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for the year 2025-26, conferred by the

**Late Sukasheth Jadhav
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*We extend our heartfelt congratulations and best wishes
for his continued success and dedicated service to society.*

- Best Wishes From -



HON. RAJESAHEB MANIKRAO AGALE

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HON. VISHAL GUJAR • HON. SAGAR BODKE

HON. SHIVANAND HALLALE

HON. MEHBOOB SHAIKH

PUBLIC WORKS SUB-DIVISION BHOR TALUKA

All Staff Members

Pune

Sharad Pawar's Rajya Sabha plan unclear as Parth Pawar's name does the rounds

BOBBY ANTHONY, MUMBAI / PUNE

The BJP held an important meeting of the party's core committee at the residence of Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadnis on Tuesday to decide its Rajya Sabha candidate, sources said.

The development comes after the Election Commission of India (ECI) announced elections for 37 vacant Rajya Sabha (RS) seats in 10 states recently.

Voting will be held on March 16. The official notification will be issued on February 26, after which candidates will be able to file nominations till March 5.

In Maharashtra, seven seats are falling vacant on April 2. Depending on the strength, the ruling Mahayuti which comprises the BJP, Shiv Sena and the NCP, is poised to win six seats, while the opposition Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA), which comprises the Congress, Uddhav Thackeray-led Shiv Sena and the Sharad Pawar-led NCP could win one seat.

According to a senior BJP leader, the party is likely to field four candidates for the Rajya Sabha, including current Rajya Sabha MP Ramdas Athawale, though other names of BJP leaders like Vinod Tawde, Vijaya Rahatkar



and Dhairyashil Patil are also being discussed to enter the contest for the remaining three seats.

There has been no decision or indication from Sharad Pawar if he intends to go to the Rajya Sabha and this has fuelled political speculation.

However, it is fairly certain that the late Deputy CM Ajit Pawar's elder son Parth Pawar will be sent to the Rajya Sabha by the ruling BJP-led Mahayuti alliance. The present Deputy CM Sunetra Pawar held discussions with NCP Working President Praful Patel as well as Maharashtra NCP President Sunil Tatkare on this.

The Ajit Pawar-led NCP leadership is expected to hold discussions with Maharashtra CM Fadnis, who calls the shots in the BJP-led Mahayuti, as well as Deputy Chief Minister Eknath Shinde, before formally making any announcement regarding Parth Pawar's Rajya Sabha entry, sources said.

Speaking to media persons, Ajit Pawar-led NCP chief and MP Sunil

Tatkare said, "The notification for the Rajya Sabha will be issued on February 26. We will first elect the national president of our party, and then the name of the candidate for the Rajya Sabha will be finalised at this meeting. It is a clear mandate that everyone wants Parth Pawar to be our Rajya Sabha candidate".

What has got political observers excited is whether Sharad Pawar or his grand nephew would go to the Rajya Sabha.

If he makes it to the Rajya Sabha, Parth Pawar would be a third-generation parliamentarian from the Pawar family after Sharad Pawar, his daughter Supriya Sule and the late Ajit Pawar's wife Sunetra Pawar, to serve as a Rajya Sabha MP.

The seven retiring members of the Rajya Sabha from the state include four from the opposition MVA, namely Sharad Pawar himself and Sharad Pawar-led NCP's Fauzia Khan, Uddhav Thackeray-led Shiv Sena's Priyanka Chaturvedi and Congress party's Rajani Patil, while the three from the ruling BJP-led Mahayuti are BJP's Dhairyashil Mohan Patil and Bhagwat Karad, besides RPI (A) chief and union Minister of State for Social Justice and Empowerment Ramdas Athawale.

The Maharashtra Legislative

Assembly has 288 members (current strength 286 MLAs), out of which the BJP-led ruling Mahayuti's strength consists of 131 BJP MLAs (after the death of Shivajirao Kardile), Shinde Shiv Sena's 57 MLAs and the NCP's 40 MLAs (after Ajit Pawar's death) plus support of JSS (2), RSPS (1), RSPA (1), RSYP (1) and one independent MLA.

The opposition's strength consists of Uddhav Thackeray Shiv Sena's 20 MLAs, Congress party's 16 MLAs, Sharad Pawar-led NCP's 10 MLAs, one MLA of the CPI (M), one MLA of the Peasants & Workers' Party (PWP), two Samajwadi Party MLAs and one MLA of the AIMIM.

Given the quota of 37 votes needed to go to Rajya Sabha, the opposition MVA has a strength to elect only one Rajya Sabha MP as against the ruling BJP-led Mahayuti which can send six MPs to the Rajya Sabha.

The BJP is expected to renominate RPI (A) chief and union Minister of State for Social Justice and Empowerment Ramdas Athawale, who is a time-tested ally with a following in the Dalit community.

Meanwhile, the opposition MVA allies are expected to hold talks in the next couple of days to finalise their Rajya Sabha candidates.

"If Death Must Come, Let It Come While Serving Folk Art" – Pandurang Ghotkar

Shahir Patte Bapurao Award and Lavani Festival Held at Wanwadi



HADAPSAR, REPRESENTATIVE

"If death must come to me, let it come while I am serving folk art. I have dedicated my entire life to this art form. My final moment should also be in front of my audience. I wish to take my last breath while playing the dholki. I have served art lovers throughout my life and will continue to do so until my last breath," expressed veteran dholki maestro Pandurang Ghotkar Guruji emotionally while accepting his award.

This year's prestigious Shahir Patte Bapurao Award, presented by the Shahir Patte Bapurao Pratishtan, was conferred upon renowned dholki player Pandurang Ghotkar. He made these heartfelt remarks during his acceptance speech.

The award ceremony was held at Mahatma Phule Cultural Bhavan. Along with Ghotkar, Lavani dancer Pramila Lodhgekar received the "Namchand Pavala Award," and Shahir Appasaheb Ugle was honored with the "Tamasha Sahityik Bapusahab Jintikar Award." Each award carried a cash prize of ₹15,000 and

a memento, while Ghotkar received ₹21,000 and a memento. Harmonium player Sudhir Javalekar was presented with the "Shankarrao Ghotkar Memorial."

The awards were presented at the hands of senior thinker and former MLA Ulhas Pawar, who was also felicitated by artists on the occasion of his Sahasra Chandra Darshan ceremony with a citation honoring him as a patron and ardent supporter of folk artists. Pawar expressed his gratitude towards the artists during his address.

Among those present were former Mayor Prashant Jagtap, Ulhas Shewale, Corporator Ujjwala Jangale, Corporator Nitin Gavade, Nalini Kulkarni (daughter-in-law of Shahir Patte Bapurao), Chhaya Jintikar and Kiran Jintikar (family members of Bapusahab Jintikar), Jay Ambika Kala Kendra head Surekha Pawar, Suresh Ghule, Founder President of the Pratishthan Jayprakash Waghmare, Festival Committee President Mitravaran Zambre, Vice President Dr. Shantanu Jagdale, Babu Jagtap, Ravindra Chavan, Krishna

Dherange, Reshma Paritekar, Sandeep Ghule, and several other dignitaries.

Artists from Sansawadi, Modnimb, Pune, Jalna, and Ahilyanagar performed traditional Gan, Gavlan, Mujra, and Lavani during the festival organized alongside the award ceremony.

Award recipients Ghotkar, Lodhgekar, Shahir Ugle, and Javalekar presented Shahir Patte Bapurao's famous "Saalu Lavani" through instrumental music and dance, receiving an overwhelming response from the audience.

The Lavani festival showcased various traditional styles including Baithaki, Baleghati, Shringarik, and fast-paced Lavani performances by artists Reshma Paritekar, Pramila Lodhgekar, Varsha Paritekar, and Ashwini Paritekar. In an era dominated by DJ-based Lavani performances, the artists preserved authenticity by performing with traditional musical instruments, earning enthusiastic appreciation from the audience.

Demand to Name Mumbai-Pune Missing Link and Nira River Bridges After Late Ajitdada Pawar

Pune, Correspondent

A demand has been made by the Nationalist Students Congress to name the Mumbai-Pune Missing Link project as well as the bridges in the Ujani Dam area and over the Nira River after Late Ajitdada Pawar. The proposal has been put forward under the concept of Dr. Abhishek Boke, and a memorandum has been submitted to the state government in this regard.

The memorandum was submitted under the leadership of Somnath Lohar (President: Nationalist Students Congress,

Western Maharashtra Division), Dr. Maruti Awargand (State Coordinator: Nationalist Congress Party), and Keshav Mane (State General Secretary: Nationalist Students Congress).

According to the memorandum, the sudden demise of Ajitdada Pawar has cast a shadow of grief across Maharashtra, and he played a significant role in the state's development. The Mumbai-Pune Missing Link is described as an ambitious and historic project that will strengthen the state's transportation infrastructure.

Therefore, it has been requested that the project be named in his honor.

The memorandum also mentions the bridge being constructed between Shirisodi (Taluka Indapur, District Pune) and Kungav (Taluka Karmala, District Solapur) over the Ujani Dam area. It states that Ajitdada Pawar contributed significantly by facilitating funds for this long-pending demand. Once completed, the bridge is expected to improve connectivity between Pune and Solapur districts.

Similarly, it has been noted

that he played an important role in securing funds for the bridge over the Nira River at Niranimgav in Indapur taluka. This bridge has enhanced connectivity between Indapur (Pune) and Malshiras (Solapur), bringing considerable convenience to local residents.

Considering his contribution to these development works, the office bearers have urged the government to take an immediate decision to name the concerned projects and bridges after Late Ajitdada Pawar, stating that it would serve as a true tribute to him.

Resolve Industry-Related Issues Promptly: Resident Deputy Collector Jyoti Kadam

PUNE, AGENCY

Resident Deputy Collector Jyoti Kadam has directed concerned departments to resolve industry-related issues within the stipulated time frame. She also appealed to industrial associations and their members to create awareness among micro and small entrepreneurs about the Flatted Shed Rental Subsidy Scheme, so that more eligible units can benefit from it.

Kadam was speaking at a joint meeting held at the District Collector's Office of the District Advisory Committee, District Udyog Mitra Committee, District-Level Sick Industries Rehabilitation Committee, Local Employment Committee, and District Export Promotion Committee. The meeting



was attended by Archana Kothari, General Manager of the District Industries Centre, representatives of various industrial associations, and officials from government departments connected with the industry sector.

Kadam said that the Maharashtra State Export Policy 2023 should be widely publicized through the District Export Promotion Committee to boost exports from the district. She instructed industrial bodies to take the initiative in ensuring that industry stakeholders

avail themselves of the various incentives provided under the policy.

During the meeting, a demand was raised to provide PMPML bus services for workers in industrial areas. Concerned officials assured that positive action would be taken in this regard.

Discussions were also held on ensuring uninterrupted electricity supply with adequate voltage to industrial units and on effectively implementing the government resolution regarding providing employment opportunities to local residents in industrial establishments.

The meeting concluded with General Manager Archana Kothari expressing a vote of thanks.

Permanent Houses to Be Provided Within Two Years in Siddharth Nagar Housing Project: CEO Satishkumar Khadke

PUNE, AGENCY

A large-scale eviction drive was carried out on February 25, 2026, at the unauthorized slum settlement in Siddharth Nagar, Nagar Road (Ramwadi area) by the Slum Rehabilitation Authority (SRA). The operation, conducted in coordination with the Municipal Corporation, Police Department, and other government agencies, resulted in the removal of 216 unauthorized huts, and the land parcel has now been completely cleared.

Chief Executive Officer Satishkumar Khadke stated that this was the largest and most systematically planned action in the authority's history so far.

The drive was conducted peacefully between 7 a.m. and 2 p.m. in the slum area falling under Survey Nos. 204, 205, parts of 2145 and 2146,

Yerwada, Pune. Notices had been issued to residents prior to the action, and adequate police deployment was arranged to maintain law and order.

The operation was led by Deputy Collector and Competent Authority Archana Yadav, with the presence of Tahsildar Geeta Dalvi, Ramesh Patil, Sushma Paikar, Assistant Registrar Officer Pandharinath Ghughe, Naib Tahsildar Ganesh Desai, Police Inspector Bagwan, Pune Municipal Corporation Encroachment Department Head Somnath Chankar, Prakash Balagude, and officials and staff from MSEDCL, Fire Brigade, and the local police.

Encroachments were removed using machinery with coordinated support from all concerned departments. During the drive, officials interacted with residents and

explained the legal procedures.

Eligible residents have been provided alternative accommodation arrangements. For those affected by road widening, action is underway through the Pune Municipal Corporation to allot houses in housing projects at Gnyati and Elessia, Kharadi.

Additionally, as per beneficiaries' demand, permanent houses will be provided within the next two years in the rehabilitation project being developed at Siddharth Nagar itself, Khadke informed through a press release.

With the encroachments now fully cleared, the land is ready for planned development works. The authority also warned that similar strict action will continue against unauthorized constructions in the future.

Municipal Commissioner visits key projects; Orders immediate completion.

PUNE, CORRESPONDENT

The Municipal Commissioner of the Pune Municipal Corporation, Naval Kishore Ram, visited various pending development projects in the Aundh-Bopodi ward on Tuesday. During the visit, he issued clear instructions to the concerned officials to complete all projects without delay.

Present during the inspection were Deputy Mayor Parashuram Wadekar, local corporator Sunny Nimbhan, corporator Sapna Chhajed, corporator Bhakti Gaikwad, as well as RPI Shivajinagar constituency president Avinash Kadam, Dnyaneshwar Javir, and several other office-bearers and party workers.

Wadekar stated that a meeting with the Commissioner had been requested for several days regarding important development works in the ward. However, the Commissioner himself expressed willingness yesterday to visit the ward and personally review citizens' concerns.

Commissioner Ram reviewed the pending work at the Vipassana Vihar and the Hockey Stadium and directed that the projects be completed immediately without further delay. He also instructed officials to develop a well-equipped public garden at the open ground near Harish Bridge for the benefit of local residents.

Maharashtra Ranks First in the Country for Effective Implementation of PESA Act

PUNE, AGENCY

Maharashtra has secured first place in the country for the effective implementation of the Panchayats (Extension to Scheduled Areas) Act (PESA), according to the PESA Indicator Ranking for 2024-25 released on January 25, 2026, on the eve of the 77th Republic Day.

The rankings were announced at a felicitation ceremony for Panchayat representatives held in New Delhi, where Union Minister of State for Panchayati Raj Prof. S. P. Singh Baghel released the report. Vivek Bhardwaj, Secretary, Ministry of Panchayati Raj, along with other senior officials, was also present.



As per the ranking, Maharashtra stood first, followed by Madhya Pradesh in second place and Himachal Pradesh in third among states falling under the Fifth Schedule where the PESA Act is applicable.

Congratulating Maharashtra and other top-performing states, the Union Minister urged all states to intensify efforts to strengthen Gram Sabhas and Panchayat

empowerment in line with the original objectives of the PESA Act. The purpose of the ranking is to reinforce Gram Sabha-centric self-governance, encourage evidence-based policy interventions, and identify areas that require focused attention.

PESA Indicator Ranking (2024-25):

Top States: Maharashtra (1st), Madhya Pradesh (2nd), Himachal Pradesh (3rd)

Good Performers:

Rajasthan, Chhattisgarh, Telangana

Aspirational States: Andhra Pradesh, Gujarat

Initial Stage States: Odisha, Jharkhand

Publishing the PESA Indicator Ranking reflects the collective commitment of the Centre and states toward measurable and effective implementation of the Act. Maharashtra's top ranking signifies national recognition of the state's sustained efforts to empower Gram Sabhas in Scheduled Areas and strengthen decentralized self-governance, said Shekhar Sawant, Director of the State PESA Cell, in an official press release.

Congress spokesperson claims assault in Pune, questions police action

PUNE, CORRESPONDENT

Congress spokesperson Hanumant Pawar was allegedly attacked at Mitra Mandal Chowk in Pune, triggering a political controversy. Pawar has accused workers affiliated with the Bharatiya Janata Party of carrying out the assault. Speaking here on Tuesday, Pawar alleged that six individuals were involved in what he described as a pre-planned and life-threatening attack. He claimed that a pistol was brandished during the incident and that he



was physically assaulted with intent to kill.

He further alleged that despite the seriousness of the incident, the accused were released without strict police action. Questioning the role of the state Home Department, Pawar

asked whether the government was shielding those responsible. He said no concrete action had been taken even after such a serious attack.

Pawar alleged that the Congress Bhavan in Pune, which he described as a

historic centre of the freedom movement, was targeted by a large group that included local BJP leaders. He accused the attackers of stone-pelting and attempting to intimidate party workers.

Emphasising his party's ideological roots, Pawar said Maharashtra would continue to be guided by the thoughts of Yashwantrao Chavan and the Constitution framed by B R Ambedkar. He asserted that the Congress would not be intimidated by threats or violence.

Satej Patil likely to be appointed Leader of Opposition in Maharashtra Legislative Council

MUMBAI, AGENCY
The appointment of the Leader of Opposition in the Maharashtra Legislative Council is likely to take place during the ongoing Budget Session. Congress leader Satej Patil from Kolhapur has emerged as the frontrunner for the position. Leaders of the Maha Vikas Aghadi had submitted a letter to the Chairman during the Winter Session regarding the selection for the post. A decision on the appointment is expected soon from Chairman Ram Shinde.



including Minister of State for Home (Urban), Housing, and Transport.

Recognized as an influential leader from Kolhapur, Patil is considered one of the prominent faces of the Congress party in Western Maharashtra. Over the past few years, he has consistently worked towards maintaining unity within the Maha Vikas Aghadi alliance. Given these factors, political observers believe that he is likely to be appointed as the next Leader of Opposition in the Legislative Council.

From Local Rivalry to National Role: MP Dhairyashil Mohite-Patil Appointed to India-UAE Friendship Committee

Solapur | Pandharpur, Correspondent

Madha MP Dhairyashil Mohite-Patil, who has been a vocal opponent of the BJP in Solapur district since the Lok Sabha elections, has now been entrusted with a significant parliamentary responsibility. He has been appointed as a member of the India-UAE Friendship Committee, a key parliamentary body linked to strengthening India's foreign relations.



The development has sparked political discussion, as Mohite-Patil had defeated BJP's Ranjitsinh Nimbalkar in the Lok Sabha election, and since then the district has witnessed an intense "Mohite-Patil vs BJP" political contest.

Local Clash, National Recognition

Following his electoral victory, Mohite-Patil's influence reportedly contributed to BJP setbacks in both Madha and Solapur constituencies. In assembly segments such as Sangola, Malshiras, Madha, and Karmala, his opposition is

believed to have cost the BJP politically. He has also posed challenges to the party in local body elections, including municipal and Zilla Parishad contests.

Despite this local political rivalry, the Centre and the Lok Sabha leadership have included him in the India-UAE Friendship Committee, highlighting his growing parliamentary stature.

Signal of Changing Political Equations?

The committee plays an important role in promoting bilateral ties between India and the United Arab Emirates, making the appointment politically notable. Observers

ZP President, Vice-President Elections to Be Held Before March 20

Rural Development Dept Issues Orders; Collector to Announce Schedule Soon Power Equation in Sangli Zilla Parishad Still Unclear

SANGLI, CORRESPONDENT

The long-awaited election of the Zilla Parishad President, Vice-President, and Panchayat Samiti chairpersons will be completed before March 20, 2026, following clear directives from the State Rural Development Department. Accordingly, the District Collector is expected to announce the official election schedule shortly.

Although the results of the general elections held on February 7 were declared on February 9, uncertainty over the formation of power has continued for over two weeks. With no single party securing a clear majority in the Sangli Zilla Parishad, political activity has intensified as parties attempt to forge alliances.

Under Sections 11(1) and 59(1) of the Maharashtra Zilla Parishads and Panchayat Samitis Act, 1961, it is mandatory to convene the first meeting after general elections, from which the members' term officially begins. In line



with this provision, Deputy Secretary B. M. Asole from the Rural Development Department has directed all concerned District Collectors to hold the first meetings and complete the leadership elections before March 20.

The absence of a clear majority has deepened the power struggle in the Sangli Zilla Parishad. Neither the BJP nor the Maha Vikas Aghadi bloc has independently secured the numbers required to form the ruling side. As a result, the role of Shiv Sena, Ajit Pawar-led NCP faction, and smaller parties is expected to be crucial in determining

the final power equation.

With 31 seats required for a majority in the 61-member Zilla Parishad, the political future of the district hinges on alliance calculations. Observers expect political negotiations to intensify once the election programme is officially announced, and the leadership picture is likely to become clear before March 20.

Party Strength in Sangli Zilla Parishad (Total 61 seats):

- Sharad Pawar-led NCP – 18
- BJP – 16
- Congress – 11
- Shiv Sena – 7
- Ajit Pawar-led NCP – 6
- Uddhav Thackeray Sena – 1
- Jansurajya Party – 1
- Rayat Kranti Party – 1

All eyes are now on the upcoming schedule, as the selection of the Zilla Parishad leadership is expected to determine the district's political direction for the next term.

Leopard Panic Grips Walwa Taluka

Repeated Sightings Near Villages Disrupt Daily Life

WALWA, SANGLI

A growing leopard presence in Walwa taluka has created widespread fear among residents, with repeated sightings near farms, sugarcane fields, riverbanks, and village outskirts. A recent attack has further heightened anger and insecurity among locals, disrupting normal life in the area.



traps in some locations and claims to have increased patrols, villagers say the measures are insufficient. They point out that the leopard's movement is not confined to a single area and appears to be spreading rapidly.

Two days ago, a leopard reportedly attacked a young man and a minor who were travelling on a two-wheeler on the Peth-Nayakalwadi road, triggering panic across nearby villages.

Daily Life Affected

The threat has significantly altered the routine of farmers and labourers. Going to fields in the early morning or late evening has become risky, particularly for sugarcane workers, women, and dairy farmers, who now travel in fear. In several villages, parents have stopped sending children outside alone, and school and tuition schedules have also been affected. Streets fall deserted soon after dusk as residents prefer to remain indoors.

Questions Over Forest Department Measures
Although the Forest Department has installed

Residents are demanding more cages, intensified night patrols, drone surveillance, and installation of CCTV cameras to monitor the animal's movement and ensure safety.

Appeal for Caution

Local authorities have advised citizens to move in groups, carry sticks and torches, and avoid stepping out unnecessarily at night until the situation is brought under control. However, villagers insist that the Forest Department must act urgently to capture the leopard and free the region from the prevailing fear.

The situation remains tense, with residents hoping for swift intervention to restore normalcy in the taluka.

41 Tiger Deaths Recorded in Maharashtra in 2025; Govt Steps Up Protection Measures

MUMBAI, AGENCY

A total of 41 tiger deaths were recorded in Maharashtra in 2025, with most occurring due to natural causes, State Forest Minister Ganesh Naik informed the Assembly on Wednesday. He added that the government is intensifying efforts to reduce tiger deaths caused by accidents, electrocution, and poaching.



According to the data shared in the House, 28 tigers died of natural causes, while eight deaths were due to accidents, four due to electrocution, and one case of poaching was reported during the year.

Naik highlighted the vulnerability of the Ballarshah-Gondia railway line, which passes through forest divisions and sensitive buffer zones of the Tadoba-Anhari and Navegaon-Nagzira tiger reserves. Between 2011 and 2025, five tigers were killed on this railway stretch. To prevent wildlife casualties in train accidents, the Chief Conservator of Forests (Regional), Chandrapur, has formally urged the Railway authorities to implement safety measures.

Proposals include constructing underpasses and overpasses along new railway lines to allow safe animal movement, enforcing a speed limit of 40 kmph for trains passing through sensitive forest areas, and ensuring proper disposal of food waste by passengers so animals are not attracted to tracks.

The Minister noted that successful conservation efforts have increased

wildlife populations, but this also leads to migration in search of new habitats, raising the risk of human-wildlife conflict. To strengthen response capacity, the government has proposed recruiting 368 contractual personnel for Rapid Rescue Units, Tiger Cells, and Elephant Tracking Teams, subject to Finance Department approval.

Naik also outlined existing protection measures, including the M-Stripes mobile monitoring system for field staff, a strengthened Wildlife Crime Cell in Nagpur, and a Cyber Cell in Melghat to track poachers through digital intelligence. Deployment of Special Tiger Protection Forces, dog squads, and metal detectors to locate traps near water sources is also being considered.

District-level tiger committees are meeting regularly to refine conservation strategies, while a Secret Service Fund is being used to maintain informant networks at the forest range level, the Minister said.

BJP Faces Setback in Solapur

Petition Filed Seeking Cancellation of District President's ZP Membership



PANDHARPUR | SOLAPUR, CORRESPONDENT

In a development seen as a potential setback for the BJP in Solapur district, a court petition has been filed seeking the cancellation of the Zilla Parishad membership of BJP district president Chetansingh Kedar. The issue has surfaced just ahead of the crucial election for the Zilla Parishad president's post.

According to the petition, Kedar's name allegedly appears in two separate electoral rolls—one for Sangola city and another for Sangola rural—and he is said to possess voter identity cards linked to both entries. Under Section 31 of the Representation of the People Act, an Indian citizen can be registered as a voter at only one place.

The petition has been filed by R. Y. Ghutukade of the Shiv Sena (Uddhav Thackeray faction), who has accused Kedar of violating electoral rules by maintaining dual voter

registrations. The plea seeks direct cancellation of Kedar's Zilla Parishad membership on these grounds.

Kedar had earlier been elected as a municipal councillor in Sangola in 2016 and is currently serving as a Zilla Parishad member from the Chopadi group in Sangola taluka. His wife, Sujata Kedar, is also a sitting municipal councillor in the Sangola Municipal Council.

The petitioner has alleged that registering in both urban and rural voter lists amounts to misrepresentation and electoral irregularity, and has urged the court to take action.

With the Zilla Parishad leadership elections approaching, the case has triggered political speculation in the district. Observers say the outcome of the petition could influence the local political balance if the court admits the plea or orders further inquiry.

Fidel Acquires majority stake in Japan-based IM Corporation Strengthening its global AI & technology consulting capabilities

Pune, Agency

Fidel, a global AI-led enterprise B2B digital transformation services company, on Wednesday announced the acquisition of a majority stake in IM Corporation, a Japan-based technology consulting and DX services firm with over 30 years of industry experience.

This strategic acquisition strengthens Fidel's local delivery presence in Japan while accelerating its global expansion and AI innovation roadmap, a release stated.

Founded more than three decades ago, IM Corporation specializes in functional consulting, enterprise technology services, and digital transformation support for Tier-1 Japanese system integrators and enterprise clients.

Over the past three years, IM has also developed and deployed AI-assisted

service models leveraging its proprietary neural knowledge framework to support SI firms in improving delivery productivity and knowledge reuse, the release noted.

With a team of over 150 skilled professionals and deep cultural alignment with Japan's enterprise ecosystem, IM Corporation has built a strong reputation for delivering high-quality consulting and technology services.

With this acquisition, Fidel's Japan operations expand to a combined strength of 200 professionals, making it one of the prominent India-origin SME technology service providers with a strong on-ground Japan delivery presence. Globally, the Fidel group now has a workforce strength of 500 professionals, supporting clients across multiple geographies.

The partnership enhances Fidel's

ability to deliver AI-enabled services, enterprise solution implementation, bilingual consulting, managed services, and language localization solutions tailored to the evolving needs of Japanese enterprises. By combining IM Corporation's local project management strengths and functional consulting expertise with Fidel's global technology, AI, and digital engineering capabilities, the integrated entity aims to deliver faster execution, innovation-driven outcomes, and improved business agility for clients, the release added.

"Japan is a strategic market for Fidel, and this acquisition marks an important milestone in our global growth journey," said Sunil Kulkarni, CEO, Fidel.

"IM Corporation's deep understanding of the Japanese market, combined with Fidel's expertise in IT and AI-driven services,

creates a powerful platform to deliver enhanced value to customers in Japan and beyond. This partnership also reflects the long-standing trust and relationships we have built in Japan over the years," he said.

The leadership team at IM Corporation will continue to play an active operational role, ensuring business continuity while enabling seamless integration with Fidel's global delivery model.

"Partnering with Fidel opens new opportunities for innovation and global collaboration," said Kikuchi-san, President & CEO, IM Corporation.

"Together, we are well positioned to offer advanced technology and AI-enabled solutions to Japanese enterprises while maintaining the quality and trust our clients expect," he added.

From Waiter to Alleged Trafficking Kingpin: Pune Police Bust Major Human Trafficking Racket in Budhwar Peth

PUNE, CORRESPONDENT

Pune Police have uncovered a major human trafficking and illegal prostitution racket operating in the crowded lanes of Budhwar Peth, exposing the alleged role of a man known as "Babu Bhaiyya," alias Papa Sheikh, who is believed to have run the network for nearly two decades.

Raid Leads to Shocking Revelations
During a recent operation in Budhwar Peth, police detained 22 women. Subsequent verification revealed that 11 of them were Bangladeshi nationals. Officials said the women were found carrying fake Aadhaar cards, ration cards, and other forged identity documents.

Earlier raids in the area had also identified 10 Bangladeshi nationals, strengthening suspicions of an organised trafficking chain. A



case has now been registered at Faraskhana Police Station under the Immoral Traffic (Prevention) Act and other relevant sections.

Alleged Mastermind on the Run

Police investigations indicate that Papa Sheikh, the suspected mastermind, had been active in Pune for about 20 years. He reportedly began as a small-time hotel

worker before gradually entering the illegal trade and expanding operations.

Investigators believe the racket brought women from Bangladesh via Kolkata, luring them with promises of jobs in beauty parlours or tailoring work. Once in Pune, they were allegedly coerced or threatened into prostitution, with a major share of their earnings taken by the accused.

Police sources also claim that Sheikh's family members were involved in maintaining control over the network and allegedly used intimidation and violence to prevent victims from escaping.

MULTIPLE ACCUSED BOOKED

Along with Papa Sheikh, police have registered cases against Sumitra Kamble, Rajesh Kalimani, Ranjit Patra, and Rupa Sheikh. The main accused is currently absconding,

and search operations are underway.

The joint action by Faraskhana and Khadak police teams has led to the initiation of legal procedures to repatriate the Bangladeshi women through proper channels. Authorities are also probing the role of agents who may have arranged fake documents and cross-border movement.

Police say the crackdown is part of a wider effort to dismantle international trafficking links and curb illegal activities in Budhwar Peth, where such cases have reportedly increased in recent years.

Change of Name

"I am changing my name from KASIM NANABHAI PATHAN TO KASHIM NANABHAI PATHAN"

BMC
BudgetFocus on pollution control and
Mumbai Climate Action Plan

MUMBAI, AGENCY

The Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation has set aside Rs 159.82 crore for its Environment and Climate Change Department in the 2026-27 civic budget, which has a total outlay of Rs 80,952 crore. The allocation is aimed at implementing the Mumbai Climate Action Plan, strengthening air pollution control measures and advancing various sustainability initiatives across the city.

The move comes at a time when Mumbai continues to grapple with a severe pollution crisis. The city has been witnessing poor to hazardous Air Quality Index levels for several months. Large infrastructure works undertaken by both government agencies and private developers have contributed significantly to deteriorating air conditions and broader



environmental concerns. On environmental compliance, the civic body said it has followed the directions of the Bombay

High Court regarding restrictions on immersing Plaster of Paris Ganesh idols in natural water bodies. During the 2025

Ganeshotsav, as much as 98 per cent of Ganpati idols were immersed in artificial lakes, compared to 40 per cent in 2024. The administration described this increase as a major behavioural change achieved through stricter enforcement and sustained public awareness efforts.

Municipal Commissioner Bhushan Gagrani presented the budget to Standing Committee Chairman Prabhakar Shinde. The total budget estimate for 2026-27 stands at Rs 80,952.56 crore, making it the highest ever for the country's richest civic body. This represents an increase of more than Rs 6,500 crore over the 2025-26 Budget Estimates of Rs 74,427.41 crore.

Budget documents show that the civic administration has proposed capital expenditure of Rs

48,164.28 crore, signalling a renewed push towards infrastructure expansion and long-term urban development projects throughout Mumbai.

A significant portion of the proposed spending has been directed towards large infrastructure schemes. The Mumbai Sewage Disposal Project has been allocated Rs 5,690 crore to modernise the city's wastewater treatment systems and improve environmental sustainability. The Goregaon-Mulund Link Road project will receive Rs 2,650 crore to enhance east-west connectivity and ease congestion on key traffic corridors. In addition, Rs 4,000 crore has been earmarked for the Coastal Road (North) initiative, including the Versova-Dahisar Link Road, which is expected to strengthen north-south travel across the western suburbs.

BMC raises health allocation by
over 22 per cent for 2026-27
4,556 new hospital beds planned
across redeveloped civic facilities

The Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation has significantly stepped up its investment in public healthcare, announcing a 22.14 per cent increase in the Health Department allocation for 2026-27. The move reflects a major drive to upgrade medical infrastructure and expand services across Mumbai's civic hospitals.

In the revised outlay for 2025-26, the Health Department had been allocated Rs 6,104.75 crore, of which Rs 4,537.05 crore was set aside under revenue expenditure and Rs 1,567.70 crore under capital expenditure. For 2026-27, the proposed Budget Estimate has climbed to Rs 7,456.80 crore. This includes Rs 5,237.09 crore towards revenue spending and Rs 2,219.71 crore earmarked for capital works, indicating higher allocations for both day-to-day operations and infrastructure development.

A key feature of the upcoming plan is a large-scale expansion of hospital capacity over the next two to three years. The civic body has proposed the addition of 4,556 beds across major redeveloped medical facilities. This includes



expansions providing 470 beds, 580 beds and 490 beds at key hospitals, along with 600 beds under Phase I redevelopment at other major institutions.

Additional bed strength is also being created at Siddharth Hospital, Bhandup Multi-Speciality Hospital, Sangharsh Nagar Hospital and Krantiveer Mahatma Jyotiba Phule Hospital as part of the broader capacity-building initiative.

Alongside infrastructure growth, the BMC is strengthening super-specialty services at King Edward Memorial Hospital, Lokmanya Tilak Municipal General Hospital and B.Y. L. Nair Hospital. These hospitals are being equipped with new facilities for transplants, oncology, dialysis and emergency care to enhance advanced treatment options for patients.

The budget speech

further noted that advanced 3-Tesla MRI machines have been procured for four major civic hospitals and are expected to become operational shortly, improving diagnostic capabilities within the municipal health network.

The civic administration will also continue outsourcing certain healthcare services. Under the public-private partnership model, more than 20,000 dialysis sessions were conducted in 2025, and the programme is set to be expanded further.

In addition to healthcare initiatives, the corporation has begun preparations for India's fully digital Census 2027. The exercise will be conducted in two phases during 2026 and 2027. A pilot project has already been successfully completed in Mumbai's M/West ward, laying the groundwork for the larger rollout.

MLA Rohit Pawar raises concerns over Police
refusal to file FIR in Ajit Pawar plane crash case

MUMBAI, AGENCY : NCP MLA Rohit Pawar on Wednesday warned of legal action and public protest after the Marine Lines Police allegedly refused to register an FIR against the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) and a private firm, VSR Company, in connection with the Ajit Pawar plane crash case.

Tension flared at the Marine Lines Police Station as Rohit Pawar and fellow NCP MLA Amol Mitkari, along with MLA Sandeep Kshirsagar, confronted police officials over what they termed inaction in the probe into the death of

former Maharashtra Deputy Chief Minister Ajit Pawar.

The legislators demanded immediate registration of a criminal case against the DGCA and VSR Company, alleging serious maintenance lapses flagged in a DGCA report.

MLA Rohit Pawar has expressed serious concerns over the refusal, questioning whether the police are acting under external pressure. He claimed that despite repeatedly demanding legal action, authorities declined to file the complaint.

Pawar further stated that he will approach the Baramati Police on Wednesday to seek registration of an FIR. He warned that if the police there also refuse to file the case, he will move the court to seek legal intervention.

In addition, Pawar cautioned that he would launch a public protest in Baramati in the presence of citizens if no action is taken. He emphasized that accountability must be fixed in the plane crash case and that regulatory authorities, including the DGCA, must face scrutiny if lapses are found.

Mumbai's 'Birdman' Bhagwan Koli: A
saviour of voiceless in a concrete jungle

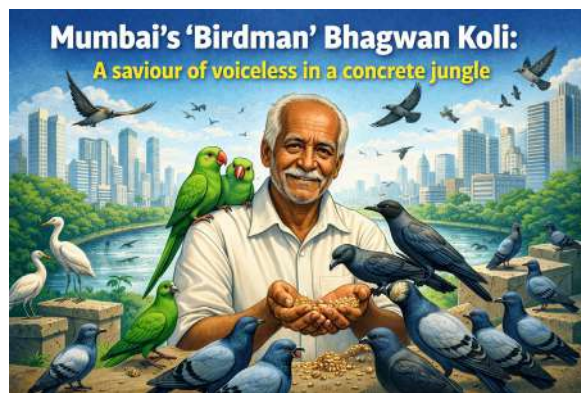
MUMBAI, AGENCY

Amid Mumbai's fast-paced life and ever-expanding concrete landscape, the scorching summer heat has made survival difficult not only for citizens but also for countless birds and animals.

As temperatures soar, many birds are collapsing mid-flight due to dehydration and heat exhaustion. In the face of growing global warming concerns, Bhagwan Koli, president of the 'Nirbhay Bano Andolan' in South Mumbai, has emerged as a true guardian angel for these voiceless creatures.

For the past 25 to 30 years, Koli has been rescuing and treating injured animals and birds without expecting any financial reward.

Spending from his own pocket, he provides medical care and ensures they recover fully before



releasing them back into their natural habitat. His selfless dedication has recently gained widespread appreciation on social media as a shining example of humanity in action.

Be it stray dogs and cats on the streets or birds like kites, vultures, and sparrows falling from the sky due to heatstroke, Koli rushes to the spot the moment he receives a call. He sets aside all other work to provide immediate treatment. Recently, he successfully

treated several birds severely affected by the intense summer heat.

Recognizing his tireless efforts, the Forest Department and several non-governmental organizations have now extended their support to his mission. Through his consistent service, Koli has kept compassion alive in a city often overwhelmed by its relentless pace.

With rising temperatures causing severe dehydration among animals and birds,

many are dying due to lack of access to water. Making an emotional appeal to Mumbaikars, Bhagwan Koli has urged residents to place a small bowl of water and some grains on their windowsills, balconies, terraces, or in their courtyards.

A small act of kindness from you can save a precious life, he says.

Through the 'Nirbhay Bano Andolan', Bhagwan Koli and his volunteers have been serving underprivileged communities and voiceless animals for nearly three decades. Notably, they do not charge a single rupee for the treatment of animals.

His unwavering, selfless commitment to protecting and caring for animals stands as a remarkable example of true humanitarian service in Mumbai's concrete jungle.

Take strict action against corrupt
school managements: IAC president

MUMBAI, AGENCY

Bharat Against Corruption National President Hemant Patil has demanded stringent action against corrupt school managements allegedly misusing a key government education scheme. He asserted that injustice towards students will not be tolerated. Patil called for a thorough and impartial re-evaluation of the schools accused of misusing the state government's ambitious Raje Yashwantrao Holkar English Medium Residential Education Scheme.

He urged authorities to register criminal cases against the guilty managements and ensure their immediate arrest if wrongdoing is established.

The scheme, implemented through the Other Backward Bahujan Welfare



Department, aims to provide meritorious students from the Dhargar community with access to reputed schools. Launched in 2024, it offers free accommodation, meals, and quality English-medium education for students from Classes 1 to 8.

Patil expressed serious concern that if institution heads are siphoning off crores of rupees by inflating student numbers on paper, it would amount to a grave betrayal of the scheme's objective. He demanded that

if allegations against the 25 schools under scrutiny are proven, their recognition should be permanently revoked.

He further emphasized that the future and education of Dhargar community students must not suffer due to corruption. While taking action, the government must ensure that students' interests remain the top priority, as many depend entirely on these residential schools for their education and well-being.

President
Droupadi
Murmu arrives
in Chhatrapati
SambhajnagarCHHATRAPATI
SAMBHAJINAGAR,
AGENCY

President Droupadi Murmu arrived at the Chhatrapati Sambhajnagar airport at around 10.10 am on Wednesday. She was received at the airport by Governor Acharya Devvrat, who welcomed her with a bouquet. Among those present on the occasion were State Minister for Social Justice and Guardian Minister of the district Sanjay Shirsat, Mayor Sameer Rajurkar, Member of Parliament Dr Kalyanrao Kale, MLA Pradeep Jaiswal and MLA Anuradha Chavan. Divisional Commissioner Jitendra Papalkar, District Collector Dilip Swami and Police Commissioner Pravin Pawar were also in attendance.

MVA to urge consensus on Sharad Pawar's
Rajya Sabha nomination: Supriya SuleNEW DELHI/MUMBAI,
AGENCY

Nationalist Congress Party MP Supriya Sule on Tuesday said that if there is unanimous support, Sharad Pawar can be sent to the Rajya Sabha from Maharashtra. She said party MLAs have already reached out to Congress legislators regarding the proposal. Sule added that she would meet senior Congress leaders in Delhi and formally request both Congress and Uddhav Thackeray to finalise Pawar's candidature from the Maha Vikas Aghadi for the Upper House. Sule clarified that no discussion has yet taken place with Pawar on the nomination due

to his recent medical examinations. She said the matter would be discussed soon. Pawar was recently discharged from Ruby Hospital and is scheduled to travel to Mumbai today. He will remain under health monitoring for the next two days.

Sule said there is strong sentiment within the party that Pawar should represent the Nationalist Congress Party in the Rajya Sabha. She also stated that Jayant Patil and Shashikant Shinde have sought an appointment with Thackeray. She has been in touch with Sanjay Raut and Anil Desai regarding Pawar's

candidature.

Of the 37 Rajya Sabha seats going to polls, Maharashtra has seven seats. Based on the current strength in the Assembly, the ruling Mahayuti alliance is expected to secure six seats, while the Maha Vikas Aghadi is likely to win one.

Within the MVA, the Shiv Sena led by Thackeray has 20 MLAs, Congress has 16 and the NCP faction led by Pawar has 10. The alliance also has the support of some Independents. A meeting of the Maha Vikas Aghadi is scheduled for today, where discussions on the Rajya Sabha nomination are expected.

NAGPUR, AGENCY

A wave of protest swept through Indian Institute of Management Nagpur (IIM Nagpur) after close to 60 students chose to skip their mid-term examinations in solidarity with 40 first-year students who were barred from appearing for the tests over an alleged violation of campus rules, sources said.

According to sources, the controversy stems from an incident on the night of February 21, when nearly 75 students stepped out of the campus for dinner.

Students claim the outing was informal, with some describing it as a farewell gathering as their final classes were drawing to a close.

According to them, two campus clubs had informed authorities that the group would be returning late.

However, when the students returned in the early hours, they were reportedly stopped at the campus gate.

The following day, several first-year students received an email notifying them that they had been debarred from appearing in the MBA mid-term examinations scheduled for February 24 and 25.

Students argued that the action was disproportionate, particularly because mid-term examinations carry substantial weight in overall academic evaluation alongside end-semester assessments.

IIM Nagpur students boycott mid-term exams in
support of 40 students facing disciplinary action

"We are postgraduate students enrolled in a professional programme. Treating us this way is unreasonable," one student said, adding that late evenings on campus are common due to classes that sometimes extend until 11 pm.

Some students further alleged that the parents of certain female students were contacted by the administration and spoken to in an inappropriate manner.

When first-year students were informed that they would not be permitted to take the exams, senior students extended their support.

As a result, over 60 students collectively

boycotted the mid-terms. A protest was also staged within the campus premises.

Students claimed that a few of those involved were suspended from the MBA programme and relieved of their positions of responsibility.

The issue also spilled onto social media, where some questioned whether such strict oversight amounted to "moral policing" in a professional institute in 2026.

Institute officials, however, maintained that the students had remained outside the campus throughout the night without securing prior approval.

According to the administration, entries in

the outing register indicated "going home" rather than a formal request for permission from hostel or institutional authorities.

An official statement emphasised that campus regulations require students to inform and obtain approval before leaving, citing safety, well-being, and accountability as the primary reasons. Non-compliance with these procedures, the administration said, constitutes a serious breach of institutional rules.

Authorities later clarified that while the students were initially barred, they would be given an opportunity to appear for the examinations at a later date.

India's true development lies in equal opportunities for all: President Murmu

NAGPUR, AGENCY President Droupadi Murmu on Wednesday asserted that India's true development will be realised only when every citizen is provided equal opportunities to grow and succeed. Addressing a gathering in Nagpur after inaugurating the "Golden Era of Maharashtra through Unity and Trust" campaign organised by the Brahma Kumaris, the President stressed the importance of fostering optimism and collective progress.

She urged people to move beyond negativity and cultivate a positive outlook to build a stronger nation.

Highlighting the legacy of Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj, she described him as a timeless symbol of courage and justice whose life continues to inspire generations in their pursuit of freedom and righteousness.

The statewide

campaign seeks to strengthen harmony, mutual trust and respect for core human values across Maharashtra.

As part of the initiative, the Brahma Kumaris have proposed eight key focus areas: creating an addiction-free society, promoting environmentally sustainable living, maintaining cleanliness, enhancing civic responsibility, encouraging readiness for humanitarian service, advancing value-based education, adopting a disciplined and spiritually enriched lifestyle through yoga and striving toward a greener Maharashtra.

The event was attended by Maharashtra Governor Acharya Devvrat, Maharashtra Revenue Minister Chandrashekhar Bawankule, along with senior members of the Brahma Kumaris organisation.

Parth Pawar tipped for Rajya Sabha; Sunetra Pawar to contest bypoll from Baramati Assembly seat

MUMBAI, CORRESPONDENT

The top leadership of the Ajit Pawar-led NCP has decided to send the late Ajit Pawar's son Parth Pawar to the Rajya Sabha, party sources said here on Wednesday. As reported earlier, elections to 37 Rajya Sabha seats across 10 states are scheduled for March 16, while the tenure of seven MPs from Maharashtra, including that of NCP founder Sharad Pawar, will come to an end shortly.

Members of the Legislative Assembly (MLAs) are the ones who vote for candidates to the Rajya Sabha and 36 legislative assembly seats are needed to contest these seven Rajya Sabha seats. Since the BJP-led NDA's thumping victory in the 2024 Maharashtra Assembly polls, six out of these seven Rajya Sabha seats are likely to go to the NDA, leaving just one Rajya Sabha seat for the entire Congress-led Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) opposition.

Out of the six Rajya Sabha seats for the NDA, the BJP alone is likely to claim three Rajya Sabha seats, while two Rajya Sabha seats would go to Eknath Shinde's Shiv Sena and one Rajya Sabha seat would go to the Ajit Pawar-led NCP. It is this one Rajya Sabha seat which is very likely to be given to Parth Pawar.

Earlier, Parth Pawar had contested the 2019 Lok Sabha polls from the Maval assembly constituency, but he ended up losing by a huge margin to the then undivided Shiv Sena candidate Shirang



Barne. Parth Pawar had been accused of illegally selling government land in Pune's Mundhwa, but neither an FIR was registered against him nor did the Kharge Committee recommend any action against him.

Party sources also said that Parth Pawar's mother Deputy Chief Minister Sunetra Pawar, who is neither a Member of Legislative Council (MLC) nor a Member of Legislative Assembly (MLA) in Maharashtra, plans to contest the Baramati Assembly bypoll in six months when they will be announced by the Maharashtra State Election Commission.

It was Parth Pawar's late father Ajit Pawar who represented the Baramati assembly constituency for a record eight times, but is unrepresented now after his demise in the January 28 air crash. According to Ajit Pawar-led NCP sources, Sunetra Pawar will contest the bypoll from the now vacant assembly seat within six months.

Efforts are on to formally appoint Deputy CM Sunetra Pawar as the national president of the Ajit Pawar-led NCP soon, party sources confirmed. These developments have led political observers in Maharashtra to speculate about the possibility of the Congress-led opposition Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) choosing to send NCP founder Sharad Pawar to the Rajya Sabha through the Maharashtra opposition's only Rajya Sabha seat. If that happens, Parth Pawar will be in the Rajya Sabha from the Ajit Pawar-led NCP as part of the ruling BJP-led Mahayuti alliance, while the MVA opposition in Maharashtra will be represented in the Rajya Sabha by Parth Pawar's grand uncle Sharad Pawar.

In a related development, Uddhav Thackeray-led Shiv Sena MLA representing Worli assembly constituency Aaditya Thackeray told media persons here on Wednesday that, "Regarding the Rajya Sabha seat, the Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) meeting has not been held yet, but we are fighting the BJP as part of the MVA. Mumbai is being mismanaged and the Constitution is being attacked. We are fighting against this along with the Congress".

Talking about the principle behind seat distribution, Aaditya Thackeray said, "If we look at the principle of Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA), those who have more seats should be given the first chance (to the Rajya Sabha). According to this principle, the (Uddhav Thackeray-led) Shiv Sena should get the first

chance".

Yet, Uddhav Thackeray-led Shiv Sena Rajya Sabha MP and chief Sena spokesperson Sanjay Raut has hinted several times recently that NCP founder Sharad Pawar would be the best person to represent the MVA opposition in the Rajya Sabha.

Reacting to Sanjay Raut's stand, BJP spokesperson Navnath Ban said that "Sanjay Raut has played a cunning trick to cut off Priyanka Chaturvedi's (Uddhav-led Shiv Sena) Rajya Sabha candidature to the Rajya Sabha by supporting Sharad Pawar's name for the Rajya Sabha. Raut, who is supposed to be a staunch supporter of Aaditya Thackeray has dropped Priyanka Chaturvedi's name and put forward Sharad Pawar's name for the Rajya Sabha. This shows how much he values Aaditya Thackeray. Raut played this trick because he knows that if Priyanka Chaturvedi gets a chance to contest the election to the Rajya Sabha this year, she will never get another chance after Raut's Rajya Sabha term ends".

"No matter how much Congress Maharashtra State President Harshvardhan Sapkal aspires for the Congress to be in the Rajya Sabha, the Congress's position in the MVA is negligible. The Congress will not get a chance in either the Rajya Sabha or the Maharashtra Legislative Council. Sharad Pawar will be in the Rajya Sabha and Uddhav Thackeray will be in the Maharashtra Legislative Council. So Congress is being utilised on a 'use and throw basis' in the MVA," BJP spokesperson Navnath Ban said.

BJP alleges Raut's backing of Sharad Pawar is move to sideline Aaditya Thackeray

MUMBAI, AGENCY

The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) on Wednesday launched a sharp attack on Shiv Sena (UBT) leader Sanjay Raut, alleging that his support for Sharad Pawar for the Rajya Sabha was a calculated move aimed at undermining Aaditya Thackeray within the Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA).

Addressing a press conference at the BJP state office, party chief spokesperson Navnath Ban claimed that by backing Pawar's name for the Upper House, Raut had effectively sidelined Priyanka Chaturvedi, who is considered a close supporter of Aaditya

Thackeray.

Ban alleged that Raut's move demonstrated how much importance he attaches to Aaditya within the alliance.

He further claimed that if Chaturvedi were to secure a Rajya Sabha berth this time, it could reduce Raut's own chances of renomination after his term ends, suggesting that this political calculation was behind Raut's stance.

Targeting the Congress, Ban said that despite the desire of Maharashtra Congress president Harshvardhan Sapkal to secure a Rajya Sabha opportunity for

his party, the Congress holds a negligible position within the MVA. He alleged that while Sharad Pawar may be nominated to the Rajya Sabha and Uddhav Thackeray may find space in the Legislative Council, the Congress is being treated as a "use-and-throw" partner in the alliance.

Ban also criticised Rohit Pawar over his repeated press conferences following the plane crash involving Deputy Chief Minister Ajit Pawar. He alleged that Rohit Pawar was politicising the tragic incident for publicity rather than fighting for justice. Taking a swipe at reported meetings

between Raut and Rohit Pawar, Ban remarked that the latter was following in Raut's footsteps by holding daily press briefings.

On the issue of Marathi-medium schools, Ban claimed that Raut's remarks indirectly targeted the Thackeray brothers. Referring to Raj Thackeray and Uddhav Thackeray, he said it is well known that their children studied in English-medium schools. He advised Raut to exercise restraint in his language during press conferences, stating that the use of abusive words in the name of Marathi pride amounts to disrespecting the language itself.

Supriya Sule demands discussion on Ajit Pawar plane crash in upcoming Parliament Session

MUMBAI/ NEW DELHI, AGENCY

Member of Parliament Supriya Sule Wednesday said that the issue of the alleged plane crash involving the late Deputy Chief Minister Ajit Pawar will be raised in the upcoming Parliament session. Addressing a press conference here, Sule stated that all aircraft must undergo a comprehensive audit. She also referred to a recent plane crash in Jharkhand, emphasising that aviation

safety concerns cannot be ignored. She added that the allegations made by Rohit Pawar will also be brought up during the session.

Sule demanded a detailed discussion on the reported accident involving Ajit Pawar, the Jharkhand crash, and the role of the Civil Aviation Minister. She insisted that the government must issue an official statement on the matter.

During the press conference, Sule strongly criticised what she

described as arbitrary functioning by certain airline companies. She asserted that all aviation companies must strictly adhere to regulations and that no company should operate at its own discretion.

We will wait for the next eight days. An inquiry is currently underway, so it would not be appropriate to arrive at a final conclusion at this stage. However, all companies must function within the rules. Arbitrary practices will not be tolerated," she warned.



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Trump's Defiance Persists

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Even repeated judicial rebukes—from lower courts to the Supreme Court—appear to have made little difference to U.S. President Donald Trump. Despite sharp criticism from economists and adverse court rulings, Trump has doubled down on his tariff-driven economic nationalism. His latest move—announcing a fresh 10 percent global import tariff soon after a judicial setback—signals not retreat, but renewed confrontation. The growing clash between the executive and the judiciary in the United States is not a healthy sign for any democracy.

The controversy centers on Trump's use of the International Emergency Economic Powers Act (IEEPA) of 1977 to justify sweeping tariffs. Invoking emergency powers, he imposed duties on countries including Mexico, Canada, China, and later extended them to a broader group of nations—including India—under what he branded a "Liberation Day" trade reset. However, in a 6-3 verdict, the Supreme Court of the United States ruled that while the president may regulate trade during national emergencies, the law does not explicitly authorize the imposition of tariffs. The court declared the measures unlawful.



Trump's reaction was swift and combative. Calling the judgment "disgraceful," he signaled he would explore alternative legal pathways. Within hours, he signed an executive order introducing a temporary 10 percent global tariff for 150 days, pending congressional review. He argued that tariffs stimulate domestic investment and manufacturing. Yet official data released recently showed that the United States continues to run a significant trade deficit—reportedly \$910

billion—even after the tariff measures.

His rhetoric has raised further concerns. In a private meeting with governors, Trump reportedly described the ruling as shameful and suggested sweeping executive authority in trade matters. In public statements, he asserted that while tariffs may face limits, he retains the power to halt trade with any nation altogether—remarks critics say reflect an alarming readiness to test constitutional boundaries.

The court's decision is widely viewed as a victory for American states and businesses that challenged the tariffs. They argued that sudden import duty hikes imposed heavy burdens on enterprises and consumers alike, potentially entitling affected companies to billions in refunds. However, the ruling has also introduced fresh uncertainty into global trade. Will Trump pursue new statutory avenues? Could this dispute escalate into a deeper constitutional standoff between the

executive, judiciary, and legislature?

For India, Trump's clarification that the interim trade agreement remains unchanged offers temporary reassurance. Under the revised framework, countries previously facing higher tariff rates—including the European Union (15 percent), Japan (15 percent), Britain (10 percent), and India (18 percent)—would see a standardized 10 percent rate. Whether this adjustment becomes permanent depends on congressional approval after the 150-day window.

At its core, this is no longer merely a dispute over tariff percentages. It is a test of institutional balance within American democracy. The U.S. Constitution envisions a system of checks and balances among its three pillars—executive, legislature, and judiciary. The Supreme Court has sought to delineate the limits of presidential authority. Trump, however, appears unwilling to abandon his protectionist agenda.

The coming months will reveal whether this confrontation strengthens democratic institutions through constitutional clarity—or deepens political turbulence. For now, one conclusion is unmistakable: the tariff war is far from over, and the tension between judicial restraint and executive ambition continues to shape America's political landscape.

Criminalising Grief: Gendered Mourning and the Silencing of Dissent in India

KANISHKA CHATURVEDI

Public mourning after sexual violence, caste-based violence, and communal riots has repeatedly been met with surveillance, police brutality, and criminal charges, revealing how grief, particularly when articulated by women and marginalised communities, is criminalised and how the act of mourning is deeply gendered in itself.

The examples of the Hathras case, the Unnao rape case, and that of Bilkis Bano speak to how the criminalisation of grief enforces a lived reality for women in India, particularly for those coming from lower caste and minority groups, and how this reality relentlessly exposes whose lives are protected and whose are abandoned.

The recent events in India over the last month speak about something far deeper in terms of the criminalisation of grief in India and how profoundly gendered this process is. This criminalisation moves from domestic spaces to national politics and into the judiciary. The domestic nature of criminalising grief within households, particularly through the silencing of the survivor, extends itself into the larger political institutions of the country, despite its claim of being the largest democracy in the world.

The gendered silencing of the Unnao rape case survivor stands as a testimony to the larger pattern of gendered silencing of dissent in India, and it reveals a state-enforced hierarchy that decides whose lives matter more than others and whose bodies can be violated, silenced, and abandoned. This structural condition can be understood through what Achille Mbembe refers to as the creation of death worlds within the framework



of necropolitics. This is no less than structural violence, or what can be described as slow death, where the survivor is subjected to daily forms of humiliation and systematically forced into silence while confronting entrenched patriarchal dogmas.

Judiciary as an Extension of Patriarchal Power

These patriarchal values do not remain confined to private spaces but visualise themselves more aggressively within the judicial institutions of India. This became evident after the hearing of a division bench of the Delhi High Court that suspended the life imprisonment of the convicted MLA from the ruling party BJP. The bench further directed that Kuldeep Singh Sengar should not come within a five kilometre radius of the survivor. However, this raises a critical question: does such a statement provide any real guarantee of the survivor's safety?

This is nothing but slow death operating within the logic of necropolitics, where structural violence manifests through exclusion, humiliation,

The convicted rapist Ram Rahim, who is also a widely celebrated godman in India, has repeatedly been granted parole since his conviction and has received parole more than fifteen times since 2017. Similarly, another celebrated godman, Asaram Bapu, who has been in custody since 2013 and stands convicted in two rape cases, has also been repeatedly granted bail.

and the continuous production of vulnerability. It leads to the creation of death worlds where survivors are made to accept their own precarious existence, forced to live under constant threat, and pushed into a state of resignation within a system that demands silence rather than justice.

Slow Death as State Practice

National Crime Records Bureau data indicating that nearly 97 percent of victims know their offenders exposes how sexual harassment and violence are overwhelmingly embedded within intimate and domestic spaces. This proximity enables abuse to be normalised,

absorbed, and silenced within households through mechanisms of shame, coercion, and enforced dependence. Such silencing does not remain private; it travels outward, reproducing itself within the structures of the state. The criminalisation of grief in India must be read through this continuum, where domestic suppression of survivors finds its institutional mirror in state repression.

Public mourning after sexual violence, caste-based violence, and communal riots has repeatedly been met with surveillance, police brutality, and criminal charges, revealing how grief, particularly when articulated by women and marginalised communities, is

criminalised and how the act of mourning is deeply gendered in itself. In this process, mourning is stripped of its legitimacy and rendered a punishable act. The gendered silencing that begins within the household thus culminates in a political order that governs not only who may speak, but who may grieve, and under what conditions.

Godmen, Impunity, and Sanctioned Leniency

The criminalisation of grief and the deeply gendered nature of mourning can be further understood through the examples of godmen in India who are convicted rapists and yet have repeatedly been allowed to walk away from the gravity of the crime of rape. These figures, despite convictions, continue to enjoy state leniency and public legitimacy. The convicted rapist Ram Rahim, who is also a widely celebrated godman in India, has repeatedly been granted parole since his conviction and has received parole more than fifteen times since 2017. Similarly, another celebrated godman, Asaram Bapu, who has been in custody since 2013 and stands convicted in two rape cases, has also been repeatedly granted bail. These instances expose a necropolitical state that systematically privileges convicted perpetrators through leniency and legitimacy while relegating survivors to a condition of permanent vulnerability, enforced silence, and institutional abandonment, making unmistakably clear that power, rather than justice, governs whose suffering is recognised and whose lives are rendered expendable.

Caste, Marginalisation, and the Policing of Grief

This criminalisation is not only deeply gendered but also profoundly caste based. Survivors from marginalised castes are far more likely to encounter institutional apathy, delayed justice, intimidation, and renewed

violence, as their suffering is systematically devalued within a social order that already marks their lives as expendable. In this necropolitical arrangement, grief itself becomes a site of control, revealing how the state determines not only who may live with dignity but who is allowed to mourn at all.

The examples of the Hathras case, the Unnao rape case, and that of Bilkis Bano speak to how the criminalisation of grief enforces a lived reality for women in India, particularly for those coming from lower caste and minority groups, and how this reality relentlessly exposes whose lives are protected and whose are abandoned. Mourning after sexual violence, caste-based violence, or communal riots has repeatedly been criminalised, policed, and surveilled, demonstrating how gendered suffering is systematically delegitimised. The policing of grief functions as a tool of governance, controlling whose suffering is acknowledged and whose is ignored. This criminalisation is not only deeply gendered but also profoundly caste based, as survivors from marginalised communities are far more likely to encounter institutional apathy, intimidation, and renewed violence. In this necropolitical arrangement, grief itself becomes a site of control, revealing how the state determines not only who may live with dignity but who is even allowed to mourn at all.

The author is a researcher based in Delhi and hails from Madhya Pradesh. Her research interests lie in intersectional feminism, workers' rights, the rights of tribal entities, and the study of violence. She did her Master's at the Centre for the Study of Social Inclusion, Jamia Millia Islamia, New Delhi.

This article first published on themooknyak.com

How Caste Discrimination Persists Within Australia's Hindu Diaspora

The Hidden Hierarchy

Caste-Oppressed, Tamil, Sikh, Muslim, and Dalit Communities Bearing Brunt of Extremist Harm, PATCA Tells NSW Inquiry

By Geetha Sunil Pillai

In a detailed submission to the New South Wales Parliament's Committee on Law and Safety inquiry into measures to combat right-wing extremism, the Periyar Ambedkar Thoughts Circle of Australia has provided what it describes as evidence of systematic caste-based discrimination operating within Australian diaspora communities. The 14-page document, formally received on 22 January, presents a comprehensive argument that caste hierarchy and Brahminical supremacy constitute not merely cultural practices but foundational elements of what it terms "far-right Hindu extremism" actively present within New South Wales.

The submission draws on parliamentary records, academic research, documented incidents in education and public life, and extensive community engagement to substantiate its claims. It asserts that caste-based discrimination, far from being an import confined to private cultural spheres, permeates public institutions, educational programs, and community organisations that receive government funding.

The Architecture of Caste in the Diaspora Context

According to the submission, caste discrimination in Australia operates through what PATCA describes as "institutional capture and ideological normalisation." The document argues that unlike other forms of discrimination that manifest through overt exclusion, caste-based prejudice often masquerades as cultural or religious tradition, making it difficult to detect through conventional anti-discrimination frameworks.

The submission states that Brahminism—the ideological system that naturalises hierarchy and exclusion based on descent, functions as a mechanism for social control within diaspora communities. It claims this system conditions acceptance of dehumanisation and inequality, serving as a gateway ideology that enables other forms of extremist harm.

PATCA's submission documents what it describes as caste-based exclusion occurring in educational settings, noting that the failure to explicitly recognise caste within extremism and anti-discrimination frameworks has resulted in "casteist religious instruction and curriculum content" in schools. The organisation points to Special Religious Education programs as



particular areas of concern, where it alleges ideological content promoting caste hierarchy is disseminated to young people without adequate oversight.

Recruitment and the Targeting of Young People

A significant portion of the submission addresses what PATCA identifies as deliberate recruitment pathways targeting young people and recent migrants. The document alleges that far-right Hindu extremist networks exploit identity insecurity among second-generation youth, experiences of racism in broader society, and the desire for belonging to groom new adherents.

These recruitment pathways, according to the submission, operate through youth camps, cultural classes, religious education programs, leadership initiatives, and online spaces. The document claims these platforms portray Hindu identity as under existential threat, reframe Brahminical dominance as cultural tradition, legitimate caste hierarchy while denying caste oppression, and promote Islamophobic and anti-Christian conspiracy narratives.

"This is not benign cultural education," the submission states. "It aligns closely with global right-wing radicalisation patterns, differing only in cultural vocabulary rather than structure or intent."

Communities experience:
• Normalisation of hate and exclusion • Social and economic boycotts • Psychological harm and identity erasure • Chilling effects on speech and participation • Intergenerational transmission of fear and stigma

The submission draws attention to what it describes as transnational funding, training, and narrative pipelines connecting Australian diaspora organisations to extremist networks based in India. It alleges that organisations presenting as cultural, educational, or charitable bodies serve as vehicles for importing and normalising Hindutva ideology,

a political ideology that seeks to establish Hindu majoritarian dominance.

According to PATCA, this mode of operation allows extremist ideas to circulate with institutional legitimacy while evading scrutiny typically applied to right-wing extremism. The document calls for mandatory disclosure of foreign affiliations for organisations receiving public funding, arguing that probity safeguards are essential preventive tools.

The submission centres on what it describes as the lived experiences of caste-oppressed, Dalit, Bahujan, Adivasi, Muslim, Christian, Sikh, Tamil, and other marginalised communities who are disproportionately harmed by these ideologies. It documents what it terms the cumulative and structural nature of the harm, including normalisation of hate and exclusion, social and economic boycotts, psychological harm and identity erasure, chilling effects on speech and participation, and intergenerational transmission of fear and stigma.

These outcomes, the submission argues, meet internationally recognised indicators of extremist harm even where criminal thresholds are not crossed. It contends that many harms associated with far-right Hindu extremism fall below criminal thresholds while still causing profound community damage, creating what it describes as a critical gap between criminal law and preventive regulation.

The Australian Human Rights Commission Recognition

The submission cites the Australian Human Rights Commission's formal recognition that caste discrimination constitutes an intersectional form of racism affecting Australians across education, employment, and public life. PATCA uses this recognition to underscore what it describes as the need for government-led preventive and regulatory responses.

The organisation notes that caste discrimination manifests through denial of educational and employment opportunities, social exclusion, and the silencing of victims through denial and gaslighting. It argues that treating caste discrimination as a purely cultural issue obscures its role in extremist radicalisation and community harm.

Recommendations for Legislative and Policy Reform

PATCA's submission includes six key recommendations for the NSW Government. These include formally recognising far-right Hindu extremism within NSW policy, intelligence, and prevention frameworks; explicitly incorporating caste-based ideology into extremism risk assessment models; applying funding and governance safeguards to publicly supported organisations with transnational extremist linkages; establishing independent oversight of Special Religious Education and faith-based programs; resourcing community-led monitoring and reporting pathways for non-violent extremist harm; and reforming anti-discrimination and multicultural governance frameworks to recognise caste as a protected attribute and vector of extremist harm.

The submission forms part of a broader parliamentary inquiry announced following a neo-Nazi rally outside NSW Parliament in November 2025. The inquiry has heard evidence on various forms of right-wing extremism, with submissions from organisations including the NSW Jewish Board of Deputies and the Australian Federation of Islamic Councils documenting rising antisemitism and Islamophobia.

Summary

PATCA's submission positions caste-based discrimination within this broader context of right-wing extremism, arguing that any serious strategy to combat such extremism must explicitly name and address far-right Hindu extremism and caste-based supremacist ideology. The document states that jurisdictions that wait for overt violence before acting consistently incur higher social, legal, and economic costs. PATCA urges the Committee to adopt a forward-looking, evidence-based, and community centred approach that moves beyond reactive criminalisation toward structural prevention, accountability, and inclusion.

This article is first published on themooknayak.com

Expanding the Boundaries of the Mind

BHAGA WARKHADE

Discrimination against people from Northeast India based on their physical features, culture, or language is unfortunately not new. So deep is this bias that a Chief Minister from the region once lamented in a press conference that people do not consider them truly Indian. Only last May, Prime Minister Narendra Modi described the Northeast as "the most distinctive region of our diverse nation." Yet, paradoxically, this very region continues to be stigmatized in multiple ways, with its people frequently becoming victims of racial prejudice.

Not long ago, Angel Chakma, a student from Tripura, was murdered in Dehradun. Within two months of that tragedy, three women from Arunachal Pradesh in Delhi were abused by their neighbours, called a derogatory term implying prostitution, and mockingly told to sell momos. That such humiliation occurred in the national capital—within their own country—makes the episode especially disturbing. What was once often experienced by Kashmiris now increasingly confronts people from the Northeast as well: a sense of being treated as outsiders in their own nation. These incidents are not reactions born of anger or quarrels, but direct attacks on identity and ethnicity. Police have registered cases under charges relating to spreading hatred based on religion, caste, and place of birth. Such behaviour starkly exposes the contradiction between reality and the ideal of "Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikas."

From the killing of Nido Tania in 2014 to the death of Angel Chakma in 2025, a chain of prejudice becomes visible. Students and workers from the Northeast have repeatedly reported being targeted for their appearance, food habits, and language. The deeper concern is that many fail to grasp the true meaning of India's rich diversity. Geography, climate, and centuries-old cultural practices naturally shape people's physical traits, speech, and lifestyles. In a country where language and water change every few miles, such diversity is its beauty—and respecting it is every citizen's duty.

Social structures in the Northeast also differ in meaningful ways. In several communities, women play central roles in family and public life, and matrilineal traditions are not uncommon. Yet this often invites suspicion or misunderstanding from those unfamiliar with such systems. Consequently, women from the region frequently complain of being viewed with distrust or subjected to baseless moral judgments.

The Supreme Court of India has repeatedly warned against discrimination rooted in regional identity. Racial hostility is an ugly extension of that tendency. In the recent Delhi incident, the aggressors reportedly asserted social superiority, invoked supposed political connections, and demeaned others using words like "aukaat." Such attitudes reveal the troubling illusion among some Indians that they are inherently superior to others. Lawyers from Sikkim have rightly asserted that they are as Indian as anyone else. Every citizen has the right to live with dignity anywhere in the country, and ensuring that right remains protected is the real test of India's unity in diversity.

In 2014, the Union Government formed a committee under retired bureaucrat M. P. Bezbaruah to address concerns of Northeastern people living in other parts of India and to curb racially motivated

attacks in cities like Delhi. Notably, while the government initially avoided explicitly using the term "race," the committee did not hesitate to confront the issue. Its key recommendation was to criminalize racial slurs and violence. Some steps followed, but the problem persists.

Anthropologists Jelle J. P. Wouters and Tanka B. Subba have pointed out that the popular imagination of the "Indian face" often excludes the Mongolian phenotype commonly found in the Northeast. The term "Mongoloid," coined in 1795 by German naturalist Johann Friedrich Blumenbach as part of a racial classification theory, has long been discredited by modern genetics. Yet the mental image of who "looks Indian" continues to be shaped by such outdated notions. Drawing on British sociologist Paul Gilroy's *There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack*, they note a parallel: just as Black citizens born in Britain are still seen as "others," Northeastern Indians are sometimes denied full belonging within India's imagined identity.

Colonial-era terminology like "Mongolian fringe," used by British official Olaf Caroe, further reflects how geopolitical prejudices seeped into perceptions. Should such colonial residues continue to shape our mental maps today? Linguist and scholar Suniti Kumar Chatterji had already challenged such thinking in *Kirata-Jana-Kriti*, emphasizing that Indian civilization emerged from the combined contributions of Aryan, Dravidian, Austric, and Mongolian elements. While the Aryan legacy has often been highlighted, the Mongolian contribution remains underexplored. The Sanskrit term *Kirataitself* historically referred to Himalayan and Northeastern mountain communities, underscoring their deep-rooted place in the civilizational fabric.

The repeated humiliation faced by Northeastern citizens across India is not merely a series of isolated incidents—it reflects entrenched prejudices in the collective psyche. In a nation proud of its diversity, questioning someone's Indianness because of facial features, skin tone, cuisine, or language is a painful contradiction. Modern genetics has dismantled racial hierarchies, but social attitudes still linger in their shadow. Suspicion toward women's independence, misinterpretation of their lifestyles, or the spread of unfounded stereotypes stems not just from ignorance, but from a misplaced sense of superiority.

The solution cannot lie in law alone. Communities of the Northeast are not peripheral to Indian civilization; they are among its central co-creators. What is needed today is an expansion of the boundaries of our minds—to respect their identity, understand their culture, and ensure equal opportunities in public life. This is not merely an act of empathy; it is a constitutional obligation.

The celebration of diversity must be visible not only in slogans, but in everyday behaviour. Each time a Northeastern citizen is asked to prove their Indianness, the spirit of the nation itself is wounded. Healing that wound is not only the government's responsibility, but that of every citizen. India will be truly united only when a young person from Imphal, Aizawl, Guwahati, or Shillong feels no need to prove themselves in Delhi, Mumbai, or Pune—because their Indian identity is unquestioned, self-evident, and respected.

Translated from its original article in marathi to english

"A Support to Many, A Builder of Roads and Progress" - Engineer Rajendra Rahane

Pune (Manchar)
RAMESH JADHAV, SR.
JOURNALIST (+91 7620 700 101)

Engineer Rajendra Rahane, currently serving as Chief Engineer in the Pune Regional Division of the Maharashtra Government's Public Works Department, is a widely respected figure in Maharashtra's administrative, social, and public spheres. Despite holding a senior government position, he has maintained strong public engagement with various social groups and distinguished personalities across the state. His name is spoken with admiration and respect, and his contribution as Chief Engineer to several landmark infrastructure projects of the state has been significant.

Recently, Rahane has been selected for the Sangamner Bhushan Award, presented by the Late Suksheth Jadhav (Phulwale) Memorial Committee of Jadhavwadi (Taluka Ambegaon), associated with veteran social activist Anna Hazare. The award ceremony will be held on Saturday (Feb

28) at 7 p.m. in Jadhavwadi, where former Maharashtra Home Minister Dilip Walse Patil will facilitate him.

Education and Early Background

Rajendra Rahane completed his schooling in Chandanapuri village of Sangamner taluka. In 1985, he joined the Government Polytechnic in Kolhapur and later graduated with a B.E. in Civil Engineering from Walchand College of Engineering, Sangli in 1988. He went on to complete his M.E. in Civil Engineering in 1993 from Karmaveer Bhaurao Patil Engineering College, Satara.

His father, Savaleram Rahane, was a dedicated school teacher who served in several villages in Sangamner taluka and contributed immensely to education by mentoring numerous students. He remains remembered as a respected teacher in the region.

Teaching Years and Leadership
From 1988 to 2000, Rahane worked as a lecturer at Amrutvahini College of Engineering, Sangamner, shaping the careers of students from Sangamner, Akole, Shirdi,



Kopargaon, and Shirampur. During this period, he built a strong academic network and led a successful movement demanding improved salaries and service conditions for teaching and non-teaching staff—an effort that benefited engineering college employees across Maharashtra.

Government Service and Administrative Career

Rahane later joined the Public Works Department through the Maharashtra Public Service Commission. After completing training in Nashik, he was posted to the Design Circle at Belapur, Navi Mumbai.

He served as Executive

Engineer in Latur, where several challenging and important projects in the Marathwada region were completed successfully under his leadership. He also contributed significantly while serving in the Bandra Coastal Circle.

Later promoted as Superintending Engineer in Pune, Rahane helped complete numerous important infrastructure works in Pune district, leaving a strong administrative imprint. He also served for a year in the Mantralaya, Mumbai, as Deputy Secretary.

Water Supply and Urban Infrastructure Contributions

As Chief Engineer in the Maharashtra Jeevan Pradhikaran, Rahane played a major role in providing safe drinking water to nearly 1.5 million rural households. He granted technical approvals for major water supply schemes in Solapur, Satara, Sangli, and Kolhapur, and contributed to implementation across several municipalities.

He also played a key role in granting technical approval for six sewage treatment projects

in Pune worth nearly ₹1,000 crore.

For the internationally held Pune Rural Tour cycling competition, Rahane supervised the preparation of 300 km of roads to international standards, helping ensure the success of the event.

Apart from his professional work, he is known for his personal discipline—over the past 20 years, he has participated in 30–40 marathons in Pune, Mumbai, and Delhi.

Road Development and Regional Impact

Between 2000 and 2020, Rahane was instrumental in completing several long-pending projects in Sangamner, Akole, Shirampur, Kopargaon, and Shirdi talukas, including roads, bridges, and public buildings. He helped expand rural road networks and oversaw notable projects such as the Sangamner bypass road and a bridge over the Pravara River.

While serving in the Maharashtra Jeevan Pradhikaran Pune division, he contributed to approvals of development works worth

over ₹700 crore across these regions.

He later served as Chief Engineer in Mumbai, where he helped clear several stalled projects within seven to eight months before being transferred to the Pune Regional Public Works Department. During this period, he received strong administrative support from then Guardian Minister Ajit Pawar, which helped accelerate pending infrastructure works across Pune, Satara, Kolhapur, Sangli, and Solapur districts.

An Inspiring Journey

Rahane's life story—marked by perseverance, hard work, and commitment to duty—serves as a strong inspiration. Rising from a rural background in Chandanapuri to a senior leadership role in government service, his journey offers valuable lessons for those striving to succeed despite challenges.

He believes that the true measure of an officer lies not in rank, but in how effectively one uses the position for public welfare and how skillfully one overcomes administrative and social obstacles. In that sense,

Rajendra Rahane stands out as a rare asset to the administration, having successfully guided major projects through difficult circumstances.

His Guiding Principle

Rahane often says:
"Roads are not merely made of cement and asphalt; they measure a nation's progress. Never compromise on speed and quality—those define an engineer's true identity."

He also emphasizes that people from modest backgrounds should remember that every struggle makes them stronger, and that in administration one should strive to be a team leader rather than just a boss, working with a humane approach—because success naturally follows such leadership.

His selection for the Sangamner Bhushan Award is a moment of pride, and it is hoped that his commitment to public service will continue to benefit society in the years ahead.

Warm congratulations and best wishes to Engineer Rajendra Rahane for his future administrative and social endeavors.

AROUND THE WORLD

- » IIM Nagpur bars students from exams over resort pool party
- » Lok Sabha Speaker & Law Minister launch JGU's three new master degree courses in Electoral Analysis & Management, Political Communication & Legislative Drafting
- » Nagaland University study identifies ecotourism as key to managing human-tiger conflicts near Jim Corbett
- » FIITJEE to begin 'proportionate' fee refunds from late June 2026

Buzzer Round

Q] WHO INVENTED THE ELEVATOR?
Send us your replies to careersmp22@gmail.com. We shall publish the names of the first 3 correct entries in next week's edition

Answer to our Feb 19 edition question: **Surya Kant**
Correct answers were sent by: **Md Rashid Parwez, Arijit Biswas, Meenakshi Basu Thakur**

NEWS & VIEWS

A state-of-the-art AICTE-IDEA Lab was inaugurated at Guru Nanak Institute of Technology in Kolkata, a JIS Group educational initiative by Sardar Taranjit Singh, Managing Director, JIS Group and others. The AICTE-IDEA Lab at GNIT features modern, industry-ready infrastructure that supports the entire product development lifecycle—from ideation to prototyping. The facility is designed to promote interdisciplinary learning, real-world problem-solving, and startup-focused innovation in a safe and professional environment.

Astrophysicists from the Department of Physics and SPASE at IIT Kanpur and the National Centre for Radio Astrophysics Pune have developed a novel and powerful method to estimate distances to stars that emit periodic radio flashes, such as pulsars. The work is reported in a recent paper titled 'Probing the morphology of the Gum Nebula using pulsar observables and a novel distance estimation method.'

DERMATOLOGIST, SURGEON AMONG INDIA'S BEST JOBS IN 2026



Specialised professional and consumer-facing skills are gaining value

OUR CORRESPONDENT

Do you know what the best job in India is now? Not Machine Learning Engineers, Data Scientists, AI Ethics Specialists or Prompt Engineers but dermatologists. Yes, you read that right. Indeed, the global job-matching and hiring platform, has recently announced its 2026 Best Jobs list in India. Healthcare features strongly among India's top jobs for 2026. Roles such as dermatologist, surgeon, and medical officer rank among the best opportunities. Apart from such roles, Chief Financial Officer, Senior Architect, Principal, Head of Marketing, Associate Professor, Head of Sales and Senior Electrical Engineer also feature in the list. Technology roles remain part of India's best jobs, with positions such as Python developer appearing on the list. However, they

sit alongside roles from healthcare, engineering, education, and services. Engineering, construction, and real estate roles make up a significant share of the list. These include civil engineers, senior electrical engineers, electrical designers, quantity surveyors, architects, senior architects, realtors, and real estate analysts.

Beyond healthcare, infrastructure, and leadership, the list highlights the growing importance of specialised professional services. Roles such as social media manager, travel consultant, and interior designer reflect changing consumer behaviour and business needs. Companies are investing more in brand presence, customer experience, and design-led differentiation. Travel and hospitality roles are also seeing renewed demand as domestic and international travel continues to recover and expand.

COMPANIES ARE INVESTING MORE IN BRAND PRESENCE, CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE, AND DESIGN-LED DIFFERENTIATION

SHOULD INDIA SET AGE LIMIT ON SOCIAL MEDIA USE?

French President Emmanuel Macron urges India to consider social media ban for children under 15 at India-AI Impact Summit 2026. This move could mark major shift in India's digital policy framework

ANUSHKA GHOSH

French President Emmanuel Macron urged India to consider banning social media for children at the recently concluded India-AI Impact Summit in New Delhi. In December 2025, Australia became the first country to ban social media use for anyone under the age of 16. The move sent shockwaves through companies such as Meta, TikTok and Snap. While these platforms opposed the age restrictions, they stated they would comply with the law. Britain is now considering a similar ban on social media, along with tighter AI chatbot safety rules for children under 16. These measures are being proposed to safeguard children's mental health and online safety.

"There is no reason our children should be exposed online to what is legally forbidden in the real world. This is why in France, we are embarking on a process to ban social networks for children under 15 years old," he said and added, "I know, Mr Prime Minister, you will join this club," urging coordinated international effort. Although India has not yet introduced such regulation, IT Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw recently said that the Centre is discussing age-based restrictions with social media companies. Two Indian states, Andhra Pradesh and Goa, however, are also exploring the possibility of implementing social media bans for children. PM Narendra Modi has likewise emphasised the importance of online safety for young users at the summit. "Just as a school syllabus is carefully curated, the AI space too must be child-safe and family guided," he said.

Macron's remarks resonate with many parents in India. Anirban Ghosh, father of a teenager in Kolkata, believes social media is beneficial only up to a certain age. He argues that excessive exposure often leads to distraction and reduced focus. "Social media can be harmful due to the increasing number of scams, frauds and instances of cyberbullying taking place today, which may eventually result in addiction like behaviour among children and adolescents," he said.

His concerns echo themes explored in Netflix's limited series 'Adolescence', often described as every parent's nightmare. The four-episode Emmy-winning British miniseries examines urgent digital-age issues including cyberbullying,



» In India, reports suggest 76% of children in the age group of 14-16 use smartphone devices for accessing social media while over 57% use them for educational purposes

» 12% of adolescents are at risk of problematic gaming, with boys more likely than girls to show signs of problematic gaming

» In the USA, up to 95% of youth ages 13-17 report using a social media platform, with more than a third saying they use social media "almost constantly"

online misogyny, toxic masculinity and the impact of social media on mental health. Like Ghosh, many parents are increasingly worried about the growing dependence

on social media and smartphones among teenagers and children. Today, social media is no longer just a pastime, it has become an integral part of everyday life. There are over 5.66 billion active social media accounts worldwide, meaning nearly two out of every three people use these platforms. On average, users spend more than two hours daily scrolling, posting and consuming content. Companies like Meta generate over \$134 billion annually from social media services, highlighting the sector's massive economic footprint.

However, the concerns are not unproven. Recent reports suggest that over 11 percent of adolescents exhibit problematic social media behaviour, struggling to regulate their usage despite negative consequences. More than one-third remain in constant online contact with peers, while 12 percent are at risk of problematic gaming patterns. Apart from Australia and France, countries such as Canada and China have introduced parental consent rules, time limits and enhanced age-verification systems. Malaysia and Spain are

also considering similar measures. Samridhhi Damani, a student from the BBA Department at JD Birla Institute, believes social media has both positive and negative effects on students. "It does help in staying connected and can sometimes be useful for academic purposes, but it also affects academic performance and mental health", she said. She further added that unrestricted access at a young age can be harmful. "I agree that social media should be banned, or at least certain types of content should be restricted for specific age groups, as it can lead to adverse effects of overall mental well being", she said.

Research points out the dual impact of social media on adolescents' mental health and academic performance. While online platforms can foster community building and emotional support, excessive use has been linked to anxiety, depression, poor body image and addiction-

like behaviour among teenagers. Prolonged screen time is also associated with sleep disruption, fear of missing out (FOMO) and unhealthy social comparison, making adolescents particularly vulnerable. Studies indicate that over half of teenagers have experienced cyberbullying at some point, often resulting in heightened anxiety, loneliness and low self-esteem.

The academic consequences are equally concerning. Excessive social media use, typically exceeding two hours per day, has been associated with reduced concentration, increased procrastination and lower academic performance. Although platforms like WhatsApp and LinkedIn offer opportunities for collaborative learning and skill development, constant notifications and late-night scrolling frequently disrupt study routines and sleep cycles, ultimately affecting students' focus and productivity.

Prof Ashok Shaw, Dean of Budge Budge Institute of Technology (BBIT), believes excessive social media use often pulls students into a fictitious world. "Many students get easily irritated during simple conversations and gradually become addicted to playing games on their phones", he said. According to him, this addiction leads to constant distractions that directly affect classroom learning and overall academic performance.

If India formally joins this global initiative, it would mark a significant shift in its digital policy framework. The central question would no longer be whether social media should be restricted for children under a certain age, but how such regulations can be implemented effectively. Age verification systems, parental consent mechanisms and stronger platform accountability are likely to become central to the discussion.

As world leaders call for tighter safeguards in an era shaped by AI and digital manipulation, protecting young users has become a shared priority. For India, aligning with this international effort could redefine boundaries between digital freedom and digital responsibility.

THE CENTRAL QUESTION IN CASE OF INDIA WOULD NO LONGER BE WHETHER SOCIAL MEDIA SHOULD BE RESTRICTED FOR CHILDREN UNDER A CERTAIN AGE, BUT HOW SUCH REGULATIONS CAN BE IMPLEMENTED EFFECTIVELY

Trending COURSES

EXECUTIVE COURSE IN CORPORATE & STRATEGIC FINANCE FROM IIM MUMBAI

OUR CORRESPONDENT

IIM Mumbai has announced the second batch of its Executive Programme in Corporate and Strategic Finance. The first batch saw participation from professionals with over 12 years of work experience, representing senior roles across finance, consulting, auditing, operations, entrepreneurship, and leadership positions. The programme curriculum focuses on core areas such as corporate finance, strategic financial planning,

valuation, capital markets, mergers and acquisitions, risk management, and governance. It is designed to help participants apply financial frameworks to real-world business challenges and strengthen their ability to contribute to high-impact organisational decisions. Through the programme, participants gain a comprehensive understanding of financial fundamentals along with contemporary strategic finance perspectives and real-world insights from academic and industry-expert faculty.

SCHOLARSHIP

University of Birmingham announces Postgraduate Chancellor's Scholarship for Indian Students

OUR CORRESPONDENT

The University of Birmingham has opened applications for the India Postgraduate Chancellor's Scholarship, offering £10,000 towards tuition fees for Indian students enrolling in full-time postgraduate Master's programmes at its UK campus from September 2026.

The scholarship is aimed at supporting high-achieving Indian students by easing tuition costs and enabling access to a Russell Group education, while helping graduates build globally relevant skills and international exposure in an increasingly interconnected job market. "Indian students bring extraordinary

HIGHLIGHTS

- » Applications for 2026 entry are now open
- » The application deadline is May 31, 2026
- » The University of Birmingham is ranked amongst the world's top 100 institutions
- » The university has more than 8,000 international students from over 150 countries



» Scholarship offers £10,000 towards tuition fees for eligible Master's programmes commencing in September 2026




ambition, resilience, and curiosity to the University of Birmingham's classrooms. The India Postgraduate Chancellor's Scholarship is designed to support their journey toward global opportunity, helping them gain skills, confidence, and international exposure that will empower their careers," said Prof Mark Lee, Deputy Pro-Vice-Chancellor (India), University of Birmingham.

To be eligible, applicants must be domiciled in India, hold and have accepted an offer for a postgraduate programme at the University of Birmingham, have paid the required deposit, and demonstrate the ability to meet living expenses and any remaining tuition fees not covered by the scholarship.

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Trump delivers first union address with excessive chest thumping, reiterates claims of ending eight wars

WASHINGTON

Delivering his first State of the Union address of his second term, President Donald Trump pushed forth a message of economic strength and global leadership in his speech, blending nationalist campaign rhetoric with presidential chest thumping, in a bid to rally voters ahead of the November mid-term elections in the country.

In a speech lasting nearly two hours - one of the longest of its kind in recent decades - Trump largely focused on domestic themes, framing his first year back in office as a dramatic turnaround from what he described as decline under his predecessor.

"I inherited a nation in crisis," he said on Tuesday night, citing what he called a stagnant economy, high inflation, rising crime and "war and chaos all over the world". But, he added, "after just one year, I can say with dignity and pride that we have achieved a transformation like no one has ever seen before and a turnaround for the ages."

Portraying the US as a kind of resurgent power, coming back from a time of



weakness, Trump touting a "golden age" of the US, told lawmakers that the southern border was now secure, inflation had fallen sharply and the economy was "roaring like never before".

He further claimed that incomes were rising and that the US was once again feared by its adversaries, while commanding respect on the global stage.

"Our enemies are scared. Our military and police are stacked. And America is respected again, perhaps like never before," he said.

Post the one-hour mark of his speech, Trump turned his attention to issues beyond American borders, and made sweeping claims about his role as a global peacemaker.

In a rapid-fire list, he once again reiterated his claims having stopped or

otherwise de-escalated eight major international conflicts, including between Thailand - Cambodia, the Israel - Hamas war, and the India - Pakistan conflict.

Further referencing the May 2025 standoff, he said that the war between New Delhi and Islamabad could have turned nuclear and that he saved the Pakistani PM's life by allegedly preventing escalation.

"Pakistan and India would have been [in] a nuclear war - 35 million people... the prime minister of Pakistan, would have died if it were not for my involvement," Trump claimed.

He also lauded the US military's actions in Venezuela, terming them "one of the most complex, spectacular feats of military competence and power in world history".

The operation, which led to the abduction and subsequent removal of Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro, was labelled by Trump as "an absolutely colossal victory for the security of the United States", as well as the start of "a bright new beginning for the people of Venezuela".

Despite heavy chest thumping and striking an assertive tone about a 'rising America', Trump was noted to have been relatively mute on China, carefully avoiding making any direct references to Beijing.

His only one reference to China was regarding the extraction of Maduro by the US forces, where he, while lauding Washington's actions in Caracas, said that Venezuela had Chinese defence systems deployed on ground, which ended up in total failure.

"This was a major military installation, protected by thousands of soldiers and guarded by Russian and Chinese military technologies. How did that go for them?" he quipped, while observers in Washington and Beijing noted that his choice of restraint was a deliberate

exercise, as his speech came just ahead of a planned visit to China.

Staunchly defending his tariff policy, the POTUS argued that other countries had long been "ripping us off" Washington, while lamenting last week's Supreme Court ruling that struck down his executive tariff powers, calling it "very unfortunate".

"I used these tariffs, took in hundreds of billions of dollars, to make great deals for our country, both economically and on a national security basis," he said. "Countries that were ripping us off for decades are now paying us hundreds of billions of dollars."

Striking a hardline and aggressive tone against Iran, Trump blasted the country's leadership, saying that the Islamic Republic "spread nothing but terrorism, death and hate" and alleged that it was "working to build missiles that will soon reach the United States of America".

While he did not outline any specific new measures, his remarks came amid heightened tensions and repeated threats of military action against Tehran.

Washington / Tehran

Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman Esmail Baghaei on Wednesday dismissed US statements on Iran's ballistic missiles, nuclear programme, and the massive casualties in the wake of the nationwide civil unrest against the regime as totally fabricated, terming it one lie after another.

"Whatever they're alleging in regard to Iran's nuclear programme, Iran's ballistic missiles, and the number of casualties during January's unrest is simply the repetition of big lies," Baghaei said on X.

His comments came following statements released by the White House, with US President Donald Trump saying that he is keeping all options on the table regarding Iran, not ruling out a limited war should diplomacy fail, declaring that as one of the central pillars of US policy, Washington will never allow Tehran to obtain a nuclear weapon.

Claiming that Tehran wants to settle things diplomatically, which too



would be his preference, he said "we haven't heard those secret words, 'We will never build a nuclear weapon.'"

"They have already developed missiles that can threaten Europe and our bases overseas, and they are working to build missiles that will soon reach the United States of America," he said.

Iranian developments have greatly rattled Washington in recent months, as Iran is well on road to develop its nuclear programme, and rebuild its stockpile of ballistic missiles, following the US airstrikes in June last year. where Trump claimed at the time that the operation had successfully resulted in the "total obliteration" of Iran's nuclear program.

He further added, that Tehran had been

well warned over the summer "to make no future attempts to rebuild" its nuclear weapons program, "yet they continue, starting it all over."

"We wipped it out and they want to start all over again," he said, adding Iran is "again pursuing their sinister ambitions."

Last month, President Donald Trump announced the deployment of a "massive armada" to the Middle East, led by the aircraft carrier USS Abraham Lincoln. He warned Tehran of potential attacks if it refuses to end its nuclear programme and dismantle its ballistic missile arsenal entirely. Tehran has instead warned of direct retaliation against any foreign armed intervention.

Sri Lanka arrests former intelligence chief over 2019 Easter Sunday bombings

COLOMBO

Sri Lanka's criminal investigators on Wednesday arrested the country's former intelligence chief in connection with the 2019 Easter Sunday bombings that killed 279 people, including 45 foreigners. Police said retired Major General Suresh Sallay was taken into custody at dawn in a suburb of Colombo, marking the most high-profile arrest in the long-running investigation, The local media reported.

There have been accusations that Sri Lanka's former government, led by strongman president Gotabaya Rajapaksa, obstructed the investigation into the country's deadliest terrorist attack, amid claims that they may have exploited the crisis to aid their return to power.

The Rajapaksa family had dominated Sri Lankan

politics for nearly a decade from 2005. While they were credited with ending the nation's 26-year civil war, their tenure was also marked by authoritarian tactics, including the alleged use of "death squads" to silence critics and journalists.

Mahinda Rajapaksa was removed from office in 2015 following allegations of corruption, but the family sought a political comeback in 2019.

Sallay was appointed head of the State Intelligence Service (SIS) in 2019 after Gotabaya Rajapaksa became president, has been accused of involvement in the coordinated suicide bombings, a charge he denied.

On Easter Sunday 2019, six suicide bombers struck churches and luxury hotels across Sri Lanka, killing 269 people, including eight British tourists.

Russia expelled 72,000 illegal immigrants in 2025

Moscow

Russia deported 72,000 foreign nationals for staying in the country illegally in 2025, Prime Minister Mikhail Mishustin said on Wednesday.

"The register of controlled persons has finally been launched. This is an essential aspect of our work. These are individuals who reside in Russia illegally, numbering approximately 840,000 as of February 6, according to our verified figures... In 2025, as a new result of these measures, 72,000 people were deported," Mishustin told lawmakers in parliament.

Mishustin delivered his annual report to the lower-house State Duma. He addressed issues such as efforts to reduce inflation, build affordable housing, raise the minimum wage, provide benefits and subsidies, lower taxes, and outlined the government's goals for 2026.

Canadian PM Mark Carney to skip Punjab during India visit

OTTAWA/NEW DELHI, AGENCY

Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney, who is set to visit India starting Friday, will significantly skip a visit to Punjab, in a break from past such visits by Canadian PMs, and in what is being seen as a move to distance his government from pro-Khalistani elements that had created fissures in ties with India in the past.

PM Carney's first trip to India will include stops in Mumbai and New Delhi, but no visit to Punjab, a major source of immigration to Canada. His office said in a statement that he is heading to Mumbai, where he will meet with business leaders, and New Delhi, for a meeting with Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

PM Carney will be in India seeking new investment and export markets for Canada as Ottawa tries to reduce its economic reliance on an increasingly protectionist United States.

Prime Minister Carney's two predecessors, Justin Trudeau and Stephen Harper, had visited Punjab. Carney avoiding a visit to Punjab suggests that his government would like to avoid antagonizing its Indian hosts, whose opposition to separatists trying to turn Punjab into an independent Sikh homeland has been a past source of tension between the countries, the Globe and Mail reported.

Both Trudeau and Harper visited Punjab and the Golden Temple in Amritsar during their official trips to India - Harper in 2009 and Trudeau in 2018. Harper returned to Punjab during his 2012 visit as well, touring the Sikh Heritage Centre among other locations. During that second trip, he also visited a Hindu shrine in India.

Visiting the Golden Temple has been widely

viewed as a symbolic gesture toward Canada's large Sikh community, a group that has played a significant role in Canadian politics. Three of the previous four prime ministers made the trip. Jean Chrétien visited the temple in 2003 when he was prime minister. Paul Martin, who followed Chrétien as PM, did not.

In recent decades, the pro-Khalistani activities of some Sikhs in Canada created a major rift in relations between Ottawa and New Delhi. India has long complained that Canada provides a haven for Khalistani elements.

In 2023, Hardeep Singh Nijjar, an Indo-Canadian Khalistani activist, was murdered in Surrey, B.C., and then PM Trudeau accused the Indian government of a role in the killing, without showing any tangible proof. Despite New Delhi stoutly denying having any role in Nijjar's killing, Trudeau persisted in levelling accusations, leading bilateral relations to plunge to low levels. Four Indian nationals now face charges in the Nijjar case.

During his 2018 visit, then PM Trudeau had invited Jaspal Atwal, a former member of a banned Sikh separatist group convicted of an attempted assassination in 1986, to an official dinner in Delhi. Though the invitation was rescinded, the photo of Atwal with Trudeau's wife Sophie, went viral and caused a strain in ties.

Asked about the absence of a Punjab stop, the Canadian Prime Minister's Office (PMO) press secretary Laura Scalfidi said in a statement that Carney will travel to Mumbai and New Delhi to "focus on expanding economic and business relationships, identify investment opportunities in Canada, and create new partnerships between

businesses in both nations." Scalfidi said cultural outreach will take place at home.

"When he is in Canada, the Prime Minister will continue his engagements with cultural communities including attending important celebrations and events on days of significance." Carney attended Vaisakhi celebrations with the Sikh community last April in Ottawa, for instance, she said.

Goldy Hyder, president and CEO of the Business Council of Canada, said he's in favour of the Carney itinerary for India. "This is a serious time and warrants a serious visit. Prime Minister Carney is right not to get distracted by diaspora political events," said Hyder, who is an Indo-Canadian.

After Mumbai, where he will talk with business leaders, Prime Minister Carney will head to New Delhi to meet with his Indian counterpart. The two will discuss "ambitious new partnerships in trade, energy, technology and artificial intelligence (AI), talent and culture, and defence," the Canadian PMO said in a separate statement.

Carney will also meet business leaders in New Delhi.

Vina Nadjibulla, vice-president of research and strategy at the Asia Pacific Foundation of Canada, said she takes Carney's itinerary as a sign that his foreign policy is "more focused on national interest and not limited to certain diaspora priorities." Balpreet Singh, legal counsel for the Ottawa-based World Sikh Organization, said his organization has been unable to procure a meeting with Gary Anandasangaree, the current Public Safety Minister. "The doors have been shut to us," Singh said.

Ex Russian President Dmitry Medvedev warns NATO Nuclear level response if it tries to give Ukraine nukes

MOSCOW

Former Russian President Dmitry Medvedev has warned that Moscow would deliver a nuclear response, should NATO countries try to supply Ukraine with atomic weapons.

Currently serving as deputy chairman of Russia's Security Council, Medvedev's warning came following the latest report by Russia's Foreign Intelligence Service (SVR), which claimed that London and Paris were jointly attempting to covertly provide Kyiv with European made components, technology, and equipment related to nuclear weapons, along with an appropriate method of delivery, under the guise of it all being domestically developed by Kyiv.

"I will be blunt and state the obvious," Medvedev said while speaking to RT, adding that the alleged intentions of London and Paris to hand over nuclear capabilities to



what he described as the "Nazi regime in Kyiv" was an extremely dangerous move, and one that could change the situation entirely.

Noting it to be a "direct transfer of nuclear weapons to a country at war," Medvedev stated "There should be no doubt whatsoever that in such a scenario Russia would be forced to use any means at its disposal, including non-strategic nuclear weapons, against targets in Ukraine that threaten our country."

"And if necessary, against the supplier nations now implicated in a nuclear conflict with Russia. This is the kind of symmetrical response that the Russian Federation

would be entitled to," he added.

The SVR also alleged that another option under consideration by London and Paris was the provision of a complete French TN 75 nuclear warhead used on submarine launched ballistic missiles, or assistance in building a radioactive "dirty bomb" using conventional explosives and nuclear materials.

The SVR statement further noted that Kyiv could seek to negotiate from "more advantageous terms" should it possess such weapons, adding that Germany had "prudently refused" to participate.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov described the reported plans as "potentially very dangerous," saying they would threaten the global non-proliferation regime.

Ukraine, for its part has argued that it gave up its Soviet-era nuclear arsenal in exchange for security guarantees that later proved worthless.

While a significant portion of Soviet nuclear forces were stationed in Ukraine, Kyiv never controlled the missiles, with the 1994 Budapest Memorandum to the former Soviet republics of Ukraine, Belarus, and Kazakhstan gave assurances - but not legally binding guarantees - that their territorial integrity would be respected after transferring Soviet nuclear weapons to Russia.

At the 2022 Munich Security Conference, shortly before the Ukraine conflict escalated, Ukraine's Volodymyr Zelensky suggested Kyiv should reconsider its non-nuclear status, leading to much anger from Russia.

Moscow maintains that after the 2014 regime change in Kyiv, Ukraine's new authorities breached the neutrality pledge underpinning its post-Soviet independence commitments, by making its desire to join NATO, the pillar of its foreign security policy.

Tehran/Beijing

Iran is reportedly close to finalising a major weapons deal with China, as it is moving closer to the purchase of Beijing's advanced anti-ship CM-302 cruise missiles, in an attempt to modernise its ageing defence capabilities amid the massive US naval buildup near its waters.

The CM-302 missile system is a multi-platform supersonic anti-ship weapon with a reported range of around 290 kilometres (180 miles), and is designed to fly low and fast to evade shipborne air defences, with a speed of Mach 3.3, and a 250 kg high-explosive blast fragmentation warhead.

The missile would significantly strengthen Iran's ability to target vessels in the Gulf and surrounding waters, and could give a significant boost to Iran's heavily depleted stockpile following its 12-day-war with Israel.

While no delivery date



has been set as of yet, and it's yet to be determined how many missiles Iran will be purchasing, and at what cost, or whether it will go through with the deal at all, the prospect alone has set various countries on edge.

The deployment of CM-302 systems along Iran's coastline could greatly complicate US naval operations in the region, particularly at a time when Washington has deployed multiple carrier strike groups and supporting assets within operational range of Iranian territory.

In addition to the CM-302, Iran is reportedly exploring the purchase of

other Chinese systems, including surface-to-air missiles and anti-ballistic missile capabilities, amid a deepening military relationship between Tehran and Beijing.

Iran's procurement efforts further complicate its ongoing arms embargo enforced by the international community, leading to massive scrutiny among global observers regarding any weapons purchases it makes.

The UN first enacted an arms embargo on the Islamic Republic back in 2006, later eventually being eased in 2015 under its nuclear agreement with the US. All its pre-2015 sanctions were

subsequently reimposed last September by the UNSC, after finding Iran's programme to be in breach of its 2015 terms.

This purchase would significantly bolster its maritime defence capabilities, as this comes just after Tehran reportedly acquired Russia's advanced Mi-28NE "Night Hunter" attack helicopter, as part of an earlier 2023 defence agreement.

The export version of the helicopter is equipped with a 30mm cannon, air-to-ground missiles, anti-tank guided missiles, unguided bombs, heavy armour, and is designed for low-altitude operations in both day and night conditions.

Taken in combination with the Russian helicopter, Iran's purchase of the Chinese cruise missile would mark a significant qualitative boost for the Islamic Republic, integrating its ageing weapon technologies to date. U

India's D2C e-comm to grow 3x faster, hit USD 60 billion by 2030: Report

NEW DELHI, AGENCY

India's direct-to-consumer (D2C) e-commerce channel is projected to grow nearly three times faster than traditional online marketplaces, reaching up to USD 60 billion by 2030, according to a McKinsey & Company report released in February 2026.

The report, titled "The great unbundling of Indian e-commerce: MSMEs and the direct-to-consumer revolution," highlights that India's e-commerce penetration, currently estimated at 6-8 per cent of total retail, could rise to 9-11 per cent by the end of the decade.

Within this growth, the D2C channel is expected to increase from USD 10-12 billion in 2025 to USD 55-60 billion by 2030.

The analysis notes that micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs) are likely to drive nearly half of the incremental growth in e-commerce. India's retail ecosystem remains

deeply fragmented, with nearly 60 million MSMEs contributing close to 30 per cent of national GDP, or roughly USD 1 trillion annually.

According to McKinsey's MSME survey conducted in November 2025, 53 per cent of small businesses expressed a preference for selling directly through websites and social commerce channels, while 47 per cent favoured marketplace platforms.

The report attributes the shift towards D2C models to factors such as lower platform fees, reduced fulfilment costs, better access to first-party customer data, and greater control over brand identity and consumer experience.

While D2C adoption accelerates, McKinsey indicates that large marketplaces, including Amazon, Flipkart, Meesho, and Myntra, are expected to remain central to India's digital

commerce landscape, with marketplace sales projected to reach USD 90-100 billion by 2030.

Quick commerce is identified as the fastest-growing segment, with a projected compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 45 per cent, expanding from USD 5-6 billion in 2024 to USD 35-40 billion by 2030.

The report also underscores the rising importance of Tier-2 and Tier-3 cities, which contribute over 60 per cent of India's e-commerce shipments. By 2030, India could add more than 140 million households earning above USD 10,000 annually, further expanding the digital consumer base.

McKinsey estimates the potential market for modular, unbundled digital commerce solutions tailored to MSMEs at USD 25-30 billion by 2030, representing roughly half of the projected D2C channel size.

Air India targets 93 pc flights with new and uniform cabin experience by end of 2026

New Delhi, P Krishna Kumar

With 85 per cent of the narrow-body aircraft retrofitting completed and retrofitting of the legacy wide-body fleet already underway and poised to get completed later this year, Air India hopes to ensure that nearly 93 per cent of its fleet offer completely new cabin experiences by end of this year.

This was conveyed by Manish Puri, Head of Global Sales while addressing a media roundtable on the sidelines of SATTE Travel Expo on Wednesday. Puri said the airline is entering the next phase of transformation after focusing largely on internal systems over the past three years. "Last three years was predominantly internal changes," Puri said, adding that from 2026 onwards the focus will shift to "360-degree communication - informing the customer, partner, media, everybody what is now in store."

Puri said 2025 marked a key milestone for the narrowbody fleet transformation. By October 2025, nearly 87 per cent of the 320/321 family aircraft had been retrofitted. "We completed almost

87 per cent of the retrofitting of the narrow body. Now we have 104 aircraft of Air India Express with the same three cabins - eight business class, 24 premium economy and 132 economy seats," he said.

The move has brought uniformity in configuration across domestic and short-haul international routes such as Kuala Lumpur, Vietnam, Dubai and Doha, eliminating frequent seat and layout changes that earlier caused customer disruption. The narrowbody overhaul triggered the airline's November brand campaign, positioning the refreshed product as a visible sign that "change is in the air".

Talking about the wide-body legacy carriers operated by the company, Puri said that 26 Boeing 787 Dreamliners will undergo a comprehensive retrofit programme now. "The first two have already gone for retrofitment and should be joining in March," he said, adding that all 26 aircraft will be fully upgraded by September-October, 2026.

The retrofit is extensive. "When it goes for retrofit, everything

is scraped off. It's only the shell which remains. Everything put inside is brand new," he noted. Alongside retrofit, the airline is inducting factory-fresh, line-fit widebodies. The first Boeing 787-9 with the new cabin has already been delivered. During 2026, the airline expects six new widebody inductions, including the 787-9 and the Airbus 350-1000 series.

By the end of this calendar year, around 50 per cent of the widebody fleet will be in a "new avatar", he said, even as retrofit of the Boeing 777 fleet is scheduled to begin next year. Puri reiterated that the airline's order book now stands at around 600 firm aircraft, following an initial order of 470 aircrafts, an additional 100, and 30 more announced later.

"So far, 57 aircraft have been delivered. 543 more are supposed to be delivered," he said, underlining the scale of the transformation. Giving a snapshot of operational impact, Puri said out of 4,900 weekly flights currently operated, 3,600 are already on new or retrofitted aircraft.

Giving a domestic and international bifurcation, Puri

said that 3,000 weekly flights in domestic and 600 in international are on a new product. By end of calendar year 2026, that number will rise sharply. "You will find 93 per cent of our flights will be on a new or retrofitted product," Puri said.

As the hardware transformation gathers momentum, the airline is also upgrading onboard offerings. Changes in menu and beverage selection have already begun on select widebody services, including the Airbus A350 and former Vistara Dreamliners.

The new 787 cabin will feature upgraded business-class suites with enhanced privacy. "When you fly the retrofit or the new 787-9, you will not be able to distinguish whether it's an old series or a new one. The cabin is like this," Puri said, describing the uniform experience.

With fleet modernisation progressing and customer-facing communication set to intensify from 2026, Air India is positioning itself to deliver a consistent three-class experience across both narrowbody and widebody operations, marking a decisive shift in its long-haul product strategy.

HDFC Bank Inaugurates New Tech and Digital Factory in Guwahati

PUNE, CORRESPONDENT

Leading private sector lender HDFC Bank has inaugurated its new Tech and Digital Factory in Guwahati, a facility aimed at advancing technology development, innovation, and talent cultivation. The centre is expected to boost skill development in AI, digital technologies, and cybersecurity in Assam.

This is the first such facility in Assam and the fourth in India, after Mumbai, Bengaluru, and Gurugram.

The building was inaugurated by Assam Chief Minister Dr. Himanta Biswa Sarma in the presence of Kaizad Bharucha, Deputy Managing Director, HDFC Bank; Ramesh Lakshminarayanan, Chief Information Officer; senior officials from the Assam government, partner academic institutions, and bank representatives.

Focus on Talent and Technology



The new facility will create career opportunities for skilled professionals in the state, enabling them to contribute directly to next-generation technology development. By leveraging local tech talent, the bank aims to strengthen its capabilities in AI, cloud computing, data engineering, and core engineering, while unlocking Assam's potential for digital product development.

HDFC Bank has also partnered with the Assam government under the

Advantage Assam 2.0 initiative, led by the Chief Minister. Through this collaboration, the bank and the state government aim to bridge academic learning with industry expertise by offering structured skill-development programmes in BFSI and fintech.

Campus-to-Corporate Programme

The initiative follows a "Campus-to-Corporate" model aligned with employment needs in the banking and fintech sectors. The curriculum combines traditional

banking knowledge with emerging IT domains.

The programme, launched in September 2025, currently has over 150 students undergoing training. Participants receive industry exposure and mentorship from senior HDFC Bank professionals. Students will also get internship opportunities of 2-4 months at the bank, allowing them to apply academic and technological concepts in a real corporate environment. Notably, the programme is offered at no additional cost to students.

Bank's Statement Speaking at the event, Kaizad Bharucha, Deputy Managing Director, HDFC Bank, said:

"With the launch of our new Tech and Digital Factory in Guwahati, we will be able to introduce new digital products and services while strengthening our IT capabilities. We signed

a MoU with the Assam government during Advantage Assam 2.0 in February 2025, and the facility has been established within a year thanks to strong government support. This centre will help attract engineering talent from Assam, enabling them to contribute to next-generation banking technology while working closer to their hometowns."

Technology Focus Areas

HDFC Bank's Tech and Digital Factory model serves as a hub for digital execution, focusing on: Experience design, Mobile and cloud engineering, APIs and orchestration, Data and GenAI solutions, Secure-by-design architecture. Assam has long been an important state for the bank's expansion and operations.

Radisson Hotel Group, MBD Group Announce Strategic Master Franchise Partnership

To Expand Radisson Collection and Radisson RED in India

PUNE, CORRESPONDENT

Radisson Hotel Group (RHG) and the MBD Group have announced a long-term strategic partnership under a master franchise agreement to accelerate the growth of RHG's luxury and lifestyle brands—Radisson Collection and Radisson RED—across mutually agreed locations in India. Built on RHG's global brand standards and governance framework, the collaboration marks a significant step in expanding India's luxury and lifestyle hospitality segment.

Under the partnership, the MBD Group will support the development of both brands nationwide and undertake business development, management, and franchise functions at identified locations, complementing RHG's independent development initiatives and partner network. The move is expected to strengthen RHG's growth strategy in India, one of its key global markets.

As part of the collaboration, the landmark Radisson Blu MBD Hotel Noida will be upgraded and repositioned as Radisson Collection MBD, following a comprehensive transformation aligned with global brand standards. The property is among RHG's top-performing

hotels in India and reflects the group's strategy of strengthening its luxury portfolio by upgrading established assets while expanding through partnerships.

RHG's South Asia Managing Director and CEO Nikhil Sharma said India's premium hospitality market continues to show strong growth, with rising demand for contemporary, design-led lifestyle experiences. He noted that the partnership would enhance RHG's ability to expand both brands in key Indian markets while reinforcing its long-term commitment to the country.

Sonica Malhotra Kandhari, Joint Managing Director of MBD Group, said the collaboration represents a decisive strategic milestone, with plans to introduce 50 co-branded hotels in the first decade, primarily through an asset-light model. The projected portfolio mix includes roughly 80% managed and franchised hotels and 20% owned properties, underscoring the shared focus on scalable expansion.

Together, RHG's global brand strength and MBD's local market expertise aim to meet the growing demand for high-quality luxury and design-driven lifestyle hospitality across India.

Projects Today Launches New AI-Powered Business Opportunity Platform to Strengthen India's Project Ecosystem

Pune, Correspondent

Projects Today has launched a new AI-powered business opportunity platform aimed at strengthening India's project ecosystem by providing comprehensive, real-time project intelligence in a single integrated interface.

The upgraded platform enables users to access complete project details, tenders, lowest-bid (L1) updates, work orders, and key stakeholder information at one place. This is expected to help companies connect with the right projects at the right time and improve decision-making efficiency.

Designed with a focus on practical business outcomes, the platform integrates advanced AI-driven features such as BOQ-based search, tracking of sub-projects, monitoring the journey from tender to order, and visibility into participating bidders. It also offers predictive tools to assess business opportunities, credibility dashboards, and mechanisms to connect with key decision-makers. These capabilities aim to move beyond simply reporting developments to guiding companies on what actions to take next, enabling timely and strategic responses.

With over 25 years of

research experience, Projects Today currently maintains a database of more than 50,000 active projects across planning, tendering, and execution stages. Each month, the platform adds over 1,500 new projects and more than 10,000 tenders, along with 1,200+ updates on L1 bidders and work orders. This data-driven ecosystem is designed to support companies across sectors in making informed and accurate business decisions.

The initiative seeks not only to provide information but also to ensure a continuous flow of opportunities among the stakeholders who build and power the nation—promoters, contractors, consultants, suppliers, service providers, and financiers. Guided by the principle "Customer First, Nation Always," Projects Today aims to continue advancing through innovation and deep sectoral knowledge.

The new platform represents a significant step toward strengthening India's project economy, promoting timely participation, better coordination, and faster execution so that project plans translate into successful partnerships and tangible outcomes.

Airtel Moves to Build Premium NBFC Platform with Major Investment in Airtel Money

PUNE, AGENCY

Telecom major Bharti Airtel has announced significant plans to build a high-quality non-banking financial company (NBFC) platform through its subsidiary Airtel Money Limited, marking a major step toward creating one of India's most trusted and large-scale digital financial ecosystems.

The NBFC is expected to be developed with a capitalization of ₹20,000 crore over the coming years. Airtel, through Bharti Enterprises Limited, along with the promoter group, will contribute 70 percent, while the remaining 30 percent will be raised from external sources.

Backed by strong digital assets, a large data and analytics engine supported by over 500 data scientists, and deep operational expertise, Airtel aims to expand access to secure, innovative, and easy-to-use digital financial services across India. Over the past two years, the company has built a high-performance credit engine using its integrated digital platform and distribution

channels, creating one of the country's strongest Loan Service Provider (LSP) models. The platform has already facilitated disbursements exceeding ₹9,000 crore, supported by robust underwriting models, disciplined portfolio management, and real-time risk monitoring.



Gopal Vittal, Vice Chairman and Managing Director of Bharti Airtel, said the success of the LSP platform demonstrates how technology, data, and customer trust can drive nationwide impact. He added that the NBFC expansion reinforces

Airtel's ambition to build a future-ready digital lending business rooted in trust, innovation, and financial inclusion.

Airtel Money Limited received its NBFC licence from the Reserve Bank of India on February 13, 2026. The expansion reflects Airtel's commitment to deepening financial inclusion and empowering underserved customers in India's rapidly growing financial services sector. According to CareEdge Ratings, India's formal credit-to-GDP ratio stands at 53 percent, highlighting significant headroom for lending growth.

The NBFC's distribution journey will be seamlessly integrated with Airtel's LSP platform while maintaining operational separation to ensure the best customer experience. By combining technology, data insights, and its large customer base, Airtel aims to set a new benchmark in India's digital financial services landscape.

As per RBI regulations, Airtel Money holds a valid Certificate of Registration dated February 13, 2026, under Section 451A of the RBI Act, 1934; however, the RBI does not guarantee the company's financial position or obligations.

Tourism in India has moved from margins of policy to centre of national development

Gajendra Singh Shekhawat

New Delhi Union Minister for Culture and Tourism, Gajendra Singh Shekhawat said on Wednesday

that Tourism, a sector which has been lurking on the margins of national policy making for decades, has moved into the centre of national development under Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

Shekhawat said that the government understands that Tourism is not merely about travel, but is an activity which stimulates livelihood, entrepreneurship and inclusive growth of the economy.

Inaugurating the 33rd annual edition of the South Asia Travel & Tourism Exchange (SATTE), a premier travel and tourism exposition of India, in the capital, Shekhawat said that the future belongs to countries which assimilate culture with commerce.

He said that globally, tourists are not merely searching for destinations, they are searching for stories, ethnic and authentic cultures, wellness, human connections and experiences. India as a nation of living heritage and rich civilisation and a land of vibrant and thriving democracy is best suited to satiate

the hunger for authentic experiences of travelers, he said.

India is not just a land of geographical diversity, but a country with diversity in terms of spiritual journeys, adventure, nature, etc., the minister said.

Speaking about the unprecedented infrastructural and other changes the country has seen over the last decade, Shekhawat said that the government is "transforming tourism through a comprehensive national approach" with focus on conservation of heritage, protection of nature and empowering the communities.

India's greatest tourism assets are its culture and rich hospitality, the tourism minister said, adding that the focus is to build India as an "experience-led" destination and a global leader in "responsible tourism".

Around 2000 exhibitors from both India and abroad are participating in the 33rd edition of SATTE 2026, which has started in Yashobhooni International Exhibition Centre. There are representatives from 60 countries who will participate in the B2B meetings.



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