, AGENCY A city court here on Friday temporarily restrained filmmaker Abhinav Kashyap and two more persons from making, circulating or posting any defamatory statement against Bollywood Superstar Salman Khan and his family.

Addressing the gathering, the Army Commander commended the ARN and CME for the exemplary conduct of the championship and reiterated the Indian Army's enduring commitment to nurturing world-class sportspersons, strengthening India's presence at national and international sporting arenas.

actor and his family.

The actor also sought similar relief against the Channel's owners, Khusboo Hazare and Komal Mehru.

During the hearing, after perusing the statements made in the interview, Judge Bhosale, prima facie, held that the same were defamatory.

"Prima facie, these statements are defamatory, derogatory, abusive and insulting in nature. These statements lower the image of the plaintiff in the eyes of the general public. The reputation of the

plaintiff is harmed by the defendants, nos. 1 to 3.

"These statements need to be restrained and taken down from publishing and further circulating on social media or any other platform," Judge Bhosale said in the order.

In the ad-interim order, the court said that nobody can make and nobody should make defamatory statements against the family of anybody. The court also refused to accept Kashyap's contention that he has the right to free speech and expression.



Shri. Ajitdada Pawar

22.07.1959 - 28.01.2026

"By fulfilling one's duty, and detaching one self from the fruits of action, one is liberated from the cycle of birth and death, and ascends to the Indestructible State that is free from all bonds..."

Bhagavadgita : Chapter II, Stanza 51

Deeply Mourned by

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Jitendra Desai

Uttara J. Desai

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SIT charge-sheet did not mention animal fat in Tirumala laddu Prasadam: Ex-Minister



VIJAYAWADA

Former Minister Vellappalli Srinivas said on Saturday that the final CBI SIT charge-sheet did not say that animal fat was mixed in the ghee used for preparing Tirumala laddu prasadam, yet coalition leaders continue to spread the same false propaganda, deliberately hurting the sentiments of crores of Hindu devotees.

Speaking to media at the YSRCP central office, at Tadepalli, near here, he said IT Minister Nara Lokesh and other leaders are misleading the public by selectively quoting a case brief note, while deliberately ignoring the laboratory reports that are part of the same chargesheet,



which categorically ruled out animal fat, pig fat, or fish oil. He said the coalition must produce evidence from the chargesheet to support its claims.

The former Minister pointed out that the ghee samples examined by NDDB and NDRD were taken on June 12, June 25, July 6, and July 12 after the coalition government came to power. Even those samples conclusively proved that there was no animal fat. If any wrongdoing had occurred, responsibility would lie with the present government, not the

previous YSRCP regime.

He accused Chief Minister Chandrababu Naidu, Deputy Chief Minister K Pawan Kalyan, and Nara Lokesh of dragging Lord Venkateswara Swamy's sacred prasadam into petty politics only because they are unable to politically counter Y S Jagan Mohan Reddy and YSRCP's strong support base.

The Ex-Minister demanded that Chandrababu Naidu, Pawan Kalyan, and Nara Lokesh immediately admit their mistake, apologise to Hindu devotees, and stop abusing faith for political gain.

Over 5,500 children rescued in Telangana under month-long 'Operation Smile-XII'



special training on the Juvenile Justice Act and the Child Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Act. Following this, intensive inspections were conducted at vulnerable locations including railway stations, bus stands, brick kilns, mechanic shops and tea stalls.

Among the rescued children, 5,108 were boys and 474 girls. Of the total, 2,292 children belonged to about 15 states, including Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Odisha and Andhra Pradesh, while 43 children were from neighbouring Nepal. As many as 4,567 children

were identified as child labourers, 486 as street children, 38 as beggars and 491 were found in other forms of exploitation.

Strict action was taken against those employing children, resulting in the registration of 1,480 FIRs and the arrest of 1,483 accused persons. The Labour Department issued 1,363 inspection reports and imposed fines totalling Rs 41.78 lakh under the Minimum Wages Act. Charu Sinha said that 4,978 rescued children were reunited with their parents, 604 homeless children were shifted to shelter homes and 2,375 children of migrant workers were enrolled in 29 urban bridge schools. Reiterating the commitment of the Telangana Police, the Additional DGP said the department, in coordination with other agencies, is working relentlessly to eradicate child trafficking, bonded labour and child exploitation in the state.

Nagaland CM Rio launches digitisation of old manual birth and death certificates

DIMAPUR
Nagaland Chief Minister Neiphiu Rio officially launched the digitisation of old manual birth and death certificates in his official chamber in Kohima on Saturday. During the launch, Rio stressed that the initiative will streamline service delivery, ensure efficient and accurate data, improve citizen access to essential documents, and assist the government in making informed public policy decisions. Commending the efforts of the economics & statistic department in making the digitization possible, he urged the citizens for timely registration of births and deaths. Following the directive

of the Office of the Registrar General of India (ORG), the department introduced online registration of births and deaths in the state in April, 2022. This initiative marks a significant step towards modernising vital records management and ensuring greater efficiency and accessibility for citizens. The department has announced that the issuance of manual certificates will soon be discontinued, with the system transitioning to 100 per cent online registration and digitisation of old manual birth and death certificates. This move is aimed at streamlining processes, reducing paperwork and providing citizens with

faster and more reliable services. The department said the digitisation of old manual certificates has become essential to ensure that all records are seamlessly integrated into the new online system, thereby safeguarding their authenticity and accessibility for future use. Only genuine certificates issued by the registrar of births and deaths and information available in the record can be digitalised. The department requested the public to come forward and access the facility provided through the ORG portal dc.crsorgi.gov.in to help build a comprehensive and secure database of vital records for the state.

"Inclusive and accessible tourism ensures that travel is possible for all people, regardless of age, ability or social background," the minister said, adding that diversity should be seen as a strength rather than a limitation. Describing accessibility as both an ethical responsibility and an economic opportunity, Riyas said the removal of physical, social, informational and attitudinal barriers was essential to enabling people to travel with dignity and independence. He cautioned against viewing accessibility only through the lens of disability, noting that its benefits extended equally to senior citizens, families with children, people recovering from injuries and travellers navigating unfamiliar environments.

The minister said barrier-free

infrastructure such as ramps, lifts, accessible toilets and well-designed public spaces helped create destinations that were safer and more comfortable for everyone. At the same time, non-physical measures like clear signage, user-friendly information systems and digitally accessible platforms were equally critical in reducing confusion and exclusion. Warning against reducing accessibility to a mere infrastructure checklist, Riyas stressed the importance of the human element in tourism. Well-trained and sensitised tourism personnel, he said, played a decisive role in ensuring that visitors felt welcomed, respected and included.

He said universal design principles provided the broader framework for inclusive tourism, arguing that facilities

democracynow Nation

Tripura has undertaken multiple strategies for upgradation of healthcare system: CM Saha

AGARTALA

The Tripura government has undertaken multipronged strategies to enhance emergency medical services, expand ICU facilities, activate operation theatres, introduce modern medical equipment through the PPP model, and improve the hospital supply chain system, said Chief Minister Dr Manik Saha here on Saturday. The CM, who holds the health portfolio, said the state is actively utilising the 'Mera Hospital' mobile application as part of its focus on patient-centric healthcare, and there are ongoing efforts to integrate AIIMS' 'Santusht'



app for systematic patient feedback and service quality enhancement. He conducted a comprehensive review of the Action Taken Report (ATR) on the MoU signed between AIIMS, New Delhi, and the Government of Tripura. The ATR, prepared after a thorough

assessment of the MoU signed in October 2024, focuses on strengthening healthcare delivery and medical education in Tripura through collaborative efforts with AIIMS in Agartala Govt Medical College (AGMC) and GBP Hospital.

The agreement encompasses various administrative reforms, faculty development programmes, training initiatives, and skill enhancement measures, as well as the establishment of a Health University in Tripura to elevate medical education, research, and institutional capacity.

Initiatives like the introduction of IT-enabled

systems, the recruitment of additional manpower, the development of new departments, and amendments to service rules are in progress to ensure the effective implementation of the MoU, aiming to elevate hospital services, medical education standards, and overall healthcare governance in the state. The Health and Family Welfare Department reiterated its commitment, in partnership with AIIMS, New Delhi, to the comprehensive enhancement of healthcare services and medical education infrastructure in Tripura, said Health Secretary Kiran Gitte.

Sonbhadra Police takes major action in cough syrup case

Begins seizure of illegal properties linked to Shubham Jaiswal

Varanasi

Police on Saturday initiated the process of seizing properties linked to the main accused, Shubham Jaiswal, and his father, Bholu Jaiswal, in the case of smuggling of banned cough syrup containing codeine. Kotwali Robertsganj in-charge Nagesh Singh said

properties at seven locations in Varanasi are to be seized. These include one property in Shivpur, five in Jagdishpur of Pindra, and one in Madhau. The total estimated value of the properties to be seized is approximately Rs six crore, including both movable and immovable assets. Property worth approximately Rs 76

lakh belonging to Shubham Jaiswal was seized in Shivpur. A few days ago, Sonbhadra police had also seized properties worth approximately Rs 28 crore belonging to Shubham Jaiswal and his father Bholu Jaiswal. Meanwhile, the Enforcement Directorate (ED) has started investigation

against Vikas Singh Narve, Akash Pathak, and hawala operator Prateek in the cough syrup smuggling case. According to sources, business worth more than Rs 50 crore was conducted between Bangladesh and Varanasi. Varanasi Commissionerate Police has frozen six bank accounts.

Verification formalities at Atal Canteens a joke on poor

Makes them wait for hours for food: Yadav

NEW DELHI

Delhi Congress chief Devender Yadav has hit out at the Delhi government, stating that the decision to make Aadhaar card and retina test compulsory for availing meals at the 'Atal Canteen' is nothing but a cruel joke on poor people, who have to wait for hours to get food due to the formalities. Yadav, hitting out at the Delhi government, alleged that instead of increasing the number of Atal Canteens, the Chief Minister Rekha Gupta-led government just wants to "trouble the poor working people".

According to the



Congress leader's claims, hundreds of poor people have to wait for hours in long queues to buy subsidised meals at the Atal Canteens. He described the Aadhaar verification at these canteens as harassment for the lakhs of slum dwellers in the national capital. Yadav

has also alleged that the food provided in the Atal Canteen is not sufficient for the poor people. He alleged that such conditions for buying food from Atal Canteens have been put in place to prevent the same person from getting food again from another such

canteen. The Congress leader demanded that the government must increase the number of thalis available at any given time in Atal Canteens, instead of harassing the people by imposing conditions. He claimed that if the number of Atal Canteens is compared to the approximate population living in Delhi's slums, and also including those poor people near markets, factories, and hospitals, then the scheme, which claims to eradicate hunger, currently seems to be a gimmick, which is in place to just deceive the underprivileged.

CBI to probe Patna NEET aspirant's death amid allegations of police lapses

Patna

Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar on Saturday recommended a CBI probe into the suspicious death of a NEET aspirant at a girls' hostel in Patna. For over three weeks, the state police had been facing allegations of negligence and a cover-up in the case, prompting the government to take the significant decision. Confirming the move, Bihar Deputy Chief Minister Samrat Choudhary wrote on social media platform X: 'The Chief Minister has requested the government of India to have the CBI investigate the NEET student's murder case in Patna. It must be ensured that the incident is uncovered in a transparent and just manner.' Since the incident came to light, widespread anger has been seen across the state. Student organisations, social activists, and political parties have been demanding

a fair investigation, repeatedly calling for a CBI probe. On Friday, the victim's family alleged that the local police was downplaying the seriousness of the case and attempting to protect certain influential individuals. Later, they met Deputy Chief Minister Samrat Choudhary and demanded a high-level investigation. Leader of the Opposition in the Bihar Assembly Tejaswi Yadav said that by handing the case to the CBI, the state government had once again proved that the state's administrative system was corrupt, incompetent, inefficient, and unprofessional, and incapable of solving "even a rape-and-murder case." He added, "In many cases like the Navrana case, the CBI has failed to arrest the accused even after 12-13 years and has stopped investigations. This case will meet the same fate." CPI (ML) general

secretary Dipankar Bhattacharya said that widespread public movements led by AISAs, students, women, and the victim's family had forced the Bihar government to bow to public pressure and recommend a CBI investigation into what he described as the "horrible rape-and-murder case of the NEET student." Calling it a victory of people's struggles, he said the fight was not yet over. "Merely recommending a CBI investigation is not enough. The probe must be conducted under the direct supervision and monitoring of a sitting Supreme Court judge to ensure a fair, independent, and credible investigation," he said. Jan Suraj party leader and former Additional Director General of Police (Himachal), JP Singh, said that handing over the case to the CBI after such a long delay raises serious questions about the functioning of the state administration.

Kerala calls for tourism that works for everyone at 'Kerala for All' conclave

KOCHI : Emphasising that accessibility must be at the heart of how tourism destinations are envisioned and managed, Tourism and PWD Minister P.A. Mohamed Riyas on Saturday called on governments and industry stakeholders to move beyond symbolic measures and integrate inclusion into the core of tourism planning. Addressing 'Kerala for All', a knowledge conclave jointly organised by The Hindu and the Kerala Tourism Department, the minister said tourism could truly connect cultures and communities only when it was designed to welcome everyone, without exception. Community participation, he said, was the backbone of successful inclusive tourism, making travel experiences more meaningful, sustainable and socially rooted.

"Inclusive and accessible tourism ensures that travel is possible for all people, regardless of age, ability or social background," the minister said, adding that diversity should be seen as a strength rather than a limitation. Describing accessibility as both an ethical responsibility and an economic opportunity, Riyas said the removal of physical, social, informational and attitudinal barriers was essential to enabling people to travel with dignity and independence. He cautioned against viewing accessibility only through the lens of disability, noting that its benefits extended equally to senior citizens, families with children, people recovering from injuries and travellers navigating unfamiliar environments.

The minister said barrier-free

infrastructure such as ramps, lifts, accessible toilets and well-designed public spaces helped create destinations that were safer and more comfortable for everyone. At the same time, non-physical measures like clear signage, user-friendly information systems and digitally accessible platforms were equally critical in reducing confusion and exclusion. Warning against reducing accessibility to a mere infrastructure checklist, Riyas stressed the importance of the human element in tourism. Well-trained and sensitised tourism personnel, he said, played a decisive role in ensuring that visitors felt welcomed, respected and included.

He said universal design principles provided the broader framework for inclusive tourism, arguing that facilities

and services should be usable by all without the need for special adaptation. Accessible transport, inclusive accommodation and culturally sensitive services, he noted, were not optional additions but the foundation of a seamless tourism experience. Expanding the scope of inclusion further, the minister said inclusive tourism must also address cultural, linguistic and economic diversity so that neither visitors nor host communities felt marginalised or exploited. "When local communities are involved, tourism becomes more responsible and more resilient," he said, linking inclusion directly to long-term destination competitiveness and sustainable development. Referring to pilot initiatives in the Beypore constituency in Kozhikode district, Riyas

said a project had been launched to transform the constituency into a fully disabled-friendly area. The initiative, undertaken in collaboration with an organisation working in the field of accessibility, aimed to demonstrate how inclusive design could be effectively implemented at the local level. Looking ahead, the minister highlighted the need for strong policy support and regulatory frameworks to accelerate the transition towards inclusive tourism. The effective use of technology, including assistive applications and digital guides, could further reduce barriers and empower travellers, he said.

In this context, he announced that Kerala was moving towards a comprehensive design policy, with the public works and tourism departments

having taken the first step by drafting a policy to embed accessibility and universal design principles into public infrastructure. Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan had earlier described the proposed policy as the first of its kind in the country, positioning Kerala as a national leader in inclusive planning. Noting that several other States were now developing similar design policies, Riyas said this reflected both the need for and acceptance of the approach, adding that Kerala's initiative could have a wider influence beyond the State. "Inclusive and accessible tourism is not a special service for a few," he said in his concluding remarks. "It is a shared responsibility of governments, industry stakeholders, communities and cities."

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US Department of Justice releases three million additional documents from Epstein files

Washington : The US Department of Justice on Friday released an additional three million documents from the Jeffrey Epstein files, uploading the latest tranche to its online repository.

The documents form part of tens of thousands of pages made public so far, including photographs, videos, court filings, FBI and DOJ records, news clippings, and emails. Some materials reference prominent figures, including President Donald Trump and former president Bill Clinton, though none of those named have been linked to wrongdoing. The releases are mandated under the Epstein Files Transparency Act, which required the DOJ to produce all records related to the late convicted sex offender Jeffrey Epstein and his associate Ghislaine Maxwell by December 19. The department said the sheer volume of material and the need to redact information identifying survivors necessitated a



rolling release. Deputy Attorney General Todd Blanche told reporters that the latest disclosure represents one of the last steps required under legislation passed by Congress and signed into law by President Trump, requiring the publication of files related to the deceased sex offender Epstein.

"Today's release marks the end of a very comprehensive documentation – document identification and review process to ensure transparency to the American people and compliance with the act. The department

has engaged in an unprecedented and extensive effort to do so, after submitting the final report to Congress, as required under the Act, and publishing the written justifications for redactions in the Federal Register, the department's obligations under the act will be completed," Blanche said. Blanche said that the release includes more than 2,000 videos and 180,000 images, which will have "extensive redactions".

He added that the Trump administration had produced roughly 3.5m pages in an effort to comply with the Epstein Files Transparency Act. He

said that they include large quantities of commercial pornography and images "that were seized from Epstein's devices". The deputy attorney general said he did not expect the release to quell interest in the case or end speculation about its contents but added that the Justice Department has not refused to charge anyone who may have had sexual relations with or trafficked victims.

"There is a hunger for information that I do not believe will be satisfied by these documents," he said. "But the assumption that we are covering up evidence or choosing not to prosecute individuals is incorrect. If evidence emerges that allows us to bring charges, we will do so." The latest disclosure marks the largest single release to date and follows mounting pressure on the department to clarify when the process would be completed. While the law allowed the DOJ 30 days to review the files, officials have argued that meeting

the deadline was unrealistic given the scope of required redactions. Critics, however, have accused the department of withholding material beyond what the law permits. Blanche said the DOJ has released approximately six million pages in total, likening the volume to "two Eiffel Towers." Attorney General Pam Bondi and Blanche also sent a six-page letter to Congress confirming that the production fulfills the department's obligations under the Act. However,

Representative Ro Khanna, a co-sponsor of the legislation to release the files, questioned the DOJ's math and level of transparency. In a statement, Khanna said the department had identified more than six million responsive pages but released only about 3.5 million after review and redaction.

Khanna said he would closely examine whether key materials have been withheld, warning that failure to release such records undermines public trust.

Trump signals Iran open to talks amid massive US military buildup

Washington US President Donald Trump on Friday signaled that Iran is open to negotiations to avoid potential American military action, even as Tehran insisted that talks cannot proceed under pressure.

Speaking to reporters at the White House, Trump said, "They do want to make a deal." He revealed that a deadline has been set for Iran to begin discussions, though he did not specify the exact timeframe. "Hopefully, we'll make a deal. If we don't make a deal, we'll see what happens," he added, referencing the deployment of a US naval carrier group near Iran.

While Washington expressed readiness for dialogue, Iran's Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi reiterated Tehran's position. He said Iran is willing to negotiate on equal footing, based on mutual interests and respect, but firmly stressed that Iran's defensive and missile capabilities will never be negotiable. Currently, no meetings are planned between Iranian and US officials to restart talks.

"I want to state firmly that Iran's defensive and missile capabilities will never be subject to negotiation," Araghchi said. The statements come amid repeated warnings from Trump about potential military action if Iran does not meet American demands, including limitations on its nuclear program and missile development. Iran has warned of retaliation to any US strike, while Turkey has offered to mediate between the two nations.

Trump has recently been briefed on a broader and more aggressive set of military options targeting Iran. These plans aim to inflict significant damage on Iran's nuclear and missile infrastructure or undermine the authority of the supreme leader, marking a significant escalation from earlier considerations.



Officials noted that the new options exceed those reviewed two weeks ago, when the focus was on enforcing Trump's commitment to halt violence against Iranian protesters. The proposals include scenarios that could place American forces directly on Iranian soil, including targeted raids on key facilities.

Earlier, US Secretary of War Pete Hegseth delivered a stern warning to Iran, highlighting American military readiness and deterrence. Hegseth emphasised that Iran should not pursue nuclear weapons, stating, "They should not pursue nuclear capabilities, and we will be prepared to deliver whatever this president expects of the War Department."

Hegseth also cited the capture of former Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro and his wife as an example of US military prowess, describing it as "unparalleled in scale and execution". He stressed that such actions signal US resolve globally. On Truth Social, Trump reiterated the US stance, noting that a "massive armada" led by the aircraft carrier USS Abraham Lincoln is moving toward Iran. He urged Tehran to return to negotiations, calling for a deal barring nuclear weapons development: "Hopefully Iran will quickly 'Come to the Table' and negotiate a fair and equitable deal – NO NUCLEAR WEAPONS. Time is running out."

He warned that if Iran does not comply, any future strikes will be far worse than prior actions. Trump also referenced a June 2025 campaign.

in which US forces, in coordination with Israel, struck multiple Iranian nuclear facilities, setting back Tehran's nuclear capabilities. Protests in Iran have largely fizzled, but the Trump administration, once considering military action over Tehran's violent crackdown, has now made "no nuclear weapons" its foremost demand.

Meanwhile, President Trump is reportedly weighing a major strike as nuclear negotiations show no progress.

The president previously pulled back from military action due to a lack of US assets in the Middle East. That constraint has now been addressed between January 22 and January 29, the US military repositioned aircraft and naval forces across the region, creating what Trump has called a "Massive Armada" capable of striking Iran if ordered.

The USS Abraham Lincoln aircraft carrier and three guided-missile destroyers are now in the Arabian Sea, according to US Central Command. The strike group left the South China Sea last week, joining three other US Navy destroyers in the region, including two near the Strait of Hormuz and another in the Red Sea.

Three smaller littoral combat ships are also operating in the Persian Gulf. The arrival of the carrier strike group added roughly 5,700 personnel to the region. The US maintains several bases across the Middle East, including Al Udeid Air Base in Qatar, which serves as the forward headquarters for US Central Command.

US approves USD 9 billion sale of Patriot missiles to Saudi Arabia

WASHINGTON

The United States has approved the potential sale of Patriot air defense missiles to Saudi Arabia, valued at approximately USD 9 billion. The announcement was made by the US State Department through notifications from the Defense Security Cooperation Agency (DSCA) and statements from the Pentagon. Saudi Arabia, a US ally and designated Major Non-NATO partner, requested the purchase of 730 Patriot Advanced Capability-3 Missile Segment Enhancement (PAC-3 MSE) interceptors.

"The State Department has made a determination approving a possible Foreign Military Sale to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia of PATRIOT Advanced Capability-3 Missile Segment Enhancement Missiles and related equipment for an

estimated cost of \$9.0 billion. The Defense Security Cooperation Agency delivered the required certification notifying Congress," the DSCA said in a statement. The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has requested to buy seven hundred thirty (730) PATRIOT Advanced Capability-3 Missile Segment Enhancement (PAC-3 MSE) missiles.

In addition to the missiles, the sale includes several non-major defense equipment items, such as PAC-3 MSE missile launcher conversion kits; PATRIOT automated logistics systems kits; PAC-3 telemetry kits; PAC-3 MSE shorting plug accumulation kit; PAC-3 MSE missile skid kits; PAC-3 MSE missiles round trainer; PAC-3 MSE empty round trainer; PAC-3 missile and ground support equipment spare parts; PAC-3 missile canister consumables; PAC-3 field surveillance

program; integration and test support and equipment.

This proposed sale will support the foreign policy and national security objectives of the United States by improving the security of a Major non-NATO Ally that is a force for political stability and economic progress in the Gulf Region. The proposed sale will improve Saudi Arabia's capability to meet current and future threats by providing advanced air defense missiles as part of an upgraded integrated air and missile defense (IAMD) system, thereby enhancing its air defense capability. The department said that this enhanced capability will protect land forces of Saudi Arabia, the United States, and local allies and will significantly improve Saudi Arabia's contribution to IAMD in the CENTCOM region.

January 2026 marks a month of weather extremes, plagued by scorching heat and deep freeze

New Delhi, Agency

January 2026 will be remembered as a month of sharp weather contrasts, with extreme heat, biting cold, and devastating rainfall affecting countries across every region of the world. From record-breaking temperatures and wildfires to crippling winter storms and deadly floods, the scale and frequency of impacts once again underlined the growing risks posed by a warming climate. The economic, environmental, and human toll of these events has brought renewed focus on the importance of accurate forecasts and timely early warnings.

National Meteorological and Hydrological Services were on the frontline throughout the month, issuing alerts on heatwaves, fires, cold snaps, snowstorms and floods, according to a press statement issued by the World Meteorological Organisation (WMO). The Weather agency's coordination mechanism helped consolidate expert advice and warnings for humanitarian agencies, ensuring consistent messaging through the Common Alerting Protocol.

"It is no wonder that extreme weather consistently features as one of the top global risks," said WMO Secretary-General Celeste Saulo, noting that the number of people affected by weather- and climate-related disasters continues to rise year after year. WMO recently confirmed that 2026 ranked among the three warmest years on record, a long-term trend that is fueling more frequent and intense extremes. Extreme heat dominated headlines in the Southern Hemisphere. Large parts of Australia were hit by two heatwaves in January, with temperatures soaring well above 45°C in several regions. Ceduna, in South Australia, recorded 49.5°C on January 26, a new local record. Dangerous fire weather

conditions followed, prompting authorities to issue heatwave and bushfire warnings.

In South America, deadly wildfires tore through Chile's Biobio and Nuble regions, killing at least 21 people and forcing mass evacuations, while prolonged heat, drought and strong winds fueled fires in Argentina's Patagonia. At the same time, severe cold and winter storms disrupted life across the Northern Hemisphere. A weakened and distorted polar vortex allowed Arctic air to spill southwards, triggering cold snaps and heavy snowfall across North America, Europe, and parts of Asia. In late January, a massive winter storm swept across Canada and the United States, causing power outages, flight cancellations, and multiple deaths. Russia's Kamchatka Peninsula experienced one of its snowiest periods since the 1970s, with snowdrifts burying infrastructure.

Heavy rainfall and flooding compounded the crisis elsewhere. Southern Africa was battered by weeks of heavy rain, with Mozambique worst affected. Floods displaced hundreds of thousands, damaged tens of thousands of homes, and heightened the risk of water-borne diseases. A World Weather Attribution study found that climate change and La Niña combined with intensified rainfall in the region by about 40 per cent compared to preindustrial times. Deadly landslides linked to heavy rain were also reported in Indonesia and New Zealand. As forecasts point to further risks from cold air intrusions, storms, and flooding in the weeks ahead, WMO has reiterated the urgency of preparedness. "Extreme weather does not stop at borders," Saulo warned. "Heeding official forecasts and early warnings is critical, because timely action saves lives."

Trump administration eases sanctions on Venezuelan oil industry

Washington : The US Treasury Department on Thursday issued a general license to ease some sanctions on Venezuela's oil industry, authorizing established US entities to engage in certain transactions involving Venezuelan crude. The license allows for the "lifting, exportation, reexportation, sale, resale, supply, storage, marketing, purchase, delivery, or transportation of Venezuelan-origin oil, including the refining of such oil" under specified conditions.

A White House official confirmed that the authorization does not cover upstream crude production inside Venezuela, where currently only one US oil company, Chevron Corp, operates under a special US license, Bloomberg reported. The license also requires that contracts with the Venezuelan government or state-run Petroleos de Venezuela be governed by US law and specify that any disputes must be resolved in the United States. According to the US Treasury Department, the license does not authorize debt swaps or transactions

involving cryptocurrency payments, and excludes dealings with countries including Russia, Iran, Cuba and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, as well as blocked vessels and China-related entities. The move came as Venezuela on the same day approved a partial reform of its hydrocarbons law to allow greater private participation in the oil sector.

U.S. President Donald Trump insisted on Thursday that this license will benefit both the United States and Venezuela. "Venezuela will actually make for themselves more money than they've ever made before, and that's a good thing," Trump said at a meeting of his Cabinet on Thursday. In a surprise raid in the Venezuelan capital of Caracas on Jan. 3, the US military seized Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro and his wife and transported them to New York to stand trial on alleged drug charges. Trump has said on multiple occasions in recent weeks that Washington intends to control Venezuela's oil sales and revenues indefinitely.

Israeli Army denies media reports on Gaza conflict casualty figures

Tel Aviv

Figures published in certain media reports regarding 70,000 casualties in the Gaza Strip conflict do not align with official data of the Israel Defence Forces (IDF), a military source from the IDF told Sputnik on Friday. "The IDF clarifies that the published data does not correspond to official IDF figures. Any publications or reports on this matter will be disseminated through official channels," the source stated. IDF spokesperson Lieutenant Colonel Nadav Shoshani also refuted the reports.

On Thursday, several Israeli media outlets reported that the IDF had allegedly confirmed for the first time estimates from the Gaza Health Ministry, according to which approximately 70,000 people had been killed in the Palestinian enclave over two years of conflict.

A report by The Jerusalem Post noted that the IDF disputes the percentage of civilian casualties cited by the UN and claims that no healthy person has died from starvation. According to the publication, various international organisations assert that the overwhelming majority of those killed in Gaza were civilians, but the IDF continues to challenge this figure, stating that about 25,000 were Hamas militants. Such reports did not cite a source for its data.

PTI says former PM Imran Khan's family to receive medical report

Islamabad Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) Secretary General Salman Akram Raja on Friday declared that the family of party founder and former prime minister Imran Khan would be provided a copy of his medical report, following a day-long sit-in by party leaders and lawmakers outside the premises of the Pakistan Supreme Court. The demonstration staged in Islamabad was attended by Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Chief Minister Sohail Afridi, Senate opposition leader Allama Raja Nasir Abbas, PTI lawmakers and party workers, with a similar protest being staged outside Adiala Jail late Thursday night.

Speaking to reporters outside the SC premises, Raja said the protest was geared towards facilitating a meeting between the incarcerated ex-premier and



his personal physicians, in addition to obtaining clarity about his recent medical treatment. The development follows confirmation by federal Information Minister Attaullah Tarar, who said Khan did indeed undergo a brief medical procedure for an eye ailment last week at Islamabad's Pakistan Institute of Medical Sciences (PIMS). According to the minister, the former premier was taken to the hospital on the night of January 24 for a 20-minute procedure.

Raja said PTI leaders remained in contact throughout the day with the chief justice of Pakistan, court officials and the attorney general, but described the outcome as "unsatisfactory." He said the authorities had agreed to hand over Imran Khan's medical reports – covering his diagnosis in jail and treatment at PIMS – in a sealed envelope to the former prime minister, with a copy to be given to his family, including his sisters. "Once the report is before the family, they will decide whether the treatment being provided is satisfactory and what further steps are needed," Raja said, adding that Imran Khan's health was the party's top concern. Alleging that the former premier had been taken to the hospital without informing his family, with contradictory statements being issued afterwards

to veil the truth, Raja remarked that PTI would continue carrying on with its protests to secure Imran Khan's visitation and medical rights. The party's political committee would meet later in the day to decide the next course of action in consultation with the two National Assembly opposition leaders and political allies, Mahmood Khan Achakzai and Raja Nasir Abbas. In a prior address to the media, CM Afridi said the nation was deeply concerned about Khan's health and warned that the party would announce further action if a meeting with his personal doctors was not arranged. PTI leaders also reiterated demands that specialists from Shaukat Khanum Hospital be allowed to examine the former prime minister, arguing that secrecy around his treatment was fuelling anxiety among his family and supporters.

K J Somaiya Institute of Management Recognised by CSRI for Advancing India's Sports Education Ecosystem

MUMBAI: K J Somaiya Institute of Management (KJSIM), one of Mumbai's leading private B-schools, has been conferred the "Best Management Institute Supporting Sports Ecosystem & Development" award by the Confederation of Sports and Recreation Industry (CSRI). The recognition highlights KJSIM's sustained contribution to strengthening India's sports education ecosystem through structured academic programmes, industry engagement, and experiential learning.

CSRI is a national body that works closely with the Government of India and leading sports organisations, playing a significant role in fostering partnerships, influencing policy, and expanding the sports and recreation industry across the country. Instituted in its inaugural year, the award was adjudicated by an independent jury, with KJSIM recognised for its consistent and meaningful impact in sports management education and ecosystem



development.

Commenting on the recognition, Dr Raman Ramachandran, Director and Dean, K J Somaiya Institute of Management, said, "Sports in India are evolving at a rapid pace, and this evolution calls for professionally trained leaders who understand both management principles and the unique dynamics of the sports ecosystem. At KJSIM, we combine rigorous academic learning with hands-on exposure, strong industry partnerships, and access to world-class sports infrastructure through

our collaboration with Somaiya Sports Academy (SSA). This integrated learning environment enables students to engage with real, high-performance sports settings, build decision-making capabilities, and develop the discipline and teamwork required to contribute meaningfully to the growth and long-term sustainability of India's sports sector."

KJSIM's work in the sports education space is anchored in its MBA in Sports Management, a programme that integrates core management

disciplines with specialised, industry-aligned training tailored to the sports industry. Designed to be immersive and practice-driven, the programme equips future professionals to respond effectively to the evolving demands of India's sports ecosystem while contributing to its long-term development.

Over the last five years, the MBA in Sports Management has evolved from a niche specialisation into a robust professional pathway aligned with the realities of India's fast-changing sports landscape. What distinguishes the programme is not only what students study, but how they are trained to think, decide, and act in complex, high-pressure sports environments.

The curriculum places increasing emphasis on Experiential learning through live projects, field immersions, and sustained industry interactions. Problem-solving and application, using case studies, simulations, and real-world sports scenarios and Decision-making, reflecting real

sports contexts rather than idealised models. Beyond classroom learning, KJSIM embeds sports and individual well-being into its academic philosophy. The institute assigns 10% academic weightage to physical fitness, evaluated through mandatory sports credit courses for all first-year students. These audit courses form an integral part of the official curriculum and weekly timetable, reinforcing the importance of health, discipline, and teamwork alongside academic rigour.

The recognition from CSRI reinforces the growing importance of structured sports management education in India and affirms K J Somaiya Institute of Management's ongoing commitment to advancing the nation's sports sector. Through focused academic programmes, experiential pedagogy, and strong industry linkages, KJSIM continues to play a meaningful role in developing talent and supporting organisations across India's sports ecosystem.

SARC Davos Dialogues 2026 Highlight State-Led, Data-Driven Path to Viksit Bharat @2047

DELHI: The SARC Davos Dialogues 2026 convened a series of high-impact leadership roundtables underscoring the centrality of state-level execution in India's journey towards Viksit Bharat @2047. Organised by SARC Global, the dialogues showcased how disciplined governance, technology-enabled decision-making, and institutional resilience are redefining public outcomes across Indian states.

A key focus was end-to-end data management through DataOS®, developed by The Modern Data Company. The discussions demonstrated how integrated data architectures can strengthen public finance management, enhance scheme execution and monitoring, enable real-time decision-making, and reduce operational friction across departments. In partnership with ColorTokens, SARC also

highlighted zero-trust, micro-segmentation cybersecurity frameworks critical for securing data centres, cloud infrastructure, OT/SCADA systems, and digital public platforms—positioning cyber resilience as foundational to Digital Public Infrastructure and public trust.

The dialogues reaffirmed India's state-led development paradigm, with governance—innovative, accountable, and execution-oriented—at its core. Uttar Pradesh and Telangana emerged as exemplars of this approach. The Uttar Pradesh dialogue focused on infrastructure-led growth, industrial expansion, and integrated urban-rural development as pillars of Viksit Uttar Pradesh @2047, emphasising fiscal prudence, accelerated project delivery, and data-driven administration as national growth

imperatives. In parallel, Telangana's engagement highlighted a human-centric development pathway anchored in skills, employment, inclusive welfare delivery, and agriculture as a stabilising socio-economic foundation. Leaders underscored how targeted skilling, outcome-based programmes, and data-enabled governance can translate growth into broad-based prosperity.

Across five days, the SARC Davos Dialogues 2026 addressed themes ranging from global capital and strategic autonomy to supply chains, competitive federalism, and regulatory certainty. The overarching conclusion was clear: India's ascent to Viksit Bharat @2047 will be shaped not merely by policy intent, but by precise, data-empowered execution—state by state, institution by institution, and outcome by outcome.

CREX Emerges as India's Fastest-Growing Sports App in Sensor Tower's State of Mobile 2026

NEW DELHI: CREX has been recognised as India's fastest-growing sports application in the State of Mobile 2026 report published by Sensor Tower, a global authority on mobile app analytics and industry research.

According to the report, CREX recorded the highest monthly active user (MAU) growth in the sports category in India and ranked fourth globally in MAU growth among sports apps. This places the platform alongside established international players shaping engagement trends in the global mobile sports ecosystem. The recognition underscores CREX's strong traction and growing relevance among India's rapidly expanding mobile-first audience.

Sensor Tower's State of Mobile report is widely

regarded as a benchmark for understanding global app trends, tracking downloads, monetisation, engagement behaviour, and category-level performance across regions. The 2026 edition highlights a monetisation-first phase in mobile, rising engagement across non-gaming categories, and the growing influence of generative AI and social platforms in redefining user behaviour. Global platforms such as TikTok and ChatGPT also featured prominently, reflecting the competitive landscape in which CREX's performance has been measured.

In the sports segment, CREX stood out as one of the few apps demonstrating sustained growth and high engagement amid intensifying competition. The report also reflects broader shifts in how

Indian audiences consume real-time scores, updates, and community-driven sports content through mobile platforms.

Commenting on the recognition, Purushotam Rawat, CEO of CREX, said the inclusion validates changing user preferences towards reliable, real-time sports information on mobile devices.

CREX is among the world's largest cricket-focused digital platforms, with over 100 million global downloads and 15-20 million monthly active users.

Recognised as the second-largest cricket community app worldwide, it is powered by more than five decades of historical match data. The platform has also strengthened its brand presence with Harmanpreet Kaur and Shikhar Dhawan as brand ambassadors.

India's Mental Well-Being Landscape Sees a Shift with the Launch of "NLP Gurukul™" by Partha Roy

"India's mental well-being is at a crossroads. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), the country carries one of the world's highest treatment gaps in mental health—between 70% and 92% of people needing care do not receive it. With only about one psychiatrist per 100,000 people and an age-adjusted suicide rate of 21.1 per 100,000, India faces a crisis that touches workplaces, families, and communities alike. Rising stress among youth and professionals makes the need for innovative, culturally resonant interventions more urgent than ever."

According to industry observers, India faces a significant gap between the requirement for trained mental well-being professionals and their actual availability. With a vast population and increasing psychological stressors, the existing professional-to-population ratio remains far from adequate. This gap is especially visible in corporates, MSMEs and emerging business ecosystems where performance pressure, uncertainty and rapid change directly impact employee productivity and leadership

effectiveness.

Corporates and micro, small and medium enterprises are increasingly recognising that mental well-being is not just a personal issue but a strategic business priority. Organisations that actively invest in emotional resilience, clarity of thinking and behavioural alignment report improved engagement, better decision-making and sustained performance. However, many still struggle to find practical frameworks that move beyond awareness into measurable transformation.

Addressing this need, NLP Gurukul™ has been launched as a curated, internationally certified Neuro Linguistic Programming workshop designed to ensure learning, retention and immediate real-world application. The initiative focuses on creating sustainable internal shifts that emerge naturally through awareness and structured practice, rather than temporary motivational interventions.

The core theme driving the initiative, led by Partha Roy, is "Create Sustainable Shift™". The approach emphasises long-term

behavioural alignment, clarity of communication and emotional regulation that participants can apply across professional and personal contexts. By integrating globally recognised NLP methodologies with contextual relevance for Indian audiences, the programme aims to develop competent mental well-being practitioners and conscious leaders.

To ensure maximum reach and accessibility, the trainings are delivered through a hybrid model that combines in-person sessions with advanced online learning techniques. This format enables participants from different geographies to engage deeply with the curriculum while maintaining flexibility. The hybrid structure also supports consistent follow-up, practice and reinforcement, which are critical for lasting change.

A key focus of the initiative is expanding access beyond metropolitan centres. NLP Gurukul™ plans to actively reach Tier 2 cities, where awareness is growing but professional training opportunities remain limited. By creating a steady pipeline of trained mental well-being

professionals across regions, the programme aims to decentralise expertise and make support more locally available.

Regular sessions conducted every month further ensure continuity and scalability. This structured frequency allows individuals, corporates and aspiring practitioners to enter the ecosystem at multiple points throughout the year, making participation more inclusive.

"Partha Roy as part of his Create Sustainable Shift endeavour has brought Next Level NLP workshops on Mental Space Psychology originated by Dr. Lucas Derkx

..that works on the hypothesis that SPACE IS THE PRIMARY ORGANISING PRINCIPLE OF THE MIND".

At its core, the initiative is driven by the belief that mental well-being should be reachable and affordable for all. By combining certification, practical tools and sustained learning frameworks, NLP Gurukul™ positions itself as a step towards bridging India's growing mental well-being gap while empowering individuals to create meaningful, lasting change.

Chandigarh University Students Receive 10,000 Job Offers from Over 1,300 Global Firms

Chandigarh Chandigarh University (CU) has recorded an exceptional placement performance, with students securing over 10,000 job offers in 2025 from more than 1,300 leading national and international companies, marking a decade of unprecedented growth in recruiter participation and employability outcomes.

Over the past ten years, the number of recruiting firms visiting the CU campus has risen from 282 in 2014 to over 1,300 in 2025—an increase of nearly 325%. Annual job offers have grown by 315%, from 2,410 to 10,000, while IT companies alone have extended more than 15,000 offers to CU students during this period, underscoring the university's strong industry alignment.

In 2025, students received offers from Tier-1 multinational corporations including Microsoft, Google, Amazon, IBM, Deloitte, KPMG, PwC, TCS, Cognizant, Accenture, SAP Labs, and Walt Disney. CU students secured the highest number of offers from TCS in North India, with 550 selections.

Record-breaking packages were also achieved, including an international offer of Rs 1.7 crore from Nutanix, Rs 54.75 LPA from Palo Alto Networks, and domestic offers of up to Rs 50 LPA from Microsoft.

Engineering students led placements with 6,047 offers from 532 companies, while core engineering recruiters increased by 70% year-on-year. MBA students secured 1,427 offers from 447 companies, with packages reaching Rs 23 LPA. Strong outcomes were also recorded across biotechnology, law, design, media, architecture, tourism, aviation, and hospitality, with several programs achieving near-100% placement.

CU also processed 1,534 internships in 2025, with 99% paid opportunities and 37 international placements. With initiatives such as India's first LinkedIn Experience Zone and exclusive campus hiring by Adobe, Chandigarh University continues to strengthen its position as one of India's most industry-integrated institutions.

Blue Dart Express Ltd. Reports Q3FY26 Profit of Rs. 70 Crore; Revenue at Rs. 1,616 Crore

MUMBAI: Blue Dart Express Ltd, South Asia's leading express air and integrated transportation and distribution company, announced its financial results for the third quarter of FY26, ended December 31, 2025, following its Board Meeting held in Mumbai.

For the quarter, the company reported a profit after tax of Rs. 70 crore, while revenue from operations stood at Rs. 1,616 crore. The performance was supported by stable domestic demand and disciplined cost management, reflecting resilience in India's logistics and express delivery sector particularly a dynamic operating environment.

Commenting on the results, Balfour Manuel, Managing Director, said the company's Q3 performance was driven by steady demand from Tier 2 and Tier 3 markets and sustained shipment activity from small and medium enterprises (SMEs). He noted that strong execution discipline across Blue Dart's network helped maintain operational efficiency and service reliability during the quarter.

During Q3FY26, Blue Dart continued to invest selectively in strengthening its infrastructure and customer-facing capabilities as part of its long-term growth strategy. A key milestone was the operationalisation of its Flagship Green Integrated Ground Hub at Pataudi, Haryana, which is expected to enhance line-haul connectivity, improve network efficiency, and boost service reliability across North



India. The company also launched its Digital Account Opening (DAO) platform, enabling faster, paperless onboarding for customers, particularly SMEs, and improving access to its express logistics services.

Sustainability remained an important focus area, with continued emphasis on responsible operations and efficiency initiatives aimed at reducing the environmental impact of its logistics network.

Looking ahead, Blue Dart remains focused on disciplined growth, operational excellence, and customer-centric innovation. With ongoing investments in network resilience, digital solutions, and service quality, the company is well positioned to benefit from supply-chain formalisation, infrastructure development, and sustained consumption momentum, while delivering consistent value to customers, employees, and shareholders.

Exide Industries Introduces AGMi – Future-Ready AGM Battery Range for Advanced Passenger Vehicles

KOLKATA

Exide Industries Limited, India's leading storage battery manufacturer, has announced the launch of Exide AGMi, an advanced Absorbent Glass Mat (AGM) battery range for the Indian automotive aftermarket. The new range is engineered to address the rising power demands of modern, technology-intensive passenger vehicles, particularly in the premium and luxury segments.

Exide AGMi features spill-proof AGM-VRLA technology, delivering enhanced safety, higher cranking power, and up to three times the cycle life compared to conventional batteries. The batteries also offer superior vibration resistance, making them well suited for today's vehicles equipped with start-stop systems, advanced electronics, and higher electrical loads. The range is available across DIN 50, DIN 60, DIN 70, DIN 80, and DIN 95, covering applications from mass-market cars to ultra-luxury passenger vehicles. With this introduction, Exide becomes the only Indian battery manufacturer to offer a complete AGM battery portfolio for the aftermarket.

Commenting on the launch, Rajeev Khandelwal, Executive Director – Trade at Exide Industries, said the AGMi range brings globally accepted AGM technology to Indian consumers. He noted that the launch reinforces Exide's leadership in advanced battery solutions that power



next-generation mobility. He further added that the expected India-EU trade agreement is likely to accelerate growth in India's premium car segment, positioning Exide AGMi to effectively address emerging market opportunities.

AGM batteries are increasingly the preferred original-equipment (OE) technology for next-generation passenger vehicles due to their ability to support frequent engine restarts and complex electrical architectures. Designed specifically for vehicles originally equipped with OE-fitted AGM batteries, Exide AGMi ensures optimal compatibility and performance with modern vehicle platforms. Exide AGMi batteries will initially be available through select aftermarket channel partners across the top 10 Indian cities, with a phased nationwide expansion planned. The launch underscores Exide's continued focus on innovation, reliability, and readiness for the evolving automotive landscape.

Budget to strike balance between sustaining growth, maintain fiscal discipline

NEW DELHI, AGENCY
With the Union Budget set to be presented in Parliament on Sunday, expectations are high that the government will strike a careful balance between sustaining economic growth, generating employment and maintaining fiscal discipline amid a challenging global environment. Economists believed that the Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman is expected to build on recent reforms while addressing domestic priorities such as boosting consumption, supporting capital expenditure and strengthening the manufacturing and services sectors. The Budget comes at a time when India remains one of the fastest-growing major economies, even as global growth moderates due to geopolitical uncertainties, tight financial conditions and slowing demand in key markets.



Ahead of the Budget, the 'halwa ceremony', which marks the final stage of the preparation process for the Budget 2026-27, was held on January 27 in the Budget Press at North Block. The Economic Survey 2026 was also tabled in Parliament on 29 January. As per the Economic Survey, the Indian economy is expected to expand by 6.8-7.2% in FY27, supported by

strong macro fundamentals and a series of regulatory reforms. It also noted that India's core and headline inflation rates are likely to be higher in FY27 than in FY26. As of November 2025, India's fiscal deficit stood at 62.3% of the Budget Estimates, and the government aims to attain a fiscal deficit target of 4.4% of GDP by FY26, the survey noted. Fiscal consolidation also remains to be a cornerstone of the Budget as the economists have believed that the government will continue its glide path towards reducing the fiscal deficit, supported by buoyant tax collections and higher dividend payouts from public sector enterprises, while protecting capital spending on infrastructure. Targeted measures are also anticipated for labour-intensive sectors such as manufacturing,

construction, textiles and MSMEs. In their budget expectations, industry bodies have also sought enhanced incentives under the Production Linked Incentive (PLI) schemes and greater access to affordable credit for small businesses. Expectations are also higher on measures to improve farm incomes, enhance irrigation and storage infrastructure, and expand support for allied activities such as dairy and fisheries. Economists say a stronger rural push could help revive consumption demand. A report by the State Bank of India (SBI) has mentioned that the central government should announce reforms across taxation, insurance and pension sectors to boost household financial savings, reduce compliance challenges and improve social security coverage in the country.

"RIICO Delegation Visits TGIIC to Study Telangana's Industrial & IT Infra

Hyderabad
A high-level delegation from the Rajasthan State Industrial Development & Investment Corporation Ltd (RIICO), led by Ms. Shivangi Swarnkar, IAS, Managing Director, RIICO, conducted an extensive study tour of Telangana's premier industrial and IT hubs here on Friday. The visit aimed at understanding the best practices adopted by the Telangana Industrial Infrastructure Corporation (TGIIC) that have positioned the state as a global destination for investment. The delegation visited landmark locations, including HITEC City, Mindspace, Genome Valley, and the Electronic Manufacturing Clusters (EMC) at Ravivara and Maheshwaram (E-City). Following the field visits, the delegation held a high-level meeting at the

TGIIC Head Office with K. Shashanka, VC & MD, TGIIC, and senior HODs. During the interaction, K. Shashanka briefed the Rajasthan officials on the "Telangana Rising: Vision 2047" initiative. He highlighted how the state is transitioning toward a "USD 3 trillion" economy to ensure balanced regional development. He attributed the state's industrial success to the dynamic leadership of Chief Minister A. Revanth Reddy and the visionary guidance of Minister for Industries, IT & Commerce, D. Sridhar Babu. The RIICO MD, Ms. Shivangi Swarnkar, expressed appreciation for TGIIC streamlined processes in land management and infrastructure maintenance, noting that Telangana's IT and Life Sciences ecosystems serve as a benchmark for other states in India.

New Delhi
The Department of Financial Services (DFS) on Friday reviewed the performance of Regional Rural Banks (RRBs) in the current financial year, with the Secretary, DFS, chairing a high-level meeting here, an official statement said on Friday. The review highlighted strong growth momentum, with the combined business of RRBs crossing the Rs 12 lakh crore mark so far in FY26. The meeting was attended by chairpersons of all 28 RRBs along with senior officials from NABARD, sponsor banks and other key financial institutions. The performance review covered business growth, profitability, asset quality and progress in financial inclusion initiatives up to December 2025. RRBs now operate through a

network of more than 22,000 branches spread across 26 states and three union territories. Collectively, these banks serve over 32 crore deposit accounts and more than 3 crore loan accounts, underlining their critical role in providing banking services in rural and semi-urban areas, the finance ministry statement added. Provisional figures indicate that RRBs recorded a net profit of Rs 7,720 crore during the current financial year so far, improving upon last year's performance. The review also noted a continued improvement in asset quality, with both gross and net non-performing assets registering a decline, reflecting better credit monitoring and recovery efforts. The banks' contribution to financial

inclusion remained a key focus area, with over 45 lakh new Jan Dhan accounts opened during FY26. RRBs were also commended for expanding credit to priority sectors such as agriculture, micro and small enterprises, self-help groups and rural entrepreneurs. During the meeting, the DFS Secretary stressed the need for further strengthening of digital banking infrastructure, wider adoption of technology-driven services and improvement in customer grievance redressal systems. RRBs were also advised to diversify their loan portfolios, enhance operational efficiency and continue outreach in remote and underserved regions, while maintaining financial discipline and stability.

Heritage Aviation sings contract for Airbus H130 helicopter at Wings India in Hyderabad

Hyderabad
India-based helicopter operator Heritage Aviation Pvt Ltd has signed a contract for one Airbus H130 helicopter to further expand heli-pilgrimage and regional connectivity operations under the Government of India's (Ude desh ka aam nagrik) UDAN scheme. The contract was signed at Wings India 2026 with the delivery scheduled for September 2026. Airbus, a leading aircraft manufacturer said in a release here on Friday. The newly contracted H130 will be deployed for passenger transportation, heli-pilgrimage and regional connectivity missions, complementing Heritage Aviation's existing fleet of Airbus H125 and H130 helicopters currently

operating under the UDAN scheme.
"The helicopter industry in India is witnessing strong tailwinds due to the Government of India's favourable policies and strong demand environment. The new H130 will be used to expand our regional connectivity footprint in other areas including North East India, which largely remains virgin territory for private helicopter operations," said Rohit Mathur, Founder and CEO, Heritage Aviation Pvt. Ltd.

"Heritage Aviation has been instrumental in bridging the last mile connectivity gap, which only helicopters can effectively do across India's remote and hard-to-access terrains. This new addition

will not only expand heli-pilgrimage routes in the country but also support the Government of India's ambitions to widen the regional connectivity network. Airbus Helicopters remains committed to developing the critical para-public market with the right products and through our long-term partnership with India," said Sunny Guglani, Head of Airbus Helicopters in India and South Asia.
Known for its high performance, economic efficiency, reliability and comfort, the H130 is a single-engine helicopter that is widely used for sightseeing, charter and passenger transport missions. Featuring a spacious cabin that can accommodate a pilot and

up to seven passengers, the H130 combines advanced avionics, state-of-the-art systems and efficient performance, making it well suited for operations in environmentally sensitive and mountainous regions. Heritage Aviation has been at the forefront of strengthening helicopter connectivity in India, particularly in the state of Uttarakhand. The operator offers services across segments, such as heli-tourism, aerial services, rescue missions and major disaster-relief operations. The company has been among the first private operators to operationalise challenging routes such as Dehradun-Pithoragarh and Haldwani-Munsyari, improving access to remote and underserved regions.

SBI strengthens its trade and international banking operation with opening of GTFC in Kolkata

New Delhi
State Bank of India (SBI) has strengthened its trade finance and international banking operations with the launch of a Global Trade Finance Centre (GTFC) in Kolkata, an official statement said here on Friday. The new facility supports SBI branches in the region by enabling faster turnaround times, enhanced compliance oversight and a smoother customer experience for businesses involved

in domestic and cross-border trade. By integrating advanced technology with specialised expertise, the bank is seeking to raise efficiency and service standards in trade finance operations. The GTFC operates with a workforce of 277 professionals, including 161 SBI employees, 105 outsourced staff and 11 temporary personnel. All outsourced and temporary positions have been filled locally,

with 61 per cent of the total workforce—169 employees—drawn from West Bengal, highlighting the bank's focus on local employment generation. Since 2024, the centre has contributed Rs 1.40 crore in GST to the State of West Bengal. The establishment of the GTFC reflects SBI's broader strategy to strengthen operational capabilities while supporting India's growing global trade ecosystem, it added.

HYDERABAD The Confederation of Real Estate

Developers' Associations of India (CREDAI) Hyderabad on Friday welcomed the Economic Survey 2025-26, saying it reaffirms Hyderabad's position as a key engine of India's urban and economic growth. The Survey projects 7.4 per cent GDP growth for FY26, backed by strong gross fixed capital formation nearing 30 percent of GDP, robust services sector growth of 9.1

per cent, and fiscal consolidation with the deficit around 4.8 per cent. It also highlights strong momentum in financial, real estate and professional services, which grew by 9.9 per cent in the first half of FY26, while construction expanded by 7.4 per cent.

CREDAI Hyderabad noted that the city's growth is marked by simultaneous core densification and rapid peripheral expansion,

NASA, Axiom Space finalise agreement for private astronaut mission to ISS in 2027



Chennai : The US space agency NASA and the US-based Axiom Space have signed a mission order for the fifth private astronaut mission (PAM) to the International Space Station, marking the agency's fifth consecutive PAM award to the company. Axiom Mission 5 (Ax-5) is targeted to launch no earlier than January 2027 from NASA's Kennedy Space Center in Florida. The mission is expected to remain docked to the space station for up to 14 days.

Crew members for Ax-5 are pending final contractual arrangements, as well as agency and international approvals, and will be announced at a later date.

"We are honoured that NASA awarded Axiom Space its fifth human spaceflight mission," said Dr. Jonathan Cirtain, President and CEO of Axiom Space. "All four previous missions have expanded the global community of space explorers, diversified scientific research in microgravity, and generated insights that are directly benefiting the development of Axiom Station, our next-generation commercial space station." Cirtain added that the award highlights Axiom Space's commitment to expanding access to space, advancing international collaboration, and enabling research opportunities in low-Earth orbit for the benefit of all.

As part of the mission, Axiom Space has selected Voyager Technologies, Inc. as a teammate, with responsibilities focused on payload integration.

"Voyager's role on Ax-5 reflects a proven mission-management heritage built through years of

supporting commercial payloads aboard the space station," said Dylan Taylor, Chairman and CEO of Voyager Technologies. "We are proud to partner with Axiom Space on Ax-5 as commercial low-Earth orbit destinations evolve into sustained operational environments." Taylor noted that missions such as Ax-5 demonstrate the value of integrated execution across human spaceflight, research payloads, and the commercial infrastructure shaping the future space economy.

As the United States transitions from government-led to commercially enabled space operations, Axiom Space remains one of the few companies with demonstrated human spaceflight experience positioned to lead this shift. Over the past four years, Axiom Space has successfully completed four missions to the International Space Station, flying 14 private and government astronauts. These missions supported more than 160 scientific and research activities, along with over 100 outreach and media engagements conducted in orbit. Previous Axiom missions were commanded by retired NASA astronauts Michael López-Alegría, Axiom Space Chief Astronaut, and Peggy Whitson, Vice President of Human Spaceflight at Axiom Space. The missions

SAIL records 60 Pc jump in profit on higher volumes and improved efficiency



NEW DELHI
State-owned Maharatna, Steel Authority of India Limited (SAIL) on Friday reported a strong improvement in its financial performance for the nine months ended December 31, 2025 (9M FY 26), supported by higher sales volumes, better operating efficiency and tighter cost controls, an official statement said here.

The company said crude steel production during the period rose by 2 per cent to 14.35 million tonnes from 14.08 million tonnes a year earlier, reflecting stable plant operations. Sales volumes recorded a sharper rise of 16.3 per cent, aided by greater outreach to retail and institutional customers, faster inventory liquidation and improved market penetration. Revenue from operations increased in line with volume growth, rising to Rs 79,997 crore in 9M FY'26 from Rs 73,162 crore in the corresponding

period of the previous year. Operating performance also strengthened, with EBITDA improving to Rs 8,384 crore from Rs 7,983 crore. Profitability saw a marked improvement during the period. Profit before exceptional items and tax rose to Rs 2,349 crore, while profit before tax increased to Rs 2,010 crore from ₹1,445 crore a year ago. Profit after tax surged by around 60 per cent to Rs 1,554 crore in 9M FY'26, compared with Rs 970 crore in the year-ago period, underscoring

gains from higher volumes, operating leverage and prudent financial management. SAIL also made progress on balance sheet strengthening, with its debt reducing to nearly Rs 5,000 crore during the nine-month period. Commenting on the results, SAIL Chairman and Managing Director Amarendu Prakash said the company delivered a significant improvement in profitability driven by robust domestic demand, improved market reach and higher volumes. He added that despite volatility in input costs and a competitive pricing environment, the company sustained operating profitability through product mix optimisation, cost discipline and efficiency measures. The results highlight SAIL's focus on strengthening operational performance and improving financial resilience amid challenging market conditions.

CREDAI Hyderabad welcomes Economic Survey 2025-26

Calls for capital and housing reforms

underlining the need for infrastructure, mobility and utilities to keep pace with urban expansion. Commenting on the Survey, Jagannath Rao Bandari, President-elect of CREDAI Hyderabad, said sustaining this momentum requires predictable regulations, contextual compliance and trust-based governance to address constraints related

to land, mobility and infrastructure. The association also flagged the high cost of capital as a key constraint and called for risk-mitigation tools, partial credit guarantees and improved access to long-term finance to support housing across segments. Ahead of the union Budget 2026, CREDAI Hyderabad sought continued thrust on infrastructure funding, support for

PMAY 2.0, single-window clearances and tax reforms to improve housing affordability and boost homeownership. Reiterating its commitment to reform-led growth and sustainable urban development, CREDAI Hyderabad said it looks forward to policies that strengthen Hyderabad's contribution to India's USD 5 trillion economy, according to a statement.

India pile up 271/5 as Kishan ton headlines brutal batting show

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM Ishan Kishan's breathtaking century, captain Suryakumar Yadav's audacious strokeplay and a ferocious finishing act by Hardik Pandya powered India to a towering 271 for five against New Zealand in the fifth and final T20 International here on Saturday.

Opting to bat at the Greenfield International Stadium, India lost Sanju Samson (6) early, and despite Abhishek Sharma's brisk 30, New Zealand briefly sensed an opening. That hope was swiftly extinguished by Kishan and Suryakumar, who unleashed a sustained assault that ripped the heart out of the New Zealand bowling.

Kishan produced one



of the most destructive T20I innings of his career, smashing 103 off just 43 balls with six fours and 10 sixes. He tore into the spinners, particularly Ish Sodhi, racing through the gears with a mix of slog-sweeps, reverse hits and towering straight blows. The left-hander brought

up his hundred in just 42 balls with consecutive sixes off Mitchell Santner, sparking a standing ovation from the spectators. His dismissal in the 18th over, after a miscued pull was taken in the deep, brought an end to a spellbinding knock.

Suryakumar was

equally devastating at the other end, compiling a fluent 63 off 30 balls. The India captain showcased his full repertoire, from wristy flicks and lofted drives to fearless charges down the pitch. He raised his fifty with back-to-back sixes off Jacob Duffy, as India plundered 23 runs from the over. The third-wicket partnership between Kishan and Suryakumar was worth a blistering 137 runs in just 57 deliveries, decisively tilting the contest in India's favour.

After Suryakumar fell in the 15th over, Pandya ensured the momentum did not dip. The allrounder walked in with clear intent and delivered a brutal cameo, hammering 42 off just 17 balls. He repeatedly punished anything short or

overpitched, clearing the mid-wicket and long-on boundaries with ease and pushing India beyond the 250-mark.

India's finishing flourish was capped by Shivam Dube, who launched Kyle Jamieson straight back over his head for six off the final ball, as the hosts amassed a staggering 169 runs in the last 10 overs.

For New Zealand, Lockie Ferguson claimed two wickets, but the rest of the attack endured a torrid evening, leaking runs at an alarming rate.

At the innings break, New Zealand face the daunting task of chasing 272, with India firmly in command after a night of relentless power-hitting led by Kishan, Suryakumar and Pandya.

Ishan Kishan smashes fifth fastest hundred by an Indian in T20Is

Thiruvananthapuram

India opener Ishan Kishan produced a breathtaking display of power-hitting, smashing a 42-ball century — the fifth fastest by an Indian batsman and the fastest ever against New Zealand — during the fifth T20 International here on Saturday.

Kishan's whirlwind hundred, which came off just 42 deliveries, is the seventh fastest in the history of T20 Internationals and places him joint fourth among Indian batters on the all-time list. His knock was a statement of intent, marked by clean striking and fearless strokeplay against a quality New Zealand attack.

The left-hander brought up his milestone in emphatic fashion off Mitchell Santner, India's onslaught with

launching back-to-back sixes over deep mid-wicket to spark wild celebrations in the stands. Hardik Pandya walked up to Kishan immediately after the landmark to embrace him, while the crowd rose to its feet in appreciation of a truly special innings.

Kishan eventually departed for a scintillating 103 off 43 balls, which included six fours and ten towering sixes. His innings came to an end when he pulled a short delivery from Jacob Duffy towards deep mid-wicket, where Glenn Phillips completed a fine catch.

As Kishan walked back, he received a standing ovation from spectators and teammates alike, with captain Suryakumar Yadav greeting him with a hug in the dugout.

India's onslaught with

the bat also resulted in several team milestones. The side smashed 23 times in the innings, the joint most ever conceded by a Full Member team in a T20 International, equaling South Africa's tally against India at Johannesburg in 2024.

With this match, India have now hit a record 69 sixes in the five-match bilateral T20I series against New Zealand, the most by any team in such a series. The previous best was 64 sixes, achieved by England against West Indies in 2023 and by Australia against West Indies in 2025.

Kishan's explosive return to form not only powered India to a commanding total but also underlined the depth and firepower of their batting line-up ahead of the next phase of the season.

Double Olympic medalist Ukrainian Iryna relishing her time in Pro Wrestling League

NOIDA : Ukraine's two-time Olympic medalist wrestler Iryna Koliadko says she is relishing being a part of the ongoing Pro Wrestling League (PWL), with its "fabulous" crowd support and the "lovely group of players".

One of the best foreign talents in the league, Iryna won a silver medal at the 2024 Paris Olympics and a bronze at the Tokyo Olympics.

Iryna's come-from-behind win against Punjab Royals' Ana Godinez in the Women's 62 kg category was a turning point of the first semi-final of the league played at Noida's indoor stadium on Friday night.

"The Olympic games involve competition for only two days, those are intense, only about concentration, but here in this league, we play for three weeks. It feels great being part of a team, such a lovely group of players, and the crowd support is fabulous," she told UNI in broken



English.

She hoped the Delhi Dangal Warriors reach the final to be played on Sunday. She said that Delhi playing the final will ensure huge crowd attendance at the Noida stadium.

The second semi final of the league will be played later today between Maharashtra Kesari and Delhi Dangal Warriors.

India opt to bat first as local boy Sanju Samson's inclusion confirmed

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

A roaring Greenfield Stadium got what it wanted when India captain Suryakumar Yadav confirmed local favourite Sanju Samson's inclusion moments after winning the toss and opting to bat first against New Zealand in the final match of the five-game T20I series here on Saturday. Choosing to bat, Suryakumar said the decision was influenced by the expected dew later in the evening and a surface that promised true bounce for most of the contest. "We were here last night, there was a lot of dew and we want to test ourselves. The groundsman says it is going to be true for 40 overs," he said.

India made a few changes to



the playing XI, with Axar Patel and Ishan Kishan returning to the side. The skipper's announcement of Samson's inclusion drew loud cheers from the stands. "Don't worry Thiruvananthapuram, Sanju Samson is playing tonight," Suryakumar said, adding that the team was still awaiting Tilak Varma's availability.

Reflecting on the team's overall balance, Suryakumar expressed satisfaction with India's progress across departments. "We have almost covered all the departments. Every game we learn something and take it forward," he said. New Zealand captain Mitchell Santner said conditions might not be as dewy as expected and confirmed four changes to his side. "It might not be too dewy tonight. We have got four changes — Allen in for Conway, Neesham is in for Chapman, KJ and Lockie are in," he said. Welcoming the return of key players, Santner added, "It is always nice to have them back, and it is an opportunity to see what they have got."

Bangkok : Indian shuttler Devika Sihag booked her place in the finals of the Princess Sirivannavari Thailand Masters 2026 after defeating fifth seed Huang Yu-Hsun in a thrilling 38-minute encounter on Saturday.

Devika has reached the finals without dropping a single game throughout the tournament. 20 year old started the opening game strongly, but momentum briefly shifted as Huang edged ahead at 8-7 and surged to a 20-15 game point lead.

Devika fought back and mounted a remarkable comeback, saving five game points to level at 20-all before clinching the game 22-20.

Carrying that confidence into the second game, the young Indian dominated proceedings to seal a 21-13 win over the Chinese Taipei shuttler, marking her maiden final appearance at a BWF Super 300 event.

Devika will next face Malaysia's Goh Jin Wei in the summit clash for the title.

momentum, visibility, and excellence for Indian golf."

Speaking to UNI, CEO of PGTI, Amandeep Johl, said PGTI's profile has risen due to this partnership. "After the PGA Tour, DP World-sponsored European tour and Japan tour, we are now at par with Korea and South Africa. So our standing has become much higher." DP World's long-standing commitment to golf goes back to 2009, when the company became the Presenting Partner of the European Tour's Dubai World Championship. It later elevated its involvement to Title Partner of the event in 2012, and in 2022 became the Title Partner of the entire Tour.

State Govt. to provide all support in establishing Kho Kho Academy: Haryana CM

Kurukshetra

Haryana Chief Minister Nayab Singh Saini on Saturday said his government would extend support for establishing a state-level Residential Kho Kho Academy and an under-16 Kho Kho League. Inaugurating the 35th Sub-Junior National Kho Kho Championship (Boys & girls) 2025-26 at Keshav Park here, Saini expressed happiness over Haryana hosting such a reputed national-level championship in the sport.

"I am happy to see that teams from all across the length and breadth of India have come, and the enthusiasm for the traditional game of Kho Kho is rising throughout the country," said Saini.

"Kho Kho is not just a game; it is the fragrance of the Indian soil. It is our collective responsibility to promote our traditional games and establish these games globally. Prime Minister Narendra Modi has a



great vision of India preparing for the 2036 Olympics and establishing our nation as a global power in sports. Programmes like Khelo India and Fit India are the outcome of this vision," said the CM.

"I assure President of Haryana Sports Kho Kho Association (HSKKA) Jawahar Singh Yadav of all support from the state government in establishing a state-level residential Kho Kho academy and an under-16 Kho Kho league in Haryana," added Saini.

He also promised Rs 21 lakhs to HSKKA for organising the ongoing championship.

"I am confident that Kho Kho will be included in the Commonwealth Games (2030) at Ahmedabad and in the Asian Games 2030. Also, as a demo sport in the Olympics (2032)", said Sudhanshu Mittal, President, Kho Kho Federation of India (KKFI).

The prestigious national event features 70 teams - 35 boys' and 35 girls' teams - representing 27 states, 5 union territories, and 3 associate member associations. The Championship is organised by Haryana Sports Kho Kho Association (HSKKA) under the aegis of Kho Kho Federation of India (KKFI).

Around 1,100 players, supported by 300 coaches and technical officials, are taking part in the championship. The event is being conducted on five playfields, including three mat fields, and follows a league-cum-knockout format with 120 matches scheduled over the first three days.

Five emerging Indian talents who stood out at the Women's Hero Hockey India League

New Delhi

The second season of the Women's Hero Hockey India League provided a significant platform for Indian players to compete at a high level alongside some of the best international talent in the sport. The tournament not only delivered competitive matches but also saw several young Indian players step up their game and make a strong impression with their consistent and match-winning performances. Following their impressive performances in the Women's Hero Hockey India League, these players have been included in the senior Indian women's national coaching camp under new Chief Coach Sjoerd Marijne. The camp is part of the team's preparations for upcoming international assignments, including the FIH Hockey Women's World Cup Qualifier Hyderabad 2026, scheduled to be held in March.

Lathantluangi (Ranchi Royals) Twenty-year-old Lathantluangi was a key part of the Ranchi Royals defensive unit that finished the Women's Hero Hockey India League with the best defence of the season, conceding just seven goals across the tournament. Showing strong game awareness and composure at the back, she read situations well and played an important role in building play from defence, using her distribution to effectively spread the ball and initiate attacks from deep positions.

Bansari Solanki (SG Pipers)

SG Pipers goalkeeper Bansari Solanki played a decisive role in her team's campaign



at the Women's Hero HIL, producing a standout performance in the Final against Shrahchi Bengal Tigers. Introduced specifically for the shootout after a 1-1 draw, the 24-year-old made three crucial saves, including a penalty stroke, to help SG Pipers secure a 3-2 shootout victory and lift the title. Her composure under pressure in the Final and her consistent performances alongside Argentine goalkeeper Cristina Cosentino also earned her the 'Goalkeeper of the Tournament' Award, underlining her impact throughout the season.

Sonam (JSW Soorma Hockey Club)

Following Sonam had yet another commendable season for JSW Soorma Hockey Club, showcasing confidence and attacking intent throughout the season. In the last edition, the 20-year-old claimed the 'Upcoming Player of the Tournament' Award and she delivered strong

performances yet again which has earned her a national camp call-up. JSW Soorma Hockey Club had their struggles in the attack this season with only six goals scored, however, one of them was a field goal by Sonam. A member of the Indian junior women's squad, Sonam's performances at the Women's Hero HIL reflected her ability to adapt to the senior level.

Shilpi Dabas (SG Pipers)

Defender Shilpi Dabas delivered a series of mature and assured performances at the back for SG Pipers as they claimed the Women's Hero HIL trophy. Having consistently impressed in the National Championships over the years, she translated that form onto the league with her composure, positioning and decision-making at the back. Her performances for SG Pipers in their title-winning campaign played a key role in earning her a long-awaited senior national team call-up, marking a significant milestone in her career.

Hina Bano (JSW Soorma Hockey Club)

At just 21 years of age, midfielder Hina Bano stood out with her calm and disciplined displays for JSW Soorma Hockey Club. Operating effectively in the middle of the park, she showed good game awareness, work rate and the ability to retain possession under pressure. Her performances highlighted her growing maturity and signalled her readiness to take on greater responsibility at the senior level, having previously been part of the Indian junior women's national setup.



Heartfelt Tribute

With profound grief, we pay our heartfelt tribute to
Honourable Late Shri Ajitdada Pawar Saheb

Deputy Chief Minister of Maharashtra

**We pray at the feet of the Almighty
that his noble soul may rest in eternal peace.**



In Mourning

**Public Works Board, Pune District
Hon. Bharat Baviskar (Superintending Engineer)**

All Officers, Employees, and Members of the Service Cadre