

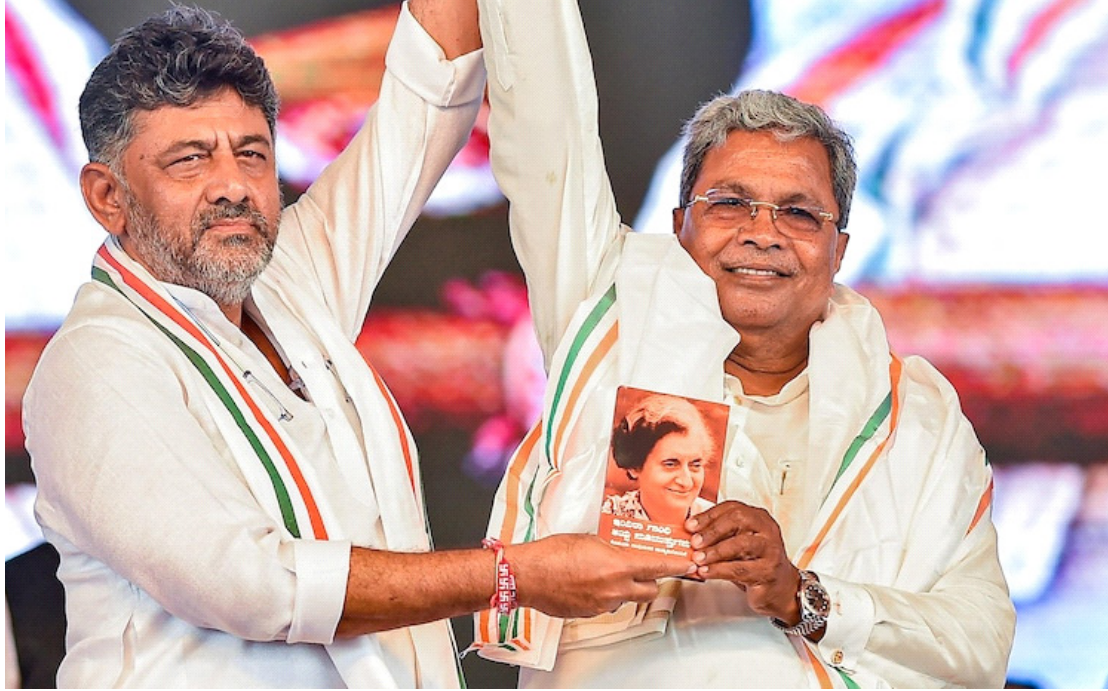
Proxy Battles Resurface in Karnataka Congress Amid Leadership Tensions

Ministers Question D.K. Shivakumar's Continued Role as State Congress President

Leadership Challenge: Ministers allied with Siddaramaiah question Shivakumar's position

Siddaramaiah's Influence: Some demand he continue as CM for the full term

Shivakumar's Stance: He defends Siddaramaiah's leadership



TPN Correspondent Bengaluru, Feb 18

Tensions within the Karnataka Congress have resurfaced, with several ministers close to Chief Minister Siddaramaiah once again questioning the continued tenure of D.K. Shivakumar as the state party president. Despite earlier efforts to quell factionalism, the simmering discord has intensified following the Congress's performance

in the Delhi Assembly elections. Ministers like Co-operation Minister K.N. Rajanna and Public Works Minister Satish Jarkiholi, who are considered allies of Siddaramaiah, have raised concerns over the "one man, one post" policy, demanding clarity on whether Shivakumar should remain in his role until the Lok Sabha elections. The debate also touches on whether Shivakumar, currently both the state Congress chief and Deputy CM, should continue in both positions. Shivakumar has maintained silence on the leadership demands but defend-

ed Siddaramaiah's role, stating, "Siddaramaiah is our leader. His name should not be misused every day." Meanwhile, some of Siddaramaiah's supporters argue for his continued leadership, asserting that his experience and political clout are critical for the party's success in upcoming elections. In a broader context, the Karnataka Congress's internal struggle over leadership positions highlights ongoing power struggles, with Siddaramaiah's long-time supporters seeking to ensure his continued influence while Shivakumar aims to solidify his position.

Gyanesh Kumar Appointed as New Chief Election Commissioner

TPN Correspondent

New Delhi, Feb 18

Gyanesh Kumar has been appointed as the new Chief Election Commissioner (CEC), the Union Law Ministry announced. His appointment comes after a meeting of the Election Committee, which included Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Union Home Minister Amit Shah, and Leader of Opposition Rahul Gandhi. Gyanesh Kumar, who is the senior-most Election Commissioner, will succeed Rajiv Kumar, whose term concludes with his retirement at the age of 65 on Tuesday. The new Chief Election Commissioner will hold office for a term of six years or until reaching the age of 65, whichever comes first. Kumar's appointment marks a significant moment as he becomes the first Chief Election Commissioner to be appointed under the new law regarding the selection of Election Commissioners, a law that has recently come into effect. The selection process took place at the Prime Minister's



Office in South Block, Delhi, on Monday evening, where the Election Committee recommended the names of candidates shortlisted by the search committee. Despite the smooth transition, the announcement was met with some political contention. The Congress party had earlier urged the government to delay the appointment until the Supreme Court hears the petition regarding the formation of the selection committee, scheduled for February 19. Congress leaders argue that the appointment should be put on hold until the court gives its opinion on the matter. As Gyanesh Kumar takes charge, his leadership will be closely watched, particularly as he steps into the role of ensuring free and fair elections at a crucial time for India's democratic processes.

DK Shivakumar Announces Expansion Plans for Congress, Condemns Kerala Youth Congress Murders

Congress Expansion: DK Shivakumar reveals a major influx of leaders joining the party, with phased decisions planned.

Condemnation of Murders: The Deputy CM condemns the brutal killings of Youth Congress workers in Kerala, offering ₹25 lakh compensation to their families.

Unwavering Commitment: Shivakumar reaffirms his lifelong loyalty to the Congress party and the Nehru-Gandhi family.



TPN Correspondent/Bengaluru, Feb 18

In a statement made on Monday, Karnataka Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar announced that several political leaders would soon be joining the Congress party. He emphasized that the joinings would occur in phases and noted that decisions regarding specific leaders were still under discussion. Shivakumar further mentioned that the names of new members would be disclosed to the public once final decisions had been made. On a more somber note, Shivakumar condemned the murder of two Kerala Youth Congress workers, describing it as a "planned and heinous" act that insulted Indian democratic values. He pledged ₹25 lakh as compensation for the families of the

victims, acknowledging their sacrifices for the party and promising the Congress's continued support. Reflecting on his long-standing relationship with the party, Shivakumar recalled his early days as a Youth Congress leader. He expressed his gratitude to the Nehru-Gandhi family, emphasizing his unwavering loyalty to them. Shivakumar also reiterated that despite the tragic loss of the two young leaders, justice had been served through the courts, which had punished the perpetrators. Shivakumar's statements underscored his strong commitment to the Congress party, ensuring the public that both the party and its leaders remain steadfast in their pursuit of justice and political growth.

Karnataka Govt Approves ₹17,835 Crore in Key Projects

TPN Correspondent/Karnataka, Feb 18

In a move to strengthen the state's economy and boost employment, the Karnataka Government has approved a series of crucial projects totaling ₹17,835 crore. The decision was made by the State High-Level Clearance Committee (SHLCC), which met under the leadership of Chief Minister Siddaramaiah. The approved investments span new and additional projects across various sectors, with an aim to foster economic growth and create thousands of job opportunities. The newly approved investments come at a time when the state is focusing on enhancing its industrial capabilities and attracting top-tier companies. The approval is expected to provide a major boost to the local economy, especially in the manufacturing and tech sectors. According to officials, the projects have the potential to generate up to 27,000 jobs across Karnataka. Among the key projects is a significant investment from Wistron Infocomm Manufacturing India, a subsidiary of the global tech giant Wistron. The company is set to invest ₹2,095 crore, with plans to create 21,723 jobs in the state. This move is part of Wistron's



strategy to expand its manufacturing footprint in India and contribute to the country's growing electronics and technology sector. The approval of these projects highlights Karnataka's commitment to becoming a leading hub for innovation and industrial growth. By attracting large investments, the state aims to further enhance its position in the global manufacturing and technology space. "This is a landmark moment for Kar-

nataka," CM Siddaramaiah said. "The approval of these projects will not only provide a significant economic boost but also offer thousands of employment opportunities for our people. We are committed to creating a conducive environment for investment and growth." The government's efforts to attract substantial investments are expected to transform Karnataka into a key player in the national and international markets, particularly in high-growth industries like technology, electronics, and manufacturing. The approval of these projects is seen as a strategic move to bolster Karnataka's economic development and position it as a global investment destination. With the promise of large-scale job creation and economic transformation, the state's latest push for industrial growth is set to shape Karnataka's future for years to come.

HD Kumaraswamy Criticized for Absence at Investor Conference and Alleged State Neglect

TPN Correspondent Bengaluru, Feb 18

Union Minister H.D. Kumaraswamy has come under heavy criticism for his absence at the high-profile Invest Karnataka 2025 conference, despite receiving an official invitation. The event, which saw a record-breaking inflow of over ₹10 lakh crore in investments, has been hailed as a major success for the state. However, Kumaraswamy's failure to attend has sparked accusations from the Congress party, claiming that the Union Minister has been neglecting Karnataka's interests.



Congress leaders have expressed disappointment with Kumaraswamy's absence, arguing that his prioritiza-

tion of other events, especially those outside the state, reflects a lack of commitment to the state's economic growth and development. The party criticized him for attending events in Baddoor while missing out on the crucial Invest Karnataka 2025 summit. According to Congress, his actions signal indifference towards the state's prosperity, despite being in a position to support and contribute to the state's initiatives. "The absence of HD Kumaraswamy at such a critical event speaks volumes

State Government Hikes Fees for Birth and Death Certificates

Certificate fees raised from ₹5 to ₹50

Fines for delayed applications significantly increased

Citizens struggle with added financial burden

TPN Correspondent | Karnataka, Feb 18

The Karnataka state government has issued an order increasing the fees for birth and death certificates, causing widespread concern among the public. The certificate, which was earlier available for just ₹5, will now cost ₹50, a tenfold increase that has hit the common man hard.

Birth and death certificates are essential for various official purposes. A birth certificate is required for school admissions, obtaining an Aadhaar card, and other legal processes. Similarly, a death certificate is mandatory for transferring property and settling legal matters related to a deceased individual. These certificates are typically issued by local bodies, including Gram Panchayats and the Revenue Department.

As per the new order, applications for birth and death certificates must be submitted within 21 days of the event to receive a free copy. If the application is made after 21 days but within 30 days, a fine of ₹20 will be levied, a steep increase from the previous ₹2 per day fine. For applications made between 30



days and one year after the event, a fine of ₹5 was previously applicable, but now citizens will have to pay ₹50, adding to their financial burden.

The sharp increase in certificate fees has led to confusion and frustration among citizens. In Bengaluru, around 450 to 500 applications for birth and death certificates are received monthly at each zonal office under the jurisdiction of the Municipal Corporation. The additional costs have created significant distress among the public, especially among lower-income groups who find the sudden increase unreasonable.

Citizens have expressed concerns that the government is steadily increasing service

charges across various sectors. The latest fee hike on essential documents has amplified worries about the growing cost of public services. Many argue that such documents should remain accessible and affordable, as they are crucial for official and legal matters.

The unexpected hike in fees for birth and death certificates has triggered widespread dissatisfaction. While the government justifies the increase as a necessary step for administrative costs, the public sees it as an additional financial burden. With the cost of living already high in Bengaluru, this move has added to citizens' worries about affordability and accessibility of essential services.



Over 2.22 crore households linked with Aadhaar

Initiative aims to streamline government schemes and prevent fraud

Village officers to be compensated for Aadhaar seeding efforts

Aadhaar Seeding Initiative Gains Momentum in Karnataka

TPN Correspondent Bengaluru, Feb 18

The Karnataka state government has made significant progress in its Aadhaar seeding initiative, linking over 2,22,83,817 households to Aadhaar. Revenue Minister Krishna Byre Gowda highlighted the crucial role of this project in preventing illegal registrations, ensuring timely assistance to farmers, and delivering government benefits directly to beneficiaries.

To achieve this ambitious target, village administrative officers (VAOs) and village assistants played a pivotal role by actively visiting households and completing the Aadhaar linking process. Many of them went beyond their duties, even spending their own money to facilitate the project. Recognizing their efforts, the government has announced a remuneration of ₹1 per Aadhaar linkage under the Digital India Land Records Modernisation Programme (DILRMP). Under the 'Bhu Suraksha' scheme, ₹4,45,67,634 has been allocated from the District Collector's Child Account for disbursing remuneration to VAOs and village assistants. According to the directive, those who have carried out Aadhaar linking until January 31, 2025, will be eligible for the compensation. For every 1,000 Aadhaar linkages, ₹2,000 will be provided—₹1,000 for the VAO and ₹1,000 for the village assistant. The Aadhaar linkage details will be collected from Tahsildars, ensuring accuracy and preventing discrepancies. The government has directed those payments be processed through the PFMS software to ensure transparency and efficiency. Additionally, officers have been instructed to verify records strictly and ensure that the remuneration is distributed based on the period of service. All necessary bank details of VAOs and village assistants must be collected from the concerned Tahsildars, and the payments must be processed by February 21, 2025, as per the official guidelines. Authorities have been advised to ensure that no delays or errors occur in the distribution process. The Aadhaar seeding project has been instrumental in improving the delivery of government services and reducing fraudulent transactions. The state government's recognition and financial support for field officers highlight the importance of grassroots efforts in executing large-scale digital governance initiatives. With continued focus and efficient execution, this initiative could serve as a model for Aadhaar integration in other states.

Family of Four Found Dead in Mysuru Apartment

TPN Correspondent Karnataka, Feb 18

A family of four was found dead in their adjacent flats at Vishweshwaraiah Layout, Mysuru, on Monday morning, sending shockwaves across the city. The deceased have been identified as Chetan (45), a businessman, his wife Rupali (43), Mother Priyamvada (62), and son Kushal (15). According to police reports, Chetan was found hanging from a ceiling fan in his flat, while Rupali, Kushal, and Priyamvada were found lifeless in a sleeping position. The bodies of Chetan, Rupali, and Kushal were discovered in one flat, whereas Priyamvada was found in the adjacent apartment. Chetan had purchased both flats in 2019, with his mother occupying the second one. Kushal was a Class 10 student. Preliminary investigations suggest that Chetan may have poisoned his family members before taking his own life. Police



Commissioner Seema Latkar, who visited the site, stated that while the exact reason behind the deaths remains unknown, financial distress might have played a role. Chetan owned an agency that recruited workers for Gulf nations. The tragic event came to light after Chetan's brother, who resides abroad, was unable to reach the family by phone. Concerned, he called Rupali's parents, urging them to check on the family. When they

arrived at the house on Monday morning, they found no response and alerted the authorities. Some of Chetan's relatives revealed that he had been facing financial difficulties for a few years, though they never anticipated such a drastic outcome. Neighbors mentioned that they had seen the family returning from a temple visit on Sunday evening, unaware that it would be their last sighting. Deputy Commissioner of Police (DCP) Jhanavi and Inspector Mohit from Vidyanarayana Police Station also visited the crime scene. Authorities are conducting further investigations to determine the exact circumstances leading to the deaths. The Mysuru tragedy has raised concerns about financial stress and its impact on mental health. The police are continuing their probe to uncover more details about the case, while the community mourns the loss of an entire family.

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HD Kumaraswamy Criticized for Absence at Investor Conference and Alleged State Neglect

about his disregard for Karnataka's future," said a senior Congress leader. "It is unfortunate that while the state is drawing substantial investments, our Union Minister was more focused on personal matters rather than state development." Moreover, Congress also highlighted Kumaraswamy's recent statements made during a visit to Andhra Pradesh, where he was accused of focusing more on his own political ambitions and personal prestige rather than tackling the urgent needs of Karnataka. These comments have fueled further discontent within the political circle, particularly among Congress leaders. On the other hand, the Invest Karnataka 2025 conference, organized by the state government, has been hailed as a significant achievement. The conference has attracted investments in a variety of sectors, including technology, manufacturing, and infrastructure, placing



Karnataka at the forefront of industrial development in the country. Despite the criticism, the success of the event underscores the growing confidence in Karnataka's business ecosystem. While Kumaraswamy's absence has been a point of contention, the successful conference serves as a testament to the state government's ability to attract and secure investments. As the political discourse heats up, all eyes remain on the next steps in Karnataka's growth trajectory and the role of its key political figures.

Namma Metro Fare Hike Triggers Public Transport Debate in Bengaluru

Citizens, experts voice concerns over affordability

BMRC's expansion strategy questioned

Metro yet to establish itself as a mass transport system

TPN Correspondent | Karnataka, Feb 18

Bengaluru's public transport sector is in turmoil following Namma Metro's steep fare hike last week. The increased ticket prices have sparked widespread criticism, with commuters and experts debating the affordability and effectiveness of Metro services in the city. Bangalore Metro Rail Corporation Limited (BMRC) officials are facing backlash for their stance on the issue, with their response further fueling public frustration. Despite its growing ridership, the Metro has not yet become Bengaluru's primary mode of transport. Long queues, crowded coaches, and limited connectivity prevent it from being the city's go-to transit option. Many commuters still rely on BMTCL buses, autorickshaws, and taxis due to last-mile connectivity challenges. The city's traffic congestion and deteriorating road conditions continue to make commuting a daily struggle. Urban mobility experts attribute the Metro's shortcomings to a lack of coordination between government agencies. Prof. Ashish Verma from IISc pointed out that BMRC seems to prioritize profit over public service. "Metro is



meant for public welfare, not as a business entity. The government must ensure affordable and seamless transport as a fundamental right," he stated. A senior official from the Urban Development Department acknowledged that the Metro is essential but noted that it is far from becoming Bengaluru's lifeline, akin to the Delhi Metro. Slow-paced construction and affordability remain significant hurdles in its expansion and accessibility. The fare hike has deterred many commuters, with BMRC officials confirming a dip in ridership. Citizens argue that transportation costs in Bengaluru are among the highest in the country, with Metro fares adding to the financial strain. Sakshi K, a college student, highlighted her struggle: "Metro fares are high, and I still need to take an auto to reach college. This fare hike is unreasonable and forces me to cut back on other expenses." Experts emphasize that BMRC's issues stem from an attitude problem and lack of account-

ability. They argue that the corporation must prioritize expansion in high-density corridors instead of focusing on connecting far-off towns like Bidadi and BMRC is working on Phase-3 of the Metro, covering 44.65 km by 2029. However, concerns about slow progress persist. The Metro has only covered 76.95 km in 14 years, despite Bengaluru spanning 857 sq. km. The failure to enhance Metro frequency and capacity has further exacerbated commuter woes. Instead of nine-coach trains running every 90 seconds, only six-coach trains operate at intervals of 4-15 minutes, increasing waiting times and travel burdens. Rajkumar Dugar, founder of Citizens for Citizens, criticized the lack of planning in Metro coverage. "Government agencies work in silos. Though the BMLTA Act was passed in December 2022, it has not been activated yet. BMLTA should be the authority overseeing transport planning in Bengaluru," he said. Land acquisition issues, bureaucratic hurdles, and financial constraints continue to slow down Metro expansion. Multiple agencies, including the Railways, Waqf Board, and Forest Department, hold crucial lands needed for Metro projects, leading to prolonged clearance processes. Delays in contractor execution and financial setbacks further stall progress. Bengaluru's Metro expansion is critical to improving urban mobility, but its affordability and efficiency remain major concerns. While BMRC has ambitious plans, the government must ensure rapid execution and better coordination to make Metro a viable transport solution for all citizens.



Karnataka's State Action Plan for Clean Air Aims to Tackle Pollution in Bengaluru

TPN Correspondent/Bengaluru, Feb 18

In response to escalating air pollution levels in Bengaluru, the state government has unveiled the State Action Plan for Clean Air in Karnataka. This initiative, part of the National Clean Air Programme (NCAP), seeks to reduce emissions across sectors such as industry, transportation, agriculture, construction, and waste management. The plan's primary focus is addressing PM10 emissions, which have become a pressing concern due to heavy vehicular traffic and industrial activities in the city. It aims to control not just vehicular exhaust but also roadside dust and soil particles, both major contributors to poor air quality. Among the key provisions, the plan advocates for the replacement of solid fuels like coal with LPG to curb the harmful effects of burning wood and other solid fuels. The retrofitting of older power generators to meet the emission standards set in 2022 also plays a vital role in reducing pollution levels. The construction and demolition (C&D) sector, a significant source of airborne dust, will face new regulations under the plan. These include measures like vertical coverage of construction sites and the establishment of C&D processing plants. The plan also seeks to raise awareness about using re-processed bricks made from these facilities. To extend these efforts beyond

Bengaluru, the plan introduces air quality monitoring for 17 categories of "highly polluting" industries across Karnataka. With 28,716 industries currently in the state, including 2,652 classified as high-risk, the Karnataka State Pollution Control Board (KSPCB) is pushing industries to install continuous ambient air quality monitoring stations and publish their environmental data online. The plan also highlights the importance of managing electronic waste and other refuse in an environmentally sound manner. Recycling initiatives, composting, bio-methanation, refuse-derived fuel (RDF), and waste-to-energy technologies are some of the recommended practices for effective solid waste management. For long-term success, the document stresses the need for strong governance and financial backing, particularly during the initial phases of implementation. The plan aims to integrate climate-conscious strategies into Karnataka's broader development framework. In a related move, the Karnataka government has allocated Rs 535 crore under the 15th Finance Commission to support air quality improvement initiatives in Bengaluru. A portion of this fund, Rs 280 crore, is still in the tendering phase. The Chief Secretary has urged the Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike (BBMP) to expedite the process and submit the required utilization certificates promptly.

Karnataka Govt Invests ₹1,700 Crore in Bengaluru's White-Topping Roads to Enhance Infrastructure

Dy CM DK Shivakumar announces ₹1,700 crore investment for white-topping 97 roads in Bengaluru.

The project aims to improve road durability, reduce future maintenance, and meet international standards.

Shivakumar assures that future phases will upgrade 1,700 km of roads, focusing on faster, high-quality work.



TPN Correspondent Bengaluru, Feb 18
Karnataka Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar recently revealed the state government's investment of ₹1,700 crore in upgrading roads across Bengaluru through the white-topping process. This initiative aims to elevate the city's road infrastructure to international standards, improving both durability and functionality. Shivakumar, who also oversees the development of Bengaluru, visited several ongoing roadwork sites to evaluate the progress and quality of the work. White-topping is currently underway on 97 roads, covering a 150 km network. We are constructing durable

roads with contributions from all urban agencies. These roads will have dedicated ducts for power and communication cables, preventing future road cutting," Shivakumar stated. The white-topping process involves the use of concrete over asphalt, making the roads more resilient to wear and tear and improving their lifespan. The project, which has an 11-month deadline, is expected to make a significant impact on Bengaluru's road network, reducing maintenance costs and improving the overall driving experience. Shivakumar further emphasized that in the second phase of the project, the government plans to white-top an

additional 450 km of roads, eventually bringing the total to 1,700 km of upgraded roads across the city. The Deputy CM's inspection focused on ensuring proper coordination between various urban agencies involved in the project, as well as overseeing the timely utilization of the allocated budget. This effort is part of a broader strategy to tackle the city's deteriorating infrastructure and to ensure long-term sustainability. Addressing a query about Union Railway Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw's criticism of Bengaluru's tunnel road project, Shivakumar defended the initiative, questioning why tunnels are being constructed in Maharashtra but not in Bengaluru. He asserted that the railway minister had no role in Bengaluru's tunnel projects. Additionally, Shivakumar reassured citizens about the summer water supply, noting that the Cauvery 5th stage project is in place to ensure adequate water distribution. He urged citizens to apply for Cauvery water connections to avoid potential shortages. In the face of worsening traffic congestion, Shivakumar also revealed that the Karnataka government plans to invest ₹1 lakh crore in transport infrastructure to alleviate the city's traffic woes, a significant step toward improving Bengaluru's overall infrastructure and urban development.

Bengaluru's 10.8 km Major Arterial Road Set to Improve Connectivity

TPN Correspondent/Bengaluru, Feb 18
The much-awaited 10.8 km Major Arterial Road (MAR) in Bengaluru, designed to provide seamless connectivity between south and west Bengaluru, is expected to be operational within the next two months. This project promises to drastically reduce travel time for commuters, making it a key infrastructure development for the city. The new 10-lane stretch runs from Challaghatta (near the Namma Metro depot) on Mysuru Road to Kadabagere Cross on Magadi Road. It serves as an alternative route to the tolled NICE corridor, located approximately 2 km away. With this new road, travel time from 1.5 hours will be slashed to just 10 minutes, significantly enhancing the efficiency of transport in the region. Initially budgeted at ₹465 crore, the project's total costs have risen to ₹585 crore due to various challenges



along the way. The Bangalore Development Authority (BDA), which is overseeing the construction, has developed the road through key villages, including Kambipura, K Krishna Sagara, Bheem-anakuppe, Kommaghatta, Kenchanapura, and Sulikere. The road project has been largely successful in terms of land acquisition, with 321.1 acres secured. However, a few final hurdles remain.

One of the main issues is awaiting approval from the forest department for the diversion of 2 acres of land in the Sulikere reserve forest. In addition, a railway underpass is still under construction, and around 300 meters of roadwork near Mysuru Road is pending completion due to ongoing work at the Challaghatta Metro depot. Despite these challenges, a BDA official expressed confidence that the remaining issues are being addressed, and that the road will be ready for use in the next two months. The MAR project was first proposed in 2011, but it faced numerous delays, with tenders only being issued in 2017 and construction beginning in 2018. Although the road's initial completion target was set for August 2019, it is now nearing its final stages, and commuters are eagerly anticipating the much-needed connectivity it will provide.

Devanahalli Farmers Stand Firm Against Land Acquisition for Bengaluru's New Railway Terminal

TPN Correspondent/Bengaluru, Feb 18

In the face of Bengaluru's ever-expanding growth, the government's proposal to build a massive railway terminal in Devanahalli, located on the city's outskirts, has sparked intense opposition from local farmers. The planned terminal is set to address the increasing railway congestion in the city but requires the acquisition of thousands of acres of land from five nearby villages. This has led to strong protests from farmers who fear losing their livelihoods. The government's vision is to establish a major railway terminal with 40 platforms and advanced tracks in Devanahalli taluk, which lies in Bengaluru Rural District. The proposed mega-terminal and suburban railway project aim to alleviate the strain on the current city railway station, which is running out of space due to the city's rapid growth. However, the land required for this ambitious project includes prime agricultural lands in villages such as Avati, where local farmers are vehemently opposing the acquisition. At a recent meeting held by the villagers of Avati and surrounding areas, they expressed their unwavering stance against the land acquisition. Farmers have stated that they would rather fight than give up their land, emphasizing the



significance of their agricultural land as a source of livelihood. The protest is not just about the land; it's a fight for their future. Avati, a village with agricultural land adjacent to the national highway, holds historical significance as the birthplace of Kempegowda, the founder of Bengaluru. The government's plan to take over this land for the railway terminal has only intensified the farmers' opposition. Many of them are already preparing for a fierce struggle, as they are not willing to part with their land, despite the allure of development. The government con-

ducted a survey earlier to assess the land needed for the terminal and suburban railway lines. Despite the survey being completed, the farmers remain resolute. They have vowed to resist any attempts at land acquisition, with many planning to escalate their protests if authorities move forward with the process. As the situation develops, it remains to be seen whether the farmers' resistance will lead to a significant delay or revision of the government's project. The tension between rural landowners and urban expansion continues to grow in the region.

Man Arrested for Duping KAS Officer with Fake Job Offer Linked to Chief Minister's Office

TPN Correspondent Bengaluru, Feb 18

In a shocking case of fraud, a 45-year-old man, Raghavendra, has been arrested for allegedly duping a Karnataka Administrative Service (KAS) officer with a fake promise of a prime posting in Bengaluru. The accused, a former personal assistant to several legislators, reportedly claimed to have close ties with the Chief Minister's Office (CMO) and forged official documents to make his scam appear credible. According to police reports, Raghavendra approached the KAS officer and convinced him that he could secure a prestigious posting in Bengaluru. The officer, believing Raghavendra's claims, paid ₹50,000 as an advance to finalize the alleged appointment. To further support his fraudulent offer, Raghavendra provided a forged document that resembled an official note from the CMO, which included instructions for the Department of Personnel and Administrative Reforms (DPAR) secretary to approve the posting. However, the DPAR officials grew suspicious upon reviewing the document and requested verification from the CMO. Upon closer inspection, the document was found to be a forgery, with the signature of the Chief Minister's secretary falsely applied. This revelation led to the exposure of the scam. Following confirmation of his involvement, police officers arrested Raghavendra from Ranebennur. He has been charged under Section 319 of the Indian Penal Code for cheating



by personation and has been remanded to judicial custody for 14 days after being produced before the ACMM court. Authorities revealed that Raghavendra had a history of misconduct, having previously worked in Vidhana Soudha as a personal assistant to multiple legislators before his dismissal for inappropriate behavior. His arrest has drawn attention to the growing concerns of fraud within official circles, highlighting the need for vigilance in government appointments. The case is under further investigation as authorities work to uncover any additional individuals involved in the scam.

CM Siddaramaiah undisputed' leader, his name shouldn't be misused: D K Shivakumar

D.K. Shivakumar calls Siddaramaiah "our undisputed leader" while criticizing his close aides for misusing his name.

The praise follows reports of Shivakumar proposing a Cabinet reshuffle to drop "non-performing" ministers, including Siddaramaiah's confidants.

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Cooperation Minister KN Rajanna Hits Back at DCM DK Shivakumar Amid Growing Tensions in Karnataka

Cooperation Minister KN Rajanna Khadak responds to Deputy CM DK Shivakumar's comment on misuse of names within the party.

Rajanna denies accusations of misusing CM Siddaramaiah's name, emphasizing internal differences are not personal.

TPN Correspondent/Karnataka, Feb 18
The political dynamics within Karnataka's ruling Congress party took a dramatic turn on Sunday, as Deputy Chief Minister D.K. Shivakumar hailed Chief Minister Siddaramaiah as "our undisputed leader." However, Shivakumar also subtly criticized the CM's close aides for allegedly "misusing" his name for personal or political gain. Shivakumar's comments were likely in response to growing statements from Siddaramaiah's camp, emphasizing his importance to the party's future. Leaders and ministers loyal to Siddaramaiah have recently pitched the idea that the CM is "indispensable" if the Congress hopes to retain power in Karnataka, especially with upcoming elections at various levels. Shivakumar, the Karnataka Congress president, framed his response while addressing the media at the KPCC office after welcoming back

party leaders L.R. Shivaram Gowda and Brijesh Kalappa. He expressed clear support for Siddaramaiah, stating, "Siddaramaiah is our undisputed leader, no doubt. We need him for all elections, including panchayat, taluk level polls, MLA, and MLC elections." However, he added, "There is no need to take his name every day and misuse it. It's unnecessary, and such things should not become fodder for the media." This response came in the wake of reports that Shivakumar had proposed a Cabinet reshuffle to the Congress High Command, suggesting the removal of "non-performing" ministers from the state government. Some of these ministers are close allies of Siddaramaiah, including Cooperation Minister K.N. Rajanna, Social Welfare Minister H.C. Mahadevappa, Housing Minister B.Z. Zameer Ahmed Khan, and Urban Development Minister B.S. Suresha. Shivakumar's reshuffle proposal appeared to

be part of a larger push to strengthen the state government and address any inefficiencies before upcoming elections. The call for a reshuffle, however, has led to internal friction, with some loyalists of Siddaramaiah pushing for a change in leadership at the Karnataka Pradesh Congress Committee (KPCC) itself, citing concerns about Shivakumar holding dual positions. When asked about the confusing statements from different factions, Shivakumar downplayed the tensions, stating, "There is no confusion. The Congress observes everything daily." However, his message may have been clearer in the streets, where his supporters cheered him on, chanting slogans calling him "the next chief minister" during his rounds in Bengaluru. As the party grapples with power struggles and reshuffle proposals, the coming weeks could be pivotal in determining the future leadership dynamics in Karnataka.

TPN Correspondent Karnataka, Feb 18
The rift within Karnataka's ruling Congress party has deepened further as Cooperation Minister KN Rajanna Khadak hit back at Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar's recent comments about the misuse of Chief Minister Siddaramaiah's name. In a sharp response, Rajanna, speaking in Bengaluru, denied allegations that his camp was misusing anyone's name. Referring to Shivakumar's earlier remarks about not misusing the AICC name, Rajanna claimed that it was the Deputy CM who was misusing the name of the All India Congress Committee (AICC) in an attempt to undermine his stance. "We have not misused anyone's name, nor have we misused the AICC name. It is a fact that the AICC said everything, and not an accusation," he asserted. Rajanna, a long-time Congress leader with over five decades of experience, further clarified that his remarks were not meant to be negative or personal. "I do not need lessons on discipline from anyone," he said, adding that while there may be differences of opinion within the party, it was not a personal conflict. He highlighted his long-standing friendship with Shivakumar, jokingly adding that the two might take different routes to the Vidhana Soudha but their differences were purely ideological. "I will invite him to my house for dinner one day," he quipped, emphasizing that their relationship remained cordial despite the political rift. The ongoing tensions between Rajanna and Shivakumar have been fueled by speculation surrounding the leadership of the state Congress, with some leaders calling for changes at the top. Recently, Shivakumar had publicly acknowledged Siddaramaiah as "our undisputed leader," reinforcing his critical role in the party's success. However, Rajanna has expressed concern about unilateral decisions, especially regarding leadership changes, urging that the opinions of all party members should be considered before any such move is made.

Rajanna's statements come amid discussions about the potential change in leadership, with supporting ministers reiterating that Siddaramaiah, as a two-time Chief Minister, should remain at the helm. "Siddaramaiah is the full-time CM, and he will continue as the Chief Minister," Rajanna reiterated, distancing himself from any notion that his loyalty to Siddaramaiah was being questioned. This verbal exchange signals a continued power struggle within Karnataka Congress as both sides seek to assert their influence within the party.

B.Y. Vijayendra Confident of Continuing as BJP State President, Decision Expected Soon

TPN Correspondent/ Karnataka, Feb 18
BJP MLA B.Y. Vijayendra has expressed confidence that he will continue as the party's Karnataka state president, with the high command expected to finalize its decision soon. There is growing speculation that the BJP leadership may announce the decision on February 18 or 22. Addressing reporters, Vijayendra asserted that the matter of appointing the party's state president would be resolved after the selection of district presidents. He noted that the appointment process is currently underway in Delhi and that central leaders would soon visit Karnataka to consult with MLAs before reaching a final decision. The uncertainty surrounding Vijayendra's position has been a topic of discussion in BJP circles. The leadership is keen on strengthening the party's organizational structure in Karnataka, especially with an eye on upcoming elections. Vijayendra, who is the son of former Chief Minister B.S. Yediyurappa, has been a key figure in the party's state unit. His leadership is seen as crucial in maintaining the BJP's presence in Karnataka and countering the ruling Congress government. When asked about

the disciplinary notice issued to BJP MLA Basanagouda Patil Yatnal by the party's central disciplinary committee, Vijayendra refused to comment in detail. He said, "The central disciplinary committee has given a notice to Yatnal, and a 72-hour deadline was set for his response. I will not discuss what has happened or is happening." Yatnal, has often been at odds with the party leadership, leading to disciplinary actions in the past. The BJP high command's handling of this issue could influence internal party dynamics in Karnataka. Meanwhile, Vijayendra also responded to recent remarks made by Karnataka's Cooperation Minister K.N. Rajanna. Rajanna had reportedly stated that Vijayendra lacked the strength to issue a notice to Yatnal, implying that the BJP state president's authority was limited. Hitting back at Rajanna, Vijayendra questioned his involvement in BJP's internal matters. "Is Rajanna from our party? He belongs to Congress," he retorted, dismissing the minister's comments. With BJP central leadership closely monitoring developments in Karnataka, the decision on the state president post is expected to be a significant one.

Leadership Change in Karnataka Congress: CM Siddaramaiah Says Decision Lies with High Command

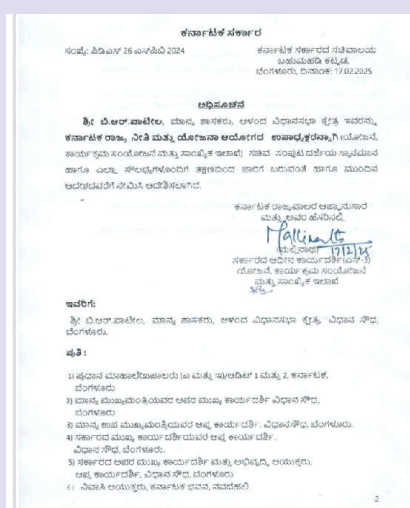
TPN Correspondent Karnataka, Feb 18
Amid mounting speculation regarding a potential leadership change in Karnataka, Chief Minister Siddaramaiah made it clear on Monday that the decision rests with the Congress high command. Speaking to reporters, Siddaramaiah responded to questions about leadership talks by stating, "It is for the high command to decide." The issue of a leadership change within the Karnataka Congress has been a hot topic, particularly regarding a "rotational chief minister" or "power-sharing" arrangement. This speculation stems from discussions within the ruling party about the possibility of a leadership transition later in the year. Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar, who is also the state Congress president, has long harbored aspirations of becoming the Chief Minister. His ambition has been no secret, and a section of party leaders and supporters has been actively promoting him as a potential future CM. This has led to ongoing debates, particularly following the May 2023 Assembly election results, when the rivalry between Shivakumar and Siddaramaiah for the top post was fierce. Ultimately, a compromise was reached where Shivakumar was appointed as Deputy Chief Minister,

but reports about a "rotational chief minister" arrangement surfaced at the time. The supposed agreement suggested that Shivakumar would take over as CM after two-and-a-half years, though these claims have yet to be officially confirmed by the Congress leadership. While Shivakumar's camp continues to rally for his ascension to the top post, a faction of ministers, particularly those close to Siddaramaiah, are advocating for the current Chief Minister to complete his full term. They argue that Siddaramaiah's leadership is crucial for the party's success in the upcoming elections and for retaining power in the state. These internal divisions persist despite Congress President Mallikarjun Kharge's warning last month for party members to "shut up" and focus on governance, rather than engaging in public debates about leadership changes. Furthermore, there have been discussions within the party, particularly among ministers from the SC/ST communities, who are pushing for the next CM to come from a Dalit or AHINDA (a Kannada acronym for minorities, backward classes, and Dalits) background, should Siddaramaiah step down. These efforts to revive the Dalit leadership demand highlight the continued tensions over the future of Karnataka Congress leadership.

B.R. Patil's New Appointment Stirs Curiosity Amid Power Struggles in Karnataka Congress

B.R. Patil, Congress MLA from Aland, has been appointed as Vice Chairman of the State Policy and Planning Commission with cabinet-level status.
His previous resignation from the post of CM's political advisor has sparked speculation regarding the reasons behind his shifting roles.

TPN Correspondent | Karnataka, Feb 18
The political landscape of Karnataka Congress has seen another twist, as B.R. Patil, MLA from Aland constituency in Kalaburagi district, has been appointed as the Vice Chairman of the State Policy and Planning Commission. The appointment, which includes cabinet-level status and full privileges, has raised questions about his future political role after he resigned from the position of political advisor to Chief Minister Sid-



daramaiah. Patil's resignation from the post of political advisor, which he held shortly after the Congress government took power, has left many wondering about his motivations. The appointment to the new post is

seen as a response to the dissatisfaction among senior Congress leaders regarding their lack of ministerial berths. Patil, along with other senior MLAs such as Basavaraj Rayareddy and RV Deshpande, had expressed

frustration over being sidelined in the government. In a bid to address these grievances, Chief Minister Siddaramaiah offered them cabinet status positions—Rayareddy was made the Chief Minister's Economic Advisor, and Deshpande was appointed as the Chairman of the Administrative Reforms Commission. However, Patil's new role as Vice Chairman of the State Policy and Planning Commission has sparked curiosity, particularly given his resignation from a role that had limited influence. The post of political advisor to the Chief Minister was largely ceremonial, offering little real power or decision-making authority. Sources close to Patil have speculated that his resignation was driven by dissatisfaction with the limited scope of his previous role and his desire for more

tangible influence in government affairs. Patil had also been vocal about his demands for more funds for his Aland constituency. It was rumored that he felt slighted by the lack of a special package for the region in the state's last budget, which could have contributed to his decision to resign. The new appointment could be seen as an attempt to regain a significant position, especially as he had hoped for a ministerial berth that would bring more substantial financial resources to his constituency. While the full implications of this shift in Patil's political trajectory remain to be seen, it is clear that the internal dynamics of Karnataka Congress continue to evolve, with senior leaders maneuvering to solidify their power and influence within the state government.



A worker sitting on a 500 feet high chimney: Do you know what the demand is?

TPN Correspondent/Karnataka, Feb 18

A worker who was dismissed from his job at the Pandavapura Cooperative Sugar Factory (PSSK) in Mandya staged a dramatic protest by climbing the factory's 500-foot-high chimney and refusing to come down for 15 hours. The worker, identified as Ramakrishna, demanded reinstatement and only agreed to descend after the management assured him that a decision would be taken by Wednesday. The PSSK sugar factory, once a prestigious establishment, was handed over to a private company five years ago after the government cited financial losses. At the time of the lease agreement, the factory's management assured workers that there would be no layoffs. However, over time, the company, Nirani Sugars, began terminating employees, violating the original agreement. Ramakrishna, one of the dismissed employees, took a desperate stand by climbing the towering chimney in the early hours of the morning, determined to protest against the management's decision.

Authorities, including police officials and factory representatives, attempted to persuade Ramakrishna to come down for hours. Despite their efforts, he refused, insisting that he would only descend if given a written order of reinstatement. His protest created panic among workers



and local residents, fearing for his safety. Eventually, after prolonged negotiations, the management board promised to review the decision by Wednesday, following which Ramakrishna agreed to come down.

This protest has highlighted the growing frustration among former employees of PSSK. Nirani Sugars, which took over the factory on a 40-year lease, initially agreed to continue employing the existing workers or provide them with a voluntary retirement scheme (VRS). However, in recent years, the company has gradually terminated employees, leaving many without a

livelihood. The sudden layoffs have affected 45 long-term employees, pushing their families into financial distress.

Ramakrishna's protest underscores the ongoing struggles of workers who were promised job security but were later dismissed. The issue has now drawn attention to the working conditions under Nirani Sugars and whether the company has adhered to its contractual commitments. With the management set to make a decision on Ramakrishna's demand by Wednesday, other affected workers are closely watching the developments, hoping for justice and fair treatment.

Mega alliance with AIADMK for 2026 Tamil Nadu assembly elections: Palaniswami

TPN Correspondent/Chennai, Feb 18

AIADMK general secretary Edappadi K. Palaniswami has announced that his party will lead the largest electoral alliance in the 2026 Tamil Nadu Assembly elections, positioning itself as the strongest contender against the ruling DMK. Speaking at a Yuva Mochra event in Vellore district, Palaniswami emphasized that electoral alliances and party ideology are separate matters, asserting that alliances are necessary to prevent vote division and secure a decisive victory. His statement comes amid growing speculation about AIADMK's coalition-building efforts, especially after actor-turned-politician Thalapathy Vijay's TVK party ruled out any possibility of aligning with AIADMK. However, Palaniswami remains confident that his party will form a broad coalition to challenge the DMK government. The AIADMK leader also launched a sharp critique of Chief Minister M.K. Stalin and his administration, particularly regarding law and order issues. Palaniswami highlighted rising crimes against women and children in Tamil Nadu, questioning Stalin's leadership. Mocking the Chief Minister's claim that the youth of the state fondly refer to him as "Appa" (father), he asked whether Stalin could hear the cries of women and children who have been victims of sexual harassment and abuse. Accusing the DMK of being an opportunistic party, he alleged that it frequently alters its stance to maintain its grip on power, often at the cost of compromising its ideological commitments. He reaffirmed AIADMK's commitment to Tamil Nadu's long-standing bilingual policy, which emphasizes Tamil and English, and made it clear that his party would not deviate from this stance. With these statements, Palaniswami has set the stage for an intense political battle leading up to the 2026 elections.



Over 7,000 Children Rescued from Child Labour in Andhra Pradesh Since 2020

TPN Correspondent/ Andhra Pradesh, Feb 18

As many as 7,069 children have been rescued from child labour in Andhra Pradesh between 2020 and 2024, according to data from the Women and Child Welfare Department. The year 2024 saw the highest number of rescues in recent years, with 2,245 children saved from exploitative labour conditions.

The rescue numbers have been steadily rising over the years, reflecting both the persistent issue of child labour and increased enforcement efforts. In 2020, 671 children were rescued, followed by 1,028 in 2021. The trend continued upward with 1,229 children rescued in 2022 and a significant jump to 1,895 in 2023. A district-wise breakdown of 2024 data shows that Chittoor recorded the highest number of child labour rescues with 258 children, followed by Nellore (237), Vizianagaram (226), Srikakulam (214), and NTR (200). These figures highlight the concentrated prevalence of child labour in certain regions, while also showcasing proactive interventions by local authorities. However, some districts reported alarmingly low or zero rescues, raising concerns about underreporting. Ambedkar Konaseema reported zero rescues, while Anakapalli (1), Alluri Sitaram Raju (6), and Parvathipuram (9) had minimal cases. Experts suggest that either child labour is less prevalent in these areas or enforcement efforts need to be strengthened.

The Child Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Act of 1986, amended in 2016, strictly bans the employment of children be-

low 14 years in any occupation and prohibits adolescents (14-18 years) from hazardous work. Violators face stringent penalties, including fines and imprisonment. Additionally, authorities focus on rehabilitation, ensuring rescued children receive education and proper care.

Among the 2,246 children rescued in 2024, 677 were placed in rehabilitation programs, while 1,569 were reunited with their families. Women and Child Welfare Department Director G. Venugopal Reddy emphasized that family reintegration remains the top priority, as it provides a nurturing environment for rescued children. However, in cases where children are orphans or their parents are unable to care for them, they are placed in child care institutions under the Child Welfare Committee's (CWC) guidance. To bridge the educational gap for rescued children, the department, in collaboration with the Education Department, offers bridge courses and counseling sessions. "When rescued children are sent to rehabilitation centres, we first provide counseling. Then, with support from the Education Department, we help them integrate into mainstream schooling," Reddy explained. Pragada Vasu, secretary of the Association for Urban and Tribal Development (AUTD) in Visakhapatnam, noted that some rescued children return to work within months due to their families' economic dependence on their earnings. Additionally, some children end up using their wages to buy addictive substances, such as white-

Growing Discontent Among Telangana Congress Leaders Over Cabinet Expansion Delay

TPN Correspondent Telangana, Feb 18

With Telangana's Cabinet expansion still pending and a full-fledged Pradesh Congress Committee (PCC) yet to be formed, frustration is mounting among senior Congress leaders. The delay has sparked unease, with some legislators questioning the high command's priorities and decision-making process.

Recently, a group of Congress MLAs held a closed-door meeting to discuss political developments and the government's functioning. This led to heightened tensions within the party, prompting the leadership to convene a Congress Legislative Party (CLP) meeting to reassure the MLAs. Party leaders urged them to remain patient, assuring that the high command would address their concerns soon. Chief Minister A. Revanth Reddy, along

with key ministers and PCC president Mahesh Kumar Goud, visited Delhi to discuss the matter with the Congress leadership. However, even after 15 days, no concrete decision has been made, leaving many legislators frustrated. The chief minister has repeatedly stated that the Cabinet expansion is beyond his control and that the high command will decide. This stance has not eased the concerns of aspirants eyeing ministerial positions. Adding to the uncertainty, the PCC president has also echoed similar sentiments, raising doubts about whether sufficient pressure is being exerted on the high command to expedite the process. Legislators are questioning why the party leadership has not prioritized Cabinet expansion or completed the PCC appointments. Some senior leaders warn that if

this delay continues for months, the party could face unforeseen consequences. Aspirants for Cabinet positions have reportedly lobbied at both the state and national levels, but their efforts have so far yielded no results. Though the state is currently under certain election-related codes, these do not legally prevent Cabinet expansion. Meanwhile, with local body elections expected to take another two months due to discussions on the caste census bill, MLAs are demanding an immediate expansion. Another factor fueling speculation is the upcoming MLC vacancy, with reports suggesting that the leadership plans to accommodate a minority leader as a minister. There is also talk of a potential Cabinet reshuffle, adding further uncertainty to the political scenario.

Bihar Railway Official Stunned as Women Claim Modi Allowed Free Travel to Prayagraj

TPN Correspondent/Patna, Feb 18

A group of rural women at Buxar railway station in Bihar claimed that Prime Minister Narendra Modi had allowed them to travel without tickets to Prayagraj for the Maha Kumbh. When Danapur Divisional Railway Manager (DRM) Jayant Kumar questioned them about their tickets, they confidently stated that they had received permission from the Prime Minister himself. The DRM was left momentarily stunned before clarifying that no such exemption had been granted by any authority and that traveling without a ticket would be considered a legal violation. This incident comes amid an unprecedented rush at the Maha Kumbh, which has continued far beyond the expected timelines. Despite preparations for a large footfall, authorities have been grappling with the overwhelming number of pilgrims, leading to logistical challenges at railway stations. The Maha Kumbh, which officially concludes on February 26, has already witnessed a record turnout of over 50 crore devotees seeking a holy dip in the sacred confluence of the Ganga, Yamuna, and Saraswati rivers. A senior railway official in Bihar was left in shock when a group of women at Buxar railway station claimed that Prime Minister Narendra Modi had allowed them to travel to Prayagraj without purchasing tickets. The unusual conversation, captured on video, has since gone viral on social media. The incident occurred on Sunday when Danapur Divisional Rail-



way Manager (DRM) Jayant Kumar was inspecting the station amid an overwhelming rush of pilgrims heading for the Maha Kumbh. This unexpected surge in footfall has been linked to overcrowding at railway stations, with a tragic stampede in New Delhi on Saturday night resulting in the deaths of at least 18 people. While conducting his inspection, the DRM noticed a group of women of varying ages standing near the railway tracks. Curious about their purpose, he inquired about their plans. The women responded that they were waiting to board a train to Prayagraj. When asked if they had tickets, they admitted they did not. Puzzled, the official asked who had informed them they could travel without tickets, to which they confidently replied, "Narendra Modi told us so." Their unexpected response momentarily left the DRM speechless, while bystanders chuckled at the exchange. Regaining his composure, the DRM explained to the women that they were mistaken and that nei-

ther the Prime Minister nor any other authority had permitted such a policy. He warned them that traveling without a valid ticket would be a legal violation. Speaking to reporters later, DRM Jayant Kumar acknowledged that special arrangements had been made to handle the Maha Kumbh rush, similar to those put in place during major festivals. However, he noted that this year's footfall remained unusually high even when numbers were expected to decline. Despite the challenges, he assured that railway authorities were prepared to manage the continuing surge. The Maha Kumbh, which draws millions of devotees for a holy dip at the confluence of the Ganga, Yamuna, and the mythical Saraswati rivers, will officially conclude on February 26, coinciding with Maha Shivratri. According to official estimates, over 50 crore pilgrims have already participated in the sacred event, making it one of the largest religious gatherings in history.



President's Rule in Manipur: A Political Move, Not a Solution to the Crisis



The imposition of President's Rule in Manipur by the Union Government has sparked debate over its true motivations. While some see it as a necessary step to restore peace and constitutional order, others view it as a political maneuver aimed at protecting the BJP's interests, rather than addressing the root causes of the ongoing crisis. The violence in Manipur, which erupted on May 3, 2023, has led to significant loss of lives and property. Despite the deployment of over 60,000 central troops and law enforcement agencies, the situation has remained volatile. Yet, the Prime Minister has downplayed the severity of the violence, even claiming that the situation is "normal," and the state is functioning as usual. This contrasts sharply with the experiences on the

ground, where residents continue to endure suffering and uncertainty. BJP's internal divisions have also played a role in this political crisis. Chief Minister N Biren Singh, once seen as a loyal ally to the Union government, faced mounting criticism from his party members due to his handling of the lawlessness in the state. While the Union government claimed to work closely with Singh, it became apparent that Delhi was taking control of key decisions, including the appointment of the Chief Secretary and Director General of Police, without consulting the state leadership. Singh himself admitted that central agencies were often bypassing his authority, indicating a breakdown in governance at the state level.

Amid growing resentment, the BJP leadership in Delhi pushed for Singh's resignation, fearing a possible loss in the upcoming elections if the current situation continued. However, the party could not agree on a suitable replacement, leading to the imposition of President's Rule. Critics argue that this move is an attempt to divert attention from the BJP's failures in handling the crisis and the suffering of the people of Manipur. For true accountability and a resolution to the crisis, a Joint Parliamentary Committee should be formed to thoroughly examine the multiple dimensions of the Manipur tragedy. Only through this process, rather than the political expediency of President's Rule, can justice be delivered to the people of Manipur.

Qatar Emir's India Visit: A Strategic Imperative Beyond Diplomatic Pleasantries



The state visit of Qatar's Emir, Tamim Bin Hamad Al-Thani, to India, beginning February 17, 2025, marks a significant diplomatic moment, but beyond the formalities and pleasantries, it highlights deeper strategic interests that shape this important bilateral relationship. With India's increasing geopolitical influence in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) region, the relationship with Qatar is becoming more pivotal, not just in terms of energy but also regional stability and economic cooperation. India-Qatar ties are underpinned by deep historical and economic roots. A significant part of Qatar's workforce—around 830,000—comprises Indians, playing a vital role in driving the country's economy. These expatriates contribute across various sectors, from construction and healthcare to technology, making them indispensable to Qatar's growth. Their expertise, along with their substantial remittances—approximately \$4.143 billion annually—shows the significance of this demographic to both countries. In addition to people-to-people ties, Qatar is a reliable supplier of Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG) to India. This energy partnership has been central to the relationship, providing India with affordable and stable energy. However, with India diversifying its energy sources, especially increasing imports from the United States, questions arise about Qatar's future role in India's energy landscape. While the

country remains an important partner, India must navigate this evolving energy dynamic cautiously, mindful of not taking Qatar's generosity for granted. Furthermore, India's engagement with Qatar goes beyond trade and energy. The resolution of the diplomatic crisis involving eight former Indian Navy officials, sentenced to death in Qatar, demonstrated India's strategic leverage. Prime Minister Modi's personal intervention underscored the importance of high-level diplomatic relations with Qatar, which also signed long-term LNG deals with India despite the European gas scramble. As India strengthens its ties with the broader GCC region, Qatar's strategic importance remains paramount. With the focus shifting to emerging sectors like renewable energy, fintech, and infrastructure, India's relationship with Qatar will likely continue to evolve beyond traditional energy partnerships. However, challenges such as regional instability, labor rights issues, and tensions in the Israel-Hamas conflict require ongoing, nuanced dialogue. In conclusion, India-Qatar relations are increasingly complex, intertwined with energy security, regional geopolitics, and economic collaboration. As India's influence in the Gulf grows, it must continue to nurture this critical relationship with Qatar, ensuring mutual benefits while addressing regional and global challenges.

New Delhi Station Stampede Highlights Urgent Need for Railway Modernization

On February 15, 2025, a tragic stampede at New Delhi Railway Station claimed the lives of at least 18 people and injured many others. This incident has once again brought attention to the perennial problem of overcrowding at the station, which, despite being the busiest in India, continues to operate at outdated capacity levels. While the standard rituals—condolences from the government, compensation for the victims, and the announcement of a high-level inquiry—have been swiftly completed, the underlying issue remains unaddressed: the lack of modern infrastructure at one of the most critical transport hubs in the country.

The Growing Traffic Surge and Its Risks

New Delhi station is not just the busiest station in India; it generates the highest passenger revenue, accounting for over Rs 3,337 crore in 2023-24. However, the station's infrastructure, which opened in 1955, has not been upgraded to handle the ever-growing number of passengers. Officially, the station's capacity reached its limit by 2000, with daily traffic hovering around 500,000 passengers. This is in stark contrast to the current numbers, where the station regularly handles between 7 to 8 lakh passengers during peak seasons, causing congestion that can turn hazardous in a heartbeat.

Despite the seasonal surge in passenger traffic being predictable, Indian Railways (IR) continues to rely on rudimentary measures to manage this influx. As the recent stampede tragically demonstrated, the lack of adequate infrastructure to handle surges leaves passengers vulnerable, and this vulnerability will only increase as the number of rail users continues to rise.

A Long Delayed Modernization Plan

The need for New Delhi station's modernization has been apparent for over two decades. The first attempt to modernize the station was conceived in the early 2000s, around the same time as the modernization of Delhi's international airport. In 2007, a design was finalized by the renowned architecture firm Farrells, with the plan to increase station capacity, improve amenities, and create a new urban space above the railway tracks. Despite this ambitious plan, it never came to fruition due to delays, opposition from local authorities, and failed tenders. The first failed attempt came in 2008, with confusion surrounding tender clauses, followed by another cancellation in 2009 due to bureaucratic



hurdles. A third attempt in 2022 saw a scaled-back version of the original plan, but that, too, failed when the winning bidder, L&T, quoted over Rs 8,000 crore, exceeding the government's estimate of Rs 5,000 crore.

In 2023, Indian Railways reduced the scope of work further and attempted to launch the project on a smaller scale, yet the tender was withdrawn in early 2024. The Rail Land Development Authority (RLDA) has since fragmented the project into smaller tenders in hopes of attracting more bidders, but as of now, the modernization effort remains stalled.

Effective Measures to Prevent Future Accidents

While the tragic stampede at New Delhi Station highlights the urgency of modernization, it is also a reminder that such incidents can be prevented with the right measures. Here are some strategies that can be adopted to manage the surge in passenger traffic:

- **Optimizing Platform Capacity:** This involves increasing the number of platforms and utilizing space more efficiently to accommodate more trains and passengers.

- **Technology-Based Solutions:** Implementing smart ticketing systems, AI-based crowd management tools, and real-time passenger flow tracking can help manage congestion.
- **Improved Signage and Barriers:** Clear and visible signage to direct passenger movement can reduce chaos, especially during peak hours. Barriers can be used to separate different streams of passenger flow.
- **Adequate Staffing:** Adequate staff presence at critical locations, including ticket counters, platforms, and gates, is essential for maintaining order and directing passengers effectively.
- **Coordination with Train Schedules:** Well-coordinated train schedules during peak times can reduce overcrowding on platforms and in trains.
- **Crowd Control Measures:** Barriers, ropes, and entry/exit points should be designed to channel passengers in a way that prevents overcrowding, especially at entry and exit points.
- **Emergency Preparedness:** Stations should have well-established emergency re-

sponse protocols, with staff trained to handle crises efficiently.

- **Infrastructure Upgrades:** Finally, upgrading station infrastructure to handle the increased traffic and to provide adequate facilities for passengers is key to preventing such accidents.

New Delhi Railway Station stands as a symbol of India's growth in terms of rail passenger traffic, but its outdated infrastructure is a stark reminder of how critical modernization efforts can be in preventing avoidable tragedies. As the busiest station in the country, it is inconceivable that New Delhi Railway Station is still grappling with capacity issues, especially when its modernization plan has been on the table for over 20 years. The failure of successive efforts to upgrade the station is a reflection of the inefficiencies within Indian Railways, and the recent stampede should serve as a wake-up call for both the government and the railway authorities. If such accidents are to be avoided in the future, New Delhi Station's modernization needs to move beyond planning stages into actionable, urgent steps—before another tragedy strikes.

India Can Turn "Fast Fashion" Waste Into Opportunity: PM Modi At Bharat Tex 2025

- Modi urges textile industry to upcycle waste.
- India's recycling market may hit \$400M.
- Bharat Tex 2025 hosts 120+ countries.



TPN Correspondent | Delhi

Prime Minister Narendra Modi addressed the gathering at Bharat Tex 2025 on Sunday evening, emphasizing the need for India's textile industry to turn the challenge of "fast fashion waste" into an opportunity. He highlighted the importance of maximizing resource use and minimizing waste generation in the sector. The Prime Minister pointed out that millions of garments are discarded each month due to changing fashion trends, creating significant environmental concerns. He also noted that by 2030, fashion waste could reach 148 million tons, with less than a quarter currently being recycled.

PM Modi suggested that India's rich traditional skills in textile

recycling and upcycling could address this issue. He cited examples from Maharashtra, where old fabrics are transformed into mats, rugs, and quilts. The Prime Minister encouraged innovation in these practices, which could help tap into global market opportunities. He announced that the Textile Ministry had signed a MoU with the Standing Conference of Public Enterprises and e-Marketplace to promote upcycling, with several up-cyclers already registered.

PM Modi projected that India's textile recycling market could grow to USD 400 million in the next few years, while the global recycled textile market is expected to reach USD 7.5 billion. He expressed confidence that India could capture a larger share of this market.

Reflecting on India's prosperous past, where the textile industry played a crucial role, the Prime Minister reiterated that as the country strives towards becoming a Viksit Bharat, the textile sector would again be pivotal. He lauded Bharat Tex as a strong platform for global engagement, collaboration, and partnership, with over 120 countries participating in the event.

He also urged the banking sector to support textile entrepreneurs, fostering business growth and job creation. Bharat Tex 2025, held at Bharat Mandapam from February 14-17, is one of the largest events of its kind, showcasing the entire textile ecosystem and providing a platform for innovation and collaboration.

Gyanesh Kumar Likely to Become India's Next Chief Election Commissioner

TPN Correspondent | Delhi

Gyanesh Kumar, who was appointed as an Election Commissioner in March of last year, is set to replace Rajiv Kumar as the Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) of India, sources told NDTV on Monday evening. If confirmed, Mr. Kumar will oversee the conduct of several crucial elections, including the Bihar Assembly election later this year, as well as elections in Bengal, Assam, and Tamil Nadu next year.



relationship with Home Minister Amit Shah.

Mr. Kumar, a 1988-batch IAS officer from the Kerala cadre, is currently the senior-most commissioner on the three-member Election Commission panel, which was previously led by Rajiv Kumar. The other commissioner on the panel is Sukhbir Singh Sandhu from the Uttarakhand cadre. However, Mr. Kumar's appointment has yet to be formally ratified.

The Congress party has raised objections to the swift move to appoint a new CEC, pointing out that the Supreme Court is set to hear a challenge to the 2023 law that governs the selection process. Critics of the law argue that it allows the ruling BJP to have control over the CEC appointment, with the process being decided by a three-member panel consisting of the Prime Minister, the Home Minister, and the Leader of the Opposition.

Mr. Kumar, 61, has held several key positions in the Indian civil services. Prior to his appointment as Election Commissioner, he was part of the Union Home Ministry, where he played a crucial role in drafting the bill that scrapped Article 370 in Jammu and Kashmir in 2019. He was also responsible for handling key documents related to the Supreme Court case on the Ram Temple in Ayodhya. Additionally, he is known to have a close rela-

Before retiring in January last year, Mr. Kumar served as the Secretary of the Ministry of Cooperation, a position also overseen by Amit Shah. He has previously held roles in the Ministry of Parliamentary Affairs and the Defence Ministry during the Congress-led UPA government. Mr. Kumar holds a B.Tech in Civil Engineering from the Indian Institute of Engineering in Kanpur, along with degrees in Business Finance and Environmental Economics from the Institute of Chartered Financial Analysts of India and Harvard University, respectively.

Rajiv Kumar, the outgoing Chief Election Commissioner, stepped down this morning after a tenure marked by efforts to modernize the election process. In his farewell speech, Mr. Kumar emphasized the importance of innovations such as remote voting for NRIs and migrant workers, biometric voting systems, and safeguarding against post-poll violence by ensuring the non-disclosure of votes. He also highlighted the need for greater financial transparency in election campaign expenses and the growing role of Artificial Intelligence in the future of elections.



To Ban or Not to Ban: Alcohol Divides J&K's Political Landscape

TPN Correspondent | Assam

The ruling National Conference (NC) in Jammu and Kashmir is facing significant criticism for its change of stance on the issue of liquor sales in the region. The NC's volte-face has sparked a backlash, especially from political and religious figures, as well as civil society groups. The controversy revolves around the Bills to be introduced in the upcoming assembly session, which seek to ban the sale and consumption of liquor in Jammu and Kashmir.

Mirwaiz Umar Farooq, the chairman of the Moderate Hurriyat, condemned NC leader Tanvir Sadiq's defense of liquor sales, which he justified under the pretext of boosting tourism. Mirwaiz, speaking at an interfaith event in Budgam district on February 16, questioned the morality of such a move in a Muslim-majority region, emphasizing the harm caused to society by drug abuse. He criticized the NC for ignoring the example of other Indian states, such as Gujarat, where alcohol is banned and tourism continues to thrive.

Sadiq had earlier argued that liquor sales should be allowed to support tourism, noting that several countries in the Arab world permit alcohol for tourists. He insisted that the local stakeholders, including travel agents, should be consulted before taking any drastic steps.

However, Mirwaiz dismissed this argument, pointing out that no consultation had been held with the stakeholders of Jammu and Kashmir regarding the issue. Opposition parties, including the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), also expressed their disapproval, arguing that linking tourism to alcohol sales is flawed. PDP leader Waheed Parra pointed to Gujarat's success as a dry state, where tourism has flourished without the need for liquor sales.

In the upcoming legislative session, at least three private member Bills will be introduced, seeking a ban on alcohol in Jammu and Kashmir. These Bills have garnered support from various quarters, including BJP leader Darakhshan Andrabi, who welcomed the move as a step toward protecting the youth from drug abuse.

The ongoing debate reflects the deepening divide over the future of alcohol sales in Jammu and Kashmir, with strong opinions from both sides of the political spectrum.

CM Stalin Slam Pradhan For Forcing Tamil Nadu to Adopt Three-Language Formula

TPN Correspondent | Tamilnadu

Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M.K. Stalin has accused Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan of "blackmail" after the latter stated that Tamil Nadu would not receive funds under the Samagra Shiksha Abhiyaan unless it accepts the National Education Policy (NEP) and the controversial three-language formula. Stalin expressed his displeasure over Pradhan's comments, asserting that Tamil Nadu's rightful due for educational funds should not be contingent on political conditions.

Stalin posted a video of Pradhan speaking on social media, stating that the Union Minister's remarks were disrespectful and threatening, warning that Tamil Nadu might show Delhi the "real trait" of its people in response. The Chief Minister's comment resonated with opposition parties across Tamil Nadu, who strongly criticized the Union government's stance on this issue.

Edappadi K. Palaniswami, General Secretary of AIADMK and Leader of the Opposition in Tamil Nadu, also condemned the central government's decision. He remarked that the Centre's refusal to release funds based on Tamil Nadu's rejection of the three-language policy was unjust. Palaniswami emphasized that Tamil Nadu had been a pioneer in the field of education and that the Centre should focus on the welfare of the people, not the political leaders in power.

The stance was echoed by Seeman, the chief of the Naam Tamilar Katchi (NTK), who criticized the NEP's push to make Hindi mandatory. He argued that while the people of Tamil Nadu could choose to learn Hindi, the Centre should not impose the language on them. Seeman expressed that India's unity lies in its linguistic diversity and that Tamil Nadu's opposition to the NEP should not result in withholding educational funds.

The controversy highlights the growing tensions between the state and central governments over educational policies, with Tamil Nadu leaders continuing to reject the imposition of Hindi and the three-language policy.



Assam CM Orders Probe into Alleged Pakistani Links of Gaurav Gogoi's Wife

TPN Correspondent | Guwahati



Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma has ordered a case against a Pakistani national, Ali Tauqeer Sheikh, for allegedly attempting to interfere in domestic matters in Assam and India. Sarma also revealed that Elizabeth Colburn, the wife of Congress MP Gaurav Gogoi, will be investigated for her alleged ties to Pakistan and its intelligence agency, ISI.

Sarma's decision came after a cabinet meeting on Sunday, where he cited reports of Sheikh's online activities and his connections with Colburn. According to Sarma, Sheikh, who founded LEAD Pakistan, a non-profit organization focused on climate change, has had direct contact with Colburn, who was involved with the organization during her time in Islamabad. Both Sheikh and Colburn were part of the global climate action group, the Climate and Development Knowledge Network (CDKN), which operates in both India and Pakistan.

Sarma raised concerns over the national security implications of the situation, particularly given Assam's historical vulnerabilities to destabilization by Pakistani actors. The Chief Minister also pointed out that Colburn, a British citizen, allegedly campaigned for Gogoi during two Lok Sabha elections, which would be a violation of visa norms. Sarma questioned the appropriateness of a foreign national participating in Indian elections, especially given her potential involvement in sensitive issues raised by her husband in Parliament, including nuclear radars and uranium mines.

Gaurav Gogoi, in response, dismissed the accusations as "dirty and baseless" politics and rejected the charges as "laughable and entertaining." He stated that his focus remains on improving Assam's economy, education, and healthcare policies, and expressed frustration with the ongoing political drama.

Sarma has called for a thorough investigation, involving central agencies, into the allegations against Colburn and Sheikh, stressing the importance of national security. He plans to share all relevant documents with Congress leaders to verify the facts.

UK willing to 'put own troops on ground' in Ukraine if needed: PM Starmer

- UK PM Starmer open to deploying troops to Ukraine.
- Trump-Putin talks raise concerns in Europe.
- Zelenskyy calls for a European army.



TPN Correspondent | UK

UK Prime Minister Keir Starmer expressed on Monday that he was prepared to send British troops to Ukraine "if necessary," highlighting a shift in European security discussions following the changing stance of the United States under President Donald Trump. Starmer's comments come in the context of Trump's recent talks with Russian President Vladimir Putin, which have raised concerns about Europe's security and Ukraine's future.

While Trump prepares for a meeting with Putin, reportedly to discuss peace negoti-

ations, European leaders, including Starmer, have been intensifying efforts to address the continent's security needs. Starmer described the situation as a "once-in-a-generation moment," emphasizing that any role in supporting Ukraine's security directly contributes to the security of Europe and the UK. "Helping to guarantee Ukraine's security is helping to guarantee the security of our continent, and the security of this country," Starmer remarked, underlining the urgency of collective European defense.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy also called for the establishment of a Europe-

an army, believing that such an institution could reduce Europe's dependence on US security guarantees. Zelenskyy's plea came amid growing concerns about the US pivoting its focus away from Europe, as indicated by Trump's stance on NATO and his previous comments about Russia's desire to end the war in Ukraine.

Meanwhile, a key meeting in Paris, scheduled ahead of the third anniversary of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, will gather leaders from several European nations including the UK, Germany, and Poland, as well as EU officials like Ursula von der Leyen and NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg.

The meeting will focus on Ukraine's situation and broader European security issues.

The ongoing diplomatic tension has also been exacerbated by the Kremlin's push for negotiations between the US and Russia, which could shape the future of Europe's defense strategy. EU nations remain concerned that Russia might demand a return to pre-2022 positions, including limiting NATO's presence in Eastern Europe. As Europe grapples with these uncertainties, Starmer's willingness to deploy UK troops signals the UK's commitment to the security of Ukraine and the broader continent.

Myanmar frees 1,000 scam center workers as crackdown widens



TPN Correspondent | Delhi

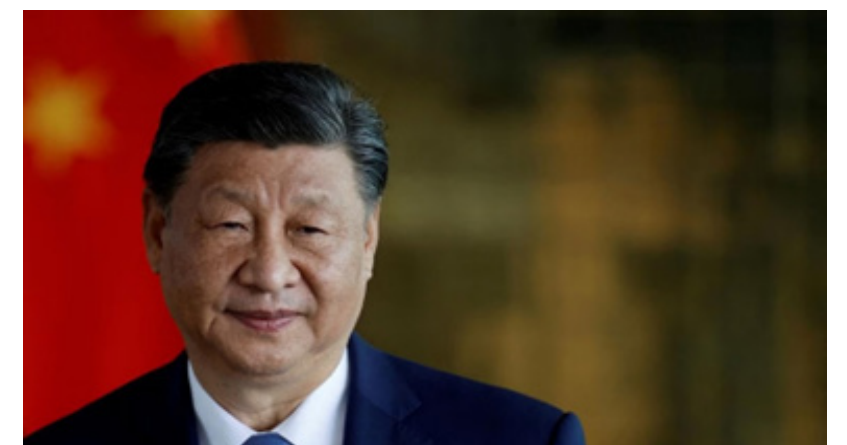
Myanmar's military government announced it is ready to hand over around 1,000 foreign nationals who were rescued from cyber scam centers near the Thai border. The victims, mostly from Asia and East Africa, were trafficked or tricked into working at these illicit centers. Myanmar authorities have vowed to intensify efforts to combat transnational criminal groups responsible for the operations.

Over the past three weeks, approximately 1,030 foreign nationals have been rescued from these scam centers, which are believed to be involved in online fraud. The Myanmar government has already repatriated 61 of the victims to their home countries, while the remaining individuals are set to be returned in the coming days, according to a statement from the State Administration Council, Myanmar's ruling military body.

The majority of the victims come from Asian countries, including China and India, although some are from East Africa. The victims were reportedly coerced or deceived into participating in online scams, where they were forced to defraud people across the globe. Many of the centers were located near the border with Thailand, a region notorious for transnational human trafficking and cybercrime activities.

The military junta launched a large-scale operation to combat online scams and human trafficking following mounting pressure from neighboring countries like Thailand and China. The high-profile trafficking of a Chinese actor, which highlighted the scale of criminal activities in the region, spurred Myanmar to take action.

The recent operation is part of a broader effort to dismantle criminal networks operating across Myanmar's borders. The government has promised to continue its crackdown on these illegal operations, although human rights organizations have raised concerns about the safety and treatment of the victims during the rescue and repatriation process. Myanmar's actions come amid growing regional concerns over the rise of cybercrime and human trafficking in Southeast Asia.



Xi Jinping Urges Chinese Entrepreneurs to Boost Confidence Amid Economic Slowdown

TPN Correspondent | Beijing

On Monday, Chinese President Xi Jinping held a rare meeting with top business leaders, including Alibaba founder Jack Ma, Xiaomi's Lei Jun, Tencent's Pony Ma Huateng, and BYD's Wang Chuanfu, to address concerns over China's slowing economy and the challenges facing private enterprises. The meeting, a symposium on private enterprises, aimed to restore business confidence amid uncertainties, both domestically and internationally.

This gathering came at a time of growing concern about the return of Donald Trump to the US presidency, particularly with his plans to raise tariffs on Chinese exports. China's GDP growth has also slowed to around 5 percent in recent years, further intensifying worries among entrepreneurs and business leaders about the future of the economy.

During the symposium, President Xi emphasized that the current moment presents a significant opportunity for private enterprises to unleash their full potential. He urged the business leaders to reach a consensus and strengthen their confidence to contribute to the healthy and high-quality development of China's private sector. Xi reassured the attendees that the government's policies regarding the private economy remain firmly embedded within China's socialist system and would not change.

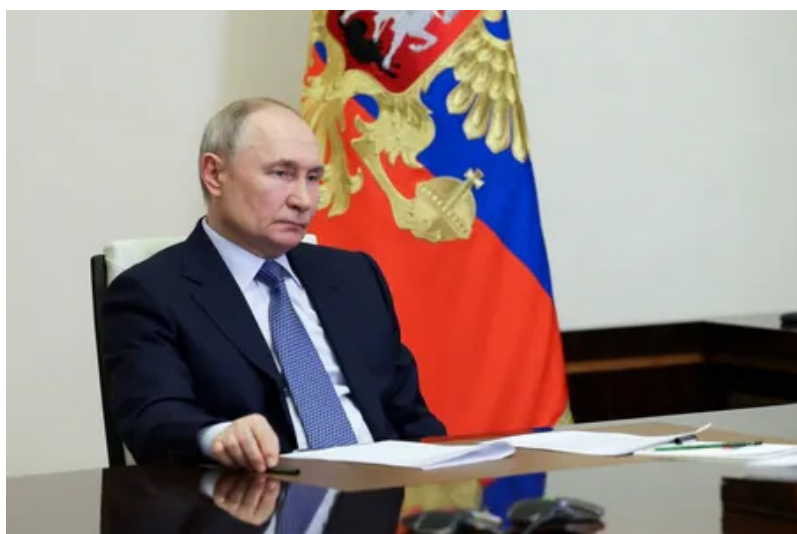
The meeting comes after a period of tension between Jack Ma and the Chinese Communist Party, following Ma's outspoken criticism of China's regulatory system. The fact that Ma was present at this high-profile meeting signals a potential shift in relations between China's government and its private business leaders, especially as the country faces ongoing economic challenges.

Russia, US to hold talks on Feb 18 in Saudi Arabia on restoring ties

TPN Correspondent | Washington

The Kremlin announced on Monday that top Russian officials will meet with their US counterparts in Saudi Arabia on Tuesday to discuss restoring relations between the two nations and the ongoing war in Ukraine, which is approaching its third year.

Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov and Yuri Ushakov, a senior foreign policy advisor to President Vladimir Putin, are scheduled to participate in the talks with US officials in Riyadh. According to Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov, the primary focus of the meeting will be on revitalizing the broader scope of US-Russia relations, which have been severely strained since the onset of the conflict in Ukraine.



Peskov also stated that the talks will address preparations for possible peace negotiations concerning Ukraine, though he did not provide further specifics on potential outcomes. The Kremlin had previously hinted at discussions surrounding a peace settlement, but the details have remained unclear.

Regarding the potential deployment of European troops to Ukraine following a possible peace deal, Peskov referred to the issue as a "complex question," which has not yet been thoroughly discussed. This issue remains a point of contention among international actors as the war continues to

devastate the region.

Lavrov and Ushakov are scheduled to fly to Riyadh on Monday ahead of the high-stakes meeting. The Kremlin's announcement of these talks comes amid growing international pressure for negotiations to end the war, which has caused immense suffering and geopolitical instability since Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022.

As the conflict enters its third year, the meeting in Saudi Arabia represents a crucial moment for diplomatic efforts aimed at de-escalating tensions and possibly finding a path to peace. The outcome of the discussions could significantly impact the future of US-Russia relations and the broader international response to the war in Ukraine.

Kim Jong Un Visits Father's Mausoleum, Pledges Commitment to 'Sacred Struggle'

TPN Correspondent | North Korea

North Korean leader Kim Jong Un made a rare visit to the Kumsusan Palace of the Sun in Pyongyang on Monday to mark the birthday of his late father, Kim Jong Il. This significant visit, which came on February 16—celebrated annually as the Day of the Shining Star—was the first in four years for Kim Jong Un to pay his respects at the mausoleum, where the embalmed bodies of his father and grandfather, Kim Il Sung, are housed.

Accompanied by his sister, Kim Yo Jong, a senior official in the ruling Workers' Party, and other aides, Kim Jong Un paid homage to his family's legacy in what state media de-



scribed as "the humblest reverence." The state news agency KCNA reported that Kim expressed his deep commitment to the country's future, vowing to continue the "sacred struggle" to ensure the prosperity, security, and well-being of the North Korean people.

Kim Jong Il's birthday is con-

sidered one of North Korea's most important holidays, and it is marked by various ceremonies and celebrations. This year's observance coincides with heightened political tensions on the Korean Peninsula, as Kim Jong Un continues to solidify his leadership amid ongoing regional and international challenges.

In his remarks during the visit, Kim Jong Un pledged to honor the legacy of his father and grandfather by working towards North Korea's continued advancement and stability. His statement underscored the importance of maintaining the "sacred struggle" for the eternal prosperity of the nation, as well as the security of its citizens. This rare appearance at the family mausoleum is viewed as a symbolic gesture of continuity in leadership and North Korea's political ideology. The visit highlights Kim Jong Un's role in upholding the Kim family's dynastic rule and his determination to preserve the country's political and military priorities amidst ongoing challenges on the global stage.

Stock Markets Rebound After Eight-Day Losing Streak, Banking and Pharma Lead Recovery



The eight-session losing streak came to an end. The indices gained today. The indices, which started with heavy losses in the morning, recovered after the afternoon due to mixed signals from global markets. As expected, a counter rally took place. Investors bought fundamentally strong shares. Bank, pharma and healthcare shares also supported this. With this, the Nifty, which traded in a loss of more than 180 points in the morning, finally ended with a gain of 30 points. The

Sensex also followed the same path.

The BSE Sensex, which closed at 75,939 in the previous session, started at 75,641 on Monday. It touched an intraday low at 75,294. It reached an intraday high at 76,041. It finally closed at 75,996 with a gain of 57 points. The NSE Nifty, which opened at 22,809, touched a low of 22,725 and a high of 22,974. It closed at 22,959, up 30 points.



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The Nifty Bank rose 159 points to settle at 49,258.

In the Nifty50, 34 companies gained while 16 lost. Adani Enterprises, Bajaj Finserv, IndusInd Bank, Adani Ports were the top gainers. Mahindra & Mahindra, Airtel, Infi, TCS, ICI- CI Bank were the top losers. Pharma, healthcare, bank, finance, metal indices rose. Auto, FMCG, IT, media indices were mixed. India VIX rose 4.71% to 15.72.

Market breadth on NSE today was completely in favour of sellers. Out of 2955 shares traded, only 1014 gained. 1871 lost. 22 shares touched 52-week highs. 747 shares touched 52-week lows.

Rupee settled at 86.87 against the dollar. Jefferies has given a buy rating to Samvardhan Motherson with a target price of Rs.165. Singtel is looking to sell Airtel worth billions of dollars. Nomura has given a neutral rating to Glenmark with a target price of Rs.1500. Quality Power Electric IPO received a response of

0.79 times by the afternoon of the second day. LTI Mindtree partners with Eurobank for multi-year banking. Borosil Renewables shares hit 5% lower circuit as losses widen in third quarter. Cyient DLM wins avionics manufacturing award from Thales. Motilal Oswal gives neutral rating to United Breweries with a target price of Rs 2000. Antony Waste EBITA rises 21.5%. Nomura gives buy rating to Mahindra & Mahindra with a target price of Rs 3681. CLSA maintains buy rating on Hindalco Industries with a target price of Rs 815.

Ashok Leyland Limited (ASHOKLEY):



Ashok Leyland is a leading commercial vehicle manufacturer in India, producing trucks, buses, and light vehicles. The company has a strong market presence and has been focusing on expanding its product portfolio and increasing exports.

Aarti Pharmalabs Limited (AARTIPHARM):



Aarti Pharmalabs specializes in the production of active pharmaceutical ingredients (APIs) and intermediates. In Q3 FY2024-2025, the company reported a net profit of ₹73.99 crore, a 40.24% increase compared to the same period last year. This growth is attributed to enhanced operational efficiencies and a diversified product portfolio.

Kaveri Seed Company Limited (KSCL):

Kaveri Seed Company is one of India's largest agricultural seed companies, offering a wide range of hybrid seeds for crops like cotton, maize, and paddy. The company has a robust research and development division, focusing on developing high-yielding and disease-resistant seed varieties.



Jubilant Pharmova Limited (JUBLPHARMA):

Jubilant Pharmova operates in the pharmaceutical and life sciences sectors, providing a range of products and services, including APIs, contract manufacturing, and drug discovery solutions. The company em-



phasizes innovation and has a global presence, catering to various markets worldwide.

Castrol India Limited (CASTROLIND):

Castrol India is a prominent player in the lubricants industry, offering a wide array of automotive and industrial lubricant products. The company has a strong distribution network and focuses on continuous product innovation to meet the evolving needs of consumers.



Income tax relief should not be seen as govt shifting focus from capex: Sitharaman

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Monday clarified that the substantial income tax relief announced in Budget 2025 does not signal a shift in the government's focus from capital expenditure to boosting consumption. This clarification comes after debates emerged over the decision to keep individuals earning up to Rs 12 lakh annually out of the income tax net, particularly following tepid GDP growth figures over two consecutive quarters. During a post-budget interaction with stakeholders in Mumbai, Sitharaman emphasized that the government's commitment to capital expenditure (capex) remains strong. She noted that the allocation for capex in the 2025 Budget is over 10.2% higher than last year, amounting to approximately Rs 16 lakh crore, including Public Sector Undertakings (PSUs). The central government alone has budgeted Rs 11.21 lakh crore for capex in 2025-26. The effective capital expenditure, which includes core capital outlays and grants for



state capital assets, is projected to rise to Rs 15.48 lakh crore from Rs 13.18 lakh crore in 2024-25.

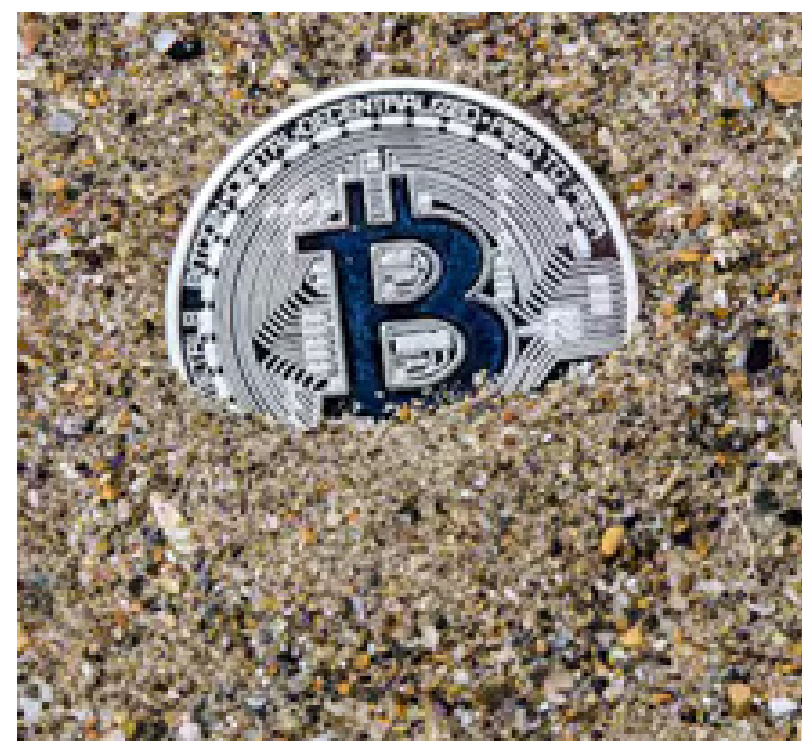
Sitharaman dismissed concerns that the focus had shifted to consumption, stating that the government's emphasis has consistently been on public expenditure to build capital assets, especially since the COVID-19 pandemic. She reassured stake-

holders that the increased tax relief, which primarily benefits middle-class taxpayers, is aimed at enhancing disposable income for consumption and investment, not at sidelining the capital expenditure drive.

The income tax relief, which raises the exemption limit from Rs 7 lakh to Rs 12 lakh, was positioned as part of the government's strategy to support economic recovery. Sitharaman also credited Prime Minister Narendra Modi for supporting the tax relief proposal, recognizing the need to reward taxpayers while maintaining the focus on infrastructure development.

In conclusion, Sitharaman reiterated that the government's approach remains balanced, with continued investment in capital assets and targeted tax relief to stimulate consumption, creating a strong foundation for future economic growth.

Establishing New World Finance Broader Impact Of Bitcoin On Global Economy



Bitcoin's emergence in 2008, closely following the global economic crisis, marked the beginning of a transformative journey in the world of finance. Although Bitcoin was initially not viewed as a significant player in the global economy, it gradually became a symbol of the future of finance. Over the past decade, Bitcoin has not only revolutionized digital currency but has also influenced key aspects of global finance through blockchain technology and decentralization.

The most profound effect Bitcoin has had on the global economy is through the rise of blockchain technology, which underpins it. Initially met with skepticism, blockchain's decentralized nature has reshaped cross-border transactions, offering greater speed, transparency, and affordability. Bitcoin's market capitalization, which exceeds \$1.9 trillion, is evidence of its growing importance as a tool for value creation. Blockchain has also spurred the rise of Decentralized Finance (DeFi), further accelerating financial innovation. The increased use of Bitcoin and blockchain-based jobs is diversifying conventional finance, offering opportunities for employment and income generation worldwide.

The economic impact of Bitcoin extends beyond technology. The global cryptocurrency industry, valued at \$2.7 trillion in 2024, is projected to grow to \$6.2 trillion by 2033. Bitcoin's rise has led to the creation of new job roles, with salaries in the sector often exceeding 150% of traditional industries. The taxation of Bitcoin-related income, such as in India (30% tax) and the US (up to 37% short-term tax), has also contributed to national and global economies, supporting governments' budgets.

In addition, Bitcoin's role as a hedge against inflation has been especially beneficial in countries with unstable currencies. Nations like Venezuela and Lebanon, suffering from hyperinflation, have turned to Bitcoin as an alternative currency to safeguard economic stability. As Bitcoin's influence continues to grow, its potential to reshape global economic policies remains significant, promising a future where digital finance becomes the backbone of global economies.

Reliance Industries Surpasses Apple to Rank No. 2 in FutureBrand Index 2024

In a significant milestone for Indian corporations, Reliance Industries Limited (RIL) has been ranked No. 2 in the FutureBrand Index 2024, surpassing tech giant Apple. This marks the first time an Indian company has entered the top three of this prestigious global ranking, reflecting the increasing global influence of Indian businesses.

The FutureBrand Index evaluates companies based on brand perception, not financial performance, and in 2024, Reliance saw a remarkable jump from No. 13 in 2023 to No. 2. This achievement highlights the company's strong brand positioning, consumer trust, and strategic growth across multiple sectors such as energy, telecommunications, and retail.

The FutureBrand Index has evolved over the years, with the global rankings becoming more diversified. In 2014, seven of

the top ten brands were from the United States, but by 2024, only four US brands remain in the top ten. In contrast, the Asia-Pacific (APAC) and Middle Eastern regions now boast five brands in the top ranks, demonstrating their significant investments in brand development, especially in B2B sectors.

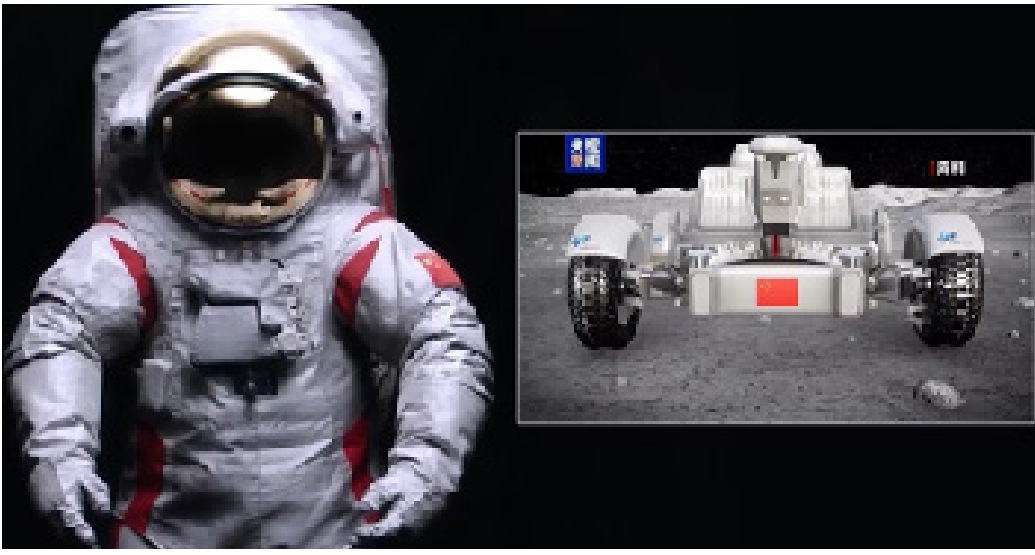
Samsung, which ranked No. 5 in 2023, has risen to the No. 1 position in 2024. The company's focus on innovation, storytelling, and authenticity has driven its success, along with its strong scores in thought leadership and consumer well-being. Apple, while still a top contender, dropped from No. 1 in 2023 to No. 3 this year, maintaining its reputation for brand loyalty and customer experience.

The finance sector emerged as the strongest performer in the 2024 index, with 10 out of 15 brands showing upward mo-



mentum, signaling robust growth and increasing consumer trust. Conversely, the healthcare sector struggled, with 10 out of 15 brands declining, reflecting ongoing challenges in public perception and industry turbulence. Overall, the 2024 FutureBrand Index underscores the shifting dynamics in global brand power, with Reliance's rise marking a notable achievement for Indian businesses on the world stage.

China Names Its Moon Spacesuit and Rover Ahead of Lunar Mission



gressing through its development phase. Zhang Chongfeng, a spacecraft designer at CMSA, revealed that the rover prototype has been tested in a simulated lunar surface environment. The rover is undergoing design refinements and engineering assessments to ensure its effectiveness in transporting astronauts across the moon's challenging terrain. China's lunar mission framework is taking shape as the nation aims to land astronauts on the moon before 2030. CMSA has made significant progress in the development of ground facilities for production and testing, and construction at the Wenchang Spacecraft Launch Site in Hainan is advancing. Additionally, CMSA announced the names of other mission components, including the crew spacecraft, "Mengzhou" ("Dream Vessel"), and the lunar lander, "Lanyue" ("Embracing the Moon").

This mission is part of China's broader space exploration goals, which include advancing technology and scientific research beyond low Earth orbit. With an integrated system of heavy-lift launch vehicles, crewed spacecraft, and lunar surface mobility solutions, China is taking significant steps toward its ambitious goal of establishing a human presence on the moon.

China has officially unveiled the names for its next-generation lunar spacesuit and crewed moon rover, key components for its planned human moon landing before 2030. The China Manned Space Agency (CMSA) revealed that the spacesuit will be called "Wangyu," meaning "gazing into the cosmos," while the rover has been named "Tansuo," which translates to "explore." Over 9,000 suggestions were submitted during a public participation process in 2024, culminating in the final selection of these names.

The spacesuit, Wangyu, is designed to withstand the harsh conditions of the moon's surface, providing astronauts with enhanced mobility and protection. According to Zhang Wanxin, director of the spacesuit engineering office at the China Astronaut Research and Training Center, the prototype has already been developed, and performance assessments are currently underway to ensure it meets the required operational standards.

The Tansuo rover, which will facilitate lunar surface exploration, is also pro-

Manipur Street Stall Selling Dalgona Candies Looks Straight Out Of Squid Game

The global phenomenon *Squid Game* continues to inspire creative ventures around the world, and now, fans in Manipur have brought the hit show to life with a Squid Game-themed roadside stall. Digital creator Lanchenba Meitei recently shared a video on Instagram, showcasing this innovative tribute to the Korean series. The stall features a variety of Dalgona candies, one of the key elements of the show, shaped like umbrellas, triangles, stars, and circles, just like in the famous "Dalgona candy challenge" from *Squid Game*.

The stall's design pays homage to the iconic aesthetic of the series, with the owners dressed in pink jumpsuits and wearing masks similar to the guards in the show. The stall's banner prominently displays the words "Dalgona" and "Squid Game," along with an image of the protagonist, Seong Gi-hun, holding a Dalgona candy. The background features a poster of the infamous doll from the "Red Light, Green Light" game, one of the most memorable scenes from the series. To add to the immersive experience, the background music includes the popular



song "Round and Round" from *Squid Game*'s second season, instantly evoking the show's atmosphere.

The stall not only offers the delicious Dalgona candies but also showcases other *Squid Game*-themed merchandise. Fans can purchase Ddakji cards, a nod to the game played during the selection process in subway stations, as well as coasters featuring images of the show's

characters. The stall has quickly become a popular stop for fans of the show, combining the thrill of the series with the charm of local creativity in Manipur.

This unique pop-up stall is a testament to the global impact of *Squid Game* and how it continues to inspire cultural references and creative displays worldwide.

Chinese Zoo Paints Donkeys To Look Like Zebras, Leaves Netizens Annoyed



A Chinese zoo has come under scrutiny after it allegedly painted donkeys to pass them off as zebras in an attempt to attract more visitors. The stunt, which took place at a zoo in Zibo City, Shandong province, quickly backfired after keen-eyed netizens recognized the creatures

for what they truly were—donkeys, not zebras.

The controversy began when a video went viral showing a zoo worker standing next to a donkey with black and white stripes across its body. However, the worker left the donkey's face un-

touched, which made it even more obvious that it was not a zebra. The attempt to disguise the donkey as a zebra was so poorly executed that online viewers immediately noticed the difference, sparking a wave of jokes and criticism across social media platforms.

In response to the growing uproar, representatives from the amusement park told Chinese media that the painted donkeys were part of a "marketing strategy." However, their explanation did little to quell the backlash, with many criticizing the zoo for trying to deceive visitors. The debacle has raised questions about the ethics of using such deceptive practices in animal exhibits. While the zoo's marketing attempt may have been intended to draw attention, it ultimately served as a reminder of the power of social media and the sharp eye of internet users. The incident also highlights the importance of authenticity in tourism, with visitors increasingly expecting transparency and honesty from attractions.

Despite the failed stunt, the story has given the zoo a fleeting moment of fame—though likely not the kind they had hoped for. Instead of gaining new visitors through their creativity, they have become the subject of ridicule and mockery online.

OpenAI Shifts Focus to GPT-5, Cancels Standalone o3 AI Model



OpenAI CEO Sam Altman recently announced that the company has decided not to release the highly anticipated o3 artificial intelligence (AI) model. Instead of launching the o3 model as planned, OpenAI will now focus on a unified GPT-5 model, which will integrate the capabilities of o3.

Altman shared details about the company's updated AI roadmap, revealing that OpenAI will simplify its product offerings with the release of GPT-4.5 and GPT-5. The goal is to eliminate user confusion when choosing between various models for different tasks. Instead of offering multiple specialized models, GPT-5 will be designed to deliver "unified intelligence," meaning it will be capable of utilizing all OpenAI tools and know when to apply reasoning without users having to choose the appropriate model for each task.

The cancellation of the o3 model's standalone release marks the end of the o-series of AI models, with the company opting to integrate the features of o3 di-

rectly into GPT-5. Altman also announced changes to OpenAI's tiered subscription model. When GPT-5 is launched, all ChatGPT users will have access to the AI model, with free-tier users receiving unlimited chat access at the standard intelligence level. To prevent misuse, the company will impose abuse thresholds. Pro subscribers will get access to a higher intelligence level, and the top-tier subscribers will have the most advanced capabilities. GPT-5 will also introduce new features, including Advanced Voice, Canvas, Search, and Deep Research. However, before GPT-5 arrives, OpenAI plans to launch GPT-4.5, its last non-chain-of-thought (non-CoT) model. While the exact release date is still unclear, Altman suggested that GPT-4.5 could arrive in the coming weeks or months. Interestingly, GPT-4.5, internally referred to as "Orion," was initially rumored to be GPT-5 itself.

With these developments, OpenAI is aiming to streamline its AI offerings and deliver a more efficient, user-friendly experience.

Apple Maps may soon include ads to boost services revenue



Apple Maps, which has long maintained an ad-free experience, is set to introduce ads on its platform. According to a Bloomberg report, the decision to integrate advertisements follows Apple's ongoing effort to enhance its services revenue. Business owners will soon have the opportunity to promote their locations within the app, a move that mirrors the advertising model used by Google Maps.

This shift in Apple Maps' strategy follows an internal all-hands meeting where the company's board gave the green light to explore the inclusion of ads. Although discussions around adding ads to Apple Maps have been ongoing since 2022, the rollout was initially expected in 2023 but was delayed for unspecified reasons.

Apple Maps users, who have enjoyed an ad-free experience up until now, will soon encounter promoted listings for businesses, making it more similar to other mapping platforms like Google

Maps, which has long allowed businesses to pay for visibility in search results and map locations.

By introducing ads, Apple aims to diversify its services revenue, which has become an increasingly important part of the company's financial growth. As Apple continues to expand its advertising initiatives across its ecosystem, including the App Store and other apps, the move to include ads in Apple Maps marks another step in the company's broader strategy to increase earnings from services.

The exact timeline for the launch of ads on Apple Maps has not been confirmed, but business owners will soon be able to begin promoting their locations to potential customers directly through the platform. This change may offer new opportunities for businesses looking to increase their visibility within the app, while also contributing to Apple's overall revenue growth.

Indian Women's Hockey Team Aims for Victory Against Spain in FIH Pro League



The Indian Women's Hockey Team is eager to return to winning ways as they face Spain in the FIH Pro League 2024-25 on February 18 and 19 at the Kalinga Hockey Stadium. After a 3-2 win over England and a tough 2-2 draw followed by a shootout loss, India sits in eighth place with four points. With a focus on improving penalty corner conversions, the team aims to rectify their previous mistakes. Vice-captain Navneet Kaur, with a goal in each game, has been in strong form. Spain, currently in fourth place with eight points, comes off back-to-back wins over Germany. India captain Salima Tete expressed confidence, stating the team is ready for the challenge, aiming to build momentum with a solid performance in front of the home crowd.

Rajasthan Kings Set Up Final Showdown with Chhattisgarh Warriors in Legend 90 League



als in Qualifier 2 at the Shaheed Veer Narayan Singh International Cricket Stadium. Batting first, Delhi Royals posted a competitive 167/5 in 15 overs, with Lendl Simmons (63 off 34) and Sharad Lumba (60 off 24) leading the charge. Despite a strong start, the Kings made a strong comeback, with Sudeep Tyagi's crucial delivery forcing Simmons' retirement. Rajasthan Kings chased the target with ease, thanks to explosive knocks from Phil Mustard (53* off 34) and Rajat Singh (56 off 28). The final will be played against Chhattisgarh Warriors on Monday at 7:15 pm, featuring a special performance by Bollywood star Thamman Bhatia.

Rajasthan Kings booked their spot in the grand finale of the Legend 90 League with a dominant six-wicket victory over Delhi Royals.

23rd National Para Athletics Championships Kick Off in Chennai

The 23rd National Para Athletics Championships have officially commenced at Jawaharlal Nehru Stadium in Chennai, marking a historic first for the city. The event, running from February 17 to 20, features a massive participation of 1,476 para-athletes across 30 teams, competing in 155 events. Organized under the guidance of Deputy Chief Minister Udhayanidhi Stalin and supported by the Tamil Nadu Government, the championship is one of the largest para-athletics gatherings in India.

The Paralympic Committee of India (PCI), led by Devendra Jhajharia, and the Tamil Nadu Paralympic Sports Association (TNPSA), headed by Chandrasekar Rajan, are overseeing the successful execution of the



event. With world-class facilities and strong government support, the championship not only celebrates para-athlete talent but also fosters inclusivity and excellence in Indian sports.

23rd National Para Athletics Championships Kick Off in Chennai



With Jasprit Bumrah sidelined due to injury, India's hopes in the 2024 ICC Champions Trophy rest on Mohammed Shami's shoulders. Set to partner Arshdeep Singh, Shami's experience and wrist wizardry are expected to be pivotal in India's campaign. The 34-year-old, returning from injury, faces the challenge of delivering in a high-pressure tournament, especially without Bumrah, his trusted ally for years. Shami's impact with the new ball will be crucial, and former pacer Laxmipathy Balaji believes the bowler can step up and lead India's attack. With his ability to move the ball off the deck and hit the stumps, Shami's leadership and skills are vital for India's Champions Trophy aspirations.

Crispin Chettri Names 23-Member Squad for Pink Ladies Cup in UAE



Indian senior women's football team coach Crispin Chettri has announced a 23-member squad for the upcoming Pink Ladies Cup, a friendly tournament set to take place in Sharjah, UAE, from February 20 to 26. India will face Jordan, Russia, and the Korean Republic in this tournament, providing valuable preparation for the AFC Women's Asian Cup 2027 Qualifiers. India's matches are scheduled at the Al Hamriya Sports Club Stadium, Sharjah, with the team set to play Jordan on February 20, Russia on February 23, and Korea Republic on February 26. The squad includes goalkeepers Elangbam Panthoi Chanu, Payal Basude, and Shreya Hooda, along with defenders Aruna Bag, Kiran Pisdha, and others. Coach Chettri emphasized the importance of adapting to different playing styles for a well-rounded team performance.

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Indian Men Aim to Continue Winning Momentum Against Germany in FIH Pro League



India's men's hockey team will look to build on their recent victory as they take on Germany in their next FIH Pro League match on Tuesday. After a tough start to their campaign, the team bounced back with a 2-0 win over Spain on Sunday, earning three points from two matches and sitting eighth in the standings. India's victory against Spain was marked by field goals from Mandeep Singh and Dilpreet Singh, but the team continues to face challenges with penalty corner conversions, having failed to score from seven attempts so far. Captain Harmanpreet Singh's return to the lineup is expected to strengthen the set-piece execution. Germany, currently seventh in the standings with four points, will be India's next challenge, with their attack led by Raphael Hartkopf, Gonzalo Peillat, and Thies Prinz. Harmanpreet emphasized the need to stay focused and improve in key areas to secure another win.

MoS Sports Inaugurates Maharashtra Esports Open Championship 2025

Union Minister of State for Youth Affairs and Sports, Raksha Nikhil Khadse, inaugurated the Maharashtra Esports Open Championship 2025 at MIT World Peace University, marking a historic milestone in the state's sports history. This state-backed tournament, organized by the Federation of Electronic Sports Associations India (FEAI) and the Maratha Esports Association (MEA), has attracted 2,100 participants, with 52 finalists advancing to the Grand Finale. Khadse highlighted the growing

significance of esports, which became a medal sport at the 2023 Hangzhou Asian Games and will feature in the 2027 Olympic Esports Games. The Government of India's recognition of esports as a "multi-sport event" and the recent introduction of cash incentives for outstanding players further cements esports' status. With over 500 million gamers in India, Maharashtra is positioned to be the country's esports hub, poised for explosive growth and future Olympic success.



Kanika Kapoor Unveils 'Gori Hai Kalaiyan 2.0' – A Vibrant Reinterpretation of a Classic



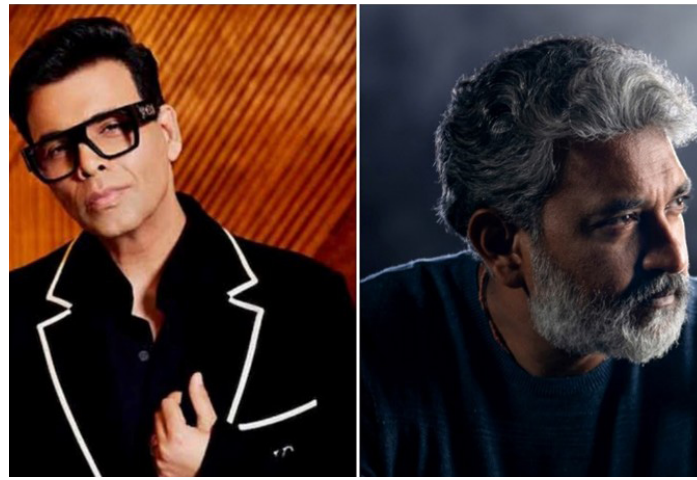
Singer Kanika Kapoor is back with a fresh, energetic take on the iconic track Gori Hai Kalaiyan for the upcoming film Mere Husband Ki Biwi, releasing on February 21. Featuring Badshah, Sharvi Yadav, and IP Singh, the song blends nostalgia with a modern vibe, earning buzz for its upbeat rhythm. Kanika, known for hits like Baby Doll and Chittiyaan Kalaiyaan, calls the track a perfect fit for her playful, high-energy style. She shares her excitement about experimenting with different genres, including Afro and R&B. Despite the pressure of maintaining success, Kanika sees it as motivation, focusing on enjoying the creative journey. With upcoming collaborations, she's eager to share more diverse music soon.

AR Murugadoss Announces Title of Upcoming Sivakarthikeyan Film as Madharasi



The much-anticipated film directed by AR Murugadoss, starring Sivakarthikeyan, has officially been titled Madharasi. The announcement was made on Sivakarthikeyan's birthday, adding excitement to his fans. The film, previously referred to as #SKXARM, promises a high-octane action-packed experience. A teaser featuring intense action sequences was shared by Murugadoss, hinting at a role for actor Biju Menon as a cop. The movie also stars Rukmini Vasanth, Vidyut Jammwal, Shabeer Kallarakkal, and Vikranth. The film, 90% complete, will wrap up after Murugadoss finishes working on Salman Khan's project. Produced by Sri Lakshmi Movies, Madharasi features music by Anirudh Ravichander and cinematography by Sudeep Elamon. The film's visual effects will be handled by Knack Studios, Phantom FX, and BeastBells.

Karan Johar Praises SS Rajamouli's "Conviction" in Filmmaking



Karan Johar recently discussed the key to creating blockbuster films – conviction in one's craft. In a conversation with Komal Nahata for his YouTube channel Game Changers, Johar highlighted that conviction is more important than logic in filmmaking. He specifically mentioned SS Rajamouli, stating that his films, such as RRR, thrive not on logic but on Rajamouli's unwavering conviction.

Johar explained, "When conviction comes to the forefront, even the audience believes in it," citing examples like RRR, Animal, and Gadar as films driven by this powerful belief. He also noted that the moment filmmakers doubt themselves or overthink logic, it can hinder a film's success. Johar, who has a good rapport with Rajamouli, had previously presented the Hindi version of Baahubali 2.

Producer SKN Faces Backlash Over Comments on Telugu Actresses



Producer SKN (Srinivasa Kumar Naidu), who introduced actress Vaishnavi Chaitanya as the heroine in Baby, has sparked controversy with his recent remarks about Telugu actresses. Speaking at the pre-release event of Return of Dragon, SKN mentioned that he and director Sai Rajesh had decided not to promote Telugu actresses anymore. He explained that they had realized the consequences of supporting Telugu girls, leading to their decision. These comments are believed to be aimed at Vaishnavi, who reportedly declined another film offer from SKN's banner after the success of Baby. Many netizens have criticized SKN's remarks, claiming they are inappropriate, especially as Telugu actresses are gaining recognition in the industry.

New Releases This (February 17 & February 21): Must-Watch Movies & Shows

1. Mere Husband Ki Biwi (Feb 21) - Theatres



A comedy-drama about a man juggling relationships with his wife and girlfriend, starring Arjun Kapoor, Rakul Preet Singh, and Bhumi Pednekar.

2. Nilavuku En Mel Ennadi Kobam (Feb 21) - Theatres



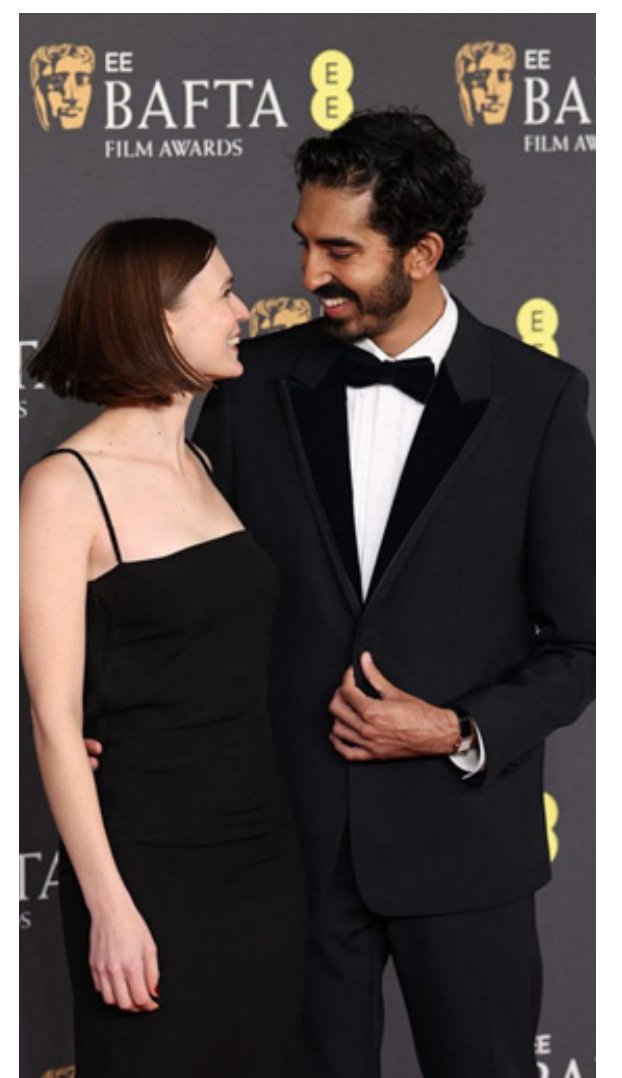
Dhanush's directorial debut featuring his nephew Pavish, a love story with Anikha Surendran and Priya Prakash Varrier.

3. The White Lotus Season 3 (Feb 17) - JioHotstar



Set in Thailand, the new season follows a group of privileged vacationers at a luxury resort.

BAFTA Awards 2025: 'Conclave' Wins Best Film, Indian Films Earn Recognition



At the 2025 BAFTA Awards, British-Indian filmmaker Sandhya Suri's Santosh, Karan Kandhari's Sister Midnight, and Dev Patel's directorial debut Monkey Man did not secure wins in the Outstanding Debut by a British Writer, Director or Producer category, which went to Irish filmmaker Rich Peppiatt for Kneecap. Payal Kapadia's All We Imagine As Light lost the Best Film Not in the English Language award to Emilia Perez, despite its Cannes victory. Conclave, a papal thriller starring Ralph Fiennes, took home the coveted Best Film and Best British Film awards. Other notable winners included Brady Corbet (Best Director for The Brutalist), Mikey Madison (Best Actress for Anora), and Kieran Culkin (Best Supporting Actor for A Real Pain).