

## Weather Forecast

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

# Congress MLA's Unexpected Comment on CM Change Sparks Debate

**Congress leaders avoid CM change talks after High Command's directive.**

**Gubbi MLA SR Srinivas's surprising statement on the issue.**

**Says party discipline must be maintained to avoid internal conflicts.**



TPN Correspondent Karnataka, Feb 19  
The issue of chief ministerial change in the Congress party has been a topic of debate, but following a strict directive from the High Command, discussions on the matter had subsided. However, Gubbi MLA SR Srinivas has now made an unexpected statement on the matter. Speaking to the media in Tumkur, SR Srinivas dismissed ongoing speculations, stating, "The media listens, and leaders talk, but do we even have the authority to discuss a CM change? It is not in our hands to change the Chief Minister or the party state president. Our focus should be on working within the party framework." When asked about actress Amrita Iyengar's name being linked to allegations made by DCM

DK Shivakumar, Srinivas refrained from making direct comments but warned that repeatedly discussing such matters in the media could harm the party's image. "There is a limit to everything. If someone crosses it, necessary actions will be taken," he added. Meanwhile, BJP leader Basan Gowda Patil Yatnal has responded to the BJP Central Disciplinary Committee's

notice. Reacting to Minister G. Parameshwar's visit to Delhi, Yatnal stated, "I don't know why he went there. We follow the party high command's decisions, and there are no factions within our party." As political tensions continue, both Congress and BJP leaders are working to maintain internal stability while addressing growing speculations.



## Congress Targets Retired Teachers to Strengthen Grassroots Support

**Congress focuses on retired teachers to strengthen grassroots network.**

**Retired Teachers' Congress unit formed in KR Nagar and Saligrama taluks.**

**New office-bearers being appointed to bolster party structure.**

TPN Correspondent Mysore, Feb 19

The Congress party is stepping up its efforts to enhance its presence at the grassroots level, with a special focus on retired teachers. As part of its strategy to galvanize support ahead of upcoming elections, the party has been forming dedicated units for retired teachers in key areas, starting with KR Nagar and Saligrama taluks in Mysore district. The initiative, spearheaded by KPC executive member Doddaswame Gowda, aims to engage retired teachers who have long-standing ties within their communities. The party believes these teachers, who are often well-respected in their localities, can play a pivotal role in organizing and spreading the party's message at the grassroots level. In an event organized by the Taluk Block Congress and the Retired Teachers' Congress unit at the party office on Mullur Road, several retired teachers were honored with the Gandhi Peace Award. Speaking at the ceremony, Doddaswame Gowda

called on all retired teachers to unite under the Congress banner and help spread government programs at the local level. He emphasized the need for retired teachers to become office-bearers of the newly formed units, leveraging their connections and influence to strengthen the party's reach. Congress MLA D. Ravi Shankar also supported this initiative, praising the party's fresh approach and expressing hope that the retired teachers' unit will prove instrumental in building stronger local connections for the Congress in the coming days. The formation of such units is not without challenges, however. While there is no indication of strong opposition from other political parties, the effectiveness of this strategy will depend on how well the Congress can unite retired teachers across party lines and maintain momentum. It remains to be seen whether this move will pay off for the Congress, as the party works to build a solid foundation for the upcoming elections.

## CM Siddaramaiah Affirms Implementation of Caste Census Report

TPN Correspondent /Bengaluru, Feb 19  
Chief Minister Siddaramaiah has reaffirmed the Karnataka government's commitment to implementing the Caste Census Report, stating that the report has been scientifically prepared and will be enforced in the coming days. Speaking at a pre-budget meeting held at Vidhana Soudha with leaders of backward communities and representatives of backward class associations, he emphasized that the state government strongly supports the caste census. Referring to the 1992 Indira Sawhney case, CM Siddaramaiah pointed out that reservations should not exceed 50% as per legal precedent. He criticized the previous government's Economically Weaker Sections (EWS) reservation, arguing that it contradicted Articles 15 and 16 of the Constitution, which mandate reservations based on social and educational backwardness rather than economic status alone. The CM high-



lighted that the caste census report provides valuable insights into the social, economic, and educational status of various communities, making it a crucial tool for effective policy formulation. He dismissed opposition to the report as a misconception, reiterating that the government's goal is to

ensure social justice and equality. Quoting Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, Siddaramaiah stressed the need to bring the backward, poor, minorities, and women into the mainstream. He acknowledged the persistent inequality among backward classes and emphasized that systematic efforts are required to address these disparities. On the issue of special status for nomadic communities, the CM stated that the government faces challenges in forming a separate commission but assured that steps are being taken to prioritize their welfare in the upcoming budget. He also highlighted that Right to Education (RTE) provisions have been extended to ensure free education for nomadic children in both government and private schools. Additionally, Siddaramaiah pledged to allocate resources based on financial feasibility and promised focused programs for the most backward classes in this year's budget.

## Karnataka PWD Proposes Commercial Complex at Nellikatte Under Asset Monetisation: Minister Satish Jarkiholi

TPN Correspondent Mangaluru, Feb 19

Karnataka's Public Works Department (PWD) has announced a major initiative to develop a G+3 commercial complex at Nellikatte in Puttur under the state's asset monetisation plan. PWD Minister Satish Jarkiholi revealed that the proposed complex would be constructed at an estimated cost of ₹17.60 crore in a Public-Private Partnership (PPP) mode. This would be the first such project of its kind in the state. The proposed commercial complex will occupy a site area of 1983 square meters and is expected to generate an annual revenue of ₹1.40 crore. The design for the complex is still under finalization, with Jarkiholi stating that further steps will be taken in the next six months to finalize proposals for other similar projects across the state. "The PWD is exploring asset monetisation initiatives in various locations



in the state to unlock the potential of unused or underutilized land," Jarkiholi said, after a review meeting of ongoing projects in Dakshina Kannada district at the Deputy Commissioner's office in Mangaluru.

**In addition to the commercial complex, Jarkiholi also discussed several other initiatives:**

**Other Key Developments:**

■ **Helipad Construction:** The PWD has written to all district Deputy

Commissioners to identify suitable land for constructing permanent helipads. This move aims to replace the current practice of creating temporary helipads during VIP visits. The PWD has sought ₹1 crore for the de-

velopment of a helipad and approach road at Maryhill and ₹50 lakh for upgrading the helipad at Mottethadka, Puttur.

■ **Inspection Bungalow Upgradation:** Jarkiholi acknowledged the need for the maintenance of rooms at the Circuit House and also supported the construction of a VIP guest house. The officials have been asked to submit a proposal for a new building to lay the foundation for another guest house in the Circuit House premises.

■ **Junior College Development in Belthangady:** MLA Harish Poonja raised concerns about the stalled work on the Junior College project, despite ₹3.50 crore in sanctions. Minister Jarkiholi instructed officials to resolve the technical issues and expedite the construction. This asset monetisation project is part of the state's broader initiative to leverage existing gover-

## CM Siddaramaiah Responds to Public Grievances: Solutions in the Works for Affected Districts

CM Siddaramaiah addresses public grievances from various districts in Karnataka.

Concrete road construction delays in Chamarajanagar and school building repairs in Bellary

Stray cattle menace in Bagalkote to be tackled with immediate action.



TPN Correspondent /Bengaluru, Feb 19  
Karnataka Chief Minister Siddaramaiah has actively responded to the concerns raised by the public across various districts of the state. People from Bagalkote, Bellary, and Chamarajanagar districts brought pressing issues to the government's attention, which the CM has vowed to resolve promptly. In Chamarajanagar, the delay in the construction of a concrete road in Yargamballi village, Yalander taluk, was causing significant inconvenience to residents. The matter was highlighted by the media, and CM Siddaramaiah's office swiftly intervened. The Special Duty Officers from the Chief Minister's Office instructed the concerned departments to expedite the work. Additionally, in the same region, the Nirmithi Kendra has already initiated roadwork in Aditi Prabhubdev taluk, which is also set for completion soon. In Bellary, the media reported that the building of the Government Junior Primary

School in Harikrupa Colony, Kurugodu town, had not been repaired, putting students' safety at risk. The Chief Minister's Special Duty Officers directed that immediate repairs be carried out. To ensure the safety of students in the interim, children are being temporarily relocated to other rooms within the college building. Funds for the repair work have been released, and the district collector's approval for repairs has been secured. The issue of stray cattle in Aminagada town, Bagalkote district, was another serious concern raised by the public. The increasing

presence of cattle on roads was causing fear among residents. The Chief Minister's office took swift action, instructing local authorities to prevent stray cattle from entering state highways. The town panchayat has been tasked with taking the cattle to designated cow sheds. CM Siddaramaiah emphasized that he is always ready to listen to the public's concerns and has urged people to bring local issues to the government's attention via social media, ensuring that solutions are found for all districts across Karnataka.



K N Rajanna Slams D K Shivakumar, Accuses Him of Misusing High Command's Name

TPN Correspondent Bengaluru, Feb 19  
Infighting within the ruling Congress party has intensified as Cooperation Minister K N Rajanna openly criticized Deputy Chief Minister D K Shivakumar, accusing him of misusing the name of the Congress high command. This sharp exchange between the two prominent leaders comes amid ongoing speculations about the leadership structure in Karnataka's Congress government. Rajanna's remarks came a day after Shivakumar urged his colleagues to stop "misusing" Chief Minister Siddaramaiah's name for political gain. In a counterattack, Rajanna emphasized that while he agreed with the sentiment of not misusing the CM's name, the same principle should apply to Shivakumar's actions. "Did I build houses in Dollars Colony, Sadashivanagar, and Tumakuru by misusing Chief Minister Siddaramaiah's name?" Rajanna said, indirectly referring to Shivakumar's wealth and influence. Rajanna further stated that Shivakumar should be reminded not to misuse the name of the All India Congress Committee (AICC) or the party's high command for personal or political advantage. He pointed out that the AICC may issue directives on certain issues, but these should be followed with due process, not manipulated for personal gain. The comments come amid growing tension between Shivakumar and supporters of Siddaramaiah, particularly those pressing for a change in the leadership within the Karnataka Congress. Rajanna, a close confidant of Siddaramaiah, has been vocal about his opposition to Shivakumar's leadership as Karnataka Pradesh Congress Committee (KPCC) president, citing the party's "one person, one post" norm. Rajanna has been actively advocating for a change in leadership, accusing Shivakumar of not fulfilling his role effectively. Rajanna also took issue with KPCC working president G C Chandrashekar's recent comments, where he compared the Congress high command to Lord Krishna and some ministers to Shishupala in a Mahabharata analogy. Rajanna dismissed Chandrashekar's influence, pointing out his minimal impact on the party's electoral success. As factional politics continue to brew within the Congress, all eyes remain on the high command's response to the ongoing tensions and the future of Karnataka's Congress leadership.

## BJP State President B.Y. Vijayendra to Address Press Conference Amidst Factional Tensions

TPN Correspondent Bengaluru, Feb 19  
The ongoing battle for control within the Karnataka BJP has reached a boiling point, with tensions escalating between factions led by Basavanagowda Patil Yatnal and B.Y. Vijayendra. BJP State President and MLA B.Y. Vijayendra has called for a long press conference on February 20, promising to answer all questions related to the post of State President and the political crisis that is currently unfolding. In anticipation of the press conference, Vijayendra clarified that the event would address not only the internal issues within the party but also broader political concerns, including the state's political crisis and challenges faced by the BJP. When questioned about the ongoing meetings with Yatnal's faction, Vijayendra expressed willingness to engage in discussions aimed at strengthening the party, acknowledging Yatnal's seniority while maintaining a focus



on unity. Vijayendra also highlighted the importance of staying connected to the legacy of former Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee, marking his birth centenary with ongoing engagements and learning from senior

leaders. He emphasized that such engagements are part of the BJP's continued commitment to its roots and values. Meanwhile, opposition figures have seized the opportunity to criticize the current state of affairs under the Congress government. Chalawadi Narayanaswamy, Leader of the Opposition in the Vidhan Parishad, pointed to a lack of development and infighting within the ruling party. He criticized the government for its failure to deliver on promises, including the non-disbursement of guarantee funds, delayed rice distribution, and the failure to release promised amounts, all of which have led to public dissatisfaction. As the situation unfolds, all eyes are on the February 20 press conference, which is expected to shed light on how B.Y. Vijayendra plans to navigate the party's internal challenges and respond to the mounting criticisms from both inside and outside the BJP.

## Cabinet Expansion After March? Vinay Kulkarni Hints at Ministerial Role in Congress

TPN Correspondent Bengaluru, Feb 19

The long-discussed issue of cabinet expansion in the Congress-led state government has resurfaced, with fresh statements from Congress MLA Vinay Kulkarni suggesting that changes may be imminent. Kulkarni, who has been eyeing a ministerial position since the formation of the Congress government, has expressed confidence that he will secure a ministerial role after the state budget is presented in March. Kulkarni revealed that, following the budget presentation, he expects a cabinet expansion and hinted that he will be included in the new lineup. "The cabinet will be expanded after March, and I am an aspirant for a ministerial post. This time, I will get the ministerial position," he said. Kulkarni had previously sought a place in the cabinet but was not appointed. Now, with his eyes set on the upcoming reshuffle, he seems optimistic about his prospects. Kulkarni also discussed the ongoing uncertainty surrounding Chief Minister Siddaramaiah's position, acknowledging that the High Command will make decisions regarding the CM and KPCC president roles. "I don't know whether Siddaramaiah will

continue as CM, as these decisions are up to the High Command," he said. Kulkarni emphasized his commitment to whatever decisions the Congress leadership makes, including any changes in leadership. The issue of cabinet expansion has been a sensitive topic within the Congress, with many leaders expressing their desire for a ministerial position. However, the Congress High Command had previously restrained public discussions on the matter. Kulkarni's statements indicate that the cabinet reshuffle may finally take place after the presentation of the state budget, which could bring significant changes to Siddaramaiah's cabinet. In addition to Kulkarni's comments, discussions about the potential for a Dalit Chief Minister in the state have also emerged. Kulkarni downplayed any caste-based considerations, stating that there is no casteism within the Congress. "Allah, Rama, and Sita are all present here," he said, referring to the party's inclusive approach. With a large pool of aspirants for ministerial positions and the uncertainty surrounding leadership changes, the expansion of the cabinet is expected to be a highly anticipated event in the coming months.

## Namma Metro Fare Hike Sparks Boycott Movement: Passengers Plan Action in a Week



TPN Correspondent Bengaluru, Feb 19  
In response to the recent metro fare hike in Bengaluru, passenger groups have announced their intention to boycott Namma Metro services within a week if the fare is not reduced. The Bangalore Metro Passengers Forum, which has voiced strong opposition to the fare increase, has set a deadline for the Bangalore Metro Rail Corporation (BMRCL) to roll back the price hike by next Sunday. The forum members held a press conference on February 18 to address the growing discontent among passengers. They warned that if the fares are not reduced, a full-scale boycott of metro services will begin. Pas-

sengers have already started voicing their frustrations by switching to alternative modes of transport, such as private vehicles and BMTc buses, causing a significant drop in daily ridership. Previously, Namma Metro had reached a peak of 9.20 lakh daily passengers, but this number has steadily declined since the fare hike. Forum leaders also pointed out that the new rules, including the minimum recharge amount of Rs 100 for metro cards, are seen as a hidden consequence of the fare increase, adding to the discontent. Many passengers are frustrated with these changes, which they believe have further burdened commuters. The Save Banga-

lore Committee, in collaboration with various organizations, has also begun distributing pamphlets to create awareness among metro passengers and rally support for the fare reduction cause. In light of the ongoing protests, metro passenger organizations have vowed to intensify their struggle. They are urging both the state and central governments to step in and address the concerns of the people, stressing the need for affordable and convenient public transportation. If the fare hike is not rolled back by Sunday, the metro boycott will officially begin, marking a new phase in the ongoing protest against the fare increase.



## Mysuru Couple Ends Life Due to Burden of Loans from Online Betting

A couple in Mysuru reportedly took their own lives due to financial strain caused by loans for online betting.

Jobi Antony and Sharmila found dead near water tank steps at Vijaynagar ground.

Jobi's late brother Joshi Antony had also taken his life, citing similar financial troubles.

TPN Correspondent  
Mysuru, Feb 19

In a tragic incident in Mysuru, a couple, Jobi Antony and Sharmila, have allegedly taken their own lives due to the immense burden of loans accumulated from online betting. The bodies of the couple were found hanging near the water tank steps at Vijaynagar ground within the Vijaynagar police station limits on Tuesday morning. The family is reeling from the loss, as Jobi's sister, Mary, revealed that Jobi's elder brother, Joshi Antony, had also tragically ended his life just a day earlier. Joshi, who was a twin to Jobi, reportedly left behind a video explaining that the couple had taken loans totaling up to Rs 80 lakh for online betting. The financial strain from

money lenders and their incessant demands for repayment had reportedly overwhelmed the family, contributing to the tragic outcomes. Mary mentioned that Jobi and Sharmila had stayed at her house a few months ago, and the moneylenders had also approached her for repayment. Both bodies have been sent to the Mortuary of Mysore Medical College and Research Institute for autopsy, and the investigation is ongoing. This marks a heart-wrenching turn of events, following the discovery of four family members' bodies just a day earlier in Mysuru. Authorities are investigating the cause and circumstances surrounding these deaths, particularly the influence of online gambling and financial strain.

## Bengaluru Metro Fare Hike Leads to Sharp Decline in Ridership, BMTC Bus Usage Soars

TPN Correspondent  
Bengaluru, Feb 19

Following a significant hike in Bengaluru Metro fares, the city has witnessed a sharp decline in metro ridership, while the number of passengers using BMTC buses has surged. Since the fare increase, which came into effect on February 9, 2025, daily ridership on the Namma Metro has fallen drastically. Before the fare hike, the daily metro ridership averaged around 7.5 lakh passengers. However, on the day the new fare structure was implemented, the numbers dropped to just 6.23 lakh, reflecting the immediate impact of the fare increase on commuter behavior. By contrast, the ridership of Bengaluru Metropolitan Transport Corporation (BMTC) buses has seen a notable uptick, with an additional 1 lakh daily passen-

gers since the fare revision. BMTC's daily ridership has increased from 36 lakh to 37 lakh, as more commuters turn to buses and private vehicles to avoid the higher metro fares. Prajavani reports that the metro's drop in ridership is particularly significant on weekdays, as Sunday ridership typically remains lower. The increase in BMTC bus usage indicates that many passengers are opting for the more affordable option in the wake of the fare hike. The rise in BMTC bus passengers is seen as a direct consequence of the metro fare increase, but official confirmation on the exact correlation is expected in the coming days. With the fare hike proving unpopular among passengers, it's clear that affordability remains a critical factor in the city's public transport choices.

## Bengaluru's Temperature Surpasses Delhi's, Records Hottest Day of 2025

TPN Correspondent  
Bengaluru, Feb 19

Bengaluru, traditionally known for its cool and pleasant climate, has been experiencing a notable shift in weather patterns, with temperatures soaring higher than those in Delhi. On February 17, 2025, the city recorded a maximum temperature of 35.9 degrees Celsius, marking the hottest day of the year so far.

In an unusual turn, Bengaluru's temperature even exceeded that of the national capital, Delhi, which recorded a much lower 29 degrees Celsius on the same day.

The India Meteorological Department (IMD) has predicted that the summer temperatures in Bengaluru will continue to rise in the coming days, with 2025 expected to be hotter than previous years. This marks a significant change for the city, which has long been

celebrated for its relatively cooler weather, especially in comparison to other major cities in India. In fact, Bengaluru's temperature this year is 2.7 degrees Celsius higher than it was during the same period in 2024. While the day's temperatures have been climbing, the evenings in the city still bring cooler weather, with the minimum temperature hovering around 17 degrees Celsius. The rise in temperatures has been a topic of concern, as the once "Garden City" is now grappling with the effects of climate change. The shift is expected to continue, with more hot days ahead as the city heads into the summer months. As Bengaluru adapts to these changes, it will be interesting to see how the city manages the increased heat, especially given its growing population and urban development.

## BBMP Offers Good News for Aspiring Homeowners in Bangalore

BBMP invites applications for the Onti Mane Scheme to help eligible individuals build homes.

Applicants must apply by February 25, 2025, at the respective zone's welfare office.

The initiative aims to support the construction of single houses for the underprivileged in Bangalore.



TPN Correspondent  
Bangalore, Feb 19

Bangalore residents dreaming of owning a home have received some good news from the Brihat Bangalore Mahanagara Palike (BBMP). The BBMP has announced that it is inviting applications under its Onti Mane Scheme, which aims to support the construction of single houses for eligi-

ble beneficiaries. Chief Commissioner Tushar Girinath made the announcement after responding to numerous public requests for assistance in homebuilding during the 'Chief Commissioner's Action Zone Program' in the Bommanahalli zone. Over 30 public requests were received, seeking support for grants under the single house construction initiative. In response, BBMP has reviewed

applications from 2022 to 2024, and eligible beneficiaries will soon be provided with the necessary grants to help construct their homes. The Chief Commissioner urged those interested to apply for the scheme before February 25, 2025. Interested individuals can visit the BBMP website to download the application form and submit it at the office of the Assistant Revenue Officer in the welfare department of their respective zone. The Onti Mane Scheme is designed to assist those in need, enabling underprivileged residents to realize their dream of owning a home in Bangalore. This initiative underscores BBMP's commitment to improving the lives of Bangalore's lower-income communities by providing the means to build their own houses.

## Water Shut Down: Cauvery Water Supply Disruption on Feb 20th in Bengaluru

TPN Correspondent  
Bengaluru, Feb 19

Bengaluru residents are advised to brace for a disruption in drinking water supply on February 20 due to ongoing maintenance work by the Bengaluru Water Supply and Sewerage Board (BWSSB). The disruption, scheduled between 9 AM and 9 PM, is caused by the blockage of the 800 mm pipeline near Jalmandali Kaveri 4th Stage 2nd Stage Kania, near Marathahalli and Jeevika Hospital.

As a result, areas across the city will experience a shortage in Cauvery water supply for about 12 hours. Affected areas include Marathahalli, Doddanekundi, Munnekollu, HRBR Layout, Belandur, Indiranagar, and several others. Dr. V. Ram



Prasat Manohar, Chairman of Jalmandal, requested the public's cooperation, urging them to store water ahead of the disruption. He also warned that those found wasting water would face fines up to ₹5000. The BWSSB has

emphasized the importance of conserving water, especially with summer approaching and the potential for increased water shortages due to groundwater depletion. Residents are urged to plan accordingly and ensure suffi-

Cauvery water supply will be disrupted on February 20 from 9 AM to 9 PM in several Bengaluru areas.

Disruption is due to work on the 800 mm pipeline near Jalmandali Kaveri 4th Stage 2nd Stage Kania.

Affected areas include Marathahalli, HRBR Layout, Indiranagar, and others.

cient water storage during the planned disruption.

## Bengaluru Airport Set to Reduce Taxiing Time, Improving Passenger Experience



TPN Correspondent  
Bengaluru, Feb 19

Passengers flying through Kempegowda International Airport in Devanahalli will soon experience shorter taxiing times, thanks to a major infrastructure improvement underway. The airport's management, Bengaluru International Airport Limited (BIAL), is in the final stages of a project aimed at reducing the time it takes for planes to taxi from the

terminal to the runway, a long-standing complaint among travelers. The new taxiway, currently under construction, is designed to connect two runways at the airport, significantly easing congestion and reducing wait times for aircraft. Passengers have frequently expressed frustration with long taxi times, which not only delays departures but also increases fuel consumption for airlines. As Aditi Prabhu-

deva humorously pointed out, long taxiing times have even caused disruptions in personal plans, like the absence of a guest at a wedding due to the lengthy wait for takeoff.

This new development will benefit both airlines and passengers. With reduced taxiing time, airlines will save on fuel costs and improve overall efficiency. Currently, aircraft often need extra fuel to cover the extended taxi routes, resulting in operational losses. The new taxiway is expected to alleviate these issues by allowing planes to move more quickly to the runway.

BIAL aims to complete the construction of the taxiway by December 2026. Once fully operational, it will mark a significant step in enhancing the overall passenger experience at Kempegowda International Airport, improving the airport's ability to handle increased air traffic, and contributing to the growth of Bengaluru as a key aviation hub. The airport's efforts to address this problem reflect its commitment to providing smoother, faster, and more efficient services to its passengers, ensuring that Bengaluru continues to be a leading airport in India.

# Yatnal Responds to BJP's Disciplinary Notice: Major Allegations and Demands

- Basanagowda Patil Yatnal responds to BJP's disciplinary notice with a five-page explanation.
- Yatnal calls for competent leadership and criticizes state BJP President B.Y. Vijayendra.
- Allegations against Vijayendra for family bias and failing to unify the party.



PN Correspondent  
Bengaluru, Feb 19

IP MLA Basanagowda Patil Yatnal has finally responded to the notice issued by the IP Central Disciplinary Committee, which had taken issue with his alleged anti-party activities. Yatnal, in his detailed five-page reply, vehemently denied the charges and elaborated on his stance regarding internal party matters, including leadership issues and factionalism.

In his response, Yatnal emphasized that only competent individuals should be selected for key positions, particularly the post of BJP State President. He defended his actions within the party, insisting that his involvement in the Waqf issue was a matter of concern but done within the party's framework and without causing harm to the BJP's interests. He specifically refuted the notion of engaging in factional politics, asserting that he has always fought for the party's unity and strength.

However, Yatnal did not hold back when it came to addressing state BJP President B.Y. Vijayendra. He made serious allegations, accusing Vijayendra of favoritism towards his relatives and of undermining senior party leaders and activists. According to Yatnal, Vijayendra's biased approach and reliance on family politics have harmed the party and led to setbacks in the state. Yatnal further argued that the lack of party cohesion and unity, especially under Vijayendra's leadership, had hindered key struggles, including fighting against corruption and the Congress government's failures. He stressed that the BJP needed a leader who could take everyone into confidence and lead the party with unity to secure success in the upcoming elections.

## BJP's B.Y. Vijayendra Criticizes Congress Govt Over Alleged Discrimination in Grant Release

TPN Correspondent  
Bengaluru, Feb 19

BJP State President B.Y. Vijayendra has fiercely criticized the Congress government in Karnataka, accusing them of failing to uphold social justice for backward communities. The controversy centers around the alleged discrimination in the release of grants to the Vishwa Ganiga Community Trust, which serves the mining community—considered one of the most backward in the state.

Vijayendra, in his remarks, slammed Chief Minister Siddaramaiah for his rhetoric on backward classes, accusing him of using their plight merely as a political tool to secure votes. According to Vijayendra, despite the Congress government's claims of supporting underprivileged communities, there is no tangible evidence of significant contributions, especially for the very backward Kayak and mining communities, who are being neglected.

The controversy erupted when Shivraj Thangadagi, the state's Backward Classes Welfare Minister, was accused of withholding grants meant for the development of the Vish-

wa Ganiga Community Trust, which focuses on uplifting the Ganiga Samaj, a particularly marginalized group. Vijayendra said that this action exposed the "real mask" of the Congress government, claiming that their preachings of social justice were merely a facade. Further criticism came from BJP leader Basanagowda Patil Yatnal, who condemned the state government for ignoring the genuine concerns of religious and social leaders like Param Pujya Purnanandapurji Swamiji. Swamiji, a former minister and a dedicated advocate for the backward classes, had worked for decades to improve the condition of mining communities and had hoped the government would fulfill its commitments.

Yatnal, along with Vijayendra, demanded the immediate release of the withheld grants, accusing the state government of exploiting backward communities for political gain. As the controversy continues to unfold, it highlights growing tensions between the BJP and Congress over their respective records on social welfare and support for backward classes.

# Karnataka Tops Panchayat Decentralization Index: A Milestone in Local Governance

Karnataka Tops Panchayat Decentralization Index

Karnataka ranks first in the Union Ministry of Panchayat Raj's Panchayat Decentralization Index.

State excels in 'Finance' and 'Accountability' for empowering local governance.

Karnataka leads in timely utilization of Finance Commission grants.

TPN Correspondent  
Bengaluru, Feb 19

Karnataka has been ranked first in the recently released Panchayat Decentralization Index (PDI) by the Union Ministry of Panchayat Raj.

This achievement highlights the state's commitment to strengthening panchayat raj institutions and promoting grassroots democracy. Priyank Kharge, Minister for Rural Development and Pan-

chayat Raj, expressed pride over the state's performance, stating that the ranking underscores Karnataka's leadership in local governance. The PDI evaluates states based on six critical parameters: functions, finance, executives, capacity building, and accountability. Karnataka emerged as the leader, particularly excelling in the areas of 'Finance' and 'Accountability.'

The state's strong performance in the 'Finance' category is attributed to its efficient use of the Fifteenth Finance Commission grants, with Karnataka ensuring timely release and proper utilization of the funds. Furthermore, the State Finance Commission of Karnataka has enhanced



the financial autonomy of panchayats by ensuring that funds are promptly transferred, allowing local bodies to effectively implement development programs.

Karnataka's success in panchayat decentralization sets a national benchmark, with the state showcasing how empowering local governance can lead to better administrative efficiency and improved public services.

## Minister G. Parameshwar Called to Delhi Amid Factional Politics in Congress



TPN Correspondent  
Bengaluru, Feb 19

Factional politics within the ruling Congress party in Karnataka has come to the forefront once again, as Home Minister G. Parameshwar has been called to Delhi by the Congress High Command. The call comes amidst ongoing discussions about a potential change in leadership, including talks of a new Chief Minister and a possible reshuffle of the KPCC president.

Parameshwar, a senior Congress leader, will be leaving for Delhi on Tuesday morning from Kempegowda International Airport at 10:20 AM and is expected to arrive in the capital by 1:15 PM.

During his visit, he will meet several key Congress leaders, including AICC President Mallikarjun Kharge, MP Rahul Gandhi, and state officials. The purpose of the meeting remains unclear, but it has fueled speculation about the internal dynamics of the state Congress.

Factionalism has been rampant in the state Congress, with rumors of a possible change in the Chief Minister's position despite warnings from the High Command to avoid discussing such

matters. Chief Minister Siddaramaiah's position is under scrutiny, with some insiders suggesting that he may not be the party's choice for the upcoming elections. At the same time, speculation about the recall of the KPCC president continues, with various leaders vying for influence.

Meanwhile, Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar has cautioned party members against discussing the potential change of CM publicly. The situation has led to tensions within the party, as various factions jockey for position.

Recently, Congress state in-charge Randeep Singh Surjewala visited Bengaluru to hold meetings with party leaders and ministers, urging them to refrain from making open statements about leadership changes. Despite his advice, factional politics continues to simmer, with Parameshwar's trip to Delhi now adding another layer of intrigue to the unfolding political drama.

With Parameshwar's visit to Delhi, all eyes are now on the High Command's response to the growing political uncertainty in Karnataka's Congress government.

# No Land, No Investment: Uttara Kannada Faces Industrial Growth Barrier

Over 30 companies eager to invest in Uttara Kannada but land availability remains a key issue. Opposition leader R. Ashok criticizes the state government's neglect of land allocation. Allegations that industrial development is hindered by the Congress government's lack of action.

TPN Correspondent  
Bengaluru, Feb 19

In a striking reflection of the challenges faced by certain districts in the state, Uttara Kannada has become a focal point for industrial growth woes. Despite a recent investor conference organized by the state government, where promises of lakhs of crores in capital investment were made, Uttara Kannada continues to struggle due to a lack of land availability.

Opposition leader R. Ashok took to social media to highlight the issue, revealing that more than 30 companies are eager to invest in Uttara Kannada but have been unable to proceed due to the unavailability of land. He

slammed the Congress-led state government for its failure to provide the necessary infrastructure, leaving investors to look elsewhere. Ashok criticized the government's approach, accusing them of prioritizing publicity over real industrial development.

He remarked that despite showcasing the state as an attractive destination for investment at the investor conference, the lack of concrete action, especially in providing land, is preventing actual progress.

He further emphasized that the youth and women of Uttara Kannada are being deprived of employment opportunities because of this

stagnation. Ashok also questioned MB Patil, the Minister of Heavy and Medium Industries, for not taking necessary action regarding land allotment in Uttara Kannada. He argued that industrial growth in the region and employment generation for the local population could only occur if investors were provided with the land and infrastructure they require.

He called on the state to focus less on appearances and more on creating a conducive environment for industries to thrive, stressing that the state's future industrial success will depend on addressing these land and infrastructure issues.



## Odisha IAS Officer Alleges Harassment by CBI, Threatens to Commit Suicide

A senior IAS officer from Odisha, identified as Sethi, has alleged harassment by a CBI team that arrived at his residence on the morning of February 15 in connection with an ongoing investigation into a Rs 10 lakh bribery case. The officer, who is from the 1995 batch, claimed he felt "helpless" and threatened to take his own life due to the alleged mistreatment.

Sethi, who had previously cooperated with the CBI, stated that his mobile phone was seized during the search at his residence, and his native village in Balasore was also searched without the presence of local police. He further claimed that the CBI team did not follow proper procedures, including failing to bring a woman officer for the search despite his wife being present at the residence. The officer expressed frustration at being targeted, particularly due to his Dalit background, and claimed that he was being unfairly harassed because of his lack of political support. He also denied any connection to the bribery case involving the Bridge and Roof Company (India) Lim-



ited and its general manager, Chanchal Mukherjee, who was arrested last year for allegedly accepting a bribe. Despite Sethi's claims, CBI officials at the scene denied any mistreatment, arguing that the search was carried out in accordance with the law. They asserted that there was no ill-treatment of the officer. Meanwhile, a resignation letter pur-

portedly written by Sethi has surfaced on social media, but its authenticity has not been confirmed. The state government has not received any official resignation from Sethi, according to Chief Secretary Manoj Ahuja. As the situation unfolds, legal and administrative circles have called for a thorough investigation into the allegations made by the officer.

## MLA Security Cover Dispute Escalates Tensions Between Fadnavis and Shinde, But Both Deny Rift



The ongoing tension between Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis and Deputy CM Eknath Shinde appears to be intensifying, now centered around the issue of downgraded security for several MLAs, particularly those from Shiv Sena. As per protocols established by the Special Protection Unit (SPU), top leaders like Fadnavis, Shinde, and other high-ranking officials are assigned Z-plus security, while ministers receive Y-plus security.

In a recent security review, the cover for around 20 Shiv Sena MLAs, including those who aligned with Shinde, was significantly downgraded, leaving them with minimal protection, including just one constable. This move has sparked controversy, particularly as security for some Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) MLAs led by Deputy CM Ajit Pawar was also reduced, though the scale was smaller. Notably, leaders such as Sharad Pawar and Uddhav Thackeray continue to receive Z-plus

protection.

Despite the growing friction, Shinde has denied any rift between the alliance partners, stating, "There is no cold war (between allies)... We are 'thanda thanda cool cool.'" He further clarified that the ongoing disagreements are directed at those opposing Maharashtra's development.

This security issue is just one of the recent points of contention between Fadnavis and Shinde. Earlier this week, Shinde established a Medical Aid Cell at the state secretariat, despite the existence of the Chief Minister's Relief Fund. Fadnavis, however, expressed no objections, explaining that both the CM and Deputy CM frequently receive requests for assistance. The situation reflects the ongoing dynamics and competition between the two factions, particularly as Shinde also launched a coordination center for infrastructure projects, competing with the war room overseen by Fadnavis.

## Tamil Nadu Reaffirms Opposition to NEP and Hindi Imposition in Protest



Tamil Nadu's stance on the language issue was made clear on Tuesday as the state asserted that it will not bow down to the Union Government's pressure regarding the National Education Policy (NEP) and the three-language formula. This statement comes after Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan's recent comments, stating that the Centre would

withhold Rs 2,400 crore in funds from Tamil Nadu unless the state implements NEP 2020.

School Education Minister Anbil Mahesh Poyyamozhi addressed the massive protest organized by the ruling DMK and its alliance partners, which included the Congress, VCK, CPI(M), CPI, IUML, MDMK, and others from the Secular Progressive

Alliance (SPA). Poyyamozhi condemned Pradhan's ultimatum, calling it "unfortunate" and reiterated Tamil Nadu's firm opposition to the imposition of Hindi and the three-language formula.

During the protest, Poyyamozhi made it clear that Tamil Nadu rejects the NEP and the three-language formula, asserting that the state would continue with its long-standing two-language policy. The state's rejection of NEP has been consistent, with Poyyamozhi emphasizing that Tamil Nadu will never succumb to the Union Government's "hegemony" over language issues.

VCK chief Thol Thirumavalavan also spoke out, claiming that the push for a three-language policy was an attempt to reduce the importance of Tamil in the state. He warned that such policies could lead to the marginalization of regional languages, citing the examples of native languages in Bihar and Rajasthan after the imposition of Hindi.

This protest highlights Tamil Nadu's ongoing resistance to the Centre's policies regarding language education, marking yet another chapter in the state's long-standing opposition to any attempt to impose Hindi in the region.

## Conflicting Claims on Delhi Stampede: Experts Call for Independent Probe



The tragic stampede at New Delhi Railway Station on February 15, which claimed 18 lives, has sparked conflicting statements from various officials, prompting experts to demand an independent investigation. Witnesses, Railway Protection Force (RPF), and ministry officials have given contradictory versions of the events, leading safety and legal experts to stress the need for an impartial probe to ascertain the facts and ensure accountability.

Following the incident, the Railway Ministry appointed a two-member committee to investigate the matter. However, experts argue that given the conflicting reports, an independent inquiry is essential for credibility. Senior railway officials suggested that passenger confusion between two similarly named trains — the 'Prayagraj Express' and the 'Prayagraj Special' — led to a rush and the stampede.

However, an inspector from the RPF contradicted this, pointing to an announcement of a platform change that triggered the chaos. Eyewitnesses, as well as

Delhi Police sources, have provided differing accounts, with some blaming overcrowding due to delayed trains and others citing a rumour about the train change. The Railway Ministry's statement attributing the stampede to a rumour further complicates the situation. Legal experts, including retired Delhi High Court judge R.S. Sodhi and senior lawyer Prashant Bhushan, have suggested that a retired judge from the Delhi High Court be tasked with the probe to ensure fairness and transparency.

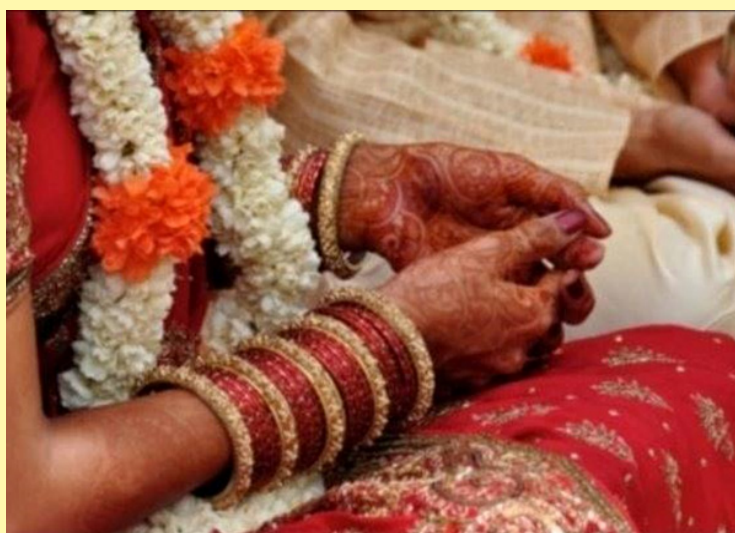
They stressed that an independent investigation is crucial to maintain the credibility of the findings and restore public trust in the system. Experts on railway safety also emphasized the need for thorough reform and accountability, as 18 lives were lost due to apparent negligence.

They argued that any inquiry conducted by ministry officials might lack impartiality, underscoring the importance of an independent body overseeing the investigation.

## Rajasthan Groom Returns Dowry Cash to Set Example Against the Practice

In a remarkable act of defiance against dowry practices, Paramveer Rathore, a civil services aspirant, returned Rs 5.51 lakh in cash that was gifted to him by his would-be in-laws during his wedding in Rajasthan's Karaliya village. The wedding, which took place on February 14, saw Rathore arriving in a traditional procession, riding a mare, as part of the Hindu wedding customs.

During the 'tilak ceremony', Rathore was presented with a plate containing Rs 5.51 lakh in cash, a gesture typically associated with dowry. Upon seeing the money, Rathore was visibly saddened by the persistence of such practices in society. He ex-



plained that although he couldn't reject the gift immediately due to wedding rituals, he later discussed the matter with his family and made the decision to return the cash.

Rathore, who believes in the power of education to drive social change, said, "I am a civil services aspirant, and I have studied a lot, so I felt if educated people don't make a change, then who will?"

He added that society needs to begin addressing dowry practices at an individual level, with every person contributing to the change.

His father, Ishwar Singh, a farmer, echoed the sentiment, stating that women today are excelling in every field, making dowry practices even more outdated. They only accepted a coconut and a one-rupee coin as part of the rituals, sending a strong message against dowry.

Rathore's brave decision has been widely praised, with family members and villagers commending his stance against such feudal traditions. This bold act has sparked a conversation on the urgent need to end dowry practices in society.

# India's Paradox: Booming Economy, But Where Are The Jobs?



India, with the world's largest youth population, is at a critical juncture. While it stands as Asia's fastest-growing economy, it faces a severe employment crisis that remains unique to its socio-economic context.

The real paradox lies not in the absence of jobs but in the lack of skilled professionals who meet industry demands. An alarming 83% of India's unemployed workforce is between 15 and 29 years old, highlighting a mismatch between education and employability. Although India produces 50 lakh graduates annually, nearly half of them are unemployable—not due to lack of knowledge, but because of essential skill deficiencies, including communication, problem-solving, and interpersonal skills.

This skills gap is further exacerbated by low youth workforce participation, leading to rising frustration among young professionals and deepening economic strain for families that invest heavily in education, only to see their children unable to secure stable jobs. The inability of the job market to absorb this growing unemployable workforce, particularly in fields like research and development, hampers innovation and productivity, which are vital to sustaining India's economic growth. Efforts like the National Education Policy (NEP) and skill development programs are commendable but haven't fully addressed the skills gap. These initiatives encourage alignment between academia and industry needs, yet many graduates remain

unemployable due to deficiencies in real-world skills. Additionally, rural youth face a further disadvantage, with limited English proficiency hindering their entry into urban job markets, where English fluency is often a requirement for multinational companies. For India to continue its growth trajectory, it must bridge this skills gap to ensure that economic expansion translates into equitable job creation. The solution lies in realigning education with industry needs, fostering lifelong learning, and investing in skills development. If done correctly, India's demographic dividend can become a major economic asset, transforming its youth into a powerhouse of innovation and progress. The time for reform is now.

# Trump's Blunt 'No' To Europe Could Change Everything



A new phase in the Ukraine war is unfolding, as the Trump administration seeks to engage Russia without involving Ukraine or Europe. The Saudis are stepping in as mediators, with key figures like US Secretary of State Marco Rubio, Trump's Middle East special envoy Steve Witkoff, and National Security Adviser Mike Waltz playing central roles. This shift marks a dramatic departure from the US's policy of the past three years and leaves Europe scrambling to respond.

Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelenskyy has strongly opposed any deals made without Ukraine's involvement, but the US seems ready to walk away from its commitment to European security. US officials, including Vice-President JD Vance, have emphasized that Europe must take on a greater role in its own defense, with US Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth stating that Ukraine returning to its pre-2014 borders is unrealistic, while also downplaying Ukraine's NATO aspirations. The Trump administration's stance represents a fundamental rethink of the US-Europe partnership. In Paris, European leaders are urgently discussing how to respond to this shift, with UK leader Keir Starmer and Germany suggesting peace-keeping troops for Ukraine. However, many fear that Trump's pursuit of peace with Putin could put Europe at a long-term disadvantage.

As the US shifts its focus to the Indo-Pacific, Europe must confront the reality that its security is no longer a top priority for Washington. The task now is for European leaders to bolster their defense commitments and ensure that they have a say in the future of transatlantic relations. Trump's bold moves could disrupt the global order, with Europe left to reconsider its place in the new world order.

## Beyond Deportation: Joint Efforts a Must to Curb Illegal Immigration

India is facing a serious challenge in the form of illegal immigration, particularly with planeloads of deported Indian migrants arriving from the United States. The individuals involved are primarily Indian citizens, and their deportation not only reflects poorly on the states they originated from but also on the nation as a whole. Political finger-pointing over the matter does little to address the deeper issues at play. Successive governments at both the central and state levels have failed these citizens to such an extent that they risked their lives seeking opportunities abroad.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi, during his recent visit to Washington, pledged to accept any verified Indian migrant deported from the United States and to intensify efforts to combat human trafficking. His call to move beyond mere repatriation and to address the root causes of illegal immigration is a positive step. However, this effort cannot be the responsibility of the Indian government alone. Tackling illegal immigration requires coordinated action from both the Union and state governments, as well as collaboration with civil society and the general public. All these stakeholders are key to formulating a sustainable solution to this pressing issue.

The situation is particularly dire in Punjab, which has experienced an alarming exodus of its residents seeking better prospects in the US. Over the past 15 years, the state has been ruled by various political parties, including the Akali-BJP alliance, the Con-

gress, and the Aam Aadmi Party. Despite the change in leadership, the problem persists. The tendency to shift blame between political factions has failed to yield any real solutions. It is crucial for all political parties to put aside differences and prioritize the long-term interests of the state, addressing the root causes of illegal immigration in a unified manner.

The treatment of deportees has been another point of contention, with many arriving in India still shackled despite the country's protests to the US authorities. Additionally, the fact that nearly all deportations are being routed through Amritsar raises further concerns. While these issues cannot be ignored, they should not divert attention from the larger challenge at hand. A key task for both the central and state governments moving forward will be to prevent deported individuals from resorting to similar illegal attempts to migrate again. Equally important is to dissuade potential migrants from taking dangerous and desperate measures in pursuit of the elusive "American dream." To truly curb illegal immigration, it is essential for India to adopt a holistic and collaborative approach. Rather than focusing solely on deportation, efforts must be directed toward addressing the socio-economic factors that drive people to take such drastic steps. Only through coordinated action across all levels of government, along with the involvement of civil society, can India hope to solve this pressing issue and prevent further harm to its citizens.

## Failure of Planning: Will Vaishnav Take Blame for Stampede?



The tragic stampede at New Delhi station, which claimed 18 lives during the Maha Kumbh Mela rush, was not merely an accident. It was a catastrophic failure of planning, foresight, and accountability by the authorities. As thousands of pilgrims descended on the station to board trains to Prayagraj, the lack of preparation to manage the massive influx of passengers became tragically apparent. The event's scale was not unexpected—such large gatherings have long been part of the Mela, and the resulting strain on railway infrastructure is well-documented. The fact that authorities failed to anticipate and implement proper crowd control measures is a glaring oversight that ultimately led to the deaths of innocent people.

Former Railway Minister Pawan Kumar Bansal was blunt in his assessment of the situation,

asserting that the ultimate responsibility lay with the current Railway Minister, Ashwini Vaishnav. While the government hastily announced compensation for the victims' families—Rs 10 lakh for each deceased and Rs 2.5 lakh for the seriously injured—ethical concerns arose when reports emerged of cash being distributed at the station. The distribution of money in violation of the 2023 compensation guidelines, which limit cash payouts to Rs 50,000, only served to highlight the government's inability to address systemic issues properly. The optics of handing out large wads of cash amid chaos seemed insensitive and inadequate in the face of such a preventable tragedy. The demand for Vaishnav's resignation is gaining momentum, especially after the government initially dismissed the stampede as a "rumor." Such deflection of responsibility highlights a deep-

er reluctance to acknowledge the failure in managing the situation. Historically, railway ministers such as Lal Bahadur Shastri and Nitish Kumar demonstrated moral responsibility by resigning following similar disasters. This raises the question: will Vaishnav follow suit and take accountability for the loss of life under his watch?

While resignations might offer a symbolic gesture of responsibility, what is needed now is not just individual accountability but a comprehensive overhaul of the railway system. Effective crowd management protocols must be instituted, especially during major religious and festival events. It is time to put in place robust systems that prioritize passenger safety, preventing such disasters from occurring in the future. Without this, no amount of compensation will be able to undo the damage done.



# India, Qatar Elevate Ties To 'Strategic Partnership' As Emir Meets PM Modi

- India and Qatar upgrade ties to a strategic partnership.
- Discussions focus on trade, energy, and investment growth.
- Leaders explore a free trade deal and fiscal cooperation.



TPN Correspondent | Delhi

India and Qatar have officially agreed to elevate their bilateral relationship to a strategic partnership, marking a significant milestone in their diplomatic ties. The agreement was finalized following a meeting between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the Emir of Qatar, Sheikh Tamim Bin Hamad Al-Thani, in New Delhi.

The leaders engaged in extensive discussions at Hyderabad House, focusing on key areas such as trade, investment, technology,

energy, food security, culture, and people-to-people exchanges. One of the highlights of the talks was a potential free trade agreement, with both nations aiming to double bilateral trade to \$28 billion over the next five years.

Energy security also featured prominently in the discussions, with both sides exploring ways to broaden their cooperation in this sector. Additionally, the two countries agreed on measures to prevent fiscal evasion and avoid double taxation concerning income taxes. An agreement on this front was also exchanged.

Both leaders also touched upon regional and global issues of mutual interest during their talks, reinforcing the strong partnership between the two nations. The Ministry of External Affairs spokesperson, Randhir Jaiswal, shared details of the discussions on social media, emphasizing the breadth of cooperation envisioned across various sectors, including innovation and technology.

In a rare diplomatic gesture, Prime Minister Modi personally received the Emir at the airport,

offering a warm handshake and a hug, underscoring the importance of the visit. The Emir's visit, which began on Monday evening, follows Prime Minister Modi's trip to Qatar in February 2024.

During the visit, the Emir was given a ceremonial guard of honour at the Rashtrapati Bhavan, where he was warmly welcomed by President Droupadi Murmu. Accompanying the Emir is a high-level delegation, including ministers, senior officials, and business leaders, further strengthening ties between the two nations.



## Maharashtra Cabinet Approves Formation Of 6th Finance Commission

TPN Correspondent | Mumbai

In a significant move, the Maharashtra Cabinet has approved the establishment of a Sixth State Finance Commission to assess the financial position of panchayats and municipalities and recommend necessary financial measures. The Cabinet authorized Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis to propose the names of the Chairman and members of the Commission to the state Governor, C.P. Radhakrishnan. Additionally, an officer with at least a Junior Administrative Grade Officer rank will be appointed as the Member Secretary of the Commission.

The Finance Commission will be responsible for reviewing the financial status of local government bodies and recommending the allocation of state revenue from taxes, duties, tolls, and fees among panchayats and municipalities. The Commission will also suggest the principles for the distribution of grants-in-aid and measures to improve the financial health of local bodies. The recommendations will be based on the 2011 Census population data to determine the fair share of taxes and subsidies. The Commission's work will be supported by necessary resources, including office space and a dedicated budget for recurring and non-recurring expenses.

In addition to the Finance Commission approval, the Cabinet greenlit a major solar power project for the Mysal Lift Irrigation Scheme under the Krishna-Koyna Lift Irrigation Project. This energy-efficient initiative, with a budget of Rs 1,594 crore, aims to meet the annual electricity needs of approximately 398 million units for the scheme. The project will benefit drought-prone areas in Sangli and Solapur districts by providing irrigation water to over 1 lakh hectares.

Furthermore, the Cabinet approved the revised budget of Rs 1,275.78 crore for the Varkhede Londhe Barrage project in Jalgaon. Another notable decision was the establishment of an anti-drug task force, with 346 posts created to strengthen efforts in combating substance abuse in the state.

## Gyanesh Kumar appointed as CEC; Vivek Joshi election commissioner

TPN Correspondent | Delhi

On Monday, Gyanesh Kumar was appointed as the next Chief Election Commissioner (CEC), according to the law ministry. Kumar's appointment marks a significant moment as he becomes the first CEC to be appointed under the new law that governs the appointment of members to the Election Commission (EC). His term will extend until January 26, 2029, just before the expected announcement of the schedule for the next Lok Sabha election.

Vivek Joshi, a 1989-batch Haryana-cadre Indian Administrative Service (IAS) officer, was also appointed as an Election Commissioner. Joshi, born on May 21, 1966, will serve in this role until 2031, in line with the law stipulating that CECs and ECs retire at the age of 65 or serve for a six-year term.



Before his appointment, Sushil Chandra had resigned from his position as the Chairman of the Central Board of Direct Taxes (CBDT) to become an Election Commissioner. Joshi, a former Haryana Chief Secretary, had been on central deputation since January 2019.

During his tenure as CEC, Kumar will oversee several crucial state elections, including the Bihar Assembly elections later this year, as well as the Kerala and Puducherry Assembly elections in 2026. He will also supervise the Assembly elections in Tamil Nadu and West Bengal, which are scheduled for 2026.

Kumar, a 1988-batch Kerala-cadre IAS officer, played a vital role in implementing decisions related to the abrogation of Article 370 during his tenure in the Union Ministry of Home Affairs. He took over as Election Commissioner on March 15, 2024.

# Indian Embassy Assures Investigation into Nepalese Student's Alleged Suicide at KIIT

TPN Correspondent | Delhi

The Indian Embassy in Nepal has promised a thorough investigation into the alleged suicide of Nepalese student Prakriti Lamsal at Odisha's Kalinga Institute of Industrial Technology (KIIT). The third-year B Tech student was found dead in her hostel room on Sunday, triggering protests on the KIIT campus where nearly 1,000 Nepali students are enrolled.

In response to the incident, students took to the streets, blocking roads and staging protests against the administration. Demonstrations also took place in front of the Indian Embassy in Kathmandu, with students demanding a comprehensive probe into the matter.

The embassy issued a statement urging Nepali students to return to campus and continue their studies. It highlighted that Nepali students form a crucial part of the educational and cultural ties between India and Nepal. The statement further reassured that the Indian government would



continue taking necessary measures to ensure the safety and well-being of Nepali students in India.

The protests escalated on campus, leading to some Nepali students being evicted from their hostel by the authorities. KIIT clarified that extensive counseling efforts had

been made for over 10 hours to manage the situation. However, certain protesters had disrupted the process, blocking roads and creating tensions. As a result, the university advised students to return to their homes until the investigation is complete, with assurances that their academic progress would not be affected.

Meanwhile, Nepal's Prime Minister K.P. Sharma Oli intervened, dispatching officials to counsel students and provide them with the option of returning to their homes or staying in the hostel. State education ministers also instructed KIIT to ensure the safe return of Nepali students to Bhubaneswar by special buses.

# Former UK PM Rishi Sunak and Family Visit India's Parliament House

TPN Correspondent | Delhi

Former UK Prime Minister Rishi Sunak, accompanied by his wife Akshata Murty, visited the Parliament House in India on Tuesday, February 18, 2025. The family, including their two daughters, Krishna and Anoushka, was welcomed by the Lok Sabha Secretary General, Utpal Kumar Singh, during their visit to the iconic political landmark.

In a video shared by news agency ANI, Sunak can be seen arriving at the Parliament with his family. The warm reception marked a special moment for the Sunak family during their trip to India. In addition to his immediate family, Sunak's mother-in-law, Sudha Murty, who is a Member of the Rajya Sabha, was also present



at the Parliament House on the same day. Sudha Murty is known for her extensive philanthropic work and as the chairperson of Infosys Foundation.

Rishi Sunak's visit comes amid a series of engagements in India that have included cultural and

official events. The former UK PM, who made history as the first person of Indian descent to hold the position of Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, continues to maintain close ties with India, where his in-laws are prominent figures in the business and philanthropic spheres.

The visit was an opportunity for Sunak and his family to experience India's legislative heart and engage with Indian political leaders. The family's connection to India has always been a subject of interest, especially considering Sunak's background, with both of his parents being of Indian origin.

This trip also highlights the strengthening of ties between the UK and India, two nations with historical, political, and cultural bonds. As Sunak and his family toured the Parliament, the occasion symbolized a moment of personal and professional significance for the former Prime Minister, alongside his continued support for fostering UK-India relations.

# Tesla Begins Hiring In India After PM Modi-Elon Musk Meet In US

- Tesla begins hiring in India, signaling market entry plans
- Job listings in Mumbai and Delhi hint at service expansion
- India's EV sector set for increased competition with Tesla's arrival



TPN Correspondent | Riyadh

Tesla has initiated recruitment efforts in India, signaling its upcoming entry into the country's burgeoning electric vehicle (EV) market. This development follows a recent meeting between Tesla CEO Elon Musk and Prime Minister Narendra Modi during his trip to the United States, highlighting growing ties between the two nations in the tech and defense sectors.

A LinkedIn job post from Tesla revealed that the company is looking to fill 13 positions across Mumbai and Delhi. The roles range from customer-facing positions to back-end roles, including service technicians, customer engagement managers, delivery operations specialists, and advi-

sory positions. This recruitment drive is seen as a clear indication that Tesla is laying the groundwork for its expansion into India's EV market.

Tesla's potential entry into India is significant, given the country's increasing focus on clean energy and sustainability. With its strong brand recognition and innovative electric vehicles, Tesla could play a pivotal role in shaping India's transition to electric mobility. The company's recruitment efforts suggest that it plans to offer a range of services, including customer support and after-sales services, to ensure a smooth experience for Indian consumers.

The move also follows ongoing discussions between India and the US aimed at

reducing trade imbalances and increasing cooperation in key sectors, including military sales. As US President Donald Trump mentioned during his tenure, the US was keen on increasing military exports to India, including potential deals for advanced fighter jets like the F-35. These talks further strengthen the economic and strategic partnership between the two nations, providing a favorable backdrop for Tesla's entry into the Indian market. As Tesla continues to expand globally, its foray into India is expected to spark increased competition in the country's electric vehicle industry, which is experiencing rapid growth. Tesla's entry could further boost India's efforts to reduce its carbon footprint and promote sustainable transportation solutions.

## Netanyahu Orders Immediate Enforcement of UNRWA Law, Ending Operations in Israel

TPN Correspondent | Tel Aviv

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has directed the immediate enforcement of the UNRWA law, following the Knesset's passage of the legislation with broad support. The law mandates the cessation of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) operations within Israeli territory, including East Jerusalem.

The law, passed in October 2024, prohibits Israeli authorities from engaging with UNRWA and calls for the agency to vacate all premises in occupied East Jerusalem by January 30, 2025. Israel's Prime Minister's Office (PMO) confirmed the directive in a post on social media, stating there are no restrictions on its implementation. UNRWA, a vital relief and human development agency, was established in 1949 to provide services to Palestinian refugees who lost their homes and livelihoods in the 1948 Arab-Israeli war. For decades, the agency has provided essential humanitarian aid, including health facilities, schools, and vocational training, primarily in the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

The Knesset's decision to end UNRWA's operations in Israeli-controlled areas has drawn international criticism. UN Secretary-General António Guterres expressed concern, warning that the effective ban could have devastating consequences for Palestinian refugees. Joyce Msuya, the acting head of the UN aid coordination office, called the move "dangerous and outrageous." UNRWA's Commissioner-General Philippe Lazzarini also condemned the decision, claiming that the legislation would increase suffering among Palestinians and amounted to "collective punishment." Earlier this month, U.S. President Donald Trump also signed executive orders to cut U.S. funding to UNRWA, further isolating the agency. As tensions surrounding the issue continue to rise, the implementation of the UNRWA law reflects Israel's stance on the ongoing Palestinian refugee situation and its efforts to limit the agency's influence in the region.



## Vatican cancels Pope's weekend engagements as he battles 'complex' infection

TPN Correspondent | Vatican City

Pope Francis, who is currently in the hospital for a "complex" respiratory infection, will not participate in this weekend's Holy Year events, the Vatican announced on Tuesday. The 88-year-old pontiff has been suffering from the infection for over a week and was admitted to Rome's Gemelli hospital on Friday.

As a result of his health condition, the Vatican confirmed that a public papal audience scheduled for Saturday has been canceled. However, a papal mass set for Sunday will still be held but will be led by a senior Vatican official in place of the Pope.

On Monday, the Vatican shared that doctors had modified the Pope's medication for the second time during his hospitalization in an attempt to address his "complex clinical situation." The infection is described as a "polymicrobial" one, which can involve a combination of viruses, bacteria, and fungi affecting the respiratory tract.

Pope Francis, who has faced various health challenges over the past two years, including bouts with influenza, continues to receive medical care. Despite these ongoing health struggles, his condition is described as stable, although his public engagements are being reduced for now to ensure his recovery.



## Russian Delegation Arrives in Saudi Arabia for High-Level Talks with US Officials

TPN Correspondent | Moscow

The US and Russian delegations have agreed to address ongoing tensions in their bilateral relationship, according to a statement from US State Department spokesperson Tammy Bruce following talks in Riyadh on Tuesday. The discussions, which focused on the Ukraine conflict and future economic cooperation, marked a significant step toward improving relations between the two countries.

US Secretary of State Marco Rubio, who participated in the meeting, revealed that both sides had agreed to form a 'high-level team' tasked with negotiating peace in Ukraine and fostering economic cooperation. The aim, he said, was to find a sustainable, enduring solution to the conflict that would be acceptable to all parties involved.

Bruce emphasized that the US is committed to finding a resolution to the war in Ukraine "as soon as possible," while ensuring that the solution is long-lasting and acceptable to all sides. However, despite the discussions, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky expressed concerns about the talks, warning that Ukraine would not accept any agreements made about the country's future without its direct participation.

The meeting, which was hosted by Saudi Arabia, was significant for its lack of Ukrainian representation at the table, highlighting the complexities of the peace process. Zelensky's statement underscored the importance of Ukraine's involvement in any discussions related to its sovereignty and future.

In addition to the peace talks, Bruce noted that the US and Russia would explore opportunities for future cooperation on matters of mutual geopolitical interest. This includes potential economic and investment opportunities that could arise from a successful resolution to the conflict in Ukraine.

Secretary Rubio acknowledged the complexity of the process, calling the Riyadh talks "the first step of a long and difficult journey." He also hinted that the European Union (EU), which has imposed sanctions on Russia, would likely need to be involved in future negotiations. Rubio suggested that EU involvement would be crucial to reaching a comprehensive and lasting peace agreement.



## Hasina vows to return, blames Yunus for 'terrorism and lawlessness' in Bangladesh

TPN Correspondent | Delhi

In a strong condemnation of the interim government in Bangladesh, former Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has blamed Chief Advisor Muhammad Yunus for causing "terrorism and lawlessness" in the country. Speaking virtually to her supporters from exile in India, Hasina, who was ousted from power in August 2024, accused Yunus of destroying Bangladesh's social fabric and allowing terrorists to wreak havoc on the population.

Hasina's remarks came as she criticized Yunus for his silence during violent student-led protests last year, which saw dozens of police officers killed. She accused Yunus' administration of being ineffective and unable to manage the country, particularly in terms of addressing the violence and civil unrest that erupted during her government's downfall.

"He has no experience in running a government. He dissolved all inquiry committees and unleashed terrorists to butcher people. They are destroying Bangladesh," Hasina said. She vowed to return to Bangladesh and promised that the perpetrators of the violence would be held accountable for their actions.

Hasina's comments were aimed at rallying support for her political party, the Awami League, which she leads. She pledged that her return would be marked by justice for those who had suffered under Yunus' leadership, adding, "Inshallah, we will oust this government of terrorists. The killers will face justice in Bangladesh."

## About Ukraine, Without Ukraine": Zelensky Slams US-Russia Talks

TPN Correspondent | Kyiv

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky has voiced strong opposition to the ongoing discussions between the United States and Russia regarding the war in Ukraine, highlighting that these talks are being held without Ukraine's participation. The talks, which are taking place in Saudi Arabia, involve high-level officials from both the US and Russia, but Zelensky expressed his frustration over Ukraine's exclusion from these crucial conversations.



Speaking during his official visit to Turkey, Zelensky criticized the discussions, stating, "Talks are taking place between representatives of Russia and representatives of the United States of America. About Ukraine – about Ukraine again – and without Ukraine." His comments reflect grow-

ing dissatisfaction in Kyiv over the fact that decisions regarding Ukraine's future are being made without the country having a seat at the table.

Zelensky's remarks underscore Ukraine's longstanding position that any peace talks or negotiations involving the country must

include direct Ukrainian participation. Ukraine has consistently maintained that it should have the opportunity to actively engage in any diplomatic conversations related to the war, especially considering the profound impact these discussions have on the nation's sovereignty, territorial integrity, and security.

The ongoing war between Ukraine and Russia, which began in February 2022, has led to significant loss of life, displacement, and destruction. As international efforts to mediate the conflict continue, Zelensky's comments reflect his belief that Ukraine's involvement is essential in shaping the outcome of any discussions. He has repeatedly emphasized the importance of Ukraine determining its own future and security, rather than having decisions made by outside powers.





## Intraday Rebound Falls Short Markets Slip Amid FII Outflows and Global Uncertainty

Domestic stock markets were in turmoil on Tuesday. The trend of benchmark indices is not clear due to lack of proper direction. Nifty lost 140 points in the morning due to mixed signals from global markets and FIIs leaving. Sensex also followed the same path. After the afternoon, it recovered after finding support at the crucial 22800 level. Investors recovered intraday losses as they bought IT, pharma, oil and gas shares. Overall, Nifty lost 14 points and Sensex lost 29 points.



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a strong brand presence, robust distribution network, and is expanding in premium product categories. Rising demand in housing and infrastructure. Expanding premium product lines. Strong brand recall and distribution network.

### 2. Sundaram Finance

Sundaram Finance is a leading non-bank-



**SUNDARAM FINANCE**  
*Enduring values. New age thinking.*

ing financial company (NBFC) specializing in commercial vehicle and auto financing. The company has a strong presence in South India and a history of conservative lending. Rising demand for vehicle financing. Expansion in rural and used vehicle finance. Strong capital adequacy ratio.

### 3. Tech Mahindra

Tech Mahindra is one of India's top IT services companies, with a strong focus on telecom, BFSI, healthcare, and digital transformation. The company has been expanding in AI, cloud computing, and cybersecurity services. Strong order book in telecom and BFSI segments. Expansion in AI and cloud solutions. Increasing digital transformation projects. Slowdown in IT spending by global clients. Margin pressure due to wage hikes and competition.



The BSE Sensex, which closed at 75,996 in the previous session, opened at 76,073 on Tuesday. It touched an intraday low of 75,531. It reached an intraday high of 76,091. Finally, it closed at 75,967, down 29 points. The NSE Nifty, which opened at 22,963, touched a low of 22,801 and a high of 22,992. It closed at 22,945, down 14 points. The Nifty Bank lost 171 points and settled at 49,087.

In the Nifty50, 18 companies gained while 32 lost. NTPC, Tech Mahindra, Wipro, ONGC and Apollo Hospitals were the top gainers. IndusInd Bank, Trent, BEL, UltraTech Cement and Mahindra & Mahindra were the biggest losers. IT, Oil & Gas indices rose. Realty, Metal and Finance indices ended flat. Bank, auto, FMCG, media, pharma, consumer durables stocks were volatile.

Market breadth on NSE today turned in favor of sellers. Out of a total of 2928 stocks traded, 720 gained and 2128 lost. 14 stocks touched 52-week highs. 652 stocks touched 52-week lows.

Rupee weakened by 7 paise to settle at 86.94 against dollar. Morgan Stanley has given an overweight rating to Deepak Nitrate with a target price of Rs 3000. CLSA has given an underperform rating to Nazara Technologies with a target price of Rs 665. Quality Power Electrical received a response of 1.16 times by noon on the third day. Shares of Mahanagar Gas rose after the Mumbai Municipal Commission ordered roadside vendors and restaurants to switch to clean energy. CLSA gave Tech Mahindra an Outperform rating at Rs 2030. 16 lakh shares changed hands in GAIL. Reliance Infra is looking to enter the renewable energy manufacturing industry. Shares of Rate Gain Travel Technologies fell to an 18-month low after successive cuts in its FY2025 guidance. JPMorgan gave Persistent Systems an Outperform rating with a target price of Rs 7200.

### 1. Berger Paints

Berger Paints is India's second-largest paint manufacturer, offering decorative and industrial paints. The company has



### 4. Axis Bank

Axis Bank is one of India's largest private sector



banks, offering retail, corporate, and investment banking services. The bank has a strong digital presence and a growing loan book. Expanding retail and digital banking services. Strong loan growth across sectors. Low non-performing assets (NPA).

### 5. NLC India

NLC India is a public sector company engaged in coal mining and power generation. It is expanding into renewable energy, particularly solar and wind power projects. Government push for renewable energy projects. Stable coal-based power demand. Expansion in solar and wind energy.



## India's Fiscal Deficit Target for FY2026 Set at 4.5%, Focus on Capital Expenditure Growth



India's fiscal deficit target for FY2026 is projected to be set at 4.5% of the country's GDP, marking a reduction of 25-30 basis points compared to the anticipated fiscal deficit of 4.8% in FY2025. This follows the government's efforts to rein in fiscal deficits while continuing to support economic growth through infrastructure and capital spending.

lakh crore, which accounts for 46% of the budgeted target of ₹11.11 lakh crore. Nayar stressed that a large capex shortfall is expected for the current fiscal year, and for FY2026, maintaining a fiscal deficit target of 4.5% of GDP would be realistic. This would enable a capex allocation of ₹11 trillion, marking an 11-12% growth compared to FY2025's feasible capex figure.

Domestic credit rating agency ICRA has emphasized the need for the government to prioritize capital expenditure (capex), estimating that the target for Budget 2025 should be ₹11 lakh crore. ICRA Chief Economist Aditi Nayar highlighted that the current year's budgeted capex of ₹11.11 lakh crore is likely to fall short by around ₹1.4 lakh crore, and next year's capex target should align with the previous year's level to stay within borrowing limits. Nayar also noted that the capex spending for FY2025 is currently trailing the required run rate, indicating a potential shortfall.

Nayar also warned that setting a higher capex target could be "imprudent," as larger borrowing and a higher fiscal deficit would increase yields. Over the past few years, India has ramped up its capex spending to stimulate the economy, with increases from ₹4.39 lakh crore in 2020-21 to ₹10 lakh crore in FY2023-24. This push has been vital in stimulating economic growth and generating a positive cycle that benefits other sectors.

Between April and November 2024, the government's capex spending amounted to ₹5.13

In conclusion, while India aims to reduce its fiscal deficit in FY2026, prioritizing capital expenditure remains crucial to sustaining economic momentum and supporting infrastructure development.

## Samsung Electronics to Cancel \$2.01 Billion in Treasury Shares as Part of Buyback Plan



Samsung Electronics announced on Tuesday that it will cancel 3 trillion won (\$2.01 billion) worth of treasury stocks as part of its ongoing buyback initiative aimed at enhancing shareholder value. The company will retire approximately 50.1 million common shares and 6.9 million preferred shares, according to a regulatory filing.

This move follows a decision made by the Samsung board in November 2024 to repurchase a total of 10 trillion won worth of shares over the course of the upcoming year. The initial phase will involve the buyback of 3 trillion won worth of shares within three months, which will then be fully canceled. By reducing the number of outstanding shares, Samsung aims to improve its earnings per share (EPS) and support its stock price, ultimately benefiting its investors.

In related news, Samsung Electronics Chairman Lee Jae-yong emerged as the top dividend earner in South Korea last year. According to a survey by corporate data tracker Leaders Index, Lee received 346.5 billion won in dividends for 2024, marking a 7.1% increase from the previous year. The survey, which covered 560 companies, revealed that these firms collectively distributed 40.7 trillion won (US\$28.2 billion) in dividends, reflecting a 10.4% increase from 2023.

Hyundai Motor Group's Honorary Chairman Chung Mong-koo and Executive Chair Euisun Chung ranked second and third for dividends, receiving 189.2 billion won and 174.7 billion won, respectively. Meanwhile, SK Group Chairman Chey Tae-won ranked seventh, receiving 91 billion won in dividends. Among the surveyed companies, 285 increased their dividends, 94 maintained the same level as in 2023, and 181 reduced their payouts.

SK hynix, a key affiliate of SK Group, saw its dividends nearly double following record earnings driven by high demand for artificial intelligence (AI) chips. This trend of increasing dividends reflects a strong performance by major corporations in South Korea.

## 3rd in a row: Goods exports shrink 2.4%



India's merchandise exports saw a decline for the third consecutive month in January 2025, with exports falling to \$36.43 billion, representing a 2.38% drop compared to the same month last year. The dip in exports has raised concerns about the country's trade performance as global demand remains sluggish.

The merchandise trade deficit also widened, reaching \$22.99 billion in January, an increase from \$16.56 billion in January 2024 and \$21.94 billion in December 2024. This growing trade gap highlights the challenges faced by India's export sector, which has been struggling to recover from various global and domestic economic pressures.

Several factors have contributed to the

decline in exports, including weakening demand from major trading partners and the global slowdown in economic growth. Key export sectors, including petroleum products, gems and jewelry, and engineering goods, have seen reduced demand. This trend is in line with broader global economic conditions, which have been characterized by lower consumer spending and slower growth in both advanced and emerging economies.

The widening trade deficit is a cause for concern as it could exert pressure on India's foreign exchange reserves and contribute to the depreciation of the rupee. As India continues to grapple with challenges in the global market, experts suggest that there is a need for increased

focus on diversifying export markets and enhancing the competitiveness of Indian goods.

Despite these challenges, the Indian government has emphasized its commitment to boosting exports and addressing structural issues in the trade sector. Measures to improve logistics, enhance export credit availability, and provide incentives for export-oriented industries are expected to play a role in supporting India's long-term trade growth.

The outlook for India's export sector remains uncertain, but officials remain hopeful that recovery will take place with the right policy measures and favorable global conditions in the near future.



## China Approves Deep-Sea Research Facility to Boost Marine Exploration



tem and be designed for long-term operation.

The research facility will also incorporate cutting-edge technologies, including a four-dimensional surveillance grid that integrates surface ships, unmanned submersibles, and seabed observatories. This network will enhance data collection, enabling comprehensive deep-sea exploration and research. The new facility is expected to be part of a broader infrastructure project, including a vast fibre-optic communication system on the seabed and the drilling ship \*Mengxiang\*. The latter will be tasked with exploring the Earth's mantle and investigating deep-sea resources, adding another layer of capability to China's growing marine exploration ambitions.

This deep-sea station will not only advance scientific knowledge but also give China greater control over one of the world's most contested and resource-abundant maritime regions, further strengthening its strategic influence in the South China Sea.

China has officially approved the construction of a deep-sea research facility in the South China Sea, a move that could significantly advance marine exploration and bolster Beijing's geopolitical influence in the region. After years of planning and technical evaluations, the approval marks a major milestone in the country's deep-sea scientific pursuits. The facility, located at a depth of 2,000

meters (6,560 feet) in the resource-rich and strategically important South China Sea, will focus on studying "cold seep" ecosystems, areas where cold methane and hydrogen-rich fluids seep from the seabed. The research station will be equipped to support up to six scientists for missions lasting up to a month. To endure the extreme conditions of the deep sea, the facility will feature an advanced life-support sys-

## The Great London Beer Flood: When Beer Became a Tsunami

On October 17, 1814, London witnessed one of the most bizarre disasters in history: the Great London Beer Flood. Instead of rain, the streets of St Giles Rookery were flooded with beer, creating a chaotic scene that would forever be etched in the annals of odd historical events.

It all began at the Meux & Co Horse Shoe Brewery, located in the bustling Tottenham Court Road area. At around 4:30 PM, one of the brewery's massive wooden fermentation tanks, holding over 3,500 barrels of fermenting porter beer, suddenly gave way. The iron rings holding the tank together snapped, causing a catastrophic chain reaction. Within minutes, the rupture unleashed between 128,000 and 323,000 gallons (4.85 lakh - 12.2 lakh liters) of beer onto the streets. A 15-foot wave of alcohol surged through the densely populated slum, tearing down houses and claiming the lives of eight people.

As the beer flooded the streets, locals, in a bizarre twist, rushed to scoop up the "free beer," with some even drinking it straight from the ground. Sadly, a ninth victim succumbed to alcohol poisoning



days after the event, highlighting the dangers of such an unexpected deluge. The aftermath of the flood was both tragic and surreal. The stench of beer lingered in the air for months, while reports of more casualties surfaced, including one involving a collapsed floor at an Irish wake, plunging visitors into a beer-soaked cellar.

The brewery faced legal consequences, but was ultimately absolved after the event was deemed an "act of God." How-

ever, Meux & Co suffered significant financial losses, nearly bankrupting the company. The disaster did, however, result in the implementation of new safety regulations for breweries, replacing wooden casks with safer materials like concrete.

The Great Beer Flood became a source of humor and inspiration in art and literature, reminding us that even in the most chaotic moments, there's always room for a laugh.

## Pizza Hut Hong Kong Introduces Snake Meat Pizza: A Bold Culinary Experiment



Pizza lovers around the world are used to seeing all sorts of quirky toppings on their favorite pies, from pineapple to seafood. However, Pizza Hut in Hong Kong has taken the concept of unusual pizza toppings to a whole new level by introducing a truly shocking ingredient: snake meat.

In collaboration with Ser Wong Fun, a restaurant that has been serving traditional Chinese cuisine for over 100 years, Pizza Hut has created a unique pizza that features shredded snake meat as its star topping. The nine-inch pizza, which is available until November 22, also includes black mushrooms, Chinese

dried ham, and is topped with an abalone sauce base, replacing the usual tomato sauce.

According to CNN, this experimental pizza is designed to challenge the conventional notion of what a pizza should be and offers a bold departure from traditional Italian

flavors. Pizza Hut Hong Kong believes that the addition of snake meat, paired with cheese and diced chicken, enriches the flavor profile and offers a new taste experience that also ties into health-conscious eating. They described the dish as not just an exciting culinary adventure but also a way to rethink the relationship between food and well-being.

For those brave enough to try it, the snake meat pizza combines rich flavors and textures, with the tender snake meat complementing the savory cheese and unique abalone sauce. While it may sound strange to some, it's a part of a growing trend where restaurants around the world are pushing the boundaries of what ingredients belong on a pizza.

Pizza Hut's snake meat pizza may not be for everyone, but it's certainly a conversation starter. Whether you're an adventurous foodie or simply curious about unusual global dishes, this pizza is one way to experience an entirely new take on a classic comfort food.

## Italian Woman Undergoes 20 Body Modifications to Become a Human Cat



Chiara Dell'Abate, an Italian woman who goes by the name Aydin Mod, has revealed that she is on a unique quest to transform herself into a "human cat." At just 22 years old, Dell'Abate has undergone an astonishing 20 body modifications to achieve her dream, including over 72 piercings, subdermal implants, and even cosmetic surgery.

Her journey into body modification began at the young age of 11 when she got her first ear piercing and started stretching her ears. Over the years, her transformation has grown more extreme, with her most recent changes including split tongue procedures, punched nostrils, and multiple piercings on her lips and inner labia. She also underwent blepharoplasty, a surgery that removes excess skin or fat from the eyelids, to further enhance her cat-like appearance. Dell'Abate's modifications don't stop there. She has added 10 subdermal implants on both her hands, which give her a more unique, otherworldly look. Ad-

ditionally, her transformation includes eyeball tattoos, pointed ears, permanent eyeliner, and even claw-like nails to complete her feline-inspired aesthetic.

In a TikTok video that has gone viral with over 65 million views, Dell'Abate shows off her split tongue as it flicks through two holes above her lips, further showcasing her dedication to becoming a human cat. Despite being criticized and labeled as "psychotic" by some, Dell'Abate remains confident and unapologetic about her lifestyle choice. When asked about her transformation, she explained, "I'm thinking that I would be a pretty cool cat lady." Embracing her distinctive look, she continues to document her body modifications and share them on social media platforms, where she has attracted a large following.

While her extreme modifications may be shocking to some, Dell'Abate sees her unique appearance as an expression of her true self and an example of the possibilities of body modification.

## Man Calls Mumbai "Chaotic and Unlivable," Compares it to Dubai in Viral Reddit Post



In a viral Reddit post, a man from Mumbai shared his recent experiences comparing his hometown to Dubai, calling Mumbai "chaotic and unlivable." Despite spending over 40 years in Mumbai, the Reddit user, identified as Mr. Yash, expressed that his trip to Dubai made him acutely aware of the glaring differences between the two cities.

Yash highlighted that Dubai, being a developed city, has a significant edge over Mumbai in various aspects, including infrastructure, traffic management, and civic sense. "I just came back from a week-long trip to Dubai. When you are back from a developed country, you can see just how far behind we are," he wrote. While not his first visit to a developed country, he not-

ed that this time, the contrasts were more apparent.

He pointed out several frustrations he has with Mumbai, such as its "non-existent infrastructure" and the lack of road discipline, which he believes worsens traffic congestion. "Main roads that have no lanes, construction and debris everywhere," he complained. Yash also mentioned the city's ongoing pollution issues, saying it "burns your throat." The overwhelming presence of trash and rubble, coupled with chaotic traffic, left him feeling disillusioned with his home city.

In contrast, Yash praised Dubai's organization and cleanliness. He observed that Dubai's roads were clearly marked, with separate lanes and designated truck routes that avoided congestion. He was also impressed by the disciplined traffic flow in Dubai, where vehicles stop at signals, and drivers do not cut in front of each other, unlike the situation in Mumbai.

While Yash confessed his love for Mumbai, he ultimately concluded that the city, which serves as India's financial capital, is becoming increasingly unlivable. He urged for better infrastructure and a more organized approach to urban planning, which he believes could help Mumbai catch up with cities like Dubai.

## FIH Hockey Pro League: Germany Defeats India 4-1 with Dominant Performance



minute. From the very beginning, both teams showcased their competitive spirit, with the game producing fast-paced, thrilling action. While India enjoyed greater possession in the early minutes, Germany's tactical brilliance paid off in the 7th minute, as Florian Sperling finished a superb assist from Eric Kleinlein to open the scoring. India quickly responded in the 13th minute, when Rajinder Singh set up Gurjant Singh with a well-executed cross to equalize. However, Germany took control again in the 14th minute, when Thies Prinz scored a dramatic goal, extending their lead to 2-1 despite a defensive hit on Manpreet Singh. The second quarter saw India push for an equalizer, with young forwards creating several chances. Nilakanta Sharma's brilliant pass to Abhishek in the 17th minute came close, but Abhishek failed to control it. Another opportunity arrived when Gurjant Singh missed a deflection attempt in the 20th minute. Suraj Karkera, who replaced Krishan Pathak

in the second quarter, was key in goal, making a brilliant save after India lost possession. India also had chances, with Dilpreet's unconventional shot on goal failing to find the mark. The third quarter was intense, with India earning a penalty corner in the 38th minute. Jugraj Singh, filling in for the rested Harmanpreet Singh, attempted a flick but failed to execute it successfully. India's defense remained strong, but a crucial moment arrived in the 50th minute when Michel Struthoff capitalized on a rebound to score, extending Germany's lead to 3-1. With a growing deficit, India intensified their search for goals, but to their dismay, Germany sealed their victory with a fourth goal from Raphael Hartkopf in the 55th minute, ending the match 4-1 in favor of the World Champions. Despite a spirited performance, India couldn't overcome the German side's dominance, leaving them with a bitter defeat in this high-stakes encounter.

The reigning World Champions, Germany, put on a stellar display to secure a comprehensive 4-1 win over India in a thrilling encounter at the FIH Hockey Pro League 2024-25 at the iconic Kalinga Hockey Stadium on Tuesday. Germany's goals came from Florian Sperling (7'), Thies Prinz (14'), Michel Struthoff (48'), and Raphael Hartkopf (55'), while India's lone goal came from Gurjant Singh in the 13th

## Russia, Greece, and India Join Forces to Expand Modern Pythian Games



In a groundbreaking move towards global cultural unity, representatives from the International Delphic Committee (Russia), Ecumenical Delphic Union (Greece), and International Pythian Council (India) have joined hands to strengthen the Modern Pythian Games. The collaboration aims to establish a larger platform for arts, culture, and traditional games, expanding the global reach of this revived cultural movement. The Modern Pythian Games celebrate artistic, cultural, and traditional sports excellence, providing an international platform for artists, performers, and athletes. This partnership marks a new chapter in promoting global cultural exchange, with both online and offline participation opportunities for individuals worldwide. Bijender Goel, Founder of the Modern Pythian Games, emphasized that this collaboration signals a new era of cross-cultural cooperation. Discussions are set to finalize the strategy and framework of this global initiative. In addition, Goel has invited Russia to participate in the upcoming 1st Global Para Pythian Games 2025, hosted by India, which will focus on empowering disabled artists and athletes. This alliance promises to enhance cultural diplomacy, inclusivity, and foster a revolution in sports and the arts by offering a truly global stage for creative expression and talent.

## USA Breaks India's 1985 Record for Successfully Defending Lowest Total in ODI



In a remarkable achievement, the USA broke India's long-standing record for successfully defending the lowest total in a full men's ODI. On Tuesday, the USA, after posting a modest 123 runs in their first innings, managed to defend it and defeated Oman by 57 runs in their ICC Men's Cricket World Cup League 2 match. India's previous record was set in 1985 during the Rothmans Four-Nations Cup, when they defended a total of 125 runs against Pakistan in Sharjah. India emerged victorious by 38 runs in that match, which had stood as the lowest total ever defended in an ODI for nearly four decades. The USA-Oman match was a unique encounter, with the entire game being dominated by spin bowling. All nine bowlers used in the match were spinners, marking the first game in ODI history after 4,671 matches in which no pacer bowled a single delivery. This rare scenario added a distinctive flair to the contest. The match also witnessed a record-setting 19 wickets falling, the same number as the ODI between Pakistan and Bangladesh in 2011 in Chattogram, where spinners claimed all the wickets. The combined total score of both teams was just 187 runs

from 61 overs, making it the second-lowest aggregate in ODI history where both teams were dismissed. The lowest aggregate remains a 163-run game between India and Bangladesh in 2014, played in 41 overs. Milind Kumar was the standout performer for the USA, scoring a steady 47\* off 82 balls, leading

his team's efforts. Oman's bowlers, particularly Shakeel Ahmad, were impressive, with Ahmad claiming three wickets for just 20 runs. However, despite his efforts, Oman's chase of 123 faltered badly, with Hammad Mirza's 29 off 43 being the only score of note in their reply. USA's Nosthush Kenjige was the

hero with the ball, taking an incredible five-wicket haul. His spell dismantled the Oman batting lineup, which was bowled out for a mere 65 runs, sealing a comfortable 57-run victory for the USA. This game will now be remembered as a historic moment in ODI cricket for the USA.

## InBL Pro U25 2025: Gujarat Stallions Edge Past Chennai Heat in Thrilling 74-72 Victory



## FIH Hockey Pro League: India Women's Team Falls Short Against Spain in Thrilling 4-3 Defeat



The India women's hockey team suffered a heartbreaking 4-3 loss to Spain in a thrilling encounter at the FIH Hockey Pro League 2024/25 at Kalinga Stadium, Bhubaneswar, on Tuesday. Spain dominated the final moments to edge past India in a high-intensity match. Baljeet Kaur (19'), Sakshi Rana (38'), and Rutaja Dadaso Pisal (45') scored for India, while Estel Petchame (25', 49'), Sofia Rogoski (21'), and captain Lucia Jimenez (52') found the net for Spain. The match began with both teams battling for dominance. India had an early chance when Sharmila Devi's shot narrowly missed the post, while Spain struggled to break India's defensive press. India earned the first penalty corner of the match but failed to capitalize. Spain's defense held firm until India's Baljeet Kaur scored her first senior international goal in the 19th minute. However, Spain responded swiftly, with Sofia Rogoski and Estel Petchame putting

Spain ahead 3-1 by the end of the second quarter. India fought back in the third quarter, with debutant Sakshi Rana equalizing before Rutaja Da-

daso Pisal restored India's lead. Yet, Spain continued to press, with Petchame scoring again and Jimenez netting the winner in the 52nd minute. Despite in-

dia's desperate attempt to equalize by pulling their goalkeeper in the final minutes, Spain maintained their lead to secure the 4-3 victory.

In a thrilling encounter that kept fans on the edge of their seats, the Gujarat Stallions emerged victorious with a hard-fought 74-72 win over the Chennai Heat at the Thyagraj Indoor Stadium in the InBL Pro U25. Despite the victory, the Stallions remain behind on a head-to-head basis after losing by 8 points to the Heat in their earlier tournament encounter. The match saw multiple lead changes, with standout performances from both teams. Chennai Heat's Arvinder Singh played a key role in the first quarter, leading his team to a 17-13 advantage. Matt Gray followed suit, contributing a couple of crucial three-pointers. The Gujarat Stallions, however, stayed in the contest thanks to Trenderon Hankerson's consistent scoring. The second quarter saw a surge from the Stallions, with Joshua Duach coming off the bench to score nine quick points, and Jock Perry joining the offensive charge. The Stallions ended the first half with a solid 41-29 lead, setting up a tense second half.



## “Hari Hara Veera Mallu” to Release on March 28: Producer AM Ratnam Confirms



Powerstar Pawan Kalyan's upcoming film Hari Hara Veera Mallu is all set to hit the big screens on March 28, as confirmed by the producer, AM Ratnam. In a recent interview, Ratnam reassured fans that there would be no delays and that the film would release on the previously announced date. He also stated that the remaining shoot featuring Pawan Kalyan is currently being completed. On the occasion of Valentine's Day, the movie unit announced a key up-

date: the second single, a romantic track titled “Kollagottindhiro,” will be released on February 24 at 3 PM. Fans are eagerly awaiting the song's release.

Hari Hara Veera Mallu is a period action drama directed by Krish Jagarlamudi, with AM Ratnam's son Jyothi Krishna taking over the remaining portions of direction. Music is by Oscar-winning composer Keeravani. Nidhi Agerwal stars alongside Pawan Kalyan in the film.

## Jyothika's New Netflix Crime Thriller “Dabba Cartel” Set to Stream on February 28



Netflix is all set to launch its latest crime thriller series, Dabba Cartel, which revolves around five women involved in a drug trafficking operation. Directed by Hitesh Bhatia, the series features an impressive cast including Shabana Azmi, Jyothika, and Shalini Pandey in pivotal roles. Premiering on February 28, the show is set in the backdrop of Mumbai's suburban areas, known for its thriving ‘dabba’ (lunch delivery) business. The story follows five women who venture into the illicit drug trade through the lunchboxes delivered to customers. Confident in their intel-

lect and skills, they begin their operations with full belief that no one can catch them. However, their journey is filled with unpredictable twists as they face challenges that test their wit and survival instincts. Blending crime with comedy, Dabba Cartel promises to offer a fresh take on the genre. With the rising demand for crime thrillers on OTT platforms, this series is expected to captivate audiences. Fans are eager to see how the show will be received, given its unique premise and star-studded cast.

## Sikandar New Poster: All Eyes On Salman Khan Ahead of Release



Salman Khan fans have a reason to celebrate as the superstar recently unveiled a thrilling new poster of his upcoming film, Sikandar, which is set to

release on March 28. The intense poster showcases Salman in a fierce, all-black avatar, sporting a rugged bearded look and an earring. What stands out the most, however, is the fire in his eyes—capturing the essence of his character in a truly captivating way. The poster reveal coincided with the 59th birthday of Sikandar's producer, Sajid Nadiadwala. The film, produced under Nadiadwala Grandson Entertainment, marks the second collaboration between Salman and Sajid, following their successful partnership in the 2014 blockbuster Kick. To make the moment even more special, Salman

shared a heartwarming birthday wish for Sajid, along with the exciting poster announcement on Instagram.

Directed by AR Murugadoss, Sikandar stars Rashmika Mandanna as the female lead, with a supporting cast that includes Kajal Aggarwal, Prateik Babbar, Sharman Joshi, and Sathyaraj. Earlier this year, the much-anticipated teaser was released, giving fans a glimpse of Salman's action-packed role.

With the poster and teaser setting the stage, anticipation is high for Sikandar as it gears up for its big-screen release.

## Amid Dating Rumours With Vijay Deverakonda, Rashmika Mandanna Receives Roses From Her “Paapalu”



Rashmika Mandanna, who is basking in the success of her latest film Chhaava, has once again ignited dating rumours with Vijay Deverakonda. The actress posted a cryptic story on Instagram on February 17, sharing a picture of herself holding a beautiful bouquet of red roses. The accompanying note read, “You always know how to put a smile on my face paapalu” (with a red heart emoji), though she did not reveal the sender's identity.

The pair, who starred together in the successful films Geetha Govindam (2018) and Dear Comrade (2019), have long been the subject of relationship speculations. While they have never confirmed their romantic status, their social media posts continue to fuel the rumours. For instance, on February 13, Rashmika shared the poster for Vijay's upcoming film Kingdom, cheerfully endorsing his work and expressing admiration.

In a recent interview with The Hollywood Reporter, Rashmika hinted at having a “partner” in her life, sharing her belief in the importance of home and personal connections. She emphasized how she cherishes her privacy, despite the public attention surrounding her career.

On the work front, Rashmika's Chhaava, which tells the story of Maratha warrior Chhatrapati Sambhaji Maharaj, hit theaters on February 14, starring alongside Vicky Kaushal.

## “Exhuma”: A Chilling Korean Horror Movie Now Streaming on Amazon Prime

The Korean horror movie Exhuma has recently made its way to Amazon Prime, offering a spine-chilling experience for horror fans. Directed by Jang Jae-hyun, the film follows a haunting tale revolving around two coffins. Starring Choi Min-sik, Kim Go-eun, Yoo Hae-jin, and Lee Do-hyun, Exhuma initially hit theaters in February 2024, before its recent streaming release.

The story centers on Park Ji-young, a young man living in the U.S. with his family. When his newborn son cries incessantly, they seek help from a paranormal expert, who believes a vengeful spirit of Park's late grandfather is behind the child's distress. The investigation leads to the discovery of two coffins, with one unleashing a vengeful spirit. As the story unfolds, dark secrets tied to an ancient war between nations come to light.

While the film follows a familiar supernatural premise, the tension escalates when a second coffin is uncovered. The movie combines eerie photography, intense sound



effects, and blood-curdling moments, creating a gripping narrative. However, the gruesome visuals may not be suitable for all viewers. Exhuma scores a 3/5, providing an intriguing horror experience.