



**Weather Forecast**

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

# Trump calls \$21 million USAID fund to India a 'kickback scheme'



\$21 million for voter turnout in India.

Why are we caring about India turnout? Trump questioned.

DOGE confirmed the cancellation of the USAID fund.

"I guess they were trying to get somebody else elected," Trump hinted at election interference.

BJP and Congress Clash Over Trump's Allegations

**Veena Reddy: Ex-USAID India Chief in "\$21M Fund" Controversy**

The controversy has brought former USAID India chief Veena Reddy under focus. Born in Andhra Pradesh, Reddy held key USAID roles before leading operations in India. During her tenure, US-AID's funding surged from \$94.3 million in 2021 to \$228 million in 2022, before falling to \$151.8 million in 2024. She returned to the US in July 2024, just after the Lok Sabha elections. Trump's claims have intensified debates over foreign funding, with both BJP and Congress using the controversy to attack each other.



**TPN Correspondent | New Delhi**  
Former US President Donald Trump slammed the now-cancelled \$21 million USAID fund for "voter turnout" in India, calling it a "kickback scheme." Speaking at the Republican Governors Association meeting in Washington DC, he questioned why US taxpayers should fund elections in another country. "\$21 million for voter turnout in India. Why are we caring about India turnout? We got enough problems. We want our own turnout," Trump said, as reported by NBC News. The Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE), led by Elon Musk, confirmed the cancel-

lation of the USAID fund, listing it among taxpayer-funded programs that were scrapped. Trump also hinted at election interference, stating, "I guess they were trying to get somebody else elected." BJP and Congress clash over allegations Trump's remarks triggered a political battle between the BJP and Congress. BJP IT cell head Amit Malviya accused "deep-state assets" of using such funds to manipulate Indian elections. Congress spokesperson Pawan Khera questioned the Modi government's role, asking, "If this money entered India, why did the BJP allow it?"

# DK Shivakumar's 'Even God Can't Change Bengaluru' Remark Sparks Controversy

DK Shivakumar claims even God can't solve Bengaluru's problems overnight

Remarks spark sharp criticism from opposition and citizens

Economist Mohandas Pai questions government's lack of progress

TPN Correspondent | Karnataka

Karnataka Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar has triggered a political storm with his controversial remark that even divine intervention cannot fix Bengaluru's ongoing traffic and infrastructural woes in a short period. His statement, made during the inauguration of a workshop on road construction, has been met with sharp criticism from the opposition and citizens alike.



"Bengaluru can't be changed in two or three years. Even God can't do that. It can be changed only when proper planning is done and executed well," Shivakumar said, acknowledging the challenges faced by the city. However, many saw his remark as an admission of failure by the Congress-led Karnataka government.

The comments come at a time when Bengaluru residents and urban planners have been raising concerns over worsening traffic congestion, delayed metro expansions, and inadequate public transport. While the government has announced several infrastructure projects, critics argue that execution remains slow and inconsistent, worsening the city's already crumbling road network.

Shivakumar's statement quickly went viral on social media, with many condemning it as an irresponsible remark from a senior leader. Prominent economist and Aarin Capital chairman Mohandas Pai openly challenged the minister's claim, questioning the government's lack of progress in improving Bengaluru's infrastructure.

"Minister DK Shivakumar, it has been two years since you became our Minister! We applauded and welcomed you as a strong leader. But our lives have become much worse!" Pai posted on social media. He further alleged that major infrastructure projects remain incomplete, footpaths are in a state of disrepair, and public

transport is severely lacking. Pai called for urgent action, including the immediate purchase of 5,000 new electric buses, better pedestrian pathways, and round-the-clock metro expansion work to ease the city's growing traffic problems.

**Opposition BJP Slams Congress Government**

The opposition BJP also seized the opportunity to attack the Siddaramaiah-led Congress government, accusing it of incompetence.

"It is very unfortunate that the person who said he would make 'Brand Bengaluru' now says even God cannot fix this. Then who can?" BJP leader Mohan Krishna told NDTV.

He further criticized the Congress government for allegedly neglecting infrastructure development and focusing on political issues rather than governance. "God has given an opportunity to a person or a party to serve the people. It is unfortunate that this government has indulged in activities other than development," he added.

**Government Defends Its Stand**

Following the backlash, Shivakumar later clarified that the government is actively working on long-term solutions. He announced the release of a handbook on roads aimed

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# Emvee Group to Invest ₹15,000 Crore in Bengaluru IT Investment Region



TPN Correspondent | Karnataka

Bengaluru-based Emvee Group, a leading manufacturer of solar photovoltaic panels and modules, has announced an investment of ₹15,000 crore to establish a large-scale manufacturing plant in the Bengaluru IT Investment Region (ITIR). The project, to be developed in phases, aims to strengthen green energy production and sustainable development in Karnataka.

Speaking on Thursday, Karnataka Large and Medium Industries Minister MB Patil stated that the company has sought 120 acres of land for the plant. The state government will facilitate the request after due consideration.

As part of the first phase, Emvee Group will invest ₹5,000 crore to build a facility with a 5 GW power generation capacity, expected to create 10,000 jobs. This investment falls under the Global Investors Meet (GIM) - Invest Karnataka 2025 agree-

**Emvee Group to set up a ₹15,000 crore solar manufacturing facility**

**Initial investment of ₹5,000 crore for a 5 GW power plant**

**Project to create 10,000 jobs and boost green energy production**

ments, for which a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was recently signed.

"The proposed plant will significantly contribute to sustainable energy development and boost green power production in the state," Minister MB Patil said after a meeting with senior company representatives.

German Firm Krones AG to Set Up Plant in Kolar

In another major investment, German F&B packaging and bottling solutions giant Krones AG is set to establish a ₹315 crore manufacturing plant in Kolar, creating 550 jobs.

Laying the foundation stone at Vemgal Industrial Hub, Minister MB Patil stated that this initiative is part of the ₹10.27 lakh crore investment proposals secured during the Global Investors Meet (GIM). The new plant is expected to enhance Krones' bottling machine manufacturing capacity and strengthen Karnataka's industrial growth.

# Govt to Explore Legal Options on Palace Grounds Land

TPN Correspondent | Karnataka

The Karnataka government has decided to explore legal options regarding the Bengaluru Palace Grounds land issue following the Supreme Court's direction to issue Transferable Development Rights (TDR) to the heirs of the erstwhile royal family of Mysuru.

During a cabinet meeting on Thursday, Chief Minister Siddaramaiah and his ministers deliberated on the legal complexities surrounding the case. The government had earlier promulgated an ordinance to drop the TDR proposal, citing the massive financial burden of over ₹3,014 crore. The state has maintained that land acquisition under the Bangalore Palace (Acquisition and Transfer) Act, 1996, at ₹11 crore, should remain valid. However, the Supreme Court ruled that the TDR issuance is non-negotiable.

The government has already acquired a portion of the Palace Grounds for widening Ballari Road and Jayamahar Road. The issue has now taken a legal turn, with the cabinet en-



trusting Law and Parliamentary Affairs Minister HK Patil to determine the next course of action.

Speaking to the press, HK Patil said, "The cabinet has decided to consult our legal counsels in New Delhi, including senior advocate Kapil Sibal and the advocate-general. Our priority is to safeguard the interests of the people, as adhering to the TDR directive would place a huge financial burden on the exchequer. We cannot accept paying ₹3,014 crore."



## Karnataka Budget 2025: CM Siddaramaiah to Present Budget on March 7



- Karnataka Budget Session scheduled from March 3 to March 21.
- CM Siddaramaiah to present the state budget on March 7.
- Assembly Speaker U.T. Khader hints at possible session extension.

TPN Correspondent  
Karnataka, Feb 22

The Karnataka government, led by Chief Minister Siddaramaiah, is gearing up to present the much-anticipated Karnataka Budget 2025. The budget session will be held from March 3 to March 21, with Governor Thawar Chand Gehlot addressing the joint session on the opening day. Chief Minister Siddaramaiah will present the state budget on March 7, which is expected to include significant policy announcements and economic plans. Speaking in Hubli on Friday, Assembly Speaker U.T. Khader stated that there is an intention to extend the budget session beyond the

initially planned 18 days. A decision regarding the extension will be taken in a business advisory committee meeting on the first day of the session, where both the ruling party and the opposition will participate. Khader emphasized the importance of robust discussions in the Assembly, stating that healthy debates are a key aspect of democracy. He also noted that several issues raised in the Belgaum session will be reviewed for implementation during this budget session. Book Fair Ahead of Budget Session Ahead of the budget session, a book fair has been scheduled from February 27 to March 3 at the Bangalore Vidhana Soudha premises. Speaker Khader urged everyone to participate in the fair, emphasizing its importance in promoting knowledge and governance awareness. With the Karnataka Budget 2025 expected to address key economic and development issues, all eyes are now on CM Siddaramaiah's announcements on March 7.

## Karnataka HC directs revenue officials to record injunction orders in land records

TPN Correspondent  
Bengaluru, Feb 22

The Karnataka High Court has directed the Principal Secretary of the Revenue Department to instruct all revenue officers to mandatorily record civil court injunctions in the "other rights" column of revenue records. This move aims to prevent unnecessary litigation and uphold the sanctity of judicial orders.

Justice Sachin Shankar Magadam issued the directive while allowing a petition by Suvarna from Hennagara village in Anekal taluk. The petitioner had challenged an endorsement issued by the Special Tahsildar of Anekal on December 31, 2024, which refused to reflect a civil court's injunction in a partition suit. The court strongly criticized the Tahsildar's stance that the state was not a party to the litigation, calling it legally untenable and condemnable.

The HC quashed the endorsement and ordered the Tahsildar and the Assistant Commissioner of Bengaluru South Sub Division to immediately incorporate the injunction order in the revenue records. The court asserted that revenue authorities, as custodians of land records, are obligated to comply with judicial directives, and failure to do so would constitute willful disobedience.

Highlighting concerns over fraudulent transactions



and multiple litigations arising from non-compliance, the court stated that ignoring injunctions facilitates illegal dealings in disputed properties. It further condemned the revenue officials' reasoning, stating that their refusal to enforce court orders defies legal principles and undermines the authority of civil courts.

## Doctor's Body Recovered from Tungabhadra River After Two-Day Search

TPN Correspondent  
Karnataka, Feb 22

The body of a 26-year-old doctor from Hyderabad, Ananya Rao, was recovered from the Tungabhadra River on Thursday evening, two days after she went missing following a cliff jump in Koppal district. The incident occurred on February 18, when Ananya, who was vacationing with friends near Hampi, leapt off a cliff into the river but failed to make it back to shore. Ananya, a recent MBBS graduate pursuing postgraduate studies, had been staying at a homestay in Sanapur village with her group. On Tuesday, she attempted the jump into the river, a popular activity among tourists in the area. However, she did not resurface, triggering an extensive search operation. Rescue efforts began immediately but were hampered by the challenging terrain, with rocky outcrops lining the riverbanks. Initial attempts to locate her were unsuccessful, prompting authorities to escalate the operation. Expert teams, including an underwater rescue unit from JSW, were deployed, and drone cameras scanned the area. Local fishermen also joined the effort, while officials at the Tungabhadra Dam reduced water discharge to lower river levels, aiding the



search. A 10-kilometer stretch of the river was combed before her body was finally retrieved on Thursday. Ananya was closely related to a former Congress MLA from Telangana, who, along with her parents, was present during the search. The family had been holding out hope as teams worked tirelessly to find her. Following the tragedy, the Koppal district administration announced a suspension of cliff-diving activities in the area. A senior official stated, "We have halted cliff jumping and issued strict safety advisories to tour operators. Water-based activities like river swimming, coracle rides, and cliff jumping must adhere to enhanced safety protocols moving forward." The official noted that the Tungabhadra River's water levels had risen in recent days due to a discharge of 3,000 cusecs, contributing to the suspension. "Activities will resume only when water levels stabilize," they added. The incident has cast a spotlight on the risks associated with adventure tourism in the region, prompting calls for stricter regulations. For now, Ananya's family and friends mourn the loss of a promising young doctor whose life was cut short during what was meant to be a joyful getaway.

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## DK Shivakumar's 'Even God Can't Change Bengaluru' Remark Sparks Controversy

at tackling Bengaluru's infrastructure challenges. According to him, this handbook will outline strategies for designing new roads, bus stands, and decongestion measures to tackle the severe traffic crisis. The government has also promised to accelerate pending projects and take citizen feedback

into consideration for future developments. Despite the clarification, the controversy has added pressure on the Karnataka government to deliver tangible results, as citizens grow increasingly frustrated with Bengaluru's deteriorating infrastructure.

## Meenakshi Negi becomes Karnataka's first woman Principal Chief Conservator of Forests

TPN Correspondent  
Bengaluru, Feb 22

The Karnataka government has appointed senior Indian Forest Service (IFS) officer Meenakshi Negi as the Principal Chief Conservator of Forests (PCCF) and Head of Forest Force (HOFF), making her the first woman to hold this position in the state. She is currently only the second woman PCCF, HOFF in the country, alongside Maharashtra's Shomita Biswas.

Meenakshi, a 1989-batch IFS officer, took charge on Friday, succeeding Brijesh Kumar Dikshit, who retired on January 31. PCCF (Wildlife) Subhash Malkhade had been holding additional charge in the interim. Expressing her plans, she said, "There are too many jobs on my list that I want to do. I will first take stock of the situation and then start working."

She has held several key positions in Karnataka's Forest Department since 1993, spanning wildlife conservation, social forestry, territorial management, and working plans. Between 2007 and 2015, she was on central deputation, serving under the Ministry of Ayush as CEO of the National Medi-



nal Plant Board and Director of Ayush.

Returning to Karnataka, she played a crucial role in the tribal relocation programme in Kali Tiger Reserve as Additional PCCF and Chief Operating Officer, CAMPA, from 2021-23. She was also instrumental in running the Aptamitra-Covid helpline and Covid Care Centres in Ayurvedic hospitals in the state.

Until February 18, Meenakshi served as the Member Secretary of the National Commission for Women. Her appointment marks a significant milestone in Karnataka's forest administration.

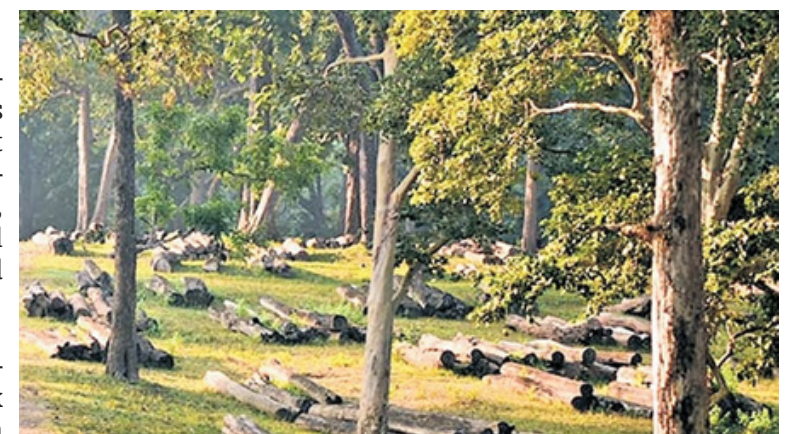
## Karnataka's Dandeli depot to begin e-auction of timber

TPN Correspondent  
Bengaluru, Feb 22

The Karnataka Forest Department's Dandeli timber depot is set to open its gates for an e-auction of timber, allowing not just commercial buyers but also individual citizens to participate. The auction, scheduled to begin on February 21, will offer nearly 2,300 cubic metres of wood for sale.

Dandeli depot, one of the oldest in Karnataka, has a historical legacy dating back to the British era, with its timber used in government buildings and even during World War II. "The wood from this region is unique due to its high oil content and grain formation, influenced by the terrain, soil, and environmental conditions. The rosewood from Dandeli remains one of the most sought-after varieties in the auction," an official from the Kali Tiger Reserve stated.

According to the forest department, the Dandeli depot contributed ₹55 crore to the state exchequer in the last financial year through timber sales. Annually, around 5,000 cubic metres of wood is auctioned, though the volume offered ranges between 2,300 and 3,500 cubic metres. The current auction will include teak, rosewood, matti, nandi, jambe,



and honne wood varieties.

Officials clarified that all timber auctioned is dry and seasoned, sourced from trees marked for removal in the Anshi and Dandeli forest patches of the Kali Tiger Reserve. This ensures that buyers do not have to wait for seasoning before utilizing the wood.

The Karnataka Forest Department operates timber depots in Mysuru, Yellapur, Shivamogga, Hunsur, Krishnagiri (Kodagu district), and Dandeli, with Dandeli being a key contributor to the state's timber trade.



## Karnataka Government's Plan to Shut 6,000 Schools Condemned by AISEC



**TPN , correspondent BENGALURU , Feb 22:** The Karnataka State Committee of the All India Save Education Committee (AISEC) has strongly condemned the state government's proposed plan to shut down over 6,000 government schools due to poor enrolment ratios. AISEC President Allamaprabhu Bettaduru accused the government of treating education as a burden and pushing for the privatisation of education. In a media statement released on Thursday, Bettaduru criticized the School Reform Commission's earlier proposal to merge schools with fewer than ten students with nearby institutions, citing it as an illogical excuse to avoid providing quality education. Bettaduru emphasized that, if executed, this plan would result in the closure of over 25% of government schools, affecting more than 50,000 students. Bettaduru raised concerns over the government's claim of providing

transport for students from remote villages, questioning how financially-struggling families could afford such services. He argued that this was merely an excuse to close down schools rather than addressing the root cause of low enrolment. AISEC President called on the government to focus on improving the quality of education and address the underlying issues behind low enrolment. "The primary duty of the government is to provide universal education, and it should not be viewed through a profit-and-loss lens," Bettaduru said. He further urged the state to allocate at least 10% of its budget to save government schools and colleges. Bettaduru suggested abolishing unscientific teaching methods, introducing proven educational approaches, and filling teaching and non-teaching positions to improve the public education system.

## BMCA Slams Metro Fare Hike, Demands Transparency on City Cess

**TPN Correspondent | Bengaluru, 22**

- **BMCA accuses political parties of avoiding accountability over metro fare hike.**
- **Demands disclosure of special city cess collected for infrastructure between 1996-2003.**
- **Over 10,000 signatures gathered in protest; petition submitted to BM-RL.**
- **Citizens' convention with E Sreedharan scheduled to discuss fare hike impact.**

The Bangalore Metro Commuters' Association (BMCA) has strongly opposed the recent metro fare hike, asserting that Bengaluru Metro remains the costliest in the country. At a press conference on Wednesday, the association called for an immediate rollback and demanded explanations from the Bangalore Metro Rail Corporation (BMRCL), the state Congress government, and the central BJP government. BMCA has also requested full transparency regarding the special city cess collected between 1996 and 2003, intended for infrastructure projects, and criticized the government for shifting the financial burden of metro project delays onto commuters.



Road. The event will focus on fare reduction strategies and the negative impact of the hike.

The association pointed to a sharp decline in metro ridership, with over one lakh daily commuters shifting to other transport modes since the fare increase. This shift, they warned, could aggravate Bengaluru's traffic congestion. BMCA urged authorities to implement Sreedharan's recommendation of boosting non-fare revenue and capping metro fares at 1.5 times the non-AC bus fare. BMCA highlighted the cost escalation of Metro Phase 2 from Rs 26,205 crore to Rs 40,614 crore, with its completion deadline extended to 2026. Despite this, BMRCL has recorded an operational profit of Rs 129.3 crore in 2023-24, following a Rs 108-crore surplus in 2022-23, and is projected to reach Rs 200 crore by 2025-26. The association questioned the necessity of a fare hike when the corporation continues to generate surplus revenue. BMCA has vowed to continue pressing for fare reductions and greater transparency from the government regarding metro project finances.

## 'Beyond Carlton' Calls for Verification of NCRB Fire Data Accuracy

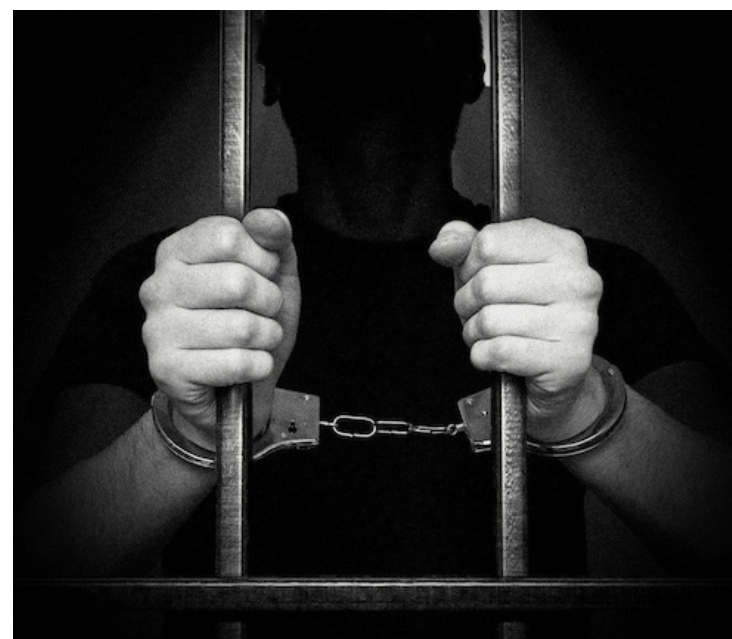
**TPN , correspondent BENGALURU , Feb 22:** Beyond Carlton, a citizen-led initiative focused on fire safety, has raised concerns regarding the accuracy of National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) data, which reports a sharp decline in fire accidents over the past decades. The group urged for verification with hospital records, fire department data, and burn registries to ensure the reliability of these statistics. The NCRB data suggests a significant drop in fire incidents, from 22,788 in 1996 to just 7,566 in 2022, sparking doubts about its accuracy. Gopal Devanahalli, Trustee of Beyond Carlton, emphasized the need for cross-verification, pointing out that while the figures indicate a decline, they might not accurately reflect the ground reality. "Triangulating with data from

burn registries and fire departments could help confirm the true progress reflected by these numbers," he said. The report highlighted that despite the decline in fire deaths, fire-related fatalities from LPG incidents have decreased by over 50%, even as the

number of LPG connections has significantly increased. Trustee RA Venkitachalam suggested that discrepancies in the classification of causes, with over 50% of cases listed under 'other causes', indicate a need for better forensic investigation. In addition to scrutinizing the data, Beyond Carlton also launched a report titled 'Fire Safety in India - a Beyond Carlton Perspective' at the Bengaluru Press Club. The report calls for urgent reforms to enhance fire safety in the country, highlighting the need for improved enforcement, better preparedness, and stronger community involvement. Uday Vijayan, Managing Trustee, emphasized that the report is not just about identifying problems, but also offering a roadmap to save lives, given the alarming rate of fire fatalities in India.



## Month-Old 'Hawala' Case Turns Out to Be Dacoity Incident



**TPN , correspondent BENGALURU , Feb 22:** A month-old case, initially suspected to be related to hawala transactions, has now been confirmed as a dacoity incident by the Uttara Kannada Police. The case involved a car found abandoned in Ramanaguli forests near Gullapura in the last week of January 2025. It has now emerged that the car was carrying Rs 1.7 crore in cash, which was stolen during a daring dacoity.

On January 27, Mohammed Issac, a driver for jeweller Rajendra Prakash Pawar, was asked to deliver gold to a Belagavi-based customer, Sachin Jadav, and bring back the payment. Along with assistant Akash, Issac drove to Belagavi and received Rs 2.95 crore for the gold. Of this, Rs 1.8 crore was placed in two lockers under

the car's front seats, and the remaining Rs 1.15 crore was stored in a rear seat locker. As Issac and assistant Abdul Samad traveled back to Mangaluru via Ankola, their car was intercepted around 4 pm by another vehicle. Five armed miscreants attacked, broke the car's windows, and took control of the vehicle. They also blindfolded Issac, while Samad was taken along by the assailants. The gang drove off with the cash, and Issac heard them attempting to break open the car's lockers. After the attackers abandoned the car in Ramanaguli and left Samad at a remote location, Issac returned to Mangaluru and contacted his friend to deliver the remaining cash to Pawar. The police seized the car, and investigations revealed the true nature of the crime.

## Man, Daughter, and Brother-in-Law Arrested for Murder in Bengaluru

**TPN Correspondent | Bengaluru, Feb 22**

- **Three family members arrested for attacking a woman and murdering her alleged lover.**
- **The brutal incident took place at noon in Kadugodi; the woman remains in critical condition.**
- **Police confirm prior disputes over the alleged extramarital relationship. Gruesome Attack in Kadugodi**

Bengaluru witnessed a horrifying crime on Thursday when Kadugodi police arrested a man, his daughter, and his brother-in-law for attacking his wife and murdering her alleged lover. The accused—Yellappa (45), his daughter Pooja (21), and his brother-in-law Venkataramana (37)—carried out the assault at Kishore's residence near Kadugodi, using machetes to attack the victims.

The victims, Kishore (38) and Arundathi (38), were allegedly in an extramarital relationship, which had caused previous tensions within the family. Around noon, the accused confronted the duo, leading to a heated argument that escalated into a violent attack. Arrests and Investigation

Following the incident, Kishore succumbed to his injuries on the spot, while Arundathi was rushed to a nearby hospital, where Ji ji jishe remains in critical condition. Police officers confirmed that the three accused were immediately taken into custody and are being interrogated.

A senior police official stated, "The suspects were detained soon after the attack. Arrest procedures have been initiated, and further investigation is ongoing." Authorities revealed that Kishore, who was also married, worked as a private school bus driver. Meanwhile, Yellappa managed agricultural land in Sriniwasapur, Kolar, and Venkataramana made a living by driving an auto and taking up odd jobs.

According to police investigators, the accused had prior knowledge of the alleged affair, leading to multiple disputes in the past. On Thursday, the situation turned violent, resulting in the fatal assault.

Kadugodi police have registered a case and are conducting a thorough investigation. Officials are gathering statements from neighbors, family members, and eyewitnesses to piece together the sequence of events leading to the crime. Authorities are also examining whether the attack was premeditated.

The police are waiting for Arundathi's condition to stabilize so they can record her statement, which could provide further clarity on the case. Meanwhile, forensic teams are analyzing evidence from the crime scene.

## Bengaluru Fire Department Well-Equipped, But Gaps Remain

**TPN Correspondent | Bengaluru, Feb 22**

- **Upgraded Fire Safety Measures: New fire stations, modern equipment, and skilled personnel have strengthened the department.**
- **Persistent Gaps in Fire Safety Awareness: Many buildings violate safety norms post-clearance, increasing fire risks.**
- **Technological Advancements: Fire-fighting robots, GPS tracking, and high-rise platforms enhance efficiency.**

The Bengaluru Fire and Emergency Services department has undergone significant improvements since the Carlton Towers fire in February 2010, which claimed nine lives and injured 70 people. According to Uday Vijayan, president of Beyond Carlton, these upgrades include setting up new fire

stations, acquiring modern emergency equipment, and training skilled personnel. However, the biggest challenge remains a lack of fire safety awareness among residents. Vijayan highlighted that while buildings receive initial safety clearance, modifications made after occupancy often violate fire norms, increasing risks. To address this, the fire department has mandated biannual inspections to ensure compliance. However, he emphasized that awareness and prevention should be prioritized alongside firefighting efforts. Former DGP of Fire and Emergency Services, Kamal Pant, revealed that the department is in the process of acquiring firefighting robots. These robots will be deployed in high-risk zones, such as cracker godowns, where human intervention is too dangerous. The robots will suppress

flames, allowing firefighters to enter safely and contain the remaining fire.

Additionally, the department has introduced high-rise platforms with ladders extending up to 120 feet, high-capacity water tankers, and specialized rescue tools to tackle fires in tall buildings. Each taluk now has a fire station, ensuring a quicker response time of 10 minutes or less in emergencies. The integration of GPS and fleet management systems further enhances real-time tracking and efficient dispatch of emergency vehicles.

The RA Mundkur Fire and Emergency Services Academy in Bengaluru serves as the primary training center for firefighters. The institution offers comprehensive programs on fire prevention, firefighting techniques, rescue operations, and evacuation drills.



# Mahadevappa backs CM Siddaramaiah, dismisses leadership change talks

TPN Correspondent  
Mysuru, Feb 22

Social Welfare Minister Dr HC Mahadevappa dismissed speculation regarding a leadership change in Karnataka, affirming that Chief Minister Siddaramaiah enjoys the full support of Congress legislators. He stated that the party high command has already endorsed Siddaramaiah's leadership, leaving no room for change.

"MLAs have affirmed that Siddaramaiah should remain the CM, and the high command has also directed the same. Hence, there is no question of leadership change," Mahadevappa said, responding to BJP's claims of an impending shift.

Taking a swipe at the Opposition, he compared BJP's stance to an old fable, saying, "It is like a tiger waiting for an elephant to fall, but neither does the elephant fall, nor does the tiger get to feast on it. This is exactly



BJP's condition right now."

He also welcomed the Lokayukta report giving Siddaramaiah a clean chit in the Mysuru Urban Development Authority (MUDA) site allocation case, calling it an expected outcome. "This case was nothing but a

politically motivated conspiracy by the Opposition to tarnish Siddaramaiah's name. The clean chit proves his innocence beyond doubt," he stated. Meanwhile, Home Minister Dr G Parameshwara denied any political agenda behind his visit to New Delhi, clarifying that

he had only visited the AICC office and did not meet any senior party leaders except AICC General Secretary KC Venugopal. "If there was any political agenda, I would have met AICC chief Mallikarjuna Kharge, Sonia Gandhi, and Rahul Gandhi," he said.



## BJP mocks Lokayukta clean chit, calls it biased

TPN Correspondent  
Bengaluru, Feb 22

The BJP has dismissed the Lokayukta's clean chit to Chief Minister Siddaramaiah, his wife BM Parvathi, and two others in the Mysuru Urban Development Authority (MUDA) case as "biased" and "pre-planned."

Leader of the Opposition in the Assembly R Ashoka claimed that the report was designed to shift blame onto MUDA officials. "The Lokayukta officials will submit their report to the court, but the court is not bound to accept it. If rejected, a fresh investigation will be conducted. We have faith in the judiciary," he said, adding that Congress leaders aspiring for the CM's post will now be disappointed.

Questioning the clean chit, Ashoka asked, "If Siddaramaiah was not involved, why did he surrender the sites? The report states there isn't enough proof, but was the land automatically converted?" He insisted that only a CBI probe could reveal the truth.

Leader of Opposition in the Legislative Council Chalavadi Narayanaswamy echoed the demand for a CBI investigation, stating, "Our fight against MUDA irregularities will continue. We are considering legal action."

Meanwhile, Union Minister H D Kumaraswamy had earlier predicted the Lokayukta's verdict, questioning the credibility of an inquiry led by officials working under the CM.

On the other hand, CM's legal adviser A S Ponnanna defended the clean chit, asserting that the case was politically motivated. "The Karnataka High Court has ruled that the Lokayukta's probe was transparent. The CM and others have been proven innocent. Is H D Kumaraswamy above the court?" he remarked.



## Lokayukta Has Done its Job, BJP can Continue Protesting - DK Shivakumar

TPN Correspondent  
Karnataka, Feb 22

Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar and Home Minister Dr. G Parameshwara on Thursday stood by the Lokayukta report that cleared Chief Minister Siddaramaiah and his family members of any wrongdoing in the controversial Mysuru Urban Development Authority (MUDA) sites allotment case. Their defense came in response to ongoing protests from the BJP, which has labeled the investigation as biased.

Shivakumar, also the state Congress president, criticized the BJP for its persistent protest, labeling it as a conspiracy involving the BJP and JDS. "Lokayukta has done its job. BJP can continue its protest if it wants to. This is a conspiracy that can't go on forever," he stated in Bengaluru. He further stressed that the Chief Minister had no involvement in the allotment process, pointing out that there were no signatures from Siddaramaiah on any of the documents linked to the case.

Shivakumar emphasized that it is common for people to seek compensation when they lose land, but clarified that the sites in question were returned to avoid further controversy. "They haven't asked for sites in any specific area," he added. The Deputy CM also reassured that the Lokayukta investigation was unbiased and that there was no interference from the Chief Minister, citing the High Court's recognition of the Lokayukta as an autonomous body.

Dr. Parameshwara, echoing Shivakumar's sentiments, defended the Lokayukta Police's findings, underscoring that the investigation was based on their independent assessment. "How can the government give directives to the Lokayukta, which is an independent institution?" he questioned, urging respect for the integrity of the probe.

# Ek Nath Shinde Warns Opponents: "Don't Take Me Lightly"

- Ek Nath Shinde warns rivals, recalling his 2022 rebellion that brought down Uddhav Thackeray's government.
- Reports suggest tensions between Maharashtra CM Devendra Fadnavis and Shinde.
- Shinde asserts his strength, emphasizing his role in the Mahayuti government's rise to power.



TPN Correspondent  
Maharashtra, Feb 22

Maharashtra Deputy Chief Minister Ek Nath Shinde has issued a strong warning to his opponents, asserting that he should not be taken lightly. Addressing supporters on Friday, Shinde reminded everyone of his 2022 rebellion, which led to the split of the Shiv Sena and the fall of Uddhav Thackeray's government.

"Don't take me lightly. Those who did in 2022 saw the consequences. I was an ordinary worker of the party, but I am

a worker of Bala Saheb. Everyone should remember that. When I was underestimated, I changed the government and brought a leadership that the common people wanted," Shinde declared, as reported by ANI.

His remarks have fueled speculation about growing tensions within the ruling Mahayuti alliance in Maharashtra. According to reports from India On Friday, Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis has been holding key meetings without inviting Shinde, raising concerns about a possible power struggle.

Shinde, who led a major political shift in 2022, initially became the Chief Minister after his faction of the Shiv Sena aligned with the BJP. However, following the 2024 Maharashtra Assembly elections, in which the BJP secured 132 seats while Shinde's Shiv Sena won 57 seats, Shinde stepped down, allowing the BJP to take the CM position.

Despite his reduced role, Shinde maintains that he remains a crucial force in Maharashtra politics. "Those who think I am weak should reconsider. I had told Fadnavis that we would

Shinde also addressed concerns about recent death threats against him. He claimed he has received such threats multiple times in the past, including during his crackdown on dance bars and from Naxal groups. "I have never bowed down to any threats, and I never will," he stated firmly. With increasing political tension in Maharashtra, Shinde's latest remarks indicate that he remains a powerful figure in the Mahayuti government, capable of influencing future political developments in the state.

# Pralhad Joshi questions Congress over Trump's '\$21-million donation' remark



TPN Correspondent  
Hubballi, Feb 22

Union Minister Pralhad Joshi has sought clarification from the Congress over for-

mer US President Donald Trump's claim that a \$21-million donation was sent to India "to boost voter turnout" and allegedly bring a different government to power.

Speaking to the media on Thursday, Joshi demanded answers on who in India received such a large sum as a donation. He insisted that the Congress must disclose which external force was involved in interfering with India's electoral process.

Referring to previous remarks by Overseas Indian Congress chairman Sam Pitroda about Congress' ties with billionaire George Soros, Joshi said the party must explain its alleged foreign connections. He also questioned whether Congress would dissociate itself from Pitroda's controversial comment on China.

"The Congress has always tried to undermine India's electoral system by seeking support from external forces. The party must first apologise to the nation for it," Joshi asserted.



# No Plan to Allow Early Leave for Muslim Staff During Ramzan

Minister G Parameshwara confirms no such proposal before the government  
Says no discussion on early leave for Muslim employees in cabinet  
BJP terms the demand as appeasement politics

TPN Correspondent | Bengaluru

Karnataka Home Minister G Parameshwara on Friday clarified that the state government has no plans to allow Muslim government employees to leave work early during Ramzan, dismissing claims of any discussion on the matter. His statement came in response to a petition submitted by state Congress vice-presidents Y Syed Ahmed and A R M Hussain to Chief Minister Siddaramaiah, requesting permission for Muslim staff to leave by 4 pm to break their fast. The petition cited similar measures taken by the governments of Telangana and Andhra Pradesh. "They may have written a letter, but there is no such proposal before the government. No discussion has taken place,



either at the cabinet level or otherwise," Parameshwara stated. Reacting to criticism from the BJP, which termed the proposal as appeasement politics, the minister said, "We are not concerned about Telangana." Meanwhile, Leader of Opposition R Ashoka slammed the Congress over the issue, accusing it of indulging in vote-bank politics.

# Dharmendra Pradhan Slams MK Stalin Over Language Row

Calls Anti-Hindi Claims 'Politically Motivated'

TPN Correspondent | New Delhi

Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan has accused Tamil Nadu Chief Minister MK Stalin of creating a false anti-Delhi narrative regarding the National Education Policy (NEP). In an exclusive interview, Pradhan said the DMK was depriving Tamil Nadu students of academic progress for political reasons and dismissed allegations of Hindi imposition. Under the NEP's three-language formula, students must learn three languages, with the Centre arguing that this helps restore Indian languages, including Tamil, to their rightful place in education.



Tamil Nadu, however, has opposed the policy, sticking to its two-language formula. Pradhan also responded to Stalin's claims that the Centre was withholding ₹2,000 crore under the Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan as pressure to implement NEP, calling such accusations "politically motivated."

He clarified that funds for the PM-Poshan scheme remained intact and that Tamil Nadu's opposition to the NEP was preventing additional funding under the PM SHRI scheme, which promotes mother-tongue education, digital classrooms, and skill development. He further alleged that the Tamil Nadu government had initially agreed to implement the NEP but later backed out for political reasons. "They think they can create an anti-Delhi narrative, but this fear psychosis of Hindi imposition is uncalled for, unfortunate, and politically motivated," Pradhan asserted.

# KSRTC Conductor Assaulted for Not Speaking Marathi in Belagavi

TPN Correspondent | Belagavi

A Karnataka State Road Transport Corporation (KSRTC) bus conductor was allegedly assaulted on Friday near Belagavi for not responding to a passenger in Marathi. The incident has sparked protests from pro-Kannada activists demanding the arrest of those involved. The 51-year-old conductor, Mahadevappa Mallappa Hukkeri, recounted that a woman passenger, accompanied by a man, spoke to him in Marathi after boarding at Sulebhavi village. When he requested her to speak in Kannada, stating he did not understand Marathi, she allegedly abused him and insisted he learn the language. Soon after, a group of people gathered and attacked him, hitting him on the head and body. Hukkeri was admitted to the Belagavi Institute of Medical Sciences with minor injuries and is reported to be out of danger. The attack has reignited tensions in the border region, where a section of Marathi-speaking residents has been advocating for Belagavi's merger with Maharashtra, a demand strongly opposed by the Kannada-speaking population and the Karnataka government.



# Delhi's 'Lady Don' Zoya Khan Arrested With ₹1 Crore Heroin



TPN Correspondent | New Delhi

Delhi Police have arrested Zoya Khan, the 33-year-old wife of jailed gangster Hashim Baba, for drug trafficking. She was caught in northeast Delhi with 225 grams of heroin worth nearly ₹1 crore while attempting to deliver the consignment. Police had been tracking Zoya's activities based on a tip-off and set up a trap on Wednesday, leading to her arrest. Authorities believe she played a crucial role in running Baba's criminal empire after his imprisonment, managing extortion and drug distribution operations while maintaining a polished public image. Zoya, who married Hashim Baba in 2017 after two previous marriages, regularly visited him in Tihar Jail, where he allegedly trained her in coded communication and gang management. Despite suspicions of her involvement in crime, police struggled to gather direct evidence against her until now. Hashim Baba, currently in jail for the murder of a gym owner in South Delhi, had earlier linked fellow gangster Lawrence Bishnoi to the crime in a judicial confession. Police say Baba and Bishnoi maintained contact since 2021, even from behind bars, allegedly using secure communication channels to coordinate criminal activities. With Zoya's arrest, police are now investigating deeper ties between the gang and its associates.

# Madras HC seeks report on Isha Foundation's Mahashivratri event



TPN Correspondent | Chennai

The Madras High Court has directed the Tamil Nadu Pollution Control Board (TNPCB) to verify whether Isha Foundation is complying with environmental regulations during its upcoming Mahashivratri celebrations in Coimbatore on February 26. A division bench comprising Justices S M Sivasubramaniam and K Rajasekar issued the directive while hearing a plea filed by S T Sivagnanan, who alleged environmental violations by the foundation. The court has asked TNPCB to submit its report by February 24 and scheduled the next hearing for the same day. The petitioner claimed that Isha Foundation lacks proper sewage treatment facilities, discharges untreated waste, and causes severe noise pollution. He requested the court to take action against the foundation and prevent authorities from granting permission for the Mahashivratri event, citing similar violations last year.

# Tamilians Have Died For A Language, Don't Play With It": Kamal Haasan



TPN Correspondent | Chennai

Actor-turned-politician Kamal Haasan marked the 8th foundation day of Makkal Needhi Maiyam (MNM) on Friday, addressing party cadres in Chennai with a strong message on Tamil linguistic pride and his political aspirations. Hoisting the party flag at the MNM headquarters, Haasan recalled Tamil Nadu's long-standing resistance to Hindi imposition, warning against any attempts to undermine the significance of language. "Tamilians have lost their lives for a language. Don't play with such things. Even children here know what language they need," he asserted. Reflecting on his political journey, Haasan admitted he could have entered the field earlier. "I feel I lost because I entered politics too late. If I had joined 20 years ago, my speech and position would have been different," he said, responding to critics who labeled him a "failed politician." Haasan also set the tone for MNM's future, declaring that the party's voice would be heard in Parliament this year and in the Tamil Nadu Assembly next year. Urging party workers to prepare for the 2026 state elections, he likened MNM to a growing child, ready to make an impact. "Today we are 8 years old, like a child growing up. This year, our voice will be heard in Parliament, and next year, your voices will reflect in the Assembly," he emphasized.

# CCTV Links Two Murders in Delhi, Juvenile Accused Caught in 13 Hours

TPN Correspondent | New Delhi

New Delhi: In a swift operation, Delhi Police solved two murders that occurred 6 km apart within 13 hours, tracing them back to the same group of juveniles accused through CCTV footage and forensic analysis. The first incident took place in New Ashok Nagar, where police received a call at 3 am about an injured man near the Jal Board Treatment Plant. Upon arrival, they found him with multiple stab wounds. He was rushed to the hospital but succumbed to his injuries. By noon, another distress call led the Ghazipur police to an empty plot behind a liquor shop, where 49-year-old Ramesh from Kumhar Basti was found dead with deep stab wounds. CCTV footage revealed a group of juveniles attacking the victim, linking them to the New Ashok Nagar murder. Police investigations revealed that the juveniles first killed Ramesh in Ghazipur during a drunken altercation at a birthday gathering. Later, they attempted to rob a passerby in New Ashok Nagar, stabbing him when he resisted. Tracking their movements using surveillance footage and automatic number plate recognition cameras, police arrested all the accused by 4 pm the same day.



## Qatar Emir's Visit Marks Renewed Strategic Partnership with India



The recent visit of the Emir of Qatar, Sheikh Tamim Bin Hamad Al-Thani, to India has reignited a strong and strategic partnership between the two nations. The Emir's visit comes a decade after his last trip, and it marks a significant reboot in bilateral relations. This gesture underscores the growing importance of India to Qatar and reflects the strong ties between the two countries, which have been mutually beneficial in various sectors.

India, as the world's fifth-largest economy, is set to become the third-largest by 2027, and Qatar, one of the wealthiest nations globally, has long played a pivotal role in energy exports. Qatar fulfills a significant portion of India's liquefied natural gas (LNG) needs, with Indian labor also forming the backbone

of Qatar's workforce. Bilateral trade stands at \$15 billion, and both sides have committed to further investment, with Qatar planning to inject \$10 billion into India.

The two countries also aim to double their trade to \$28 billion in the next five years and are considering a free trade agreement. This collaboration is expected to strengthen their strategic ties, especially in energy, trade, and infrastructure development.

Qatar's importance extends beyond economics. It has been a key diplomatic player in the Middle East, mediating peace talks, including the Hamas-Israel ceasefire. Its strategic positioning, with military bases hosting the US and Turkey, places it at the center of regional political shifts. As the Middle East undergoes

changes, Qatar continues to assert its influence, including maintaining close ties with Islamist groups, which have been controversial among its Arab neighbors.

Despite recent tensions, including the arrest of Indian naval officers in Qatar, which strained relations, the Emir's visit has set the stage for a closer relationship. Diplomatic efforts led by Indian leaders helped resolve such issues, ensuring stability in the bilateral relationship. With energy demand expected to grow in India, Qatar's role as a key energy supplier remains crucial. This renewed partnership highlights the strategic importance of the relationship between India and Qatar, signaling a bright future for both nations amidst a rapidly changing global landscape.

## Whose Interests Was USAID Really Serving in India?

Recent revelations about the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and its funding in India raise important questions regarding the influence of foreign interests in India's electoral process. Reports uncovered by the newly formed Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE), led by Elon Musk, have shed light on large sums of American taxpayer dollars being directed towards initiatives aimed at boosting voter turnout among marginalized communities in India, particularly ahead of the 2014 and 2019 parliamentary elections.

USAID has been involved in India for decades, initially focusing on food security and governance reforms. Since 2011, its Democratic Elections and Political Processes (DEPP) program has allocated substantial amounts of funding, with over \$318,000 annually given to the Consortium for Elections and Political Process Strengthening (CEPPS) for India-focused projects. In election years, funding spikes significantly, such as in FY2014, when \$21 million—about ₹182 crore—was spent on voter awareness campaigns during the national elections. However, funding dropped drastically after May 2014, suggesting an electoral rather than institutional focus. A similar funding pattern occurred in 2019, with \$486 million allocated regionally.

Despite claims by USAID of promoting democracy, US President Donald Trump raised concerns that these efforts were more about restricting democracy, questioning the need for such large sums in India's elections. In fact, USAID's expenditures in India have often drawn comparisons to those in other countries, such as Bangladesh, where funding from the US for "strengthening the political landscape" was linked to

political unrest. Additionally, the Election Commission of India (ECI) signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the US-based International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES) in 2012, which reportedly facilitated training programs at the ECI's India International Institute of Democracy and Election Management (IIIDEM). While former Chief Election Commissioner S.Y. Quraishi denied any direct USAID funding to the ECI, audits revealed that funds were channeled to NGOs for initiatives aimed at mobilizing marginalized voters—often along caste lines. These initiatives, includ-



ing a focus on Dalit voter participation, have sparked controversy, especially as similar rhetoric later surfaced in political debates, such as Congress leader Rahul Gandhi's call for caste-based rights allocation.

The dual funding from USAID and tech giants like Google, Meta, and Microsoft to IFES has also raised concerns about conflicting interests, particularly as IFES's policy papers have promoted caste-based voter categorization. These funding patterns and political alignments prompt questions about foreign influence in shaping India's political landscape, especially when such efforts coincide with election cycles.

## 'Hindu-Buddhist Bhai Bhai'? The Politics Behind the RSS-Buddhist Alliance at the Kumbh Mela



The grand spectacle of Hindu-Buddhist unity at the 2025 Kumbh Mela, featuring Buddhist monks alongside RSS leaders like Bhaiyyaji Joshi and Indresh Kumar, is less an eternal truth and more a political performance with deep historical precedents. This grand display of solidarity between Hinduism and Buddhism is not without its contradictions, as it reflects both the shared heritage of these traditions and the historical schisms between them. The roots of this alliance can be traced back to the early 20th century. In 1923, Anagarika Dharmapala, a Sinhalese Buddhist leader, proclaimed at the Akhil Bharatiya Hindu Mahasabha that "Buddhists are also Hindus." This was a crucial moment in the histor-

ical construction of Hindu nationalism, as leaders like Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya echoed the sentiment, positioning Buddhism, Jainism, and Sikhism as sects within the broader Hindu fold. Such attempts to incorporate Buddhism into the Hindu identity were motivated by political pragmatism rather than deep spiritual kinship, as the emerging Hindu nationalist movement sought to consolidate power and create a unified Hindu identity.

However, this narrative of harmonious unity overlooks the historical hostility between Brahmanism and Buddhism. Ancient Buddhist texts such as the Tevijja Sutta and Ambaṭṭha Sutta criticize the Brahmanical caste sys-

tem, and brahminical texts often portrayed the Buddha as a heretic or disruptive force. Even during the colonial era, figures like Swami Vivekananda presented Buddhism as a misguided offshoot of Hinduism, reinforcing the idea of an antagonistic relationship between the two traditions.

In the early 20th century, Hindu nationalist leaders, facing colonial rule and internal divisions, sought to include Buddhists within the "Hindu Nation." This was a strategic move, aimed at uniting marginalized groups while excluding Muslims and Christians, viewed as external threats. Anagarika Dharmapala's involvement in these debates was driven by his desire to gain control over the Maha

Bodhi Temple in Bodhi Gaya, a symbol of Buddhist heritage. The most striking example of this alliance was in 1935, when the Hindu Mahasabha invited U Ottama, a Buddhist monk from Burma, to preside over the organization, an alliance forged more out of shared anti-colonial politics than religious unity.

In the present day, the Kumbh Mela's display of Hindu-Buddhist unity is underpinned by similar political calculations. While the resolutions passed at the event condemn the persecution of minorities in Bangladesh and Pakistan, the lack of any similar critique of India's marginalized communities, particularly Dalits, is notable. This selective advocacy underscores the po-

litical nature of this alliance, which often sidelines internal dissent.

The participation of Tibetan exiles at the Kumbh Mela also signals a shift from colonial-era alliances. With Tibetans reliant on Indian support, many are forced to align with the RSS and BJP to secure their place in India, even as they remain cautious of these political forces. Thus, the "Hindu-Buddhist bhai bhai" narrative at the Kumbh Mela is a performance grounded in political pragmatism, shaped by the shifting dynamics of power, history, and survival. The deep-rooted contradictions in this alliance raise questions about its durability, suggesting that alliances of convenience may not endure without tension.



# India needs leaders to find solutions to global complexities: PM Modi

- India flags US funding cut as foreign interference
- MEA calls \$21M USAID halt "deeply troubling"
- Tensions rise over electoral sovereignty concerns



TPN Correspondent | Delhi

The Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) on Friday expressed concerns over the recent cancellation of a \$21 million USAID funding by the Donald Trump administration, intended for voter turnout programs in India. The MEA described the decision as "deeply troubling" and raised alarms about potential foreign interference in the country's internal affairs.

The funding was part of USAID's broader efforts to strengthen democratic processes globally, including in India, but the recent developments have sparked tensions between the two countries. The Indian government's response highlights its growing sensitivity to perceived foreign involvement in its domestic matters, particularly when it comes to elections and political processes.

The USAID initiative had been designed to support voter education and ensure fair electoral participation in the world's largest democracy. However, critics argue that the cancellation of the funds could undermine efforts to increase political engagement among Indian citizens, especially in remote areas.

The US move comes amid a broader conversation about foreign influence on global democracies and the need for nations to safeguard their sovereignty and electoral processes from external interference. While the Indian government has expressed its displeasure over the funding cut, it remains to be seen how this issue will impact the relationship between the US and India moving forward.

As the situation unfolds, the MEA's comments underscore India's commitment to maintaining the integrity of its democratic processes without external influence.

Spokesperson for the MEA, Randhir Jaiswal, stated, "We have seen information that has been put out by the US administration regarding certain USA activities and funding. These are obviously very deeply troubling. This has led to concerns about foreign interference in India's internal affairs." His comments came after the US government halted the funding, which was aimed at supporting voter engagement and turnout initiatives during elections in India.

## My father is 100% fit, vote for him: Nitish's son urges Bihar people



TPN Correspondent | Patna

Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar's son, Nishant Kumar, on Friday urged the people of Bihar to vote for his father in the upcoming assembly elections, asserting that the 72-year-old leader is "100 per cent fit" to continue serving the state. Speaking briefly with journalists at Patna airport upon returning from a wedding in Delhi, Nishant appealed to voters to back his father's leadership, emphasizing the progress Bihar has seen under Nitish Kumar's tenure.

"This is an election year. I have urged the people to vote for my father before, and I do so again. He has done so much for Bihar, and his return to power will ensure that development continues without interruption," Nishant stated. His comments came amidst growing political speculation, with the state gearing up for assembly elections later this year.

Nishant was also questioned about rival RJD leader Tejashwi Yadav's recent remarks casting doubt on the health of Chief Minister Nitish Kumar, who is set to seek a fifth consecutive term. In response, Nishant firmly stated, "My father is 100 per cent fit," dismissing any concerns regarding his father's health.

While speculation surrounding Nishant's potential political career continues, with rumors suggesting he could join the JD(U) or even contest the assembly elections from Harnaut—his father's former constituency—he refrained from commenting on these matters. Nishant quickly moved past the group of journalists and entered his car, not addressing any further questions about his own political ambitions or the future of the party leadership.



## India Rejects Turkish President Erdogan's Remarks on Kashmir, Lodges Protest

TPN Correspondent | Delhi

India on Friday strongly rejected Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's comments on the Kashmir issue, stating that it is an internal matter of India and does not warrant external interference. The Indian Ministry of External Affairs lodged a formal protest with the Turkish ambassador in New Delhi over Erdogan's remarks, which were deemed both "unwarranted" and "unacceptable."

Erdogan's comments were made during his visit to Islamabad on February 13, following talks with Pakistan Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif. In his statements, Erdogan called for the Kashmir issue to be addressed according to a United Nations resolution, suggesting that the matter should be resolved through dialogue between India and Pakistan, while considering the aspirations of the people of Kashmir.

The remarks, which diverged from Erdogan's usual stance on Kashmir, were viewed by India as a departure from his prior silence on the issue. For nearly two years, Erdogan had refrained from publicly commenting on Kashmir, even at international fo-

rum like the UN General Assembly and the D8 bloc. His sudden remarks sparked strong reactions from New Delhi, prompting a swift diplomatic response.

Indian External Affairs Ministry spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal rejected the Turkish president's comments, asserting that "Jammu and Kashmir is an integral part of India" and that no other country has the right to comment on it. He further stressed that such statements undermined India's territorial integrity and sovereignty.

In response to Erdogan's remarks, the Indian government reiterated that matters related to Kashmir are purely domestic and are not subject to international mediation. India continues to maintain that it is committed to resolving any issues through dialogue, but only within the framework of its territorial sovereignty.

As the Kashmir issue remains a sensitive topic in India-Pakistan relations, India's firm stance against Erdogan's comments reinforces its position on the matter, further asserting that external interference is neither necessary nor acceptable.



## Qatar's Growing Influence in Middle-East Politics and Its Ties with India

TPN Correspondent | New Delhi

In the complex and often volatile landscape of Middle-East politics, Qatar has carved out a significant role, earning a reputation as both the arsonist and firefighter of the region. In a place where radical Islam and Shia-Sunni tensions often dominate, Qatar uses its vast natural gas reserves—third largest in the world after Russia and Iran—to wield considerable political leverage, often at the expense of more traditional regional powers.

The small Gulf nation has earned international recognition for its ability to play a central role in diplomatic negotiations. Qatar hosts the largest US airbase in the Middle East at Al Udeid and has brokered significant deals, such as the US-Iran prisoner swap in 2023. It was instrumental in facilitating the US-led coalition's withdrawal from Afghanistan in 2021 by offering refuge to Taliban leadership. Furthermore, Qatar has been actively involved in peace efforts in Gaza, facilitating ceasefires and hostage releases, and has had a hand in the civil wars in Yemen, Syria, and Libya. Notably, it maintains strong ties with the Muslim Brotherhood, further amplifying its political influence.

Under the leadership of Emir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani, Qatar has become an influential power in West Asia, adept at contributing to regional problem-solving. The Emir's diplomatic acumen has led Qatar to be recognized as a key player in shaping the future of the Middle East.

Acknowledging Qatar's growing stature in the region and the country's positive relationship with India, Prime Minister Narendra Modi, along with External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar, made a notable gesture of respect during the visit of Sheikh Tamim to India in February 2025. Breaking diplomatic protocol, both leaders personally greeted the Emir and his delegation at Delhi's IGI Airport, underscoring the importance of Qatar's role in the Middle East and its cordial ties with the large Indian diaspora living in the Gulf nation.

## "India Needs To Cut Tariffs For Its Own Good": NITI Aayog CEO

TPN Correspondent | Delhi

NITI Aayog CEO BVR Subrahmanyam asserted that tariffs do not protect countries, and India needs to reduce them for its own benefit, regardless of external pressures. Speaking at the 69th Foundation Day of the All India Management Association (AIMA), Subrahmanyam emphasized that being open to global markets should be one of India's top priorities if it aims to become a developed nation.

He highlighted the need for India to finalize trade agreements with key economies such as the European Union and the United Kingdom to facilitate tariff reductions. Subrahmanyam further stressed the importance of deregulation at both the central and state levels to integrate India into global supply chains.

Subrahmanyam also observed that while there is global interest in India, many investors are choosing to explore other countries instead. He pointed to nations like Indonesia, Vietnam, and Turkey, which have benefitted from the "China plus one" strategy adopted by global companies seeking alternatives to China.

The NITI Aayog CEO argued that India's entry into global value chains requires more than just initiatives like the Production Linked Incentive (PLI); it also demands deregulation and a focus on skill development. He expressed concern about the bureaucratic red tape involved in business operations, which he claimed is stifling growth, particularly for MSMEs.

Subrahmanyam shared that NITI Aayog is working on integrating India into global supply chains across various sectors, including electronics, auto components, chemicals, textiles, and footwear. He also mentioned that the Aayog is awaiting Cabinet clearance for its recommendations on the electronics component supply chain and is preparing to launch a national manufacturing mission within three months.

In addition to manufacturing, Subrahmanyam identified education and agriculture as critical areas for India's development. He stressed the need to transform agriculture by shifting focus away from traditional crops like rice and wheat toward horticulture, floriculture, and dairy production. He also emphasized that states must be open to enterprises from other regions to stimulate growth, with a free-flowing enterprise environment being key to progress.





# Saudi Arabia Invests in Dark Skies to Boost Astrotourism

- Red Sea Destination to become the region's largest Dark Sky Reserve
- Blends Islamic astronomy with tourism while preserving natural darkness



TPN Correspondent | Saudi

Saudi Arabia is making significant investments in dark sky conservation and sustainable tourism to promote astrotourism. With its vast desert landscapes and minimal light pollution, the Kingdom is capitalizing on the global trend of stargazing, which has become a key driver of tourism worldwide. Astrotourism has seen an uptick in popularity, with destinations like the United States generating billions in revenue from stargazing tourism. Saudi Arabia is now positioning itself as a prime destination for those seeking to experience the wonders of the night sky.

The Kingdom's clear desert skies make it an ideal place for astrotourism, and projects like the AlUla Manara and Al-Harameel Nature Reserves are already

receiving recognition for their pristine nightscapes. Even more ambitious plans are in the works, including the development of the Red Sea Destination, which is set to become the largest Dark Sky Reserve in the Middle East. The reserve will span an area the size of Belgium, and its development will focus on preserving natural darkness by minimizing light pollution. Red Sea Global, the developers behind the project, are working with lighting experts to ensure compliance with stringent light pollution guidelines.

In addition to its natural landscapes, Saudi Arabia is tapping into its rich Islamic astronomical heritage, offering unique experiences that bridge science and culture. One such initiative focuses on celestial objects used for navigation during the Hajj pilgrimage, as well as integrating the moon's phases and the Hijri

calendar into the visitor experience. This fusion of astronomy and cultural traditions offers a distinctive dimension to the astrotourism experience.

However, as with any booming tourism sector, astrotourism also presents challenges. Increased visitation could lead to light pollution, but Saudi Arabia's low population density provides an advantage in keeping light pollution minimal. The Red Sea Global project plans to limit annual visitor numbers to one million while ensuring environmental protection initiatives are in place to safeguard local wildlife and ecosystems. Saudi Arabia is set to become a leading hub for astrotourism, offering travelers an unparalleled opportunity to experience the beauty of the night sky in one of the world's most awe-inspiring desert landscapes.



## Raises Worries Of Interference In Internal Matters: India On USAID

TPN Correspondent | Washington

India's Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) recently raised concerns over the US Agency for International Development (USAID) \$21 million funding aimed at voter turnout in India in 2012, saying it "raises worries of interference in India's internal matters." The response came amid a heated political clash between Congress and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), both of which have criticized the funding as "external interference" in India's electoral process.

The controversy intensified after the Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE), led by Elon Musk, identified the \$21 million allocation to India as part of a broader \$486 million audit of government expenditures in the US. DOGE's audit also included grants to Moldova for political process strengthening and other countries. The revelation spurred further political discourse, with BJP leaders accusing the Congress party of allowing external forces to influence India's elections.

Congress's Pawan Khera strongly criticized BJP leader Amit Malviya's claims, pointing out that the funding was approved in 2012, when the Congress-led UPA was in power, not the BJP. Khera sarcastically asked why the Congress would invite "external interference" if it was meant to sabotage its own electoral prospects. BJP leaders Nalin Kohli and Amit Malviya, however, questioned the rationale behind such a significant financial investment by a foreign entity into India's elections.

Former Chief Election Commissioner SY Quraishi refuted BJP claims, explaining that the funding was part of a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES), intended for election training and preparation. Quraishi denied any malicious intent behind the funding, which he described as a routine partnership with international organizations.

## Post-Ramzan Protests Loom as Imran Khan's Party Targets Shehbaz Sharif Government

TPN Correspondent | Islamabad

Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan (February 21) – Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) President of Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa, Junaid Akbar Khan, announced plans to launch a protest movement after Ramadan and reaffirmed the party's commitment to forming a grand opposition alliance. Speaking to the media outside Adiala Jail, Khan expressed his frustration after being denied a scheduled meeting with PTI's founding chairman, Imran Khan, by authorities.

Despite government restrictions, Junaid Akbar Khan emphasized that PTI leaders would continue to stand by their chairman's call. He dismissed claims that party leaders were avoiding jail visits, affirming that they remained fully committed to supporting Khan. Khan also confirmed the party's intention to rally opposition forces and organize large-scale protests after Eid, in what is expected to be a high-profile political initiative.

While speaking to reporters, PTI leaders suggested that the possibility of a sit-in outside Adiala Jail could be considered, should the situation demand it. They strongly criticized the government for restricting their efforts to meet with Imran Khan, describing these actions as a violation of constitutional rights.

In a related statement, PML-N President Nawaz Sharif reiterated his position that the people of Pakistan would no longer tolerate disruptions to national progress. He firmly stated that the country's development would not be held back by groups lacking political and democratic understanding, a reference aimed at the opposition parties.

PTI leaders, including Khan, have repeatedly accused the government of intentionally misrepresenting their party's actions and misguiding the public about the intentions of opposition leaders. Khan further criticized the government's tactics, calling them part of a broader strategy to undermine PTI and its leaders. He rejected accusations that PTI was responsible for any uncivilized political behavior, insisting that it was the ruling party's leaders who had first engaged in unethical political attacks. As the political situation continues to evolve in Pakistan, PTI's planned protests and opposition alliance efforts signal growing tensions within the country's political landscape.



## Kash Patel Confirmed as FBI Director, Vows to Restore Trust in the Agency

TPN Correspondent | Washington

Indian-origin Kash Patel was confirmed by the Senate on Thursday as the new director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI). Patel, who is a close ally of former President Donald Trump, expressed his gratitude and commitment to rebuilding the FBI into an organization that is "transparent, accountable, and committed to justice."

In his first statement following the confirmation, Patel thanked President Trump and Attorney General Pam Bondi for their unwavering support. "I am honored to be confirmed as the ninth Director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation. Thank you to President Trump and Attorney General Bondi for your unwavering confidence and support," Patel said in a post on X.

Patel emphasized the need to restore public trust in the FBI, acknowledging the agency's significant role in protecting the nation, from the era of the "G-Men" to its post-9/11 mission of safeguarding Americans. However, he also acknowledged that the politicalization of the justice system had eroded public confidence in the Bureau, vowing to put an end to that. "The politicalization of our justice system has eroded public trust—but that ends today," he stated.

Patel promised to rebuild the FBI into an agency that the American people can be proud of. "Working alongside the dedicated men and women of the Bureau and our partners, we will rebuild an FBI the American people can be proud of," Patel said. He also issued a stern warning to those who pose threats to Americans: "To those who seek to harm Americans—consider this your warning. We will hunt you down in every corner of this planet."

The Senate confirmation vote for Patel passed narrowly, with a 51-49 result. While Senators Lisa Murkowski of Alaska and Susan Collins of Maine opposed his nomination, the majority of Republican Senators, including Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell, supported Patel. All Senate Democrats voted against his confirmation.



## Kickback Scheme, What Do I Care? Trump On USAID As BJP Slams Congress

TPN Correspondent | Delhi

Former US President Donald Trump has once again voiced his criticism regarding the \$21 million allocated by the US government through USAID in 2012 for voter turnout programs in India. Calling the funding a "kickback scheme," Trump expressed indifference, stating, "What the hell do I care about it? We got enough problems." He did not provide further details or evidence to back his allegations.

Speaking to a gathering of Republican Party state Governors, Trump questioned the purpose of the funds, stating, "Can you imagine all that money going to India? I wonder what they think when they get it. Now, it is a kickback scheme... they kick it back to the people that send it." He further rambled on, suggesting that whenever there is a lack of understanding about certain matters, it could indicate a "kickback" situation. He also questioned the allocation of \$29 million to strengthen the political landscape in Bangladesh.

Trump's comments were part of his broader criticism of foreign aid, and he emphasized that his administration had terminated many such projects. "We got a lot. We got enough problems," he remarked, reiterating that the US needed to prioritize domestic issues.

The remarks sparked a political firestorm, especially in India, where Trump's comments were quickly picked up by opposition parties. The BJP, in particular, linked Trump's "kickback" comment to Congress MP Rahul Gandhi's earlier remarks in the UK, suggesting that he had insulted India abroad. In May 2023, Gandhi had stated that global democracies were in decline, urging US and European nations to recognize the threats to democracy. The BJP seized upon his comments, accusing him of undermining India's image on the international stage. Meanwhile, BJP leaders like Amit Malviya and Pradeep Bhandari claimed that the \$21 million was used to sustain "deep state assets" in India, accusing Gandhi and the Congress party of benefiting from the foreign aid.



## Sebi Proposes Fast-Track Framework for REITs and InvITs Fundraising



The Securities and Exchange Board of India (Sebi) has unveiled a new proposal aimed at streamlining fundraising for real estate investment trusts (REITs) and infrastructure investment trusts (InvITs). On Thursday, the regulator introduced a framework for conducting fast-track follow-on offers, a move designed to make capital raising more efficient and accessible for these investment vehicles.

The proposed framework is expected to enhance the fundraising process by offering quicker and more flexible methods for REITs and InvITs to issue additional units. This initiative aims to reduce the time required for follow-on offers, thereby benefiting both the sponsors and investors.

As part of the proposal, Sebi has recommended a lock-in period of three years for units issued to sponsors through a preferential issue. This lock-in requirement is intended to align the interests of sponsors with those of other investors, ensuring that sponsors remain committed to the long-term growth and stability of the trust.

Sebi's move comes as part of its ongoing efforts to make the Indian capital market more dynamic and supportive of various investment vehicles. With real estate and infrastructure being key sectors in the country's growth, the framework for fast-track follow-on offers is expected to facilitate smoother and faster fundraising, attracting more capital into these sectors.

This proposal is set to significantly impact how REITs and InvITs raise funds in the future, making it easier for them to tap into the market and continue their expansion efforts. The regulator's push to improve fundraising efficiency is seen as a positive development for both investors and sponsors, offering more opportunities for growth in these investment channels.

## Maruti Suzuki Aims for 50% Market Share and EV Dominance by FY30



India's largest carmaker, Maruti Suzuki, has set an ambitious target to reclaim a 50% market share in the country, with a bold vision laid out in its mid-term management plan for FY25-FY30. The company, which once held a dominant share of the Indian automotive market in FY19, is keen to retake that position by securing one out of every two cars sold in the country.

Currently, Maruti Suzuki holds a market share of 41.6% as of FY23, having lost some ground to competitors like Tata Motors, Hyundai, and Kia. The company is now focusing on strategic moves to enhance its position, with plans to introduce new models, enhance its production capacity, and expand its reach across various segments, including electric vehicles (EVs).

Despite entering the EV market later than its competitors, Maruti Suzuki has big plans for electric vehicles and aims to be the country's largest producer, exporter, and seller of EVs. The company has yet to start sales of its electric vehicles but is positioning itself to make a significant impact in the segment. Maruti Suzuki's delayed entry into the EV space is expected to be addressed with the launch of new electric models in the coming years as part of its broader strategy.

The company's renewed focus on regaining its market dominance and its plans to lead the EV market reflect the broader trends in the Indian automotive industry, where electric mobility is increasingly gaining traction. With a strong brand presence and extensive distribution network, Maruti Suzuki is well-positioned to meet its ambitious goals, provided it executes its strategy effectively in the years leading up to FY30.

## Market falls as auto stocks tumble; Sensex down 429 points

Domestic stock markets fell sharply on Friday, weighed down by auto stocks and weak global cues. Investors remained cautious due to the absence of positive triggers and continued selling by foreign institutional investors (FIIs). The decline in auto stocks, particularly after reports of Tesla's potential entry into India, added to the downward pressure. Analysts suggest that unless the markets stabilize and consolidate over the next few days, a trend reversal is unlikely.

The BSE Sensex, which had closed at 75,735 in the previous session, opened at 75,612 and fluctuated between an intraday high of 75,612 and a low of 75,112. It eventually settled at 75,311, down 429 points. The NSE Nifty opened at 22,857, touched a high of 22,921 and a low of 22,720, before closing at 22,795, a loss of 117 points. The Nifty Bank also dropped 353 points to settle at 48,981.

Market breadth on the NSE favored sellers, with 1,744 stocks declining against 1,100 gainers out of the 2,916 traded. While 23 stocks hit 52-week highs, 91 reached new lows. Among the Nifty50 stocks, 13 advanced while 37 declined. Hindalco, Tata Steel, Eicher Motors, Larsen & Toubro, and SBI Life were the top gainers, while M&M, Adani Ports, BPCL, Tata Motors, and Adani Enterprises were among the



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biggest losers.

The rupee weakened slightly against the US dollar, closing at 86.71. Meanwhile, Mahindra & Mahindra shares took a hit following reports of Tesla's potential India entry. Tata Steel CEO TV Narendran noted that US tariffs could impact Indian exports. Varun Beverages shares saw an uptick on high trading volume,

while Adani Ports announced an additional Rs 20,000 crore investment in Vilinjampore. NHPC shares have gained 10% over the past three sessions, and metal stocks such as Hindalco, Nalco,

and Vedanta recorded weekly gains of 7-10%.

Analysts are anticipating a 25-basis point rate cut by the Reserve Bank of India in April. Additionally, SEBI and AMFI have introduced a monthly SIP scheme starting at Rs 250, while CDSL shares rose amid reports of NSDL's upcoming IPO. The share of foreign portfolio investors in mutual fund ownership of NSE-listed companies has reached a 13-year low.

Despite the market decline, investor sentiment remains focused on improving economic and corporate developments that could influence future trends.

## India on track for \$35 trillion economy, States & Centre in sync: Piyush Goyal

India is setting its sights on an ambitious economic transformation, with Union Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal announcing plans to expand the country's economy from USD 4 trillion to USD 30-35 trillion by 2047. Speaking at the Invest Kerala Global Summit, Goyal highlighted the government's efforts to lay the foundation for this massive leap, emphasizing the central role of investment and growth in achieving this target.



During his address at the summit, attended by business leaders and policymakers, Goyal spoke of the enormous potential within India's market, urging global investors to take advantage of the country's growth trajectory. "There are unmatched opportunities for growth, development, and economic opportunities," he stated, underscoring India's attractive investment landscape.

The Indian government is working in tandem with state governments to create a conducive environment for business and economic expansion, Goyal assured the audience. His remarks were aimed at bolstering investor confidence and encouraging strategic investments across sectors. India's potential, he emphasized, lies not only in its growing domestic market but also in its increas-

ing role as a global economic player.

The event, held in Kerala, also marked a significant moment as the state is facing political differences at the local level. However, despite these challenges, Kerala continues to be an important part of India's overall growth story. The Minister's focus on the state's contribution to the national economy and its opportunities for foreign investments was clear.

India's goal to reach a \$30-35 trillion economy by 2047 is part of a broader vision that seeks to drive growth, create job opportunities, and elevate the country's global economic standing. As India moves toward this ambitious target, attracting both domestic and foreign investment will play a critical role in shaping its future.

### RBI MPC Minutes

## Interest Rate Cut and Focus on Economic Growth

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) recently released the minutes from its Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) meeting held on February 21, highlighting the rationale behind the recent 25 basis points (bps) repo rate reduction and discussing the outlook for inflation and economic growth. The decision marks the RBI's first rate cut in five years, signaling a shift in policy aimed at boosting India's economic momentum as inflation shows signs of aligning with the central bank's target.

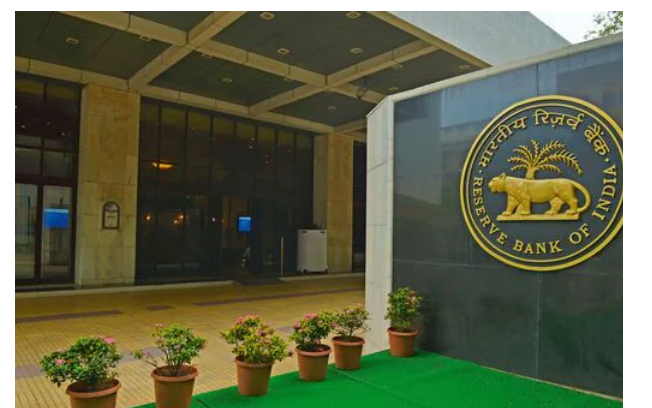
In its first bi-monthly MPC meeting of 2025, the RBI lowered the benchmark repo rate from 6.50% to 6.25% and maintained a neutral stance. This move follows a prolonged period of restrictive monetary policy, with policymakers expressing concerns over its impact on economic growth. In his comments, RBI Governor Malhotra emphasized that the rate cut was necessary to support growth, noting that retail inflation was moving closer to the RBI's 4% target.

The MPC members were largely in agreement that India's inflation outlook was turning positive, particularly with food inflation easing. India's retail inflation fell to 4.31% in January, a five-month low. Governor Malhotra praised

the government's Union Budget proposals, particularly in agriculture and fiscal consolidation, which are seen as positive for price stability and inflation expectations. He suggested that the combination of monetary easing and growth-oriented measures from the Union Budget could lead to an uptick in household consumption and investments.

However, concerns over global uncertainties, such as trade policy and weather events, were also highlighted. External MPC member Saugata Bhattacharya noted that the policy repo rate might become excessively restrictive if inflation continues on its downward trajectory, potentially harming growth.

The meeting also stressed the need for continued support for economic growth. Deputy Governor M. Rajeshwar Rao suggested that with inflation aligning with the RBI's target, the central bank had more room to address growth concerns. MPC members pointed to subdued private consumption, particularly due to low real wage growth, and urged a more accommodative policy stance to



revive private capital expenditure. The committee also expressed concerns over the subdued Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) inflows into the country and noted that growth-supportive policies would remain a priority. External member Nagesh Kumar advocated for a more aggressive 50-basis-point rate cut to signal India's commitment to growth, although the committee opted for a more cautious 25 bps reduction due to global uncertainties.

Looking ahead, the RBI revised India's GDP growth forecast for FY2025-26 to 6.7%, while maintaining its inflation target for the fiscal year at 4.8%. The next MPC meeting is scheduled for April 2025.





## World's Most Expensive Teapot: "The Egoist" Worth \$3 Million



Tea lovers around the world are known for enjoying their favorite drink in beautifully crafted cups, saucers, and teapots. But some teapots go beyond just being functional and can be incredibly expensive. Take, for instance, a teapot that costs a jaw-dropping \$3,000,000 (approximately Rs 24 crore). This luxurious teapot, known as "The Egoist," set a world

record in 2016 for being the most valuable teapot ever created.

The Egoist, owned by the N Sethia Foundation in the UK, is a true masterpiece. It is crafted from 18-carat yellow gold, covered entirely with cut diamonds, and features a stunning 6.67-carat ruby at its center. The handle of the teapot is made from fossilized mammoth ivory, further

adding to its rarity and value. Italian jeweler Fulvio Scavia was the mastermind behind this extravagant creation, which is valued at an eye-watering Rs 24 crore. The Guinness World Records shared images of this incredible teapot on Twitter on August 9, and it quickly went viral, garnering over 80,000 views, 615 likes, and numerous comments from amused and curious users.

One Twitter user joked, "I wanted to purchase it but I can't use it to make tea, so I just dash it out," while another commented, "I'm stealing this, how can a teapot be richer and worth more than me, N Sethia Foundation needs to adopt me or else." A third user humorously questioned, "I'm curious, where did the foundation steal it from? I mean, seeing that most artifacts and antiques in the UK these days have been said to have been stolen from one colonized country or another."

Despite its hefty price tag, The Egoist teapot continues to be a fascinating symbol of luxury and fine craftsmanship, sparking both admiration and lighthearted humor online.

## UK Man Creates World Record By Getting Daughter's Name Tattooed 667 Times

Mark Owen Evans, a 49-year-old man from the UK, has reclaimed the Guinness World Record for the most tattoos of the same name on his body. Evans broke the previous record by inking his seven-year-old daughter's name, "Lucy," 400 more times, bringing the total number of tattoos to an impressive 667. Evans first set the record in 2017 when he had "Lucy" tattooed 267 times on his back. However, in 2020, the record was surpassed by Diedra Vigil from the United States, who had her name inked 300 times. Determined to regain his title, Evans embarked on a mission to beat the record and chose to have the additional tattoos done on his thighs, as there was no space left on his back. The 400 new tattoos were completed in five and a half hours, with 200 tattoos on each leg. "I couldn't wait to claim the record back and dedicate this to my daughter," Evans shared with Guinness World Records. His decision to attempt the record was not only to celebrate Lucy's birth but also to raise funds for the hospital that cared for her in the months following her arrival. Evans originally planned to have Lucy's name tattooed 100 times but was pleasantly surprised when tattoo artists helped him fit double that number on his back. He designed the tattoo himself, which featured an open book with



"Lucy" written on the pages, symbolizing his connection to the Guinness World Records book.

The tattoo process was a unique experience for Evans, as two tattoo artists worked simultaneously, which helped alleviate the pain. "It felt weird - because

there were two tattooists doing it at the same time, the pain was kind of cancelled out," he said.

Evans expressed his pride in his world record, saying, "I love that I'm literally wearing my record and it goes everywhere with me."

## BluSmart Launches Pet-Friendly Ride Service in Delhi and Gurugram

Electric ride-hailing service BluSmart has introduced a new service designed for customers traveling with their pets. The service, named 'Pet Rides,' aims to provide a reliable and comfortable transportation option for pet owners. This new feature is now available for riders in Delhi and Gurugram and can be used for both classic and rental trips.

Starting today, users can conveniently pre-book pet-friendly rides through the BluSmart app. When booking a ride, customers will find an option to travel with their pets at the bottom of the app interface. Additionally, users can easily access the Pet Rides service by clicking a dedicated banner within the app, where they can schedule their rides at their preferred time slots.

BluSmart's Pet Rides service offers a solution for those who have struggled to find transportation that accommodates pets. Whether heading to the vet, a park, or any other destination, pet owners can now enjoy a seamless and comfortable journey with their furry companions.

The service ensures that both pets and their owners can travel with peace of mind, knowing that their ride will be suitable for their needs. This initiative by BluSmart is part of the company's on-



going efforts to cater to a wider range of customer needs while maintaining its focus on sustainable and eco-friendly transport solutions.

BluSmart's electric vehicles, which are

designed to reduce carbon emissions, now offer even more convenience for pet owners, creating a unique offering in the rapidly growing market of ride-hailing services in India.

## Amazon to Shut Down Appstore for Android Devices, Discontinue Digital Program



Amazon has announced the discontinuation of its Amazon Appstore for Android devices, marking the end of a 14-year journey since its launch in 2011. The e-commerce giant revealed that the app store will be shut down for Android users on August 20, 2025. While it will no longer be available for download on Android smartphones and tablets, the Appstore will still function on Amazon's own devices, including Fire tablets, Fire TV streaming devices, and other devices running Fire OS. In addition to phasing out the Amazon Appstore for Android, Amazon will also be winding down its digital currency program, Amazon Coins. These virtual coins, which allowed users to make purchases or in-app transactions on the Appstore, will no longer be available for purchase. Existing users will need to use any remaining Coins by August 20, 2025, or they will be refunded after that date. A new FAQ page on Amazon's website clarifies that users will not be able to download the Appstore on Android devices af-

ter the shutdown. Additionally, Amazon warns that any apps already downloaded from the Appstore may cease functioning once the store is discontinued. For users with active subscriptions, the company advises disabling auto-renewals through the account settings on Amazon's website.

While the company has not provided an official reason for discontinuing the app store on Android devices, it is possible that the decision relates to increased restrictions on sideloaded apps and new APIs introduced by Google with Android 15. These changes have made it harder for alternative app stores to thrive on the Android ecosystem, potentially influencing Amazon's decision.

Although the closure marks the end of Amazon's Appstore for Android, users with Amazon's own devices will continue to have access to the store. The shutdown of Amazon Coins further signifies the company's shift away from the program, as it transitions to other business priorities.

## Rare "Doomsday Fish" Washes Ashore in Mexico, Sparks Alarm



A rare and elusive oarfish was spotted in the shallow waters of Baja California Sur, along Mexico's Pacific Coast, sparking alarm among locals and online communities alike. Known for its long, ribbon-like body and vibrant orange fins, the deep-sea fish is often referred to as the "doomsday fish" due to legends that associate its sightings with impending disasters.

The oarfish, a creature rarely seen by humans, has long been believed to be a harbinger of bad news, particularly disasters or destruction. In Japanese mythology, it is known as "Ryugu no tsukai," meaning "Messenger of the Sea God." This myth gained widespread attention when approximately 20 oarfish washed ashore ahead of Japan's catastrophic 2011 earthquake, leading many to draw connections between the fish's appearance and significant seismic events.

A video of the oarfish washing ashore in Mexico was shared by an X user named FearBuck, who wrote, "A deep-sea creature

rarely seen by humans called the oarfish has washed ashore in Mexico!" The video quickly garnered attention and sparked a flood of comments. Many users expressed their concern, with one writing, "There have actually been multiple oarfish that have been spotted on beaches recently. Does that mean doomsday is coming?"

Despite these concerns, experts disagree with the claim that oarfish sightings are always linked to impending disasters. While the fish's mysterious nature and dramatic appearance have fueled superstition, marine biologists emphasize that oarfish are naturally inclined to swim closer to shore when injured or dying, and their rare appearance doesn't necessarily predict a disaster.

While some continue to fear the arrival of a major event, others see the fish's appearance as a fascinating reminder of the mysterious creatures that inhabit our oceans. Regardless of the superstition, the sighting of the "doomsday fish" has once again captured the imagination



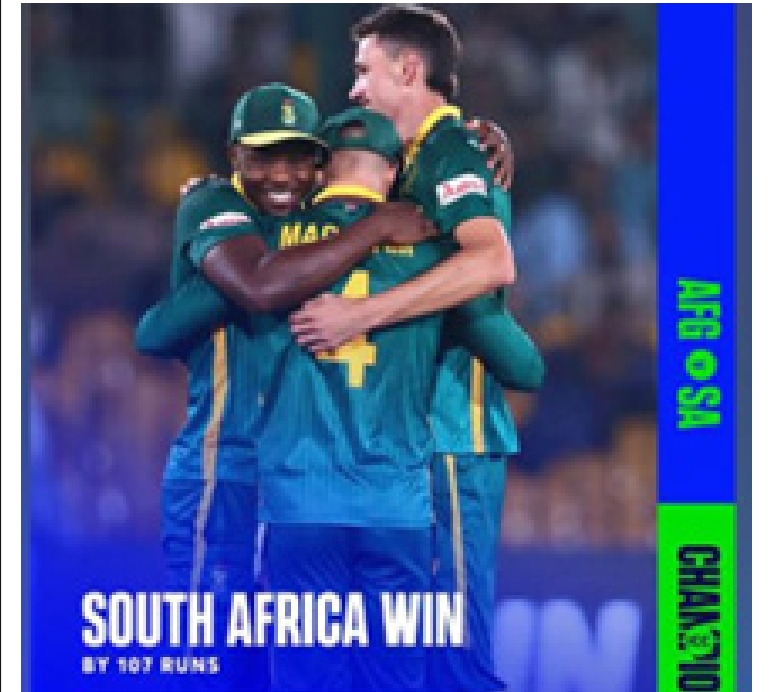


## PCB Seeks Explanation from ICC Over Omission of Pakistan's Name in Champions Trophy Branding



The Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) has formally requested an explanation from the International Cricket Council (ICC) regarding the omission of Pakistan's name from the Champions Trophy 2025 branding. During the live broadcast of Thursday's match between India and Bangladesh in Dubai, the event logo displayed "Champions Trophy 2025" but did not include Pakistan as the host nation. This oversight has prompted the PCB to seek clarification from the ICC, raising concerns about the accurate representation of the host country for such a prestigious tournament. Sources within the ICC have informally attributed the omission to an early technical error, suggesting that the issue was not deliberate. The Champions Trophy 2025 is scheduled to be held in Pakistan, making the inclusion of the host nation's name a critical aspect of event branding. The ICC is expected to address the PCB's concerns in the near future.

## South Africa Beat Afghanistan by 107 Runs in ICC Champions Trophy Opener



South Africa dominated Afghanistan in their ICC Champions Trophy opener at Karachi, securing a comfortable 107-run victory. Chasing 316, Afghanistan's wickets fell at regular intervals despite a valiant knock of 90 from Rahmat Shah. South Africa, batting first, posted a formidable total of 315/6, thanks to a maiden ODI century from Ryan Rickleton (103). Temba Bavuma also contributed a solid 58, and Rassie van der Dussen scored a well-timed 50. Mohammad Nabi was the best bowler for Afghanistan, tak-

ing 2/51 in his 10 overs. Afghanistan's run-chase was derailed early with key dismissals, including openers Rahmanullah Gurbaz (10) and Ibrahim Zadran (16). Rahmat Shah's resistance wasn't enough as Afghanistan was bowled out for 208 in 43.3 overs. Kagiso Rabada (3/36) and Marco Jansen (2/39) led the charge for South Africa with the ball. South Africa's all-round performance handed Afghanistan a crushing 107-run loss.

## India Expresses Interest in Hosting 2030 Commonwealth Games



India has shown its interest in bidding to host the 2030 Commonwealth Games, with the Sports Ministry considering the possibility of including sports disciplines that were excluded from the 2026 edition. The upcoming 2026 Commonwealth Games, scheduled in Glasgow, will feature a truncated sports programme, reducing the number of

events due to time constraints after Glasgow's late bid to host the Games. Commonwealth Games Federation (CGF) President Chris Jenkins previously confirmed that the 2026 edition will feature fewer sports, likely around 10 disciplines. The exclusion of popular events like boxing, wrestling, hockey, cricket, badminton,

and shooting, in which India excels, has disappointed many athletes. The Sports Ministry is also contemplating the possibility of hosting the dropped sports in India next year, though discussions are still informal. The final decision will depend on discussions with the 2026 host and the readiness of the organisers.

## India Men's Hockey Team Secures 3-1 Comeback Win Over Ireland in FIH Hockey Pro League



India's men's hockey team overcame a 0-1 deficit to secure a 3-1 comeback victory against Ireland in the FIH Hockey Pro League 2024-25 at the Kalinga Hockey Stadium in Bhubaneswar on Friday. Ireland took the lead in the 8th minute through Jeremy Duncan's strike, following a swift attack from the right flank. Despite India's slow start, Mandeep Singh's equalizer in the 22nd minute set the tone for a strong comeback. The second half saw India take control, with Jarmanpreet Singh scoring in the 45th minute off a rebound from a penalty corner, giving India a 2-1 lead. As Ireland's defense struggled under pressure, Sukhjeet Singh sealed the win for India with a brilliant goal in the final minute, following a well-executed variation on a penalty corner. The victory marked India's third win in the league, bringing them to nine points from five matches.



Top seeds Jeevan Nedunchezhiyan and Vijay Sundar Prashanth kept the Indian flag flying high as they reached the men's doubles final at the Maha Open ATP Challenger 100 Tennis Championship on Friday. The duo triumphed over Niki Kaliyanda Poonacha and Courtney John Lock of Zimbabwe, securing a 7-6(5), 6-3 victory in the semifinals. They will now face second seeds Blake Bayldon and Matthew Christopher Romios of Australia, who edged out Jay Clarke and Jurij Rodionov

6-3, 3-6, 10-5 in a thrilling encounter. In singles, sixth-seeded Brandon Holt of the USA caused an upset by defeating top-seeded Billy Harris of Great Britain 4-6, 6-3, 6-4, to advance to the semifinals. Holt will meet eighth-seeded Alexis Galarneau of Canada, who triumphed over last year's winner Valentin Vacherot of Monaco. The competition is being held at the Mhalunge Balewadi Tennis Stadium in association with the Department of Sports and Youth Services of Maharashtra.

## FIH Hockey Pro League (Women): Germany Secure 4-0 Win Over India

Germany clinched their first win of the season with a dominant 4-0 victory over India in the FIH Hockey Pro League 2024/25 (Women) clash at Kalinga Stadium, Bhubaneswar, on Friday. Goals from Amelie Wortmann (3'), Sophia Schwabe (18', 46'), and Johanna Hachenberg (60') helped Germany rise to the seventh

spot in the standings. The Germans took an early lead in the third minute, with Wortmann slotting home a low cross from Aina Kresken. India's defense, led by goalkeeper Savita Punia, held strong despite continuous pressure from Germany, with the visitors winning several penalty corners.

Schwabe extended Germany's lead with a brilliant individual effort in the 18th minute and added another in the 46th minute. Despite a few chances for India, including a disallowed goal from Mumtaz Khan, Germany sealed the win when Hachenberg scored in the final minute to secure a 4-0 victory.







## Bobby Deol Talks About Career Turnaround with Aashram Role



Bobby Deol opened up about his role as the anti-hero Baba Nirala in the web series Aashram, revealing that he took up the role at a time when he believed he would no longer be offered hero-like roles. The actor, who was keen on exploring different types of characters, embraced the opportunity to play a morally complex figure in Aashram, which marked a significant turning point in his career.

Directed by Prakash Jha, Aashram follows Baba Nirala, a self-proclaimed god-

man leading a fraudulent empire filled with drugs and exploitation. The first season of the series premiered in 2020, and Deol's performance was widely appreciated. Speaking at the trailer launch for Aashram season 3 part 2, titled Ek Badnaam Aashram, the actor shared that he had kept his participation in the series a secret from his family, eager to see their reaction after the show's release.

The new season is set to premiere on February 27 on MX Player.

## Prashanth Neel Launches 'NTRNeel' with NTR Jr. Into Production



Director Prashanth Neel, famed for his blockbuster hits K.G.F: Chapter 1, K.G.F: Chapter 2, and Salaar Part 1: Ceasefire, has officially launched the shoot for his highly anticipated film, tentatively titled NTRNeel. The film, which pairs Neel with NTR Jr. of RRR fame, began production on Thursday at Ramoji Film City in Hyderabad, with over 2000 junior artists involved in the shoot. This film, which has been eagerly awaited by fans, marks a dynamic collaboration between two massive forces in Indian cinema. In this initial schedule, the team is working on a huge action episode set to leave a lasting impact. NTR Jr. is expected to join the shoot in the next schedule.

The official social media announcement shared a teaser image from the set, with the caption: "The SOIL finally welcomes its REIGN to leave a MARK in the HISTORY books of Indian Cinema! #NTRNeel shoot has officially begun."

The film promises a thrilling action experience and is expected to elevate NTR Jr.'s on-screen presence. Scheduled for release on January 9, 2026, NTRNeel will be available in Telugu, Tamil, Hindi, Kannada, and Malayalam. The project is produced by Mythri Movie Makers and NTR Arts, under the leadership of Kalyan Ram Nandamuri, Naveen Yerneneni, Ravi Shankar Yalamanchili, and Hari Krishna Kosaraju.

## Samantha Ruth Prabhu Embraces Silence, Encourages Fans to Try It

Actress Samantha Ruth Prabhu recently shared her experience of spending three days in complete silence, urging her fans to try it as well. On Instagram, she posted a picture of a card that read "Silence" and revealed her "Silence sadhna" journey, where she disconnected from her phone and any form of communication. She reflected on how being alone with oneself can be one of the scariest experiences but also one of the most rewarding. Samantha encouraged her followers to embrace this

silence, saying, "Would I recommend you try it? A million times, yes." In addition to this, last month, Samantha spoke about the importance of meditation in her life. She described meditation as her "anchor," offering a way to return to a calm and peaceful state amid chaos. She encouraged her followers to meditate for 15 minutes daily, emphasizing its calming benefits. Fans overwhelmingly expressed interest in trying silence and meditation themselves.



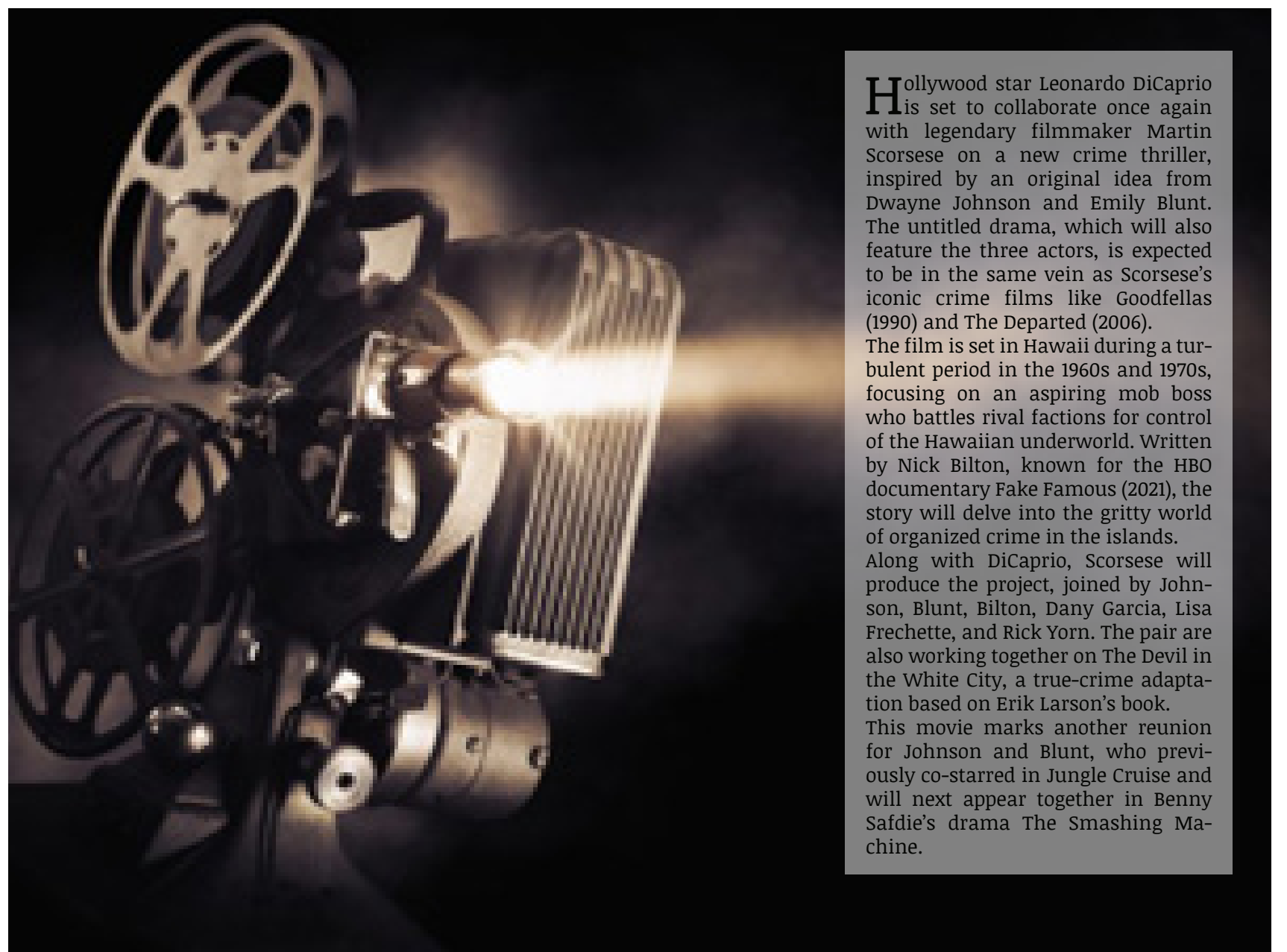
## Kangana Ranaut's 'Emergency' to Stream on Netflix from March 17



Kangana Ranaut's controversial film Emergency will be available for streaming on Netflix starting March 17. The film, which was released in theaters on January 17 after several delays, has sparked controversy, particularly regarding its censor certificate and allegations of misrepresentation of the Sikh community. Directed and produced by Ranaut, the movie portrays the period of the Emergency imposed by former Prime Minister Indira Gandhi in 1975, with Ranaut playing the role of Gandhi herself. Ranaut shared an image from

the film on Instagram, announcing the streaming release date. Despite protests from Sikh organizations, including the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC), Emergency faced bans in Punjab cinemas. Ranaut responded to the protests, calling the situation a "complete harassment of art and the artist." The film also features Anupam Kher, Shreyas Talpade, Vishak Nair, Milind Soman, and the late actor Satish Kaushik. It was produced by Zee Studios and Manikarnika Films.

## Leonardo DiCaprio to Produce Martin Scorsese's Crime Movie Set in 1960s-1970s Hawaii



Hollywood star Leonardo DiCaprio is set to collaborate once again with legendary filmmaker Martin Scorsese on a new crime thriller, inspired by an original idea from Dwayne Johnson and Emily Blunt. The untitled drama, which will also feature the three actors, is expected to be in the same vein as Scorsese's iconic crime films like Goodfellas (1990) and The Departed (2006). The film is set in Hawaii during a turbulent period in the 1960s and 1970s, focusing on an aspiring mob boss who battles rival factions for control of the Hawaiian underworld. Written by Nick Bilton, known for the HBO documentary Fake Famous (2021), the story will delve into the gritty world of organized crime in the islands. Along with DiCaprio, Scorsese will produce the project, joined by Johnson, Blunt, Bilton, Dany Garcia, Lisa Frechette, and Rick Yorn. The pair are also working together on The Devil in the White City, a true-crime adaptation based on Erik Larson's book. This movie marks another reunion for Johnson and Blunt, who previously co-starred in Jungle Cruise and will next appear together in Benny Safdie's drama The Smashing Machine.

## Eminem to Perform in India: What We Know So Far

India has become a hotspot for international music concerts, with recent performances by Ed Sheeran and Coldplay captivating fans. The latest buzz suggests that rap legend Eminem will be the next global artist to perform in India, with reports indicating a concert scheduled for June 3, 2025, in Mumbai. While no official confirmation has been made yet, the concert is expected to take place at one

of the city's prominent venues, either DY Patil Stadium or Jio World Garden, which have hosted previous international events. This performance is part of Eminem's world tour, covering major cities across North America, Europe, Asia, and Australia, with Mumbai being a key stop for his Indian fanbase. Fans are eagerly awaiting this debut performance in India, with the anticipation high

for an electrifying setlist featuring iconic tracks such as Lose Yourself, Stan, Without Me, and songs from his latest album Relapse Reloaded. Ticket sales, pricing, and other event details are yet to be released, but if the reports hold true, Eminem's concert will further solidify India's status as a top destination for international artists.

