



**Weather Forecast**

HYDERABAD	VIJAYAWADA	TIRUPATHI
H 33° C L 25° C	H 35° C L 26° C	H 36° C L 26° C

# President's Rule imposed in MANIPUR



Biren Singh resigned on February 9.

BJP failed to find a consensus on a new CM.

Ethnic violence since May 2023 left over 200 dead.

NPP withdrew support in November, deepening the crisis.

Opposition and civil society pushed for central intervention.

Parliament will now oversee the state's governance

In the official proclamation, President Droupadi Murmu cited a constitutional breakdown as the reason for assuming direct control over the state's administration. The order, issued under Article 356 of the Constitution, grants Parliament the authority to exercise legislative powers for the state. "I, Droupadi Murmu, President of India, have received a report from the Governor of the State of Manipur and after considering the report and other information received by me, I am satisfied that a situation has arisen in which the Government of that State cannot be carried on in accordance with the provisions of the Constitution," the notification stated.

## Political Developments Preceding the Move

The BJP-led government in Manipur faced instability after the Conrad Sangma-led National People's Party (NPP) withdrew support in November 2024. With no consensus on Biren Singh's successor, the leadership crisis intensified, leading to mounting demands from the opposition and civil society for the imposition of President's Rule.

Singh resigned on February 9 following discussions with Union Home Minister Amit Shah and BJP national president JP Nadda.

### TPN Correspondent | Manipur

The central government has imposed President's Rule in Manipur, days after BJP leader and former Chief Minister N. Biren Singh resigned amid ongoing ethnic violence. The Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) issued an official notification on Thursday confirming the decision. Manipur has been grappling with ethnic conflict between the Meitei and Kuki-Zo communities since May 2023, leading to over 200 deaths and widespread unrest.

### Official Notification Cites Constitutional Breakdown



# Siddaramaiah Directs BMRCCL to Address Bengaluru Metro Fare Hike

CM Siddaramaiah calls Bengaluru Metro fare hike "abnormal."

Directs BMRCCL to reduce fares where increases are excessive.

Revised metro fares took effect on February 9

Increasing ticket prices by up to 50%.

### TPN Correspondent | Bengaluru

Karnataka Chief Minister Siddaramaiah has directed the Bangalore Metro Rail Corporation Limited (BMRCCL) to address the sharp rise in Bengaluru Metro fares, calling the increase "abnormal" in certain sectors. He emphasized the need to safeguard commuters' interests and urged officials to revise fares where the hike has been excessive.

The fare revision, implemented on February 9, resulted in significant increases, with ticket prices more than doubling in some areas. "The way BMRCCL has revised fares has led to anomalies, with some routes seeing fares more than double. I have asked the MD of BMRCCL to urgently address these issues and reduce fares where the increase is unreasonable. Commuters' interests must be safeguarded," Siddaramaiah stated in a post on X.

As per the new structure, the minimum fare for the first 2 km remains ₹10, but the fare for 2-4 km has increased from ₹15 to ₹20. Commuters

traveling over 30 km now have to pay ₹90, a 50% jump from ₹60. BMRCCL has introduced peak and non-peak hour rates, offering a 5% discount to smart cardholders during peak hours and a 10% discount during off-peak hours. On Sundays and national holidays, including January 26 and August 15, smart card users will receive a 10% discount.

Siddaramaiah has instructed BMRCCL to take immediate corrective measures and ensure fare adjustments to ease the financial burden on metro commuters. The CM's intervention comes amid growing public concern over the steep fare hike.

## Indian Diaspora's Expectations from Modi-Trump Meet



- PM Modi begins a two-day U.S. visit, greeted by the Indian diaspora.
- Community seeks clarity on work visa renewals and immigration policies.
- Trade and defense cooperation expected to be key discussion points.
- The visit aims to

strengthen India-U.S. relations and economic ties. Modi to meet U.S. leaders amid concerns over tariffs and migrant issues.

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## Centre Grants Z-Category Security Cover to Dalai Lama

- CRPF VIP security wing assigned to protect the Tibetan spiritual leader.
- About 30 CRPF commandos will guard him in shifts.
- Security review by intelligence agencies led to the decision.
- BJP leader Sambit Patra also provided Z-category cover in Manipur.



TPN Correspondent | New Delhi The Union government has granted Z-category security cover to Tibetan spiritual leader Dalai Lama, citing potential threats, official sources confirmed on Thursday. The VIP security wing of the Central Reserve Police Force

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## Pak Army suffers heavy casualties after ceasefire violation

### TPN Correspondent | Jammu

Pakistani troops violated the ceasefire along the Line of Control (LoC) in Poonch district, prompting a strong response from the Indian Army. Security officials reported that enemy forces suffered "heavy casualties" in the exchange of fire in the Krishna Ghati sector.

- Pak troops violate ceasefire in Poonch
- Indian retaliation causes heavy casualties
- Security tightened along LoC after hostilities



However, the Indian Army has not officially confirmed or denied the extent of damage. This ceasefire violation, which occurred on Wednesday, is rare since India and Pakistan renewed the ceasefire agreement on February 25, 2021. It came just a day after two Indian Army personnel, including a captain, were killed in an improvised explosive device (IED) explosion triggered by suspected terrorists near the LoC in the Akhnour

sector of Jammu district. Pakistani troops initiated unprovoked firing on a forward post in the Tarkundi area, leading to a strong retaliation by Indian forces. An undated video of a Pakistani army officer paying last respects to killed soldiers has surfaced on social media. Meanwhile, a

Junior Commissioned Officer (JCO) of the Indian Army sustained minor injuries after accidentally stepping on a landmine while patrolling in the same sector. He was immediately evacuated to a military hospital. The situation along the LoC remains tense following a surge in cross-border hostilities in the past week. This marks the first ceasefire violation of the year and the fourth

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## Meitei body accuses Kuki groups of sustaining unrest in Manipur

COCOMI alleges Kuki groups fueling unrest

Calls for action against those justifying instability

Kuki groups continue demand for separate administration



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## Nirmala Sitharaman Introduces New Income Tax Bill

- FM Nirmala Sitharaman introduces the Income Tax Bill 2025 in Lok Sabha.
- Bill simplifies tax laws, cutting sections from 819 to 536.
- Opposition MPs walk out in protest.
- Sitharaman defends the bill, citing removal of outdated provisions.
- Sent to a Select House Committee; report due next session.



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## Epsilon Group to Invest ₹15,350 Crore in Karnataka for EV Battery Manufacturing



TPN Correspondent | Bengaluru, Feb 14

Epsilon Group to invest ₹15,350 crore in Karnataka over the next decade.

The company will set up EV battery component manufacturing, R&D, and testing facilities.

The move is expected to reduce India's dependence on China for key EV battery materials.

Mumbai-based Epsilon Group, a leading manufacturer of battery components, is making a significant expansion in Karnataka by investing ₹15,350 crore. The company plans to establish EV battery core component manufacturing units, research facilities, and material testing centres across the state. This long-term investment will be executed in phases over the next ten years.

At the Invest Karnataka conference held at Palace Grounds in Bengaluru, Epsilon Group signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the Karnataka government, formalizing its commitment to the state's EV sector. This initiative aims to strengthen the domestic EV battery manufacturing industry and significantly reduce India's reliance on China for key materials.

Epsilon Group is expanding its presence in Karnataka through its three major subsidiaries, each specializing in various aspects of

EV battery manufacturing. Epsilon Advanced Materials will focus on producing graphite anode battery materials, which are essential for lithium-ion batteries. Epsilon Cam Pvt Ltd will manufacture LFP (Lithium Iron Phosphate) cathode materials, a crucial component in EV batteries known for its safety and long cycle life. Inspire Energy Research Centre Pvt Ltd will be dedicated to R&D, testing, and training, ensuring advancements in battery technology and supporting the growth of India's EV industry.

Graphite anode and LFP cathode materials are crucial components in EV battery production, and India has depended on imports from China. Epsilon Group's initiative to manufacture these materials locally will significantly reduce import dependency, making India's EV industry more self-reliant.

Founded by Vikram Handa, Epsilon Group already has a strong presence in Karnataka and aims to further expand its operations in the region. The company's efforts align with India's goal of achieving energy security and sustainable mobility through localized EV battery production.

With its new manufacturing and R&D center's, Epsilon Group will provide high-quality battery materials to Indian manufacturers, supporting the country's transition to clean energy and electric mobility.

## BJP MP Tejasvi Surya Lauds HAL After Flying Indigenous HTT-40 Trainer Jet

TPN Correspondent | Karnataka, Feb 14

BJP MP hails HAL as the pride of Bengaluru and India.

Flew in the HAL-designed HTT-40 trainer jet for 30 minutes.

Criticized past UPA-era procurement while highlighting India's self-reliance in defense.

BJP MP Tejasvi Surya praised Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL), calling it the pride of Bengaluru and India after flying in the HTT-40 trainer aircraft for 30 minutes. Speaking to the media, he highlighted HAL's role in advancing India's aeronautical industry.

"Today, I had the opportunity to fly in HTT-40, produced by our own HAL. HAL is the pride of India. It is the pride of Bengaluru," he stated.

Surya reflected on the challenges HAL faced, particularly the 2012 UPA-era decision to procure Swiss Pilatus trainer jets instead of promoting indigenous aircraft. He pointed out that this procurement was later investigated, and a CBI inquiry in 2019 revealed the involvement of middlemen. The controversy led to the blacklisting of the Swiss company, causing a setback to India's indigenous trainer aircraft project.

He credited the revival of the HTT-40 project to Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the late Defence Minister Manohar Parrikar, who provided HAL with financial and administrative support after 2014. This move allowed Indian engineers to



develop the HTT-40 in a record 40 months, making it a symbol of India's journey from foreign dependence to self-reliance in defense manufacturing. Surya emphasized that the HTT-40 represents India's progress in achieving self-sufficiency in defense technology.

"From foreign dependency to aatmanirbharta (self-reliance), from not trusting our own institutions and engineers to producing state-of-the-art aircraft that are second to none, the HTT-40 is a remarkable achievement," he added.

This was not the MP's first experience with indigenous aircraft. At Aero India 2021, he had also taken a 30-minute sortie in the Light Combat Aircraft (LCA) Tejas, another major milestone in India's aeronautical advancements.

## Legendary Folk Singer Sukri Bommagowda Passes Away at 84



soulful renditions captured the essence of Karnataka's cultural heritage.

Beyond music, Sukrajji was also a passionate social activist. She played a key role in spreading awareness about social issues, particularly alcohol addiction, which was prevalent in many parts of Uttara Kannada. Through her songs and speeches, she campaigned against alcoholism, highlighting its devastating impact on families and society.

Her activism was deeply personal. Having lost her husband, Bommagowda, to alcohol addiction at the age of 16, she experienced firsthand the struggles faced by women and families affected by substance abuse. This personal loss ignited her determination to bring about change.

Sukrajji's invaluable contributions to folk music and social activism were recognized at the highest level. In 2017, she was honored with the Padma Shri, India's fourth-highest civilian award, for her efforts in preserving Karnataka's folk traditions. She was also the recipient of the Nadoja Award, which is equivalent to an honorary doctorate in Karnataka, and the Rajyotsava Award, one of the highest state honors given for exceptional contributions to society.

Despite her national recognition, Sukrajji remained deeply connected to her roots. She lived a simple, nature-friendly life in her village, surrounded by the traditions she cherished. Her home became a center for learning, where schoolchildren and researchers visited to learn about folk music, cultural heritage, and sustainable living.

She strongly believed in the power of folk music as a means of education and social change. She encouraged young artists to embrace traditional art forms and ensured that folk music continued to thrive in Karnataka.

Her passing marks the end of an era in Karnataka's folk music scene. However, her legacy lives on through her songs, recorded archives, and the many lives she touched with her activism. Her unwavering dedication to folk music and social justice has left an indelible mark on Karnataka's cultural history.

As Karnataka mourns the loss of one of its most beloved folk artists, Sukri Bommagowda's songs and messages will continue to inspire future generations.

TPN Correspondent | Karnataka, Feb 14

Folk icon Sukri Bommagowda, also known as Sukrajji, passed away at her home in Uttara Kannada.

She was celebrated for preserving Halakki folk traditions and social activism.

Honored with the Padma Shri in 2017, she was a key figure in Karnataka's cultural and social landscape.

Renowned folk singer and Padma Shri awardee Sukri Bommagowda, fondly known as Sukrajji, passed away on Thursday morning at her residence in Badageri village, Ankola taluk, Uttara Kannada district. She had been battling health issues and was undergoing treatment at

a Manipal Hospital for the past few days.

Sukrajji was a revered figure in the Halakki Vokkaliga community and was widely recognized as a "walking encyclopedia" for her deep knowledge of Karnataka's rich folk traditions. She dedicated her life to preserving and promoting traditional folk music, memorizing nearly 5,000 songs that narrated stories of love, nature, and everyday life in rural Karnataka.

Her contribution to the preservation of folk music was significant. In the 1980s, All India Radio (Akashvani) recorded and archived hundreds of her songs, ensuring that her legacy would be carried forward for generations. Her distinct voice and

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## Centre Grants Z-Category Security Cover to Dalai Lama

(CRPF) has been directed to take charge of his protection.

The 89-year-old leader was previously guarded by the Himachal Pradesh Police, with additional security provided by local police during his visits to Delhi or other cities. Following a security review by central intelligence agencies, the government has

now ensured a uniform security arrangement across the country.

A team of about 30 CRPF commandos will be deployed in shifts to secure the Dalai Lama. In a similar move, the Centre has also extended Z-category security to BJP leader Sambit Patra in Manipur, given the state's ongoing ethnic violence.

## Pak Army suffers heavy casualties after ceasefire violation

cross-border incident in five days.

On Monday, a soldier was hit by a bullet from across the border while manning a forward post in the Kalal area of Rajouri district. On February 8, an Army patrol came under terrorist fire in Rajouri's Keri sector, with terrorists suspected to be attempting infiltration. Additionally, a landmine explosion on February 4-5 reportedly caused casualties among infiltrators in the

Krishna Ghati sector.

On February 10, Lieutenant General Navin Sachdeva, General Officer Commanding (GOC) of the White Knight Corps, reviewed the security situation along the LoC in Rajouri. The Army's White Knight Corps shared on social media that he urged troops to remain vigilant and prepared for all contingencies.

## Indian Diaspora's Expectations from Modi-Trump Meet

TPN Correspondent | Washington

Prime Minister Narendra Modi has arrived in Washington, D.C., for a two-day visit, marking his first U.S. trip since Donald Trump's inauguration. Upon arrival, he was welcomed by enthusiastic members of the Indian diaspora outside Blair House. The Indian community in the U.S. sees this visit as crucial, particularly regarding immigration concerns. Many are anxious about work visa renewals, as potential policy changes could impact skilled Indian professionals' legal status and employment.

Key Issues on the Agenda

Modi's visit comes amid rising trade tariffs and immigration uncertainties. The Indian diaspora hopes he will secure assurances on visa policies and address economic cooperation between the two nations. NDTV spoke to community members who stressed the need for clarity on H-1B visa renewals and stronger bilateral relations.

During the visit, Modi is set to hold discussions with U.S. leaders on trade, defense, investment, and technology partnerships. The trip is expected to further India-U.S. cooperation while addressing key global and economic challenges.

## Honour Killing Suspected as 21-Year-Old Woman Found Dead in Bengaluru Lake, Father Arrested

TPN Correspondent | Bengaluru, Feb 14

A 21-year-old woman from a village in Karnataka was found dead under mysterious circumstances in Huskur Lake on the outskirts of Bengaluru on Monday.

The police have arrested the woman's father after her boyfriend alleged that she was murdered in an honour killing because they belonged to different communities.

The victim, identified as R. Sahana, was a resident of Harohalli near Hosur.

According to the police, Sahana and her father, Ramamurthy, fell into Huskur Lake after their motorcycle allegedly went out of control near the lake bund.

While Ramamurthy managed to swim to safety, Sahana drowned between 12:30 pm and 1 pm.

He later filed a complaint at the police station, claiming it was an accident.

However, Sahana's boyfriend, Nithin, refuted this claim, alleging that her father deliberately pushed her into the lake. He stated that Sahana's parents strongly opposed their relationship and had even arranged her marriage to a relative.

"I belong to the Naidu caste,

while Sahana was from the Kuruba community. Her father did not approve of our relationship and tried to separate us. Despite this, she was determined to marry me," Nithin told the police.

Nithin further alleged that on Sunday night, Ramamurthy had called him to his friend's house in Hebbagodi, where he physically assaulted Sahana in his presence. "Even my mother tried to intervene and convince Ramamurthy to accept our relationship, but he refused," he added.

During interrogation, Ramamurthy claimed that he lost control of the bike near the lake due to anxiety over his daughter's relationship.

He admitted knowing how to swim but insisted that he was unable to save Sahana's life.

However, Nithin questioned this version of events.

"What kind of father would abandon his daughter if he knew how to swim? He deliberately let her drown and then went to the police station," he alleged.

The police have launched an investigation to determine whether Sahana's death was an accident or a case of honour killing.

## Massive Traffic Jams Hit Bengaluru's ORR Amid Metro Construction and Aero India

- Metro construction on ORR causes massive traffic delays
- Commuters stuck for hours as key flyover closure worsens congestion
- Public frustration mounts; citizens demand better traffic management



TPN Correspondent | Bengaluru, Feb 14

Bengaluru witnessed severe traffic congestion as ongoing metro construction on the Outer Ring Road (ORR) led to prolonged delays for commuters. The ORR, a crucial corridor for the city's tech industry, became a bottleneck, with travelers enduring gridlock for hours during peak traffic periods. Many commuters reported spending over three hours navigating the choked roads.

A viral video circulating online captured an endless queue of vehicles late at night, highlighting the ordeal faced by employees returning home. Major congestion hotspots included Marathahalli, Kadubeesanahalli, and HSR Layout, where the Bengaluru Metro Rail Corporation Limited (BMRCL) was installing grid

structures. The temporary closure of the Iblur flyover further worsened the situation, forcing vehicles onto service roads, which quickly became overwhelmed.

By evening, traffic congestion extended across the entire ORR, from Hebbal to Silk Board. The ongoing Aero India show in North Bengaluru added to the woes, further burdening the city's already stressed road network. Officials anticipate continued disruptions in the coming days due to multiple international events scheduled in the city.

In a relief for commuters, the ORR flyover was reopened following the completion of the grid installation work. Bengaluru Traffic Police confirmed the development, stating, "The BMRCL girder launcher has been repaired and removed. The ORR flyover between 14th and

19th Main HSR is now open for traffic."

Bengaluru's recurring traffic woes sparked widespread outrage after Wednesday's gridlock. A popular community platform, Whitefield Rising, voiced concerns over the lack of proactive traffic management.

"A single point of failure can bring the ORR to a standstill. From Silk Board to Hebbal—17 km. The group also urged authorities to enforce strict traffic regulations to prevent similar disruptions in the future. "Illegal parking and wrong-side driving must be penalized. Service roads need urgent maintenance," their post emphasized.

As Bengaluru continues to expand its infrastructure, mounting pressure is on civic authorities to improve traffic management and minimize disruptions for daily commuters.

## Karnataka Govt to Invest ₹1 Lakh Crore to Tackle Bengaluru's Traffic Woes

- Major infrastructure push includes tunnel roads, double-decker corridors, and elevated highways
- ₹42,500 crore allocated for a 40-km twin tunnel to ease congestion
- Critics question the execution amid existing stalled projects

TPN Correspondent | Bengaluru, Feb 14

In a bid to tackle Bengaluru's escalating traffic congestion, the Karnataka GOVT has announced a massive ₹1 lakh crore investment in infrastructure projects. Deputy Chief Minister D.K. Shivakumar made the announcement at the Invest Karnataka Global Investors Meet, highlighting the urgent need for large-scale solutions as the city grapples with increasing vehicle numbers and daily gridlocks.

Among the key projects is a proposed 40-km twin tunnel at an estimated cost of ₹42,500 crore, aimed at decongesting major roads. Another major initiative is a 41-km double-decker corridor, integrating both road and Metro rail, with an investment of ₹18,000 crore. Additionally, a 110-km elevated corridor worth ₹15,000 crore and 320 km of buffer roads with a ₹5,000 crore budget have been

planned to enhance connectivity.

Other infrastructure projects include a ₹500-crore Sky Deck, a 74-km Bengaluru Business Corridor with an investment of ₹27,000 crore, and a second airport to accommodate Bengaluru's growing transportation needs. The Deputy CM emphasized that the Bengaluru Business Corridor (Peripheral Ring Road) would be a crucial solution to traffic congestion.

However, Shivakumar did not outline any expansion plans for mass transit systems like suburban rail or Metro buses. He noted that Bengaluru's population has doubled from 70 lakh to 1.4 crore in the last two decades, while vehicle registrations have reached 1.1 crore, making improved road infrastructure a necessity.

The Deputy CM has been advocating for tunnel roads, sky decks, double-decker flyovers, and Metro extensions reaching Bengaluru's outskirts. Additionally, he proposed an amusement park near the Krishnaraja Sagar (KRS) dam in Mandya to boost tourism.

Despite the ambitious plans, critics question the feasibility of these projects, given that many existing infrastructure initiatives remain stalled. The city is already struggling with civic issues and severe congestion due to ongoing Metro work and the Aero India Show. Residents have urged the Karnataka government to focus on completing pending projects before launching new ones.

## Bengaluru Man Arrested for Attempting to Kill Wife by Forcing Her to Ingest Glue

- Husband arrested for attempting to kill wife by making her ingest glue
- Victim found semi-conscious with injuries; currently recovering in hospital
- Police launch probe; suspect confessed, citing infidelity suspicions

TPN Correspondent | Bengaluru, Feb 14

Bengaluru police have arrested a man for allegedly attempting to kill his wife by making her ingest glue. The accused, Siddalingaswamy, a resident of Dasanapura on the outskirts of Bengaluru, was taken into custody following a distress call reporting a domestic altercation, according to officials. A Hoysala patrol team from the Madanayakanahalli police station responded to the scene on Sunday and found 30-year-old Manjula semi-conscious on the floor, with visible injuries on her neck. She was immediately rushed to a hospital, where she is currently recovering. According to the police investigation, Siddalingaswamy allegedly

forced his wife to consume glue. Upon his arrest, he reportedly confessed, citing suspicions of infidelity as the motive behind his actions.

Based on his confession, he has been booked under Sections 109 (attempt to murder) and 85 (cruelty by husband or relatives) of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS).

Authorities have launched a detailed investigation into the case. In another shocking incident, a man allegedly assaulted four people in separate attacks in Bengaluru's Indiranagar on Saturday night. The suspect, who was reportedly under the influence of alcohol, targeted two pani puri vendors among his victims. D Devaraj, Deputy Commissioner of Police (DCP) for the East Division, confirmed that the accused is a habitual mobile thief.

"He was drunk when he assaulted four individuals. He is currently on the run, and four FIRs have been registered against him," the officer stated. Amid speculation on social media labeling the suspect as a "serial killer," Bengaluru police dismissed the claims as false. Officials have warned that individuals spreading misinformation online will face legal action. Authorities continue to investigate both cases, urging the public to remain vigilant and report any suspicious activity to the police.

## Bengaluru Metro Ridership Drops by 1 Lakh in 3 Days After Fare

- Bengaluru Metro ridership falls by 11.63% after fare revision
- CM Siddaramaiah directs BMRCL to review and reduce fares
- Citizens' groups plan protests against the "unscientific" fare hike



TPN Correspondent | Bengaluru, Feb 14

The Bengaluru Metro Rail Corporation Limited (BMRCL) has recorded a significant drop in ridership after implementing a fare hike on February 9. Bengaluru's Metro, which typically serves over 8 lakh commuters daily, has seen 1 lakh fewer passengers, marking an 11.63% decline over four days.

The fare hike has triggered strong public opposition, with many commuters express-

ing frustration over the higher ticket prices. Several passengers, especially daily wage workers and students, have voiced concerns that the increased costs make commuting unaffordable.

Amid the widespread backlash, Chief Minister Siddaramaiah has directed BMRCL Managing Director Maheshwara Rao to review and reconsider the fare hike. "The way BMRCL has revised fares has resulted in anomalies, with prices more than doubling on certain routes.

I have instructed the MD to urgently rectify this issue and reduce fares where the increase is excessive. Commuters' interests must be protected," Siddaramaiah stated.

Adding to the growing unrest, the Save Bangalore Committee, a coalition of citizens' organizations, has announced a protest on February 15 against what they call an "un-

scientific" fare hike. The group argues that public transport should remain affordable and that the fare increase disproportionately affects low-income commuters who rely on the Metro for daily travel.

Meanwhile, Bangalore South MP Tejasvi Surya has urged the state government to seek intervention from the Centre. He called upon the Congress-led government to request a review of the fare hike and emphasized the need for affordable public transportation to ease Bengaluru's traffic congestion. Surya further stated that the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs has assured its support in revising the fares if necessary.

With public dissatisfaction mounting, the pressure is now on BMRCL and state authorities to address commuter concerns and decide whether the fare structure will be revised in the coming days.

## Karnataka High Court Directs Special Court to Review Witnesses in Iron Ore Smuggling Case

- High Court questions the role of 23 forest officers as prosecution witnesses.
- Justice M Nagaprasanna instructs the special court to decide if they should be accused.
- Witnesses allegedly signed blank permits linked to illegal mining operations.

TPN Correspondent | Bengaluru, Feb 14

The Karnataka High Court has directed a special court handling an iron ore smuggling case to determine whether 23 prosecution witnesses, who are forest officers, should be tried as accused. The decision was made by Justice M Nagaprasanna on February 7, following a petition by retired forest officer S Muthaiah, who is also a co-accused in the case. Muthaiah had earlier moved the special court, arguing that these witnesses should not merely testify but also face charges for their involvement. The case revolves around BJP MLA and mining baron G Janardhana Reddy, who allegedly forged permits to transfer iron ore with the assistance of the forest officers. The officers purportedly provided blank permits with their signatures, enabling illegal mining operations. The Central



Bureau of Investigation (CBI) arrested Reddy in 2011, shortly after a Karnataka Lokayukta report exposed illegal mining activities in Ballari. The investigation revealed that Reddy's mining mafia extracted and sold iron ore to traders who exported it without obtaining necessary forest clearances or paying taxes. During cross-examination, the 23 forest officers reportedly admitted to signing blank permits. Muthaiah's legal counsel contended that despite being complicit, they were only designated as witnesses and not charged. The argument was based on Section 319 of the Code of Criminal Procedure (CrPC), which allows courts to prosecute individuals who appear to be guilty of an offence. The High Court noted that an ac-

cusced individual may turn approver in a case and testify against co-accused after seeking pardon. However, it questioned how prosecution witnesses who were active participants in the crime could be allowed to testify without facing charges. The court observed that individuals admitting to signing blank permits should be considered accomplices and held accountable. Justice Nagaprasanna emphasized that an accused cannot simultaneously serve as a prosecution witness and evade punishment. The bench directed the special court to assess the application under Section 319 CrPC and decide whether the witnesses should also be treated as accused. Until the review is completed, they will not be examined as witnesses in the case.

## D V Sadananda Gowda Criticizes Karnataka Government Over Law and Order, Metro Fare Hike

TPN Correspondent | Bengaluru, 14

Former Karnataka Chief Minister D V Sadananda Gowda on Wednesday launched a sharp attack on the Congress-led state government, alleging that whenever Congress comes to power, certain communities take the law into their own hands. Speaking to the media in Mysuru, he also criticized Chief Minister Siddaramaiah and Home Minister G Parameshwara over governance and law enforcement issues. Gowda, who was in Mysuru for the Kumbha Mela at Triveni Sangama in T. Narsipur town, accused Siddaramaiah of focusing solely on the Mysuru Urban Development Authority (MUDA) instead of addressing key state concerns. "Siddaramaiah has changed a lot in his second term as CM. Now, his condition is such that the 'Sidda' (meaning achiever) in his name should be removed," he remarked. He further targeted Home Minister G Parameshwara, calling him a "Home Minister in name only" and accusing him of merely occupying the position without effectively managing Karnataka's law and order situation. "No one, including KN Rajan-

na and Sathish Jarkiholi, is functioning as a minister. They are all engaged in appeasement politics. This is a corrupt government," Gowda alleged. In addition to his criticism of the state administration, Gowda also addressed the recent Bengaluru Metro fare hike, stating that it fails to serve the intended purpose of promoting public transport. He urged the Karnataka government to pressure the Centre into reducing fares. "The state government must take the first step and mount pressure on the Centre to rationalize Metro fares. We agree that the fares should be reduced, and the Centre should intervene. However, it is the state government's responsibility to initiate the process. If they do so, we will accompany their delegation to the Centre," Gowda said. His remarks have added to the ongoing political friction in Karnataka, with the opposition BJP intensifying its attack on the Congress government over governance, corruption, and law enforcement issues. As the debate over Metro fare hikes and law and order continues, all eyes are on the state government's response to these allegations.



## BJP MLA Muniratna Demands Change in Bengaluru Development Minister

TPN Correspondent | Bengaluru, 14

BJP MLA Muniratna from Rajarajeshwari Nagar has written a letter to Karnataka Chief Minister Siddaramaiah, demanding the removal of the Bengaluru Development Department Minister. In his letter, he highlighted the need for increased funding, transparent governance, and better administration to accelerate the city's development. Additionally, he accused the minister of financial mismanagement and favoritism towards contractors from outside Karnataka. Muniratna pointed out serious discrepancies in the grant allocations for Bengaluru in the state's 16th budget. He alleged that many projects were awarded to contractors linked to the Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister's associates, sidelining local contractors. He claimed that an advance payment of 12% had been given to these out-of-state contractors. Furthermore, additional charges of 8% and 15% were imposed after the allocation, inflating the overall cost to 35%. He also alleged that the Bengaluru Development Minister was conducting business deals in luxury hotels rather than focusing on governance. The MLA has urged CM Siddaramaiah to convene a meeting with Bengaluru's MLAs before finalizing grant allocations. He suggested that funds be distributed directly to constituencies to ensure fair and efficient development.

He recommended that former ministers Ramalinga Reddy and K.J. George be reinstated as in-charge ministers of Bengaluru. Additionally, he proposed alternative leaders such as Krishna Byre Gowda, M. Krishnappa, or Dinesh Gundu Rao to take charge and restore credibility in the department. Raising concerns about corruption, Muniratna alleged that several engineers in the municipal corporation were acting as intermediaries for contractors and had even appointed agents to collect illegal payments. He warned that continued misuse of grants could tarnish the government's reputation, even under an "honest" Chief Minister like Siddaramaiah. Muniratna further claimed that his letter might provoke retaliation from the ruling party. He anticipated that false cases, including charges under the Dalit Atrocities Act, rape allegations, and pocso violations, might be filed against him in response to his accusations. He included this concern in his letter to the Chief Minister, warning of potential political vendettas. The letter has intensified political tensions in Karnataka, drawing attention to alleged financial irregularities and governance failures in Bengaluru's development projects. It remains to be seen how the Chief Minister will respond to these allegations and whether any changes will be made in the department's leadership.

## MLA Tanveer Sait Questions Police Conduct After Udayagiri Police

TPN Correspondent | Bengaluru, 14

Mysuru MLA Tanveer Sait on Thursday questioned the conduct of the police in handling the case of an objectionable meme that allegedly contained derogatory remarks against Islam, leading to violence at the Udayagiri Police Station on Monday night. Sait's comments hold significance as the police station falls under the Narasimharaja Assembly constituency, which he represents. The MLA, who had been in Bengaluru for medical treatment, returned on and addressed the media upon his arrival. Clarifying the reason behind the unrest, Sait stated, "The violence was not triggered by images resembling political leaders Rahul Gandhi, Akhilesh Yadav, or Arvind Kejriwal. The real issue was the derogatory text about the Prophet. I am not making a political statement, nor am I reacting to anyone's remarks. However, the police delayed filing a case against the accused who shared the objectionable meme, which escalated tensions." Sait pointed out that while the complaint was lodged in the morning, the First Information Report (FIR) was registered only in the evening. "I urge the police not to harass innocent individuals. Often, when someone is arrest-

ed, their families are left helpless. To assist them, a legal team has been set up, but beyond this, I will not interfere in the case," he added. He further demanded a thorough investigation into various aspects of the case. "The police should determine where the objectionable meme originated and who instigated the violence. Why was there a delay in registering the complaint and FIR? How did the police respond to those filing the complaint? Why did stone-pelting continue even after the accused was arrested? These questions need answers. I will be discussing the matter with the Home Minister," Sait asserted. The MLA also reiterated his long-standing demand for a second police station in Udayagiri, highlighting that he had been pressing for this for the past five years. "The jurisdiction of the existing Udayagiri Police Station is too vast, and the population density is high. To improve law enforcement and manage responsibilities effectively, a second station is essential," he emphasized. With tensions still high in the area, Sait's remarks have added pressure on the government to address both the immediate concerns regarding the incident and the broader issue of law enforcement in Mysuru.

## Siddaramaiah Hints at Long-Term Tenure as Karnataka CM, Stirring Power-Sharing Debate

- Siddaramaiah expresses desire to remain Karnataka CM for an extended period.
- Congress' internal discussions on power-sharing gain momentum.
- Supporters rally behind Siddaramaiah, while uncertainty looms over DK Shivakumar's role.

TPN Correspondent | Bengaluru, Feb 14

Karnataka Chief Minister Siddaramaiah has openly expressed his ambition to continue in office for a long period, reigniting discussions about power-sharing within the ruling Congress party. His statement has intensified political speculations, particularly regarding his tenure and the party's internal dynamics. The competition for the CM's post in Karnataka Con-

gress appears to be evolving each day, with strategies and political maneuvers shaping the scenario from grassroots levels to Delhi. Despite facing health issues, Siddaramaiah remains politically active and recently made remarks that highlight the complexities of the Congress' internal power struggle. Speaking at a private event, Siddaramaiah dismissed any plans to retire from electoral politics and revealed his hope of becoming Karnataka's longest-serving Chief Minister. Currently, the record is held by the late Devaraja Urs, who served for seven years and seven months. Siddaramaiah, who previously completed a full five-year term, needs to remain in power until December to surpass Urs' tenure. His assertion that he is confident about achieving this milestone has added further intrigue to the ongoing political discourse. Following Siddaramaiah's remarks, his close supporters and cabinet ministers openly endorsed his leadership. However, the Congress'

power-sharing formula, which allegedly involves Siddaramaiah handing over the CM post to Deputy CM DK Shivakumar after two and a half years, has been a topic of debate. While Congress leader Dr. G Parameshwara claimed he was unaware of any such agreement, he stated that Siddaramaiah should remain CM for a full five-year term. Ministers MB Patil and HC Mahadevappa have also voiced similar opinions. The growing uncertainty over whether Siddaramaiah will step down for Shivakumar has fueled internal unrest within the party. Siddaramaiah's recent comments suggest that power-sharing may not be as straightforward as initially speculated. The key question now is whether Siddaramaiah will step aside after securing his record tenure or if Shivakumar will assert his claim to the top post. The evolving political scenario will likely shape the Congress' leadership strategy in Karnataka for the coming years.

## Biocon Foundation Transforms Bengaluru Metro Pillars into Tribute to Everyday Heroes



TPN Correspondent | Bengaluru, Feb 14

The Biocon Foundation has turned over 50 Metro pillars between Huskur Gate and Biocon Hebbagodi Metro Station into vibrant works of art, celebrating Bengaluru's everyday heroes. The initiative, Pillars of Bengaluru - Celebrating Everyday Champions, uses the traditional Channapatna art style to showcase the people who keep the city running—flower sellers, electricians, cobblers, doctors, nurses, musicians, scientists, IT professionals, aerospace engineers, and more. Each pillar serves as a canvas capturing the resilience and spirit of Bengaluru, transforming the Metro corridor into an open-air gallery. Speaking on the project, Dr. Anupama Shetty, Mission Director of Biocon Foundation, said,

“This initiative has re-imagined the Metro corridor as a cultural showcase, invoking a sense of pride among citizens. By transforming a functional space into an artistic landscape, we are celebrating the everyday champions who form the backbone of Bengaluru.” The artwork highlights the city's diversity, bringing to life the contributions of street vendors, auto drivers, tech professionals, and artists. More than just a beautification effort, the initiative aims to foster a sense of connection and appreciation for these unsung individuals. This unique project blends tradition with modernity, turning an ordinary urban structure into a visually enriching experience for commuters and passersby, reinforcing Bengaluru's identity as a city of innovation and resilience.

## Bird Flu Panic in AP and Telangana: Chicken Prices Drop as Fear Spreads

- Bird flu outbreak causes panic in Andhra Pradesh and Telangana
- Chicken and egg prices fall sharply as demand plummets
- Government sets up checkpoints to prevent poultry transportation

TPN Correspondent | Hyderabad, Feb 14

Bird flu has triggered widespread fear in Andhra Pradesh (AP) and Telangana, leading to a significant drop in chicken consumption. With thousands of chickens dying in AP due to the outbreak, people are avoiding poultry products, resulting in a drastic decline in demand. As a consequence, chicken and egg prices have plummeted in both states. Authorities in Telangana have become highly alert, as large quantities of chickens are transported from AP to Telangana. To contain the spread, the Telangana government has established 24 check posts along the state border, preventing the entry of poultry from affected regions. Strict inspections are being carried out at key interstate points, including Ramapuram Cross Road and Pullur Toll Plaza on National Highway 44. Several lorries carrying chickens from AP to Telangana have been turned back over the past week as officials continue their rigorous checks. The fear of bird flu has had a severe impact on the poultry market. Previously, chicken prices ranged between ₹220 and ₹230 per kilogram, but they have now dropped to ₹150-₹170. Similarly, the price of eggs, which was ₹6 per piece, has also fallen. Hyderabad and other parts of Telangana have witnessed a sharp decline in poultry prices due to the scare. A red



alert has been declared within a 10-kilometer radius of areas affected by bird flu to prevent further spread. Despite the growing panic, health experts have reassured the public that consuming properly cooked chicken and eggs is safe. They emphasize that the bird flu virus does not survive at high temperatures. Since chicken and eggs are typically cooked at 100 degrees Celsius, there is no risk of infection from consumption. Experts urge people to remain cautious but not panic, as the virus primarily affects poultry and not humans unless there is direct exposure to infected birds. With the poultry industry facing significant losses, authorities are working to control the situation and restore public confidence. Meanwhile, strict surveillance continues at state borders to prevent further outbreaks.

## Kamal Haasan Likely to Be Nominated to Rajya Sabha with DMK Support



TPN Correspondent | Chennai, Feb 14

Renowned Tamil actor and Makkal Needhi Maiam (MNM) leader Kamal Haasan is reportedly set to be nominated to the Rajya Sabha from Tamil Nadu with the support of the DMK. The speculation gained momentum after Tamil Nadu Deputy Chief Minister Udhayanidhi Stalin visited Haasan at his residence, fueling further discussions about his potential entry into the upper house of Parliament. For the past few days, rumors have been circulating regarding Haasan's nomination to the Rajya Sabha. The actor-turned-politician, who launched MNM as an alternative to the Dravidian parties, struggled to secure electoral victories

despite gaining a significant vote share. In the 2024 Lok Sabha elections, he aligned with the DMK and actively campaigned for the alliance across Tamil Nadu. With six Rajya Sabha seats from the state set to become vacant this year, sources indicate that the DMK may honor its agreement by nominating Haasan to one of the seats.

The meeting between Udhayanidhi Stalin and Kamal Haasan is being viewed as a crucial development. stating, “We met Makkal Needhi Maiam leader Kamal at his residence today. He warmly welcomed me, and we exchanged views on various fields like politics and art. My love and gratitude to Kamal sir.” Adding to the speculation, Tamil Nadu Hindu Religious and Endowments Minister Shekhar Babu also met Haasan recently. These consecutive meetings suggest that the nomination is highly likely. Political analysts believe that Haasan's inclusion in the Rajya Sabha could be a strategic move for the DMK, potentially strengthening its presence at the national level while also acknowledging Haasan's contribution during the Lok Sabha elections. The next round of Rajya Sabha elections is scheduled for July 2025. If nominated, Kamal Haasan will secure a significant political position, marking a major milestone in his political career. His entry into the Rajya Sabha would offer him a platform to further his political vision and expand his influence beyond Tamil Nadu. As discussions continue, the official confirmation of Haasan's nomination is awaited. However, the latest developments strongly indicate that his journey from cinema to politics is set to take another significant step.

## Minor Fire at Aero India Show Swiftly Contained

TPN Correspondent | Bengaluru, Feb 14

A minor fire broke out at the Aero India show at Yelahanka Air Force Station around 11 am, causing brief panic among visitors. The fire, reported in Hall E, was quickly brought under control by fire personnel stationed at the venue. Eyewitnesses said sirens from fire tenders rang out while the flying display was underway, drawing attention to Hall E. Security personnel temporarily restricted entry as a precaution. Fire-

fighters, who responded within minutes, suspect a short circuit to be the cause. “The fire was immediately doused without causing any harm,” said a fire official. Once the situation was deemed safe, visitors were allowed back into the hall. While aerial stunts continued to mesmerize the crowd, many applauded the fire personnel and armed forces for their swift response. The exact cause of the fire is yet to be confirmed.

## Pawan Kalyan Embarks on a Spiritual Pilgrimage in Tamil Nadu

TPN Correspondent | TN, Feb 14

Andhra Pradesh Deputy Chief Minister and Janasena Party President Pawan Kalyan visited several prominent temples in and around Kumbakonam in Tamil Nadu's Thanjavur district on Thursday. His visit, which included stops at ancient and sacred sites, was part of a spiritual pilgrimage that he had been planning for years. Speaking to reporters near the Kumbeswarar temple, Pawan Kalyan expressed his long-standing desire to undertake this religious journey. “For about 4.5 years, I had been planning this trip to visit several temples, including Lord Murugan's temples and the resting place of sage Agasthiyar, to seek divine blessings. Though I made several attempts earlier, God has granted me permission only now,” he stated. His visit to temples in Tamil Nadu has garnered attention, with speculations arising about its larger implications. When asked whether his temple visits were part of a Sanatana Dharma Yatra, Pawan Kalyan denied any political motive behind the pilgrimage. “If I had planned a Dharma Yatra, I would have announced it earlier. This is purely a personal temple visit,” he clarified. During his visit, Pawan Kalyan refrained from com-

menting on political matters, including the implementation of the Uniform Civil Code (UCC) in Andhra Pradesh and actor Vijay's recent political foray. He maintained that his visit was strictly religious and not meant for political discourse. “I do not believe in making political comments in temples or during spiritual journeys. This trip is about devotion and inner peace,” he emphasized. Pawan Kalyan's pilgrimage comes at a time when Andhra Pradesh's political scenario is evolving rapidly. His spiritual journey has led to widespread discussions among his supporters and political observers, with some interpreting it as a significant move ahead of the state's political developments. However, he remains firm in presenting it as a personal and non-political act of devotion. The actor-turned-politician is known for his strong ideological stance and mass appeal, making every move he makes a subject of discussion. While his recent temple visit is purely religious in nature, it has nonetheless fueled speculations about its possible political undertones. Whether it is a simple pilgrimage or a strategic move remains to be seen, but for now, Pawan Kalyan remains committed to his faith and personal beliefs.

## Karnataka to Set Up R&D Centre to Boost Granite Mining Amid Industry Challenges

TPN Correspondent | Bengaluru, Feb 14

Karnataka is set to establish a dedicated research and development (R&D) centre in Chamaraanagar district to provide skill training for granite mining personnel, aiming to rejuvenate the sector struggling with high royalty rates, export restrictions, and policy hurdles. “We have requested the state government to allot two acres of land in Chamaraanagar for the R&D centre, and they have agreed in principle,” said Krishna Prasad, president of the Federation of Indian Granite and Stone Industry (FIGSI), during the inauguration of ‘STONA 25’ in Bengaluru on Wednesday. The industry has faced significant setbacks over the past decade, and stakeholders are now relying on new central and state mining policies for relief. The granite industry in Karnataka, despite producing some of the world's finest black granite, ranks fourth in mining output in India, behind Rajasthan, Gujarat, and Andhra Pradesh. One of the primary concerns raised by industry leaders is the steep royalty rates imposed in Karnataka. “While Rajasthan charges Rs 265

per tonne for all stones, Karnataka levies between Rs 600 and Rs 2,000 per tonne, making operations challenging,” Prasad noted.

### Industry Struggles and Policy Hurdles

The sector has been significantly impacted by a series of setbacks, including the closure of nearly 300 mines due to outdated mining policies and a backlog of lease renewals pending for over a decade. Additionally, China, which was Karnataka's largest market for granite, ceased imports following visa restrictions imposed after the Covid-19 pandemic. “With exports to China halted, our business has suffered immensely. We are now exploring markets in Eastern Europe,” Prasad stated.

Adding to the industry's woes, a strict environmental policy previously required mining waste to be dumped in quarries, which hampered mining activity. However, the government recently permitted waste dumping within a 3-km radius of quarries. “This waste can be sold later upon paying royalty, while the government remains the custodian in the meantime. We hope similar policies will be implemented in other states,” Prasad

said.

### Focus on Skill Development and Technological Upgradation

Minister of State for Commerce & Industries, Rajasthan, Krishan Kumar Vishnoi, who inaugurated STONA 2025, emphasized the need to boost the Indian granite and stone industry, which currently stands at Rs 50,000 crore, with the potential to grow to Rs 1,00,000 crore. “It is time to promote ‘Make in India’ initiatives, upskill our youth, and enhance technology adoption in the industry,” Vishnoi said. He also urged FIGSI to explore global advancements in quarrying technology and focus on processing waste through R&D initiatives at its Centres of Excellence. “Integrating new technology will add value to the industry and provide better skill sets to workers,” he added.

### STONA 2025 Highlights

The 16th edition of STONA, the third-largest international stone fair, features over 3,500 stalls with country pavilions from 18 nations. A special section, ‘Shilpgram,’ showcases the craftsmanship of 25 artisans from across India, highlighting the blend of tradition and innovation in the natural stone industry.

# Who Is Tulsi Gabbard?

From Democrat to Trump's Director of National Intelligence



TPN Correspondent | Washington, D.C.

Tulsi Gabbard, a former Democrat and Iraq War veteran, has been confirmed as the Director of National Intelligence (DNI) under US President Donald Trump. Her appointment, approved by a 52-48 Senate vote, has sparked widespread debate due to her past political affiliations, controversial foreign policy stances, and lack of intelligence experience.

## From Democrat to Trump Loyalist

Gabbard, 43, initially gained national recognition as a four-term Congresswoman from Hawaii and a 2020 Democratic presidential candidate. Once considered a rising star in the Democratic Party, she broke ties with the party in October 2022, criticizing it as "elitist" and detached from the concerns of ordinary Americans. She soon became an independent and later aligned herself with Trump, endorsing his re-election bid in August 2024.

Her role in Trump's campaign intensified when she was named a co-chair of his transition team. In October 2024, Gabbard officially joined the Republican Party, citing Trump's leadership as a transformative force that restored the GOP's focus on "the people and peace." This dramatic political shift set the stage for her subsequent rise in the Trump administration.

## A Military Background and Foreign Policy Controversies

Gabbard's credentials include her service in the Hawaii Army National Guard, where she completed three deployments in Africa and the Middle East. Her military experience, coupled with her time in Congress, shaped her foreign policy positions, which have often drawn scrutiny.

She has been criticized for her views on key national security issues. In 2017, she traveled to Syria and met with then-President Bashar al-Assad, who was accused of war crimes, including the use of chemical weapons against civilians. While Gabbard defended the visit by saying she "asked tough questions," critics accused her of legitimizing Assad's rule.

Gabbard has also expressed skepticism toward US intelligence assessments, a stance that has raised concerns about her new role as DNI. She has previously echoed Russian narratives about the Ukraine war, leading to allegations that her positions align with Kremlin propaganda. Her opposition to Section 702, a crucial US surveillance program that monitors suspected terrorists overseas, has further fueled doubts about her approach to national security.

## Edward Snowden and Surveillance Policy

Another contentious issue in Gabbard's record is her past support for Edward Snowden, the former Na-

tional Security Agency (NSA) contractor who leaked classified information about US surveillance programs and sought refuge in Russia. Gabbard acknowledged that Snowden's disclosures revealed important information about government overreach but maintained that his actions were illegal. Her stance on surveillance aligns with her broader skepticism of US intelligence operations, making her appointment to oversee the intelligence community a contentious decision. Critics argue that her past positions could influence her approach to classified information and surveillance policies, potentially weakening intelligence-gathering capabilities.

## Meeting PM Modi on Confirmation Day

On the very day of her confirmation, Gabbard met with Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi in Washington, D.C. Modi became the first foreign leader to meet the newly appointed US intelligence chief, underscoring India's importance in Washington's strategic calculations.

According to sources, the meeting also touched upon the growing presence of Khalistani elements in the United States, which had expanded significantly under the previous Biden administration. India has repeatedly raised concerns about extremist activities linked to Khalistani groups, particularly those targeting Indian diplomatic missions. With Trump back in office, there are expectations that his administration, with Gabbard as DNI, may take stricter measures against these groups.

Gabbard, who has previously expressed admiration for Modi and India's governance model, is expected to play a crucial role in shaping intelligence cooperation between the two nations.

## Challenges Ahead as Director of National Intelligence

As DNI, Gabbard will be responsible for coordinating intelligence efforts across 18 agencies, including the CIA, NSA, and FBI. Her lack of prior experience in intelligence operations has led to concerns about her ability to navigate complex security threats, especially at a time when the US faces increasing challenges from global adversaries.

While Trump and his allies view Gabbard as a principled leader who challenges establishment politics, her confirmation has deepened partisan divisions in Washington. Democrats see her appointment as a political move rather than a strategic decision for national security, while some Republicans remain skeptical about her past affiliations.

As she takes charge of US intelligence, all eyes will be on how Gabbard balances her unconventional views with the responsibilities of safeguarding national security.

# 1914, A War Story: How Indian Soldiers Left Their Mark On World War I

Prime Minister Narendra Modi and French President Emmanuel Macron paid tributes to Indian soldiers who fought in World Wars I and II during their visit to the Mazargues War Cemetery in Marseille. Their tribute highlighted the immense sacrifices made by Indian troops, particularly in the trenches of France during World War I.

"At Mazargues War Cemetery, President @EmmanuelMacron and I paid homage to the soldiers who fought in the World Wars. This includes several Indian soldiers who valiantly fought and displayed utmost grit. All the brave soldiers answered the call of duty and fought with unwavering courage," PM Modi posted on X.

President Macron, in his tribute, acknowledged India's contributions, particularly in 1914 when over 100,000 Indian soldiers fought for France. "Ten thousand never returned. They set foot on the soil of Marseille before fighting in the mud of the trenches, unaware that they were marching to their deaths. Their sacrifice binds France and India forever," he wrote.

## India's Role in World War I

During World War I, India, then under British rule, supported the war effort in hopes of gaining greater political autonomy. The British Expeditionary Force, facing severe losses, called for reinforcements, leading to the deployment of Indian divisions. On August 6, 1914, the Lahore Division (3rd Indian War Division) and the Meerut Division (7th Indian War Division) were mobilized. Initially meant to defend the Suez Canal in Egypt, the Lahore Division was redirected to France due to the worsening war situation.

Indian soldiers arrived in Marseille on September 26, 1914, and were deployed in the trenches by October 24. They played a crucial role in several key battles, including Neuve-Chapelle, Givenchy-les-la-Bassée, Festubert, Aubers Ridge, and Loos.

## Harsh Conditions in the Trenches

Accustomed to fighting in dry, hilly regions and wearing summer cotton uniforms, Indian troops struggled with the freezing, muddy trenches of France. Many suffered from pneumonia and trench foot, a painful condition caused by prolonged exposure to wet conditions. A French journal, *Le Bochofage*, wrote in 1916: "Hell is not fire. Hell is mud." Despite the brutal conditions, Indian soldiers demonstrated exceptional bravery. The 129th Baluchis and the 57th Wilde's Rifles from the Lahore Division were later sent as reinforcements for the Alleby's Cavalry Corps at Ypres in Belgium.

During the First Battle of Ypres (October-November 1914), Sepoy Khudadad Khan of the 129th Baluchis manned a machine gun until his position was overrun by German forces. He became the first Indian to be awarded the Victoria Cross, Britain's highest gallantry honor.

In November 1914, Naik Darwan Singh of the 39th Garhwal Rifles led an assault to recapture German-occupied trenches. Despite severe injuries, he continued leading until the trenches were cleared. He was the second Indian soldier to receive the Victoria Cross.

## Letters from the Frontlines

Many letters from Indian soldiers revealed the harsh realities of war. A soldier from Ludhiana wrote: "Don't be grieved at my death because I shall die with arms in hand, wearing the warrior's clothes. This is the happiest death that anyone can die." Another soldier, writing in Garhwali, described the horrors of battle: "It is very hard to endure the bombs, father. It will be difficult for anyone to survive and come back safe and sound. The bullets and cannonballs come down like snow. The mud is up to a man's middle."

## A Lasting Legacy

The sacrifices of Indian soldiers in World War I played a significant role in shaping India's fight for independence. Their bravery in foreign lands is now being acknowledged globally, as seen in the tributes paid by Modi and Macron. The recognition serves as a reminder of their extraordinary contribution to world history, ensuring that their heroism is never forgotten.



# India Slips to 96th Rank in Global Corruption Index 2024

India has slipped three positions in the Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) for 2024, ranking 96th among 180 countries. Compiled by Transparency International, the index measures perceived levels of public sector corruption worldwide on a scale from 0 to 100, where "0" signifies high corruption and "100" indicates a very clean system. India's score declined from 39 in 2023 to 38 in 2024, continuing a downward trend from 40 in 2022.

## India and Its Neighbours

Among India's neighboring countries, Pakistan ranked 135th, Sri Lanka stood at 121st, and Bangladesh dropped further down to 149th place. China, meanwhile, secured a relatively better position at 76th. The re-

port highlights that these countries continue to struggle with deep-rooted corruption, which affects governance, economic growth, and public trust in institutions.

## Denmark Leads, South Sudan at the Bottom

Denmark retained its position as the least corrupt country in the world, followed by Finland, Singapore, and New Zealand. At the opposite end of the index, South Sudan ranked as the most corrupt nation, scoring just 8 points. It displaced Somalia, which also recorded a low score of 9. Other countries with poor rankings included Venezuela (10) and Syria (12).

## Major Global Declines

Many influential countries recorded their worst rankings in over a decade. The United States dropped from 24th place to 28th, with its score declining from 69 to 65. France slipped four points to 67, landing at the 25th spot, while Germany saw a three-point drop to 75, tying with Canada at 15th place. Mexico, grappling with a lack of judicial action in corruption cases, fell five points to 26. Russia, already plagued by governance concerns, dropped another four points to 22, reinforcing Transparency International's observation that Moscow's full-scale invasion of Ukraine has "further entrenched authoritarianism."

## Impact of Corruption on

## Climate Change

The report also warned of the dangers corruption poses to global climate efforts. A lack of transparency and accountability in climate financing increases the risk of embezzlement and misuse of funds. "Undue influence," often from the private sector, obstructs policies aimed at reducing emissions and combating climate change. The misuse of climate funds has direct consequences on the world's ability to adapt to global warming, as resources meant for vulnerable populations are diverted.

## Call for Global Action

Transparency International emphasized that corruption remains a serious threat to democracy, stability,

and human rights. "The international community and every country must make tackling corruption a top and long-term priority. This is crucial to pushing back against authoritarianism and securing a peaceful, free, and sustainable world," the report stated.

While 32 countries have significantly improved their corruption standings since 2012, 148 countries have either stagnated or worsened. The findings reinforce the urgent need for stronger anti-corruption measures worldwide. India's drop in the rankings underscores the necessity for more robust institutional reforms and stricter enforcement of anti-corruption laws to restore public trust and improve governance.

# PM Modi Meets US Intelligence Chief Tulsi Gabbard in Washington

**TPN Correspondent | Washington**  
Prime Minister Narendra Modi met with the newly appointed US Director of National Intelligence, Tulsi Gabbard, in Washington, focusing on strengthening intelligence cooperation between India and the United States. During the meeting, Modi congratulated Gabbard on her confirmation as the nation's top intelligence official and acknowledged her longstanding support for India-US relations. Discussions revolved around enhancing intelligence-sharing in counter-terrorism, cybersecurity, and emerging threats. "Met USA's Director of National Intelligence, @TulsiGabbard in Washington DC. Congratulated her on her confirmation. Discussed various aspects of the India-USA friendship, of which she's always been a strong votary,"

Modi posted on X. The Ministry of External Affairs spokesperson, Randhir Jaiswal, also confirmed the discussions in a post on X, highlighting the focus on security collaboration. Modi arrived in Washington on Wednesday evening after co-chairing the Artificial Intelligence Action Summit in France with French President Emmanuel Macron. He is set to meet former US President Donald Trump at the White House on Thursday for bilateral discussions. Gabbard, 43, was sworn in as Director of National Intelligence in the Oval Office on Wednesday, just hours after the Senate confirmed her appointment with a narrow 52-48 vote. Attorney General Pam Bondi administered the oath of office. Trump, praising Gabbard's appoint-

ment, described her as "an American of extraordinary courage and patriotism," noting her three deployments in the Army National Guard and her tenure as a Democratic Congresswoman. In her remarks after being sworn in, Gabbard acknowledged the challenges facing the intelligence community and emphasized the need for restoring public trust. "Unfortunately, the American people have very little trust in the intelligence community, largely because they've seen the weaponisation and politicisation of an entity that is supposed to be purely focused on ensuring our national security," she stated. Gabbard's confirmation followed two months of deliberations over her qualifications to lead US intelligence agencies and oversee the President's daily intelligence briefings.



## Sachin Pilot's Subtle Dig at Ashok Gehlot Over Rajasthan Phone Tapping Row



**TPN Correspondent | Rajasthan**  
Congress leader Sachin Pilot has demanded a white paper from the Rajasthan government after state minister Kirori Lal Meena alleged that his phone was tapped. Pilot called for immediate action, stating that such serious allegations should not be ignored. "A responsible minister from the gov-

ernment is saying his phone was tapped. The government needs to take action," Pilot said, expressing surprise that instead of investigating the claim, the BJP government had issued a showcause notice to Meena. Pilot's remarks also appeared to be a veiled attack on former Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot, as the Congress government under Gehlot had been accused of tapping the phones of MLAs loyal to Pilot during the 2020 political crisis. "Phone tapping is a serious offence, now or earlier, it should be investigated," he asserted. The issue of phone tapping has once again rocked the Rajasthan Assembly, with Congress using it to target the BJP

government. Earlier, BJP leader and Union Minister Gajendra Singh Shekhawat had filed a case alleging that the Gehlot government tapped phone calls. Lokesh Sharma, a former Officer on Special Duty to Gehlot, reportedly admitted in court that the Congress leader had provided recordings of rebel MLAs to be leaked to the media. The case is currently being heard in Delhi's Patiala House court. Pilot also raised concerns over the farmers' agitation in Gharsana, Anupgarh district, where farmers are demanding more water from the canal system. He urged the state government to intervene, warning that similar protests in the past had turned volatile.

## Private sector must lead defence manufacturing: Rajnath Singh

**TPN Correspondent | Bengaluru**  
Defence Minister Rajnath Singh emphasized the critical role of the private sector in India's defence manufacturing, stating that the country is undergoing a revolutionary transformation. Speaking at the indigenisation event and valedictory ceremony of Aero India 2025, he highlighted how India's fighter jets, missile systems, and naval vessels are not just protecting borders but also gaining global attention. Singh underscored the shift from India's historical dependence on defence imports to self-reliance, noting that nearly 70% of defence equipment is now being manufactured domestically. He credited this progress to the trust and commitment of stakeholders, leading to increased defence exports, including systems like BrahMos and Akash missiles.

The Defence Minister pointed out that India's defence industrial complex now includes 16 Defence Public Sector Undertakings, 430 licensed companies,



and approximately 16,000 MSMEs. He stressed the need for a strong private sector contribution, which currently stands at 21% of total defence production. The government, he said, is

committed to removing uncertainties and ensuring a level playing field for private companies in defence manufacturing. Praising the Indian armed forces for their confidence in indigenous defence products, Singh said their acceptance is crucial for achieving complete self-reliance. He also expressed confidence that India is evolving from a participant to a global leader in defence innovation and aerospace technology. Aero India 2025 saw record participation, with over 500 delegates from 84 countries, including 931 exhibitors—782 from India—alongside 58 Original Equipment Manufacturers and 115 global CEOs. With the three business days concluding on February 12, the final two days of the event will be open to the public for the air show.

## Assam Rifles Crack Down on Meitei Militants in Manipur



**TPN Correspondent | Imphal**  
In a major operation against insurgency, Assam Rifles and the Indian Army apprehended two cadres of the People's Revolutionary Party of Kangleipak (Progressive) [PREPAK (PRO)] and four active members of the banned Kangleipak Communist Party (People's War Group) [KCP (PWG)] in separate operations across Manipur. Acting on intelligence inputs, Assam Rifles and Manipur Police conducted a raid in Imphal East's Dingku Road area, detaining two PREPAK (PRO) cadres. In another operation in Kameng Sabal

village, Imphal West, the Indian Army and police arrested four KCP (PWG) militants and seized five pistols, ammunition, and war-like stores. Meanwhile, a joint operation by Assam Rifles, CRPF, and Manipur Police targeted illicit poppy cultivation in Sehjang village, Kangpokpi district. Around six acres of poppy fields, capable of yielding 30 kg of opium, were destroyed. Nearby huts and makeshift shelters used for processing the drugs were also burned down. Authorities remain committed to maintaining peace and curbing illegal activities. An earlier operation on February 10 saw the arrest of eight militants and the recovery of 25 weapons across multiple districts, including Kaching, Thoubal, Tengnoupal, and Bishnupur. All seized weapons have been handed over to the Manipur Police.

## Harshwardhan Sapkal Appointed as Maharashtra Congress Chief

**TPN Correspondent | Mumbai**  
Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge has appointed Harshwardhan Sapkal as the new Maharashtra Pradesh Congress Committee (MPCC) chief, replacing Nana Patole. The decision was announced on Thursday, along with the appointment of Vijay Namdevrao Wadetiwar as the leader of the Congress Legislative Party in Maharashtra. Sapkal, who represented the Buldhana Assembly Constituency from 2014 to 2019, takes charge at a crucial time for the party in



the state. The All India Congress Committee (AICC) acknowledged the contributions of outgoing president Nana Patole in an official statement. Patole resigned following the Congress' poor performance in the Maharashtra Assembly elections, where the Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) alliance suffered a significant defeat against the ruling Mahayuti alliance of the NDA.

## Meitei body accuses Kuki groups of sustaining unrest in Manipur



- COCOMI alleges Kuki groups fueling unrest
- Calls for action against those justifying instability
- Kuki groups continue demand for separate administration

**TPN Correspondent | Imphal**  
The Coordination Committee on Manipur Integrity (COCOMI), an umbrella body of Meitei civil society groups, has accused Kuki organisations of deliberately sustaining unrest in Manipur to push their demand for a separate administration. COCOMI alleged that even after Chief Minister N Biren Singh stepped down, Kuki groups have found new reasons to continue their agitation. COCOMI claimed that Kuki organisations are "making their own people suffer while capitalising on

their discontent for political gains." The statement comes amid speculation of President's Rule in the violence-hit state following the Chief Minister's resignation on Sunday, a day before the Congress was set to introduce a no-confidence motion in the Assembly. The Indigenous Tribal Leaders' Forum (ITLF) and the Committee on Tribal Unity (CoTU), along with 10 Kuki-Zo MLAs and militant groups under the Suspension of Operations (SoO) agreement, remain firm on their demand for a separate administration. Kuki leaders argue that the ethnic violence since May 2023 has intensified their call for a Union Territory or autonomous region. The World Kuki-Zo Intellectual Council (WKZIC) recently submitted a memorandum to the Manipur Governor, highlighting that Kuki tribes have been seeking statehood since 1946-47. The document cited petitions to India's first Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, and reiterated their demand for constitutional recognition under Article 3. With over 250 people killed and 50,000 displaced since the conflict erupted nearly two years ago, tensions remain high in the state. COCOMI has urged the central government to take strict measures against any group using violence and unrest for political leverage.

## Maharashtra Minister Dhananjay Munde Summoned Over Poll Affidavit

**TPN Correspondent | Mumbai**  
A court in Maharashtra's Beed has issued a summons to state minister Dhananjay Munde following a complaint by his first wife, alleging that he failed to disclose information in his election affidavit. The Joint Civil Judge Junior Division and Judicial Magistrate First Class (CJJD and JMFC) at Parli issued the summons on February 10, with the next hearing scheduled for February 24. The complaint, filed by Karuna Munde, claims that while Munde mentioned his wife Rajshri Munde and their children in his affidavit, he did not declare any assets owned by Karuna Munde. The case

was filed under sections 33(A)(i) and 125A of the Representation of the People Act, which mandates full disclosure of information in election affidavits, with violations carrying a potential six-month jail term. Dhananjay Munde is also under scrutiny over the arrest of his aide Walmik Karad in an extortion case linked to the murder of a sarpanch in Beed district. Additionally, a Mumbai court recently ordered him to pay Rs 2 lakh per month in interim maintenance to Karuna Munde and their daughter after finding "prima facie" evidence of domestic violence.



# “Peace” On Agenda, Trump’s Phone Calls with Putin, Zelensky



TPN Correspondent | Washington, D.C.

US President Donald Trump and Russian President Vladimir Putin held a phone call on Wednesday, agreeing to initiate immediate negotiations to end the Ukraine war. Trump described the conversation as “lengthy and highly productive,” adding that both leaders also agreed to visit each other’s countries in a move signaling a major diplomatic shift. The Kremlin confirmed the call lasted nearly ninety minutes, with Putin and Trump agreeing that “the time has come to work together.” Trump stated on Truth Social that the discussions covered Ukraine, the Middle East, and artificial intelligence. He emphasized that both leaders were committed to stopping the “millions of deaths” resulting from the war, though he did not provide verification for the casualty figures. Following the call, Trump announced that he would immediately

contact Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky to inform him about the conversation. Zelensky later confirmed the discussion, stating that he and Trump explored “opportunities to achieve peace.” Trump suggested that, like Putin, Zelensky was also interested in ending the conflict.

The timing of this diplomatic breakthrough comes amid other signs of easing tensions between Washington and Moscow. A prisoner exchange earlier in the week saw Russia release detained US teacher Marc Fogel, while the US freed Russian cryptocurrency figure Alexander Vinnik. Additionally, the Trump administration secured the release of an American citizen detained in Belarus, a key Russian ally.

Trump’s remarks on Putin were notably positive, with the US leader highlighting that Putin even referenced his campaign motto, “COMMON SENSE.” The Kremlin, while

more restrained in its statement, confirmed that Putin agreed a long-term settlement could only be reached through negotiations.

The developments come as Ukraine remains under continued Russian attacks, with fresh missile and drone strikes targeting Kyiv. Meanwhile, Zelensky is set to meet US Vice President JD Vance and Secretary of State Marco Rubio at the Munich Security Conference, where he hopes to finalize an economic agreement with Washington.

Pentagon chief Pete Hegseth recently stated that efforts to restore Ukraine’s pre-2014 borders were “an illusionary goal” and described NATO membership for Ukraine as “not realistic.” The European response to Trump’s engagement with Putin has been cautious, with foreign ministers from France, Germany, and Spain asserting that a lasting peace must include Ukraine and its European allies.

## PM Modi Gifts Eco-Friendly Alphabet Set to US VP JD Vance’s Kids

TPN Correspondent | Washington

During his visit to France for the AI Action Summit, Prime Minister Narendra Modi presented a unique eco-friendly wooden alphabet set to Mirabel Rose Vance, daughter of US Vice President JD Vance. The sustainable wooden alphabet set is designed as a safe and engaging learning tool, aiding in motor skills and cognitive development. Unlike plastic alternatives, it is free from harmful chemicals and promotes environmental conservation. In addition, PM Modi gifted Dokra artwork—musicians with studded stonework—to French President Emmanuel Macron, showcasing India’s rich artistic heritage.

PM Modi visited France from February 10-12, participating in discussions on Artificial Intelligence (AI), commerce, energy, and cultural ties. He co-chaired the AI Action Summit alongside French President Macron, where global leaders and tech CEOs gathered to discuss advancements in AI.

Following his France visit, PM Modi arrived in the United States on Wednesday

evening (local time) at the invitation of US President Donald Trump. He was received at the Joint Base Andrews in Washington DC by India’s Ambassador to the US, Vinay Mohan Kwatra, along with other senior officials.

This marks PM Modi’s first visit to the US since Donald Trump assumed office for his second term. Upon arrival, he proceeded to Blair House, where members of the Indian diaspora gathered to welcome him with chants of “Bharat Mata Ki Jai” and “Modi Modi.” Expressing gratitude, PM Modi thanked the community for their warm reception.

As a symbolic gesture, the US flag at Blair House was replaced with the Indian flag ahead of his arrival. PM Modi will stay at Blair House during his US visit from February 12-13.

Since November 2024, PM Modi and Trump have spoken twice over the phone. External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar attended Trump’s inauguration and later met US Secretary of State Marco Rubio, also participating in the QUAD Foreign Ministers’ meeting in January 2025.



## Ukraine should Abandon its Plans to Reclaim Lost Territory

TPN Correspondent | Washington, D.C.

In a major shift in U.S. policy, Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth has stated that Ukraine should reconsider its ambitions of reclaiming Russian-occupied territories and instead pursue a negotiated peace backed by international forces. He also declared that Ukraine’s NATO membership is an unrealistic goal in future diplomatic agreements.

Hegseth made these remarks during a NATO meeting focused on securing additional military aid for Ukraine, signaling a stark departure from previous U.S. policy. His comments closely align with Russian demands that Ukraine withdraw from annexed regions and abandon its bid to join NATO.

**Trump and Putin Agree to Begin Peace Talks**

Shortly after Hegseth’s statement, former U.S. President Donald Trump announced on Truth Social that he had spoken with Russian President Vladimir Putin and that both had agreed to initiate peace negotiations.

“We talked about the strengths of our respective nations and the great benefit of working together. But first, as we both agreed, we want to stop the millions of deaths taking place in the war,” Trump stated.

He added that U.S. and Russian teams would begin negotiations immediately, and he would soon contact Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy regarding the developments.



**No U.S. Troops in Future Security Agreement**

Hegseth made it clear that any security guarantees for Ukraine should be implemented by European and international forces—not the U.S. military.

“To be clear, as part of any security guarantee, there will not be U.S. troops deployed to Ukraine,” he emphasized. He also ruled out NATO’s involvement in a future peacekeeping mission, arguing that such an engagement could trigger Article 5 obligations, which would require allied nations to defend those forces in case of conflict.

The defense secretary urged European nations to take on the majority of Ukraine’s military and fi-

nanial support, signaling a shift in Washington’s approach to burden-sharing.

“Europe must provide the overwhelming share of future lethal and non-lethal aid to Ukraine,” Hegseth asserted. Currently, both the U.S. and Europe contribute about 30% each to Ukraine’s defense, while the remaining portion comes from Ukraine’s own production.

**Zelenskyy’s Response and Implications for Munich Conference**

Following Trump’s disclosure of his talks with Putin, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy confirmed that he had also spoken with Trump about the war and prospects for peace.

“I had a meaningful conversation with President Trump about opportunities to achieve peace,” Zelenskyy wrote on X. “Together with the U.S., we are charting our next steps to stop Russian aggression and ensure a lasting, reliable peace. As President Trump said, ‘Let’s get it done.’”

The shifting stance of the U.S. is expected to create tensions at the upcoming Munich Security Conference, where U.S. Vice President JD Vance and Secretary of State Marco Rubio are set to meet with Zelenskyy and other officials.

## “Gaza Belongs To Palestinians”, Says China, Opposes “Forced Displacement”



TPN Correspondent | Beijing

China has reiterated its opposition to the forced displacement of Palestinians, emphasizing that Gaza is an integral part of Palestinian territory. The statement came in

response to US President Donald Trump’s reported plan to relocate Gaza’s inhabitants elsewhere.

“Gaza belongs to the Palestinians and is an integral part of the Palestinian territory... We oppose the forced displacement of the people of Gaza,” Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Guo Jiakun said during a press briefing on Wednesday.

China has consistently called for a two-state solution and a peaceful resolution to the Israel-Palestine conflict. The latest remarks reaffirm Beijing’s stance against

any measures that alter the demographics of Gaza or displace its residents.

Trump’s proposal, which has drawn criticism from several international bodies, comes amid the ongoing conflict between Israel and Hamas, with concerns growing over the humanitarian crisis in Gaza. China’s response aligns with its broader support for Palestinian statehood and opposition to unilateral actions affecting the region’s stability.

## Elon Musk’s DOGE Team Raises Major Cyber Security Concerns

TPN Correspondent | New Delhi

An internal report has raised alarm over the security risks posed by Elon Musk’s Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE) team, warning that their access to critical systems represents “the single greatest insider threat risk” the Bureau of Fiscal Services has ever faced. The DOGE initiative, launched as a cost-cutting measure, began at the Treasury Department, where its engineers took control of the federal payment system under the pretext of monitoring public spending. It has since expanded across multiple agencies, disrupting and, in some cases, shutting down operations at the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), the Department of Education,

and the General Services Administration (GSA).

Security experts are deeply concerned that a group of largely unvetted, young engineers—many affiliated with Musk’s companies—now hold control over critical government infrastructure. Senior officials with decades of experience have reportedly been sidelined, with some even locked out of buildings. At the Office of Personnel Management, DOGE-associated individuals allegedly linked an unauthorized server to the network and deployed AI software on citizens’ personal data, potentially breaching federal privacy laws.

The Treasury’s Bureau of Fiscal Services, which manages all federal payments, is a particularly vulnerable chokepoint.

Security experts Bruce Schneier and Davi Ottenheimer noted that Treasury systems were designed with nuclear-level security protocols, preventing any single person from having unlimited power. However, DOGE’s intervention has bypassed these safeguards.

Concerns over Musk’s personal conflicts of interest have also surfaced, given that his companies hold significant government contracts. Critics fear his access to sensitive data could provide an unfair advantage to his business empire. Meanwhile, cybersecurity experts warn that adversaries like China and Russia could exploit vulnerabilities created by the DOGE team’s rapid and unregulated overhaul.





## Stock Markets See Volatile Session, End in Losses After Early Gains



Domestic stock markets witnessed high volatility on Thursday, swinging from strong gains in the morning to minor losses by the close. Benchmark indices surged initially, supported by mixed global cues and buying in heavyweight stocks at attractive prices. However, persistent uncertainty led to profit booking, dragging the indices down. Banking, auto, finance, IT, and FMCG stocks contributed to the decline, while the weekly derivatives expiry also added pressure.

The BSE Sensex, which had closed at 76,171 in the previous session, opened slightly higher at 76,201 and climbed to an intraday high of 76,763. However, it later dropped to 76,013 before ending the day at 76,138, down 32 points. The NSE Nifty opened at 23,055, hit a high of 23,235, and slipped to 22,992 before closing at 23,031, losing 13 points. The Nifty Bank declined 119 points, settling at 49,359.

In the Nifty50 pack, 23 stocks advanced, while 27 declined. The top gainers included Tata Steel, Sun Pharma, Bajaj Finserv, Bajaj Finance, and Cipla, while Adani Enterprises, Adani Ports, Hero MotoCorp, Infosys, and L&T recorded the highest losses. Sector-wise, banking, auto, FMCG, IT, PSU banks, consumer durables, and oil & gas sectors saw gains,



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while finance, media, metal, pharma, realty, and healthcare indices ended in the red. Market participation remained balanced, with 1,353 stocks gaining and 1,472 declining out of 2,893 stocks traded on the NSE. 12 stocks hit a 52-week high, while 193 stocks touched a 52-week low.

In corporate news, Manappuram Finance posted a 5.8% rise in Q3 net profit to ₹453 crore from ₹428 crore. Lumax Auto's profit surged 23% to ₹44.8 crore from ₹36.4 crore, while Ipca Labs saw a 7% rise in shares following a 38% jump in net profit to ₹248 crore. Meanwhile, PN Gadgil's net profit soared 49%, hitting the 10% upper circuit.

On the currency front, the rupee remained flat at 86.89 against the US dollar. In regulatory developments, SEBI has gained social media access to remove unauthorized financial advisors. CLSA gave an outperform rating to Kotak Mahindra Bank with a target price of ₹2,125, while Bernstein assigned a similar rating to Muthoot Finance, setting a target price of ₹2,500.

Additionally, Redington, SBI Cards, Kotak Mahindra, and Shree Cements hit fresh 52-week highs during the session.

## ED Freezes ₹170 Crore in Fake Forex Trading Scam; Raids Across Multiple States

**TPN Correspondent | New Delhi**

The Enforcement Directorate (ED) has frozen bank deposits worth ₹170 crore in a money laundering probe against QFX Trade, a fraudulent forex trading and deposit scheme. Multi-state raids were conducted on February 11 in Delhi, Noida, Shamli, and Rohtak, targeting the company's directors and its alleged mastermind, Lavish Chaudhary alias Nawab Ali.

**Fraudulent Forex Scheme Busted**

According to an ED statement, QFX Trade and its directors—Rajendra Sood, Santosh Kumar, and Vineet Kumar—were running an unregulated deposit scheme, duping investors with promises of high returns. The agency launched the probe after multiple FIRs were registered by the Himachal

Pradesh Police. As part of the investigation, ED officials raided various locations and found unexplained funds in 30 bank accounts linked to QFX, leading to the freezing of ₹170 crore. Additionally, ₹90 lakh in cash was seized from an agent of the company.

**Modus Operandi: MLM and Social Media Ads**

The ED revealed that QFX operated through a multi-level marketing (MLM) system, using websites, mobile apps, and social media advertisements to lure investors. Similar tactics were earlier used by YFX, another fraudulent forex trading platform that duped customers with false promises of high returns.

The agency further disclosed that apart

from QFX, Lavish Chaudhary was behind several other fraudulent investment schemes, including BotBro, TLC Coin, and Yorker FX, which were also projected as forex trading platforms. Shell Companies Used for Fund Transfers

Investigators found that funds collected from investors were funneled into bank accounts linked to shell companies such as Capter Money Solutions, NPay Box, and Tiger Digital Services. The ED has identified these entities as dummy firms used to launder money. The probe also revealed that QFX organizers held events in India and Dubai to attract more investors. Authorities are now expanding their investigation into other fraudulent schemes connected to the accused.

## Rajasthan Announces ₹200 Crore Subsidy for Electric Vehicles



The Rajasthan government has launched a ₹200 crore e-vehicle promotion fund under its Electric Vehicle Policy-2022 to boost EV adoption in the

state. The initiative aligns with the FAME-2 scheme and offers State GST reimbursements and one-time grants for eligible EV buyers.

The subsidy applies to vehicles purchased on or after September 1, 2022, and registered in Rajasthan. Only vehicles bought within the state will qualify. Manufacturers registered under FAME-2 must enroll on the state's transport department portal before their EV models become eligible for the scheme.

Buyers can apply for the subsidy through the Vahan portal by entering their vehicle details, verifying their identity via OTP, and uploading bank details and supporting documents. Once approved, the subsidy amount will be directly transferred to their bank accounts.

Authorities have urged manufacturers, dealers, and buyers to apply early, as incentives are available for a limited number of vehicles per category.

## Nirmala Sitharaman Introduces New Income Tax Bill

**FM Nirmala Sitharaman introduces the Income Tax Bill 2025 in Lok Sabha.**

**Bill simplifies tax laws, cutting sections from 819 to 536.**

**Opposition MPs walk out in protest.**

**Sitharaman defends the bill, citing removal of outdated provisions.**

**Sent to a Select House Committee; report due next session.**



**TPN Correspondent | New Delhi**

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman tabled the Income Tax Bill 2025 in the Lok Sabha on Thursday, aiming to simplify the tax structure and make compliance easier for taxpayers. However, the introduction of the bill triggered protests from Opposition MPs, leading to a walkout from the session. As soon as Sitharaman introduced the bill amid a ruckus, several Opposition MPs were seen leaving the House. While the exact number of MPs who staged the walkout remains unclear, their objections centered around the bill's structure and the changes it proposes.

**Opposition Raises Objections**

MP NK Premachandran from Kerala's Kollam raised concerns about the bill containing more sections than the previous Income Tax Act of 1961. Responding to this, Sitharaman clarified that the original 1961 Act had only 298 sections, but over the years, amendments had expanded it to 819 sections. She emphasized that

the new bill reduces this number to 536, making the law more concise and efficient. She further pointed out that nearly 4,000 amendments had been made to the existing Act since its enforcement, and the new bill addresses these issues comprehensively. TMC MP Sougata Ray also criticized the bill, calling the changes "mechanical." However, Sitharaman dismissed this claim, arguing that significant changes had been made. She added that the number of words in the law had been halved, and both English and Hindi versions were now written in simpler language for better understanding.

**Bill Sent to Select House Committee**

Sitharaman suggested that the new Income Tax Bill 2025 be referred to a Select House Committee for detailed scrutiny. The terms of reference for the committee will be decided by Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla. The committee is expected to submit its report on the first day of the next parliamentary session.

## Honda and Nissan Call Off Merger Plans



**TPN Correspondent | Tokyo**

Japanese auto giants Honda and Nissan have officially terminated their merger discussions, bringing an abrupt end to what could have been a game-changing partnership in the global automobile industry. The companies had signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on December 23, 2024, to explore business integration, but announced on Thursday that they had mutually decided to scrap the plan.

**Breakdown of Talks**

The proposed merger was seen as a strategic move to compete with Tesla and Chinese electric vehicle (EV) manufacturers. However, the discussions reportedly fell apart when Honda proposed making Nissan a subsidiary, rather than proceeding with the initially planned integration under a new joint holding company.

**In a joint statement, the automakers clarified:**

"Honda proposed changing the structure from establishing a joint holding company... to a structure where Honda would be the parent company and Nissan the subsidiary

through a share exchange."

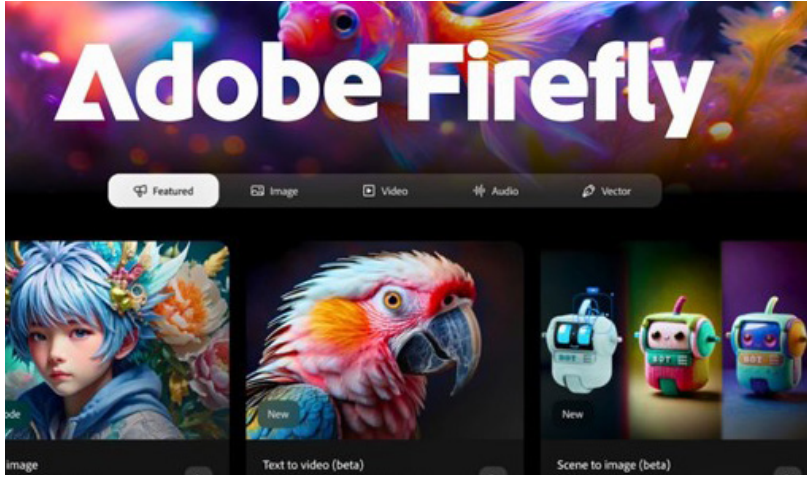
With both firms unable to reach common ground, they ultimately prioritized independent decision-making and operational agility over consolidation.

**Industry Impact and Future Collaboration**

The failed merger comes amid Nissan's financial struggles, with the company previously announcing massive job cuts and a 93% drop in first-half net profits last year. While the merger would have created the world's third-largest automaker, both companies now aim to navigate the EV transition separately. However, the firms confirmed that despite calling off the merger, they will continue collaborating on electrification and smart vehicle technologies, exploring strategic partnerships to enhance innovation and market competitiveness.

As the automotive industry shifts towards electric and intelligent vehicles, it remains to be seen how Honda and Nissan will individually adapt to growing competition in an increasingly volatile market.

## Adobe Unveils AI-Powered Generate Video in Public Beta, Revamps Firefly Web App



Adobe has officially launched its AI-driven Generate Video tool in public beta, making it accessible to all users via the Firefly web app. The tool, powered by the Firefly Video Model, was initially teased in September 2024. Alongside this, Adobe has redesigned the Firefly web app, streamlining its layout to better showcase its suite of generative AI tools. The tech giant has also introduced two new Firefly subscription plans aimed at enhancing user experience.

### Adobe Introduces Generate Video in Beta

Generate Video is Adobe's first AI-powered end-to-end video generation tool, offering users the ability to create 1080p videos at 24 frames per second using text prompts and images. The tool provides granular control, enabling users to define camera angles, motion, shooting distances, art styles, and other cinematographic elements. Currently, it can generate five-second-long videos, with Adobe promising

future upgrades, including a lower-resolution ideation model and a 4K model for production.

Users can also make detailed technical requests, such as locking in first and last frames for continuity, maintaining consistent colors and character details, and refining elements for professional output. PepsiCo, Stagwell, and Dentsu are already leveraging Generate Video for commercial applications.

### Firefly Web App Redesigned with New Features

Originally launched in 2023 as a hub for Adobe's generative AI tools, the Firefly web app has been overhauled for a more intuitive user experience. The updated platform integrates seamlessly with Adobe's Creative Cloud applications, including Photoshop and Premiere Pro, ensuring smoother workflows. Adobe has also emphasized that Firefly AI models are trained on licensed and public domain datasets, making them "IP-friendly" and safe for com-

mercial use. In addition to Generate Video, Adobe has rolled out two new tools—Scene to Image and Translate Audio/Translate Video—on the Firefly platform. Unlike Generate Video, these tools are not free. Scene to Image transforms 3D sketches and reference shapes into high-quality images while allowing users to manipulate angles and perspectives for precise output. Translate Audio/Translate Video enables users to convert audio files and video channels into over 20 languages while preserving the original speaker's voice.

### New Firefly Subscription Plans Introduced

To support the expansion of its AI offerings, Adobe has introduced two new Firefly subscription plans. The Firefly Standard plan, priced at \$9.99 per month, offers 2,000 video and audio credits and allows up to 20 five-second video generations at 1080p resolution. The Firefly Pro plan, available at \$29.99 per month, provides 7,000 credits and supports up to 70 video generations. Both plans come with unlimited access to Firefly's imaging and vector features, making them attractive options for creative professionals.

With these advancements, Adobe continues to push the boundaries of AI-powered creativity, catering to both casual users and professionals seeking advanced video and image generation capabilities.

## Noise Master Buds Launched in India With Bose-Tuned Audio, 49dB ANC Support



Noise has launched its latest true wireless stereo (TWS) earphones, the Noise Master Buds, in India. Featuring 12.4mm titanium drivers and Bose-tuned audio, the new earbuds promise an enhanced sound experience. They support Adaptive Active Noise Cancellation (ANC) up to 49dB and offer dual connectivity, allowing users to pair them with two devices simultaneously. The Noise Master Buds boast a total battery life of up to 44 hours and come in a vinyl disc-inspired charging case.

### Noise Master Buds Price and Availability

The Noise Master Buds are priced at Rs. 7,999 in India and are available for pre-booking via Amazon and the official Noise India e-store. They come in Onyx, Silver, and Titanium color options.

Customers who pre-book the earbuds by paying Rs. 999 will receive a Rs. 2,000 discount coupon, bringing the effective price down to Rs. 5,999. Additionally, they will get exclusive perks worth Rs. 2,500. The earbuds will officially go on sale from February 26 via gonoise.com, Amazon, Reliance Digital, Croma, and Vijay Sales.

### Noise Master Buds Specifica-

### tions and Features

The Noise Master Buds are equipped with 12.4mm titanium drivers, tuned by Bose, and support LHDC 5.0 audio codec for high-resolution Bluetooth streaming. They offer 49dB ANC, Transparency mode, and an in-ear design with interchangeable ear tips.

For improved voice calls, the earbuds feature a six-mic system with Environmental Noise Cancellation (ENC). Other features include dual connectivity, Google Fast Pair, Find My Device, spatial audio (without head tracking), and in-ear detection. They are also compatible with the NoiseFit app.

In terms of battery life, the Noise Master Buds provide up to 44 hours of playback with

ANC turned off and 34 hours with ANC on, including the charging case. On a single charge, the earbuds last 4.5 hours with ANC on and six hours without ANC. A 10-minute quick charge provides up to six hours of playback.

The charging case, which features a USB Type-C port, is designed to resemble a vinyl disc, complete with a 2PM light bar mimicking a vinyl needle. Each earbud weighs 4.2g, while the case weighs 40g.

With its premium features and Bose-tuned audio, the Noise Master Buds are set to compete in the high-end TWS market, offering a blend of superior sound quality, advanced noise cancellation, and long battery life.

## Vlogger Sells Tea at Maha Kumbh Mela, Earns ₹7,000 in a Day



### TPN Correspondent | Prayagraj

A vlogger's social experiment at the Maha Kumbh Mela has taken the internet by storm after he revealed his impressive earnings from selling tea. The content creator, known as @madcap\_alive on Instagram, set up a tea stall at the event to explore the potential profits in such a massive gathering.

Selling tea at ₹10 per cup, he also carried a large container around the Mela grounds, offering tea to attendees. While demand dipped slightly in the afternoon, sales picked up again in the evening, allowing him to earn ₹7,000 by

the end of the day, with a profit of ₹5,000. His video, showcasing the experiment, has garnered over 13.5 million views.

Netizens reacted with amazement, with some humorously suggesting a career switch. One user calculated, "₹5,000 per day means ₹1,55,000 per month!" Another quipped, "Education is a scam." Many welcomed him to Prayagraj, dubbing him "Kumbh Chaiwala." The viral clip has sparked conversations about business opportunities at the grand religious gathering.

## Zuckerberg Reveals He Faced Possible Death Sentence in Pakistan



### TPN Correspondent | Washington, D.C.

Meta CEO Mark Zuckerberg recently revealed in an interview with Joe Rogan that he was once at risk of being sentenced to death in Pakistan due to content posted on Facebook. The Pakistani government had accused Meta of allowing content that violated the country's strict blasphemy laws, leading to legal action against Zuckerberg personally.

The controversy stemmed from a user-posted image fea-

turing a drawing of Prophet Mohammed, which sparked outrage and a lawsuit seeking to hold Zuckerberg accountable. While he admitted he was not personally concerned for his safety—stating he had no plans to visit Pakistan—the incident underscored the broader challenges global tech platforms face when navigating free speech and local regulations.

"There are places around the world that just have different values that go against our free

expression values," Zuckerberg said, emphasizing the growing tension between Meta's commitment to free speech and the demands of certain governments.

Pakistan's blasphemy laws carry severe penalties, including imprisonment and even death, and have historically been used to prosecute individuals and organizations accused of violating religious norms. The incident with Meta highlights the ongoing struggle tech giants face when balancing their global reach with restrictive laws in certain countries.

Zuckerberg also stressed that foreign governments exert significant pressure on American tech companies, urging stronger support from the US government. He argued that threats of imprisonment and legal action against executives create an environment where tech companies require protection when facing politically motivated lawsuits abroad.

Meta has faced similar legal challenges in various countries, where governments have sought to regulate or censor content deemed offensive, harmful, or illegal under local laws.

## Chilling Audio of Titanic Submersible Implosion Released

### TPN Correspondent | Washington, D.C.

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration has released a chilling audio recording capturing the moment the Titan submersible imploded, killing all five passengers instantly. The 20-second clip, published by the Defense Visual Information Distribution Service (DVIDS), features a burst of static followed by a thunderous boom before fading into an eerie silence. Officials confirmed that the boom was the sound of the vessel succumbing to immense water pressure before reaching the Titanic wreck site in the North Atlantic Ocean on June 18, 2023. The recording, picked up by a moored passive acoustic device about 900 miles

away from the incident, was analyzed by the US Coast Guard, which described it as "the suspected acoustic signature of the Titan submersible implosion." The tragedy claimed the lives of renowned British adventurer Hamish Harding, Pakistani businessman Shahzada Dawood and his son Suleman Dawood, French national Paul-Henri Nargeolet, and Stockton Rush, CEO of OceanGate Expeditions.

The loss of the submersible prompted intense scrutiny over its engineering and safety measures. Reports later revealed that the vessel had significant design flaws and had never been independently certified for deep-sea travel. Communication with the mothership was lost less

than two hours into the dive, triggering a frantic four-day search that ended with the discovery of debris by a remotely operated underwater vehicle.

In October 2023, the US Coast Guard announced the recovery of the last pieces of the wreckage, confirming earlier concerns about the sub's structural integrity. Investigators found that the Titan had been plagued with safety hazards during previous expeditions, with 70 reported equipment issues in 2021 and 48 more in 2022. The revelations raised further questions about the oversight and approval process for extreme deep-sea explorations.



## Families Not to Travel with Team India for **Champions Trophy**



The Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) has implemented its new travel policy, which restricts players' families from accompanying them on short tours. This rule will take effect for the first time as the Indian cricket team departs for Dubai on February 15 to participate in the ICC Champions Trophy 2025. Under the new guidelines, families can only join players on tours lasting 45 days or more, with a maximum allowance of two weeks. Since the Champions Trophy runs for less than a month, play-

ers' wives and partners will not be allowed to travel with the team. Team India, led by Rohit Sharma, will kick off its Champions Trophy campaign against Bangladesh on February 20. The high-voltage clash against Pakistan is scheduled for February 23, followed by the final group-stage match against New Zealand on March 2. India will play all its matches in Dubai, while the rest of the tournament unfolds across three venues in Pakistan, starting from February 19. A senior BCCI official, speak-

ing anonymously, confirmed the decision: "Unless there is a change in policy, families will not be accompanying the players. One senior player had inquired about it but was informed that the board's decision stands." The official also noted that if any exception is made, the player will have to bear all expenses, as the BCCI will not cover any additional costs. With the final scheduled for March 9, Team India will aim to bring home the prestigious trophy, despite the absence of their families during the tour.

## Four **Indians** to Compete in Saudi Ladies International Golf Tournament



Four Indian golfers—Pranavi Urs, Aditi Ashok, Diksha Dagar, and Tvesa Malik—are set to compete in the sixth Saudi Ladies International, a \$5 million event featuring 112 players. Pranavi Urs, who finished 17th on the LET Merit List last season, had a strong pro start on the Women's Pro Tour, securing third-place finishes at the Dormy Open and Open de España. Diksha Dagar, ranked 29th on the LET, had an impressive start to 2025, reaching a play-off

at the Lalla Meryem Cup before finishing runner-up. She also recorded four Top-10 finishes last season and represented India at the Paris Olympics. Tvesa Malik, who finished 60th on the LET, regained her LET card and narrowly missed victory at the VP Swiss Bank Ladies Open, losing in a play-off. Aditi Ashok, who focused on the LPGA Tour, returns to LET events for this prestigious tournament.

## IGI, Hansraj, Khalsa, SRCC, and SPM Shine in 11th Padmashri Shyam Lal Memorial Hockey Tournament

Indira Gandhi Institute of Physical Education and Sports Sciences (IGI), Hansraj College, Sri Guru Tegh Bahadur Khalsa College, Shri Ram College of Commerce (SRCC), and Shyama Prasad Mukherjee (SPM) College emerged victorious in their league matches at the 11th Padmashri Shyam Lal Memorial Hockey Tournament.

IGI dominated Kirori Mal College 8-1, with Pulkit winning the Man of the Match award. Hansraj College

defeated Amity University 5-0, with Gusish earning the top honor. In the women's section, SPM College edged past Janaki Devi Memorial College 1-0, with Anshu named Player of the Match.

Khalsa College overcame Shyam Lal College Alumni 2-1, while SRCC secured a 3-1 win against IIT Delhi. SRCC's Siddharth was named Man of the Match, while IIT's Bhavesh received a Consolation Prize.

## PGTI 2025: Yuvraj Sandhu Holds Lead After Round Three



Yuvraj Sandhu of Chandigarh maintained his lead for the third consecutive day at the PGTI Players Championship 2025, carding a steady two-under 68 in round three. With scores of 63-61-68, Yuvraj holds a one-shot lead at 18-un-

der 192 at Tollygunge Club, where he is a past winner. Bangladesh's Jamal Hossain (65-62-66) continued his impressive form, posting a 66 in round three to reach 17-under 193, closing in on the leader. Bengaluru's Rahil Gangjee (63-

67-66), competing at a familiar course from his childhood, shot 66 to secure third place at 14-under 196. Kolkata's golf legend SSP Chawrasia (71) finished the day tied for 14th place at nine-under 201.

## CM Dhama Reviews Preparations for Amit Shah's National Games Visit

Uttarakhand Chief Minister Pushkar Singh Dhama is overseeing preparations for Union Home Minister Amit Shah's visit to the closing ceremony of the 38th National Games at Gaulapar Stadium, Kathgodam, on February 14. The state government is ensuring smooth arrangements for the event, which has featured top athletes from across the country. CM Dhama's active involvement underscores the significance of the Games for Uttarakhand.

On February 12, Dhama attended wrestling events in Haridwar and participated in the 'Mauli Samvad' National Sports Vision Conclave 2025. He also played hockey with



participants. Additionally, CM Dhama and IOA President PT Usha joined a tree plantation drive at Maharana Pratap Sports College, Raipur. On February 11, he in-

augurated the Mallakhamb competition in Khatima, emphasizing the global recognition of India's traditional sports under PM Narendra Modi's leadership.

## Indian Women's Hockey Team Gears Up for FIH Pro League

Fresh off their Women's Asian Champions Trophy victory, the Indian Women's Hockey Team is set to begin its FIH Pro League campaign at the Kalinga Stadium from February 15 to 25. India will face England on February 15 and 16, followed by Spain on February 18 and 19. The team will also take on World No. 4 Germany and top-ranked Netherlands on February 21, 22, 24, and 25.

Led by Arjuna Awardee Salima Tete with Navneet Kaur as her deputy, the squad blends experienced players like Savita and Vandana Katariya with rising stars such as Deepika and Sunelita Toppo. Captain Tete expressed confidence in the team's preparation, while head coach Harendra Singh emphasized the



importance of home support. After a disappointing previous season, India aims for a stronger performance this time.





## Nani's Next Big Leap: A Dream Collaboration in the Works?



Natural Star Nani has carved an enviable niche in Tollywood, seamlessly blending artistic finesse with commercial appeal. From his early days excelling in class-oriented narratives to his more recent foray into mass entertainers, he has consistently expanded his cinematic footprint. With a string of consecutive hits to his credit, Nani's career is currently in a phase of remarkable momentum.

Presently, the actor is juggling multiple ventures, including HIT 3 and Paradise, while also presenting Megastar Chiranjeevi's upcoming film. Yet, amid his packed slate, an even more exciting possibility is on the horizon—one that has been long-awaited by both the actor and his ardent fans.

For nearly a decade, Nani has harbored a deep desire to collaborate with acclaimed filmmaker Sekhar Kammula. De-

spite their mutual admiration, circumstances never quite aligned for the project to take off. However, that long-standing wish may soon materialize, as reports suggest that the two are finally in discussions. Kammula, who is currently wrapping up Kubera with Dhanush, has initiated talks with Nani, setting the stage for what could be an extraordinary cinematic union. While the project is still in its early stages, an official announcement is anticipated soon. Should all go as planned, this much-anticipated film might commence production towards the end of the year, following Nani's completion of Paradise.

For fans who have long envisioned this collaboration, the wait may soon be over—marking yet another milestone in Nani's ever-evolving journey.

## Vicky Kaushal Holds Katrina Kaif's Hand at Chhaava Screening, Fans Adore the Moment



Actor Vicky Kaushal attended the special screening of his upcoming film Chhaava in Mumbai, accompanied by his wife, actor Katrina Kaif. The film, also starring Rashmika Mandanna, is set to release in theatres on February 14. A video from the event, shared by a paparazzo, has captured the attention of fans, showcasing a sweet moment between the couple.

In the video, Vicky is seen holding Katrina's hand as he walks her to the designated photo spot at the event. Dressed in a dark outfit, Vicky looked stylish, while Katrina stunned in a sheer saree. The actor continued to hold her hand even as they posed for the photographers before heading inside. Vicky's brother, Sunny Kaushal, and other family members were also present at the screening.

Fans quickly reacted to the video, flooding the comment section with admiration. Many praised Katrina's look, while others called the couple 'royal' and showered them

with heart and evil-eye emojis. One fan referred to Katrina as the 'Queen of Bollywood,' while another simply wrote, "Hayee," expressing their adoration.

Known for their affectionate social media interactions, Vicky and Katrina often share glimpses of their relationship with fans. Just days before Valentine's Day, Katrina posted a video of Vicky on her Instagram Stories. In the clip, Vicky playfully described her as a "weird but honest being," to which Katrina responded with an angel emoji, highlighting their lighthearted bond.

Meanwhile, Vicky has been actively promoting Chhaava alongside Rashmika Mandanna. In the historical drama, he portrays Chhatrapati Sambhaji Maharaj, the son of Chhatrapati Shivaji, while Rashmika plays Maharani Yesubai, the Maratha queen. The film is set to bring the Maratha warrior's legacy to the big screen, generating significant anticipation among audiences.

## Elvish Yadav Summoned by NCW Over Racist Remark on Chum Darang

The National Commission for Women (NCW) has summoned YouTuber Elvish Yadav for his controversial remarks against actor and Bigg Boss 18 contestant Chum Darang. According to a News18 report, Elvish has been asked to appear before the commission on February 17 following backlash over his comments.

The controversy erupted after Elvish made derogatory remarks about Chum Darang's name and ethnicity during a podcast. He also mocked her appearance in Gangubai Kathiawadi, stating, "Karanveer ko pakka COVID tha kyunki Chum kisko pasand aati hai bhai, itna taste kiska kharab hota hai! Aur Chum ke toh naam mein hi ashleeta hai... Naam Chum aur kaam Gangubai Kathiawadi mein kiya hai." His remarks triggered outrage, with many calling them racist and offensive.

The Arunachal Pradesh State Commission for Women (APSCW) strongly condemned Elvish's statements, terming them an insult not just to Chum but to women across Northeast India. In a letter to the NCW chairperson, APSCW chairperson Kenjum Pakam demanded strict action against the YouTuber, urging authorities to take legal steps against him.

Reacting to the controversy, Chum Darang took to social media to express her disappointment. Without naming Elvish,



she criticized the normalization of hate under the guise of humor. "Disrespecting someone's identity and name is not 'fun.' Mocking someone's achievements is not 'banter.' It's time we draw the line between humor and hate," she wrote, emphasizing that her hard work and her role in Gangubai Kathiawadi had also been disrespected.

Elvish, in response, attempted to downplay the criticism in a vlog. He claimed he had checked whether his remarks were racist and, upon realizing that they had

offended people, removed the controversial segment from his video. "Mujhe negativity chahiye hi nahi. Agar maan lo kisiko kharab lag raha hai mere bolne se, toh bhai, wo part maine remove kar diya," he stated.

The incident has sparked widespread debate on social media, with many demanding accountability for derogatory comments targeting the Northeast Indian community. As the NCW summons approaches, calls for action against Elvish continue to grow.

## Thandel Achieves Break-Even in Six Days, Eyes ₹100 Crore Mark



Naga Chaitanya's Thandel has emerged as a major success, achieving break-even within just six days of its release. With a theatrical business target of approximately ₹40 crore, the film has already surpassed that mark, according to trade reports. The film has reportedly grossed over ₹70 crore so far, setting the stage for a strong second-week run.

With the deadline for increased ticket prices in Andhra Pradesh ending today, distributors are hopeful for a boost in collections from the region. The film's producers are also confident about pushing Thandel into the ₹100 crore club, banking on continued audience interest.

Upcoming releases like Laila and Brahma Anandham are not expected to pose a major threat, as they lack big stars. Additionally, Vishwak Sen's latest release has received an 'A' certificate, which may limit its appeal among family audiences, further benefiting Thandel.

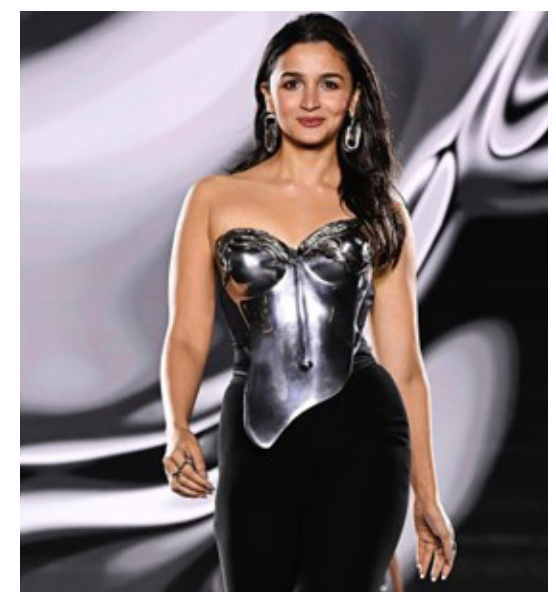
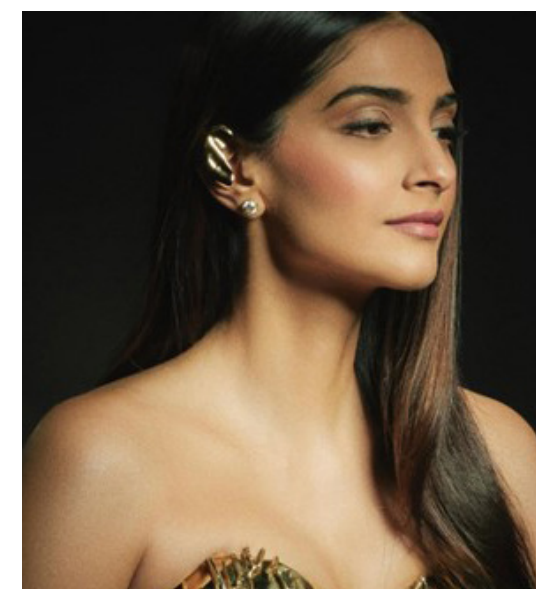
The production team is actively working on promotional strategies to sustain momentum during weekdays. With a slate of mid-range films set to release on February 21, Thandel's performance in the coming days will be crucial. If the film continues its current trend, it could deliver the highest box office numbers of Naga Chaitanya's career.

## Sonam Kapoor vs. Alia Bhatt: A Gilded Fashion Duel in Gaurav Gupta's Iconic Breastplate

Sonam Kapoor has long been synonymous with bold sartorial choices, even as she has gradually distanced herself from Bollywood's relentless spotlight following her marriage to Anand Ahuja and the birth of their son, Vayu, in 2022. Her public appearances are now rare, curated moments of grandeur—and last night was one such spectacle.

Draped in an opulent creation by Gaurav Gupta, Sonam embodied an aesthetic that was equal parts regal and avant-garde. Styled by Rhea Kapoor, she adorned a striking gold breastplate featuring molten-like frozen drips, paired with a dramatic black ballgown midi. The ensemble's sculptural waist detail, a signature of Gupta's couture, added an architectural flourish. Complementing the look were softly curled tresses tucked behind one ear, muted nude makeup, and gold-tinted French tips—a masterclass in refined elegance.

Yet, while Sonam's look was undeniably arresting, it carried an air of déjà vu. The reason? This very breastplate had already left an indelible mark on the fashion landscape when Alia Bhatt donned it months earlier in a striking silver rendition. In September 2024, Alia made her runway



debut at the L'Oréal Paris - Le Défilé show in an outfit that exuded futuristic drama. As noted by the designer's official archives, she wore a silver metal-cast breastplate intricately molded with a swan's head entwined with a serpent's sinuous body, paired with black sharara trousers. Styled by Payal Kapadia, her look was elevated with oversized geometric hoops, slick wet hair, and a luminous silver-tinted makeup

palette. Two muses. One emblematic piece. Distinctive interpretations. Sonam's take was classic, embodying old-world opulence with a contemporary twist, while Alia's approach was sleek, futuristic, and audacious. Both women served a compelling vision—but the question remains: who owned the moment?