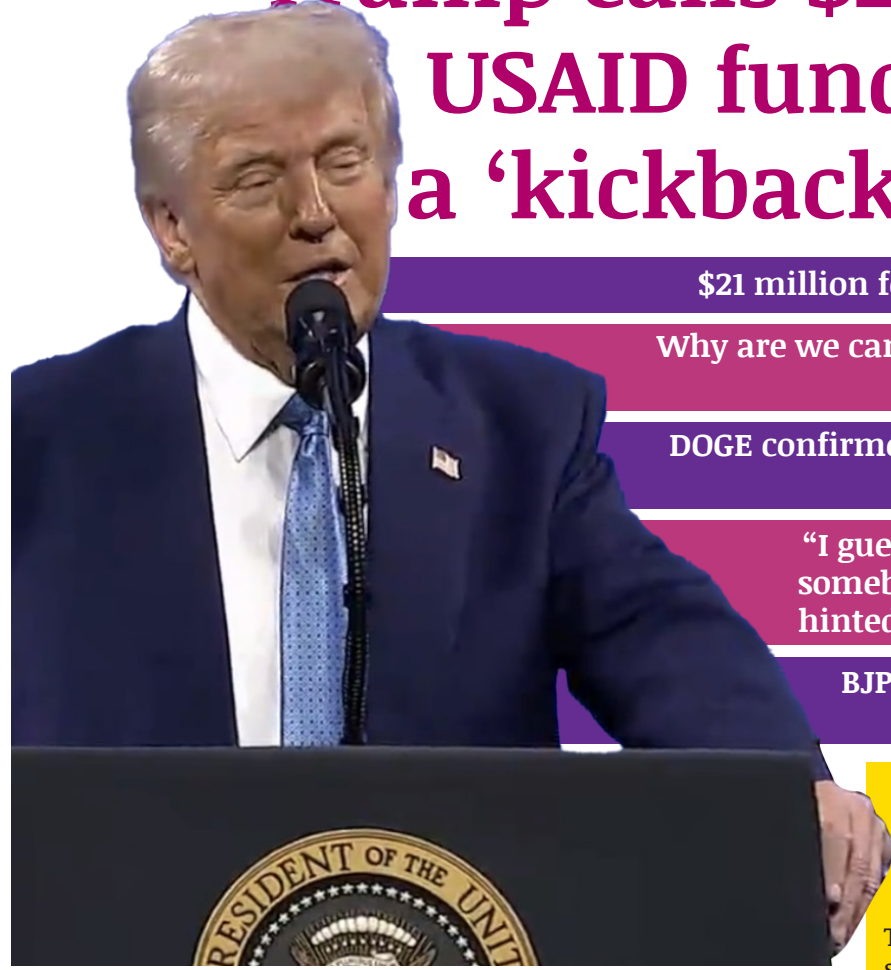




**Weather Forecast**

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, USAID'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?"

# We'll Worry About Delhi Now: Rekha Gupta Responds to AAP's Criticism After First Day in Office

TPN Correspondent | Delhi

New Delhi: The BJP's newly sworn-in Chief Minister of Delhi, Rekha Gupta, wasted no time in hitting back at the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) following the party's criticisms of her government after just one day in office. Addressing the media on Friday morning, Gupta sharply pointed out that both AAP and Congress had ruled Delhi for extended periods—13 and 15 years respectively—yet she and her new administration were already being questioned after only one day.



"Instead of focusing on their own record, how can they raise questions on our first day? We held a cabinet meeting right after taking oath and cleared the Ayushman Bharat Yojana, which had been blocked by AAP," Gupta told reporters. She emphasized that on the very first day, her government had provided a benefit of Rs 10 lakh to the people of Delhi.

Gupta also made it clear that her government, under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, would prioritize Delhi's rights, urging the opposition to focus on their own party affairs rather than criticize the new administration.

The newly-appointed Chief Minister, a first-time MLA from Shalimar Bagh, also took aim at AAP's Atishi, who had accused the BJP of "deceiving Delhiites" regarding a promise made during the election campaign. Atishi specifically targeted the BJP for not deliver-

ing on a pledge to provide direct cash transfers to women in Delhi, claiming that no decision was made on this promise in the first cabinet meeting.

Gupta responded with a warning to AAP, suggesting that the party should prepare for the tabling of Comptroller and Auditor-General (CAG) reports, which could expose alleged corruption in AAP's administration.

The verbal sparring between the BJP and AAP marks a fiery beginning to the new government's tenure, which was secured by the BJP's overwhelming win in the February 5 election. With women voters playing a crucial role in the BJP's victory, both parties are now focusing on delivering on promises made during the campaign.

# No Public Money To Be Spent On Government Glorification: Delhi BJP Chief

TPN Correspondent | Delhi

Delhi BJP Chief Virendra Sachdeva announced that the new BJP government would not waste a single penny of public funds on glorifying the government, Chief Minister, or the party. In a press conference, Sachdeva emphasized that the BJP's advertisement policy in Delhi would be completely transparent, with all advertisements serving the public interest.

The BJP's return to power in Delhi marked the end of the Aam Aadmi Party's (AAP) 10-year rule under Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal. Sachdeva took the opportunity to highlight the contrast between the BJP's approach to governance and the previous administration's alleged mismanagement.

"The BJP is known for good governance, and Delhi witnessed a glimpse of this on Thursday," Sachdeva stated, claiming that this "glimpse" exposed the poor governance and mismanagement of the AAP and its predecessor. He compared the BJP's approach with that of the AAP, noting that during Kejriwal's oath-taking ceremonies in 2015 and 2020, public money was heavily spent on



advertisements and promotions. Streets and newspapers were flooded with government advertisements ahead of the event, he pointed out.

In contrast, Sachdeva claimed that the BJP government did not spend any public funds on promoting its oath-taking ceremony held on Thursday. Instead, all advertisements, hoardings, and invitations for the "Developed Delhi" ceremony were funded by the BJP itself. He highlighted that during Kejriwal's tenure in 2020, the AAP government spent an estimated Rs 4.5 crore per day on advertisements to celebrate the formation of the third AAP government. Sachdeva emphasized that this stark contrast demonstrated the BJP's commitment to responsible and transparent governance.

Furthermore, Sachdeva accused the agency responsible for advertisements under Kejriwal's rule of lacking transparency and misusing public money for self-promotion. He concluded by reiterating that the BJP government's advertisement policy would be fully transparent, ensuring that all ads are for the public good and not for political gain.

# Get Ready For 2027 Uttar Pradesh Elections: Rahul Gandhi Tells Congress Workers

TPN Correspondent | Delhi

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Friday called on party workers to strengthen the party organization and intensify preparations for the 2027 Uttar Pradesh assembly elections. This call for action came during a meeting with Congress workers at his parliamentary residence in Bhuzna, where various issues, particularly those affecting Dalits, were discussed.



Sunil Kumar Gautam, the president of the Congress Scheduled Caste wing in Rae Bareilly, shared that a 12-member delegation from the community met Gandhi to address ongoing concerns. One major issue highlighted was that sanitation workers from the Valmiki community, employed by municipal bodies, continue to work without protective gear, violating Supreme Court guidelines. Gautam mentioned that Gandhi motivated the delegation, stressing the need for vigorous preparations for the upcoming elections while simultaneously strengthening the party's base.

Rae Bareilly Congress vice-president Sarvottam Kumar Mishra praised Gandhi's leadership, noting his "honesty, vision, and work ethic" and the way he attentively listened to party members and public grievances, stressing the need for solutions to their concerns.

Gandhi, who began his two-day visit to Rae Bare-

illy on Thursday, paid tributes to Veera Pasi, a hero of the 1857 revolution, and B.R. Ambedkar, the architect of India's Constitution, by garlanding their statues in Narpatganj on the second day of his visit. He then participated in a "Yuva Samvad" in Lalganj, where he interacted with local youth, discussing the critical issue of unemployment and criticizing the government for its inaction.

Later, Gandhi visited the Modern Rail Coach Factory (MRCF) in Lalganj, highlighting the importance of railways as the "lifeline of India" and stressing the need to prioritize passenger safety and comfort. He had a detailed discussion with the factory's general manager, Prashant Kumar Mishra, about the various types of coaches being manufactured, including sleeper, AC3 economy, and Vande Bharat coaches, emphasizing the role of indigenous technology and domestic manufacturing.

Despite his engagements, Gandhi's visit was not without controversy. Posters emerged in certain areas of Rae Bareilly accusing him of insulting Dalit icon Mayawati and her community. The posters referred to a recent statement by Congress leader Udit Raj against Mayawati, calling it an insult to Dalits. The posters demanded an apology from Gandhi or a response from the Dalit community.

## 'Deeply troubling': MEA raises concerns over 'foreign interference' amid USAID row

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.

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.

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.

## G20's ability to harmonise viewpoints key to advancing global agenda: Jaishankar

TPN Correspondent | Delhi

External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar emphasized the critical role of the G20 in harmonizing global viewpoints to push forward a collective agenda during a session on the "Global Geopolitical Situation" at the G20 Foreign Ministers' Meeting in Johannesburg, South Africa, on Thursday.

Jaishankar highlighted the complexities of today's geopolitical landscape, noting that the world continues to grapple with multiple challenges. He pointed out that issues stemming from the Covid-19 pandemic, ongoing conflicts, financial instability, food security, and climate change have compounded the difficulties. Additionally, the minister underscored emerging concerns such as the concentration of global supply chains, the weaponization of trade and finance, and the lack of transparency in data flows.

Jaishankar also discussed the broader geopolitical implications of emerging technologies, such as artificial intelligence, electric vehicles, space exploration, drones, and green hydrogen. These developments, he noted, present new challenges and opportunities that require coordinated international efforts.

He emphasized that the G20, as a forum that reflects the world's growing multipolarity, plays a pivotal role in addressing these issues. The group, Jaishankar stated,



captures a "diversity of interests, cultures, and outlooks," making it essential for the G20 to find common ground to advance the global agenda.

The minister acknowledged the "polarization" of recent years, which has led to visible stress and distorted priorities. Despite this, he expressed optimism about the G20's ability to move beyond these divisions and safeguard the institution's effectiveness in fostering global cooperation.

Jaishankar also shared India's position on several key international issues, including the situation in West Asia, maritime security, the ongoing Ukraine conflict, the Indo-Pacific region, and the need for reforms in the United Nations. His remarks reinforced India's commitment to playing a leading role in addressing the world's most pressing geopolitical challenges.

## Court Reserves Order on Sentence for Sajjan Kumar in 1984 Anti-Sikh Riots Case

TPN Correspondent | Delhi

A Delhi court has reserved its order on the quantum of sentence for Congress leader Sajjan Kumar in the 1984 anti-Sikh riots case, with the decision expected to be delivered on February 25. The case involves charges related to the instigation of violence that led to the killing of several Sikhs following the assassination of Prime Minister Indira Gandhi.

During Friday's hearing, the complainant, whose husband and son were among those murdered by a mob allegedly incited by Kumar, made an emotional plea to the court. Through her lawyer, the complainant urged Special Judge Kaveri Bawreja to award the death penalty to the former Congress Member of Parliament (MP) for his role in the riots.

Senior advocate H.S. Phoolka, representing the complainant, argued that Kumar, as a leader of the mobs, instigated violence that led to "genocide and crimes against humanity." He stressed that the cold-blooded nature of the killings warranted the maximum punishment. Phoolka emphasized that the accused's actions should be treated as premeditated and deserving of nothing less than capital punishment.



The court has also instructed Kumar's counsel to submit a written response within two days. This will allow the defense an opportunity to present arguments before the final order on the sentence is issued.

Sajjan Kumar had been convicted earlier in relation to his role in the 1984 riots. The case had been a long-running legal battle, with the families of the victims demanding justice for the atrocities committed against the Sikh community. The upcoming decision on sentencing will be closely watched as it could potentially mark another chapter in the fight for justice for the victims of the 1984 anti-Sikh riots.

## Reports of attacks on minorities in Bangladesh exaggerated: BGB chief

TPN Correspondent | Delhi

The chiefs of the Border Security Force (BSF) and Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB) have confirmed that infiltration attempts along the India-Bangladesh border have significantly decreased, thanks to mutual cooperation between the two forces. This development comes amid the political turmoil that has unfolded in Bangladesh since August of last year.

During the 55th Director General (DG)-level Border Coordination Conference held in New Delhi, BSF Director General Daljit Singh Chawdhary stated that infiltration attempts have dropped substantially due to the collaborative efforts of both border forces. He emphasized that, despite the political crisis in Bangladesh, the BSF and BGB have worked together to maintain peace and stability along the shared border.

Echoing Chawdhary's sentiments, BGB Chief Major General Mohammad Ashrafuzzaman Siddiqui also commented on the decline in infiltration, attributing it to the effective cooperation between the two countries' forces. He added that the public concern regarding rising infiltration was largely a matter of perception, not a reflection of actual incidents on the ground.

Siddiqui also addressed questions regarding alleged attacks on minorities in Bangladesh, particularly on the Hindu community. He dismissed the reports as "exaggerated," stating that the recent Durga Puja



celebrations, which are an important festival for Hindus, were among the most peaceful events in the border areas. He further assured that the BGB, along with other law enforcement agencies, had taken strict measures to ensure a safe and peaceful environment during the festival.

The BGB chief's comments are likely to ease concerns over the treatment of minorities in Bangladesh, a topic that has sparked controversy in recent months. However, the BSF chief refrained from commenting on the issue, leaving the matter for further discussion. The talks between the two border forces reflect a growing commitment to peace and security between India and Bangladesh, despite ongoing political challenges in the neighboring country.

## Arunachal Frontier Highway "Game Changer", Rs 42,000 Crore To Be Invested: Kiren Rijiju

TPN Correspondent | Delhi

Union Minister Kiren Rijiju has announced that the Arunachal Frontier Highway (AFH), which will connect 12 districts along the India-China border, will be a "game changer" for the state. Speaking at the 39th Statehood Day celebrations in Arunachal Pradesh on Thursday, Rijiju revealed that the project will receive a historic investment of nearly Rs 42,000 crore, the largest ever allocation made by the Centre for a single project.



The AFH, also known as National Highway NH-913 or the Bomdila-Vijaynagar Highway (BVH), will span approximately 1,400 kilometers, covering key areas such as Tawang, Mago,

Upper Subansiri, Mechuka, and more. The highway will start at Bomdila, passing through Nafra, Huri, and Monigong, and conclude at Vijaynagar near the India-Myanmar border. The project includes an 800-km greenfield

stretch with new tunnels and bridges along the sensitive India-China border, aimed at boosting connectivity and security.

Rijiju emphasized that the infrastructure initiative will revolutionize the border areas, ensuring enhanced development and accessibility. However, he urged the public not to hinder progress by inflating compensation claims for land acquisition, citing delays caused by similar issues in other projects.

Arunachal Pradesh, which became a full-fledged state on February 20, 1987, is rich in resources but requires peace for development, Rijiju noted. The state's Governor, Lt Gen (Retd) K

T Parnaik, praised the progress made but stressed the need for continued efforts in education, environmental management, and cleanliness. He also highlighted the importance of reducing drug abuse through prevention and rehabilitation strategies.

Chief Minister Pema Khandu discussed the newly introduced rules under the Arunachal Pradesh Freedom of Religion Act (APFRA) 1978, clarifying that the rules are meant to protect indigenous culture, not target any religious group. Khandu also revealed plans to generate Rs 10,000 crore in annual revenue from power projects, aided by a 26% equity share in all state power initiatives approved by the Modi government.

# Maha Kumbh will help UP's economy grow by ₹3 lakh crore': Yogi Adityanath



- Yogi: 8 crore lifted from poverty in 8 years
- CM criticizes opposition for doubting India's progress

TPN Correspondent | Delhi

Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath expressed confidence that the ongoing Maha Kumbh Mela in Prayagraj would significantly boost the state's economy, estimating that it could contribute more than ₹3 lakh crore. Adityanath made this statement during a discussion in the UP Assembly, where he

was responding to a query from Samajwadi Party MLA Ragini Sonkar.

The Chief Minister emphasized that the Maha Kumbh Mela not only holds religious and cultural significance but is also a major economic driver for Uttar Pradesh. "The country and the world are seeing the potential of Uttar Pradesh today, which can be seen in the successful

organization of the Maha Kumbh. This event will bring a growth of over ₹3 lakh crore to the state's economy," he said.

In his address, Yogi Adityanath also highlighted the achievements of his government in addressing poverty. He proudly announced that under Prime Minister Narendra Modi's leadership, 25 crore people had been lifted out of poverty in the last 10 years. Additionally, Adityanath claimed that his government has helped more than eight crore people in Uttar Pradesh rise above the poverty line in the past eight years. "This shows the remarkable changes happening across various sectors in the state," he added.

Further, the CM took a swipe at the opposition, particularly targeting the Samajwadi Party. He remarked, "I can understand your pain because when your leaders say that India can never become a developed country, you have to support them." His comment was a pointed criticism of the opposition's pessimistic stance on the country's progress.

Adityanath's statements come at a time when the state is witnessing a blend of cultural, religious, and economic transformations, with the Maha Kumbh Mela serving as a key event that highlights Uttar Pradesh's growth potential.

# Atishi Questions Delay in Rs 2,500 Financial Aid Scheme Approval by BJP Government



TPN Correspondent | Delhi

AAP leader Atishi on Friday criticized the newly formed BJP government in Delhi for not passing a scheme to provide Rs 2,500 monthly financial aid to women during its first Cabinet meeting. Atishi, who is a former Delhi chief minister, accused the BJP-led government of failing to fulfill Prime Minister Narendra Modi's promise under the Mahila Samridhi Yojana.

The first decision taken by newly appointed CM Rekha Gupta was to betray that promise," Atishi alleged.

She further questioned when the promised financial aid would be credited to women's accounts, suggesting that the promise might have been an election gimmick. Both the AAP and BJP had promised financial assistance to women ahead of the elections, making it a major issue during the campaign.

Speaking at a press conference, Atishi reminded the public of the assurance given by PM Modi and BJP national president JP Nadda during the elections. They had promised that the scheme would be approved in the first Cabinet meeting and that every woman in Delhi would receive Rs 2,500 in her bank account by March 8. However, despite the BJP ministers taking their oath on Thursday, Atishi pointed out that no such scheme was passed.

Atishi also pledged that the AAP would hold the BJP government accountable and ensure that the Rs 2,500 per month is provided to women by March 8, as promised. Additionally, she said the party would push for 300 units of free electricity and other welfare measures for the people.

"After the BJP's ministers held their Cabinet meeting on Thursday, no such scheme was passed. If Modi's promise was genuine, the scheme should have been approved yesterday.

In response to questions about the new government's decision to table 14 CAG reports in the upcoming assembly session, Atishi dismissed it as routine work. She noted that she had also sent CAG reports during her tenure as CM, calling it a standard part of the process.

# DMK-BJP faceoff: Tamil Nadu Deputy CM Udhayanidhi parries questions on Annamalai



TPN Correspondent | Delhi

Tamil Nadu Deputy Chief Minister Udhayanidhi Stalin on Friday refrained from commenting on BJP state president K Annamalai, despite the ongoing verbal clash between the two parties over various issues, including the language row. When reporters attempted to raise questions about Annamalai, Udhayanidhi responded with a curt, "I am not interested to talk about him."

The tension between the DMK and BJP escalated recently, with Annamalai launching a campaign against Udhayanidhi's father, Chief Minister M.K. Stalin. Annamalai took to social media platform 'X' to initiate the "#GetOutStalin" campaign, criticizing the Tamil Nadu government on issues such as lawlessness and women's safety. This move followed an earlier challenge from Udhayanidhi, inviting Annamalai for a confrontation at the DMK headquarters, Anna Arivalayam, located on Anna Salai in Chennai.

The verbal war is fueled by sever-

al political differences, including the implementation of the National Education Policy (NEP) in Tamil Nadu, where the state government has accused the central education ministry of withholding funds for important schemes. Additionally, the DMK has raised concerns about alleged attempts to impose Hindi in the state, which is a contentious issue in Tamil Nadu politics.

Despite the escalating feud, Udhayanidhi Stalin chose to remain tight-lipped about Annamalai's comments, signaling the DMK's strategy to avoid engaging directly in the media sparring. The BJP's attacks on the DMK have also focused on governance issues in the state, while the DMK leadership has emphasized the importance of maintaining Tamil as the dominant language and protecting the state's autonomy in educational and cultural matters.

The ongoing faceoff between the DMK and BJP continues to stir political debates in Tamil Nadu, with both parties seemingly preparing for more confrontations ahead.

# Sonia Gandhi Hospitalized, Envoys Present Credentials, Key Appointments Extended



TPN Correspondent | Delhi

Congress leader Sonia Gandhi has been admitted to Sir Ganga Ram Hospital in New Delhi, as per sources on Thursday. While the exact timing of her admission remains unclear, reports suggest that she was admitted on Thursday morning. However, sources have reassured that the 78-year-old leader, who celebrated her birthday in December 2024, is in stable condition and is expected to be discharged by Friday.

In a separate event, the envoys of five countries presented their credentials to President Droupadi Murmu at a formal ceremony held at Rashtrapati Bhavan on Thursday. The distinguished diplomats included Alonso Correa Miguel from Panama, Dharamkumar Seeraj from Guyana, Mohammed Abdalla Ali Eltom from Sudan, Rasmus Abildgaard Kristensen from Denmark, and Abdullah Mohammad A Abushawesh from Palestine.

In notable bureaucratic developments, the Centre has extended the tenure of NITI Aayog's Chief Executive Officer (CEO), BVR Subrahmanyam, by one year. The announcement was made through an order issued by the Ministry of Personnel. Subrahmanyam, a retired 1987-batch IAS officer from the Chhattisgarh cadre, had been appointed to the post in February 2023 for a two-year term. His extension reflects continued confidence in his leadership at the policy think tank.

Additionally, the government extended the tenure of Chief Economic Adviser (CEA) V Anantha Nageswaran for another two years, until March 31, 2027. The Finance Ministry issued the notification after approval from the Prime Minister-led Appointments Committee of the Cabinet. This extension ensures that Nageswaran will continue his role on a contractual basis until March 31, 2027, or until further orders.

These developments highlight key changes in both the political and administrative landscapes of the country.

# Congress fought Delhi polls as BJP's B-team: Mayawati hits back at Rahul Gandhi

TPN Correspondent | Delhi

Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) chief Mayawati on Friday responded sharply to Congress leader Rahul Gandhi's comments regarding her party's political approach. In a post on X, Mayawati criticized Gandhi, stating that it was widely believed that the Congress had acted as the BJP's "B team" during the Delhi Assembly elections, leading to the BJP's victory. She added that the Congress performed poorly in these elections, failing to secure deposits for most of its candidates.

Mayawati suggested that Rahul Gandhi should reflect on his own party's performance before criticizing others, particularly her party. "It would be better if the supreme leader of this party, Mr. Rahul Gandhi, looks into his own self before pointing fingers at others and especially at the BSP chief in any matter. This is my advice to him," she said.

Rahul Gandhi had earlier expressed disappointment over Mayawati's refusal to form an alliance against the BJP, particularly in Uttar Pradesh. While interacting with Dalit students in his parliamentary constituency of Raebareli, Gandhi stated, "I wanted Behenji to fight alongside us against the BJP, but



for some reason, she did not. That was deeply disappointing. If all three parties had united, the BJP would never have won."

Mayawati, in turn, accused the Congress of a "double standard" in its approach toward her party. In a series of posts on X, she pointed out that in states where Congress was strong, there was animosity toward BSP and its supporters. However, in states like Uttar Pradesh, where the Congress was weak, the party spoke of alliances with BSP. Mayawati questioned whether this was not a clear example of hypocrisy by the Congress.

In response to Gandhi's remarks, BSP workers put up posters in Raebareli accusing him of "double standards" and misrepresenting his support for Dalits. The posters criticized Gandhi for portraying himself as a champion of Dalits while allowing his party to undermine Mayawati, who is considered a Dalit icon. The posters read, "Rahul Gandhi ji, enough of your double standards..."

## Noida Airport Signs MoU with Haryana Roadways for Direct Bus Connectivity



TPN Correspondent | New Delhi

Noida International Airport (NIA) has signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with Haryana Roadways to establish seamless bus connectivity between the upcoming airport and key cities in Haryana. This initiative aims to enhance regional transportation and provide direct access to major destinations such as Palwal, Faridabad, Gurgaon, Kurukshetra, Chandigarh, Hisar, Narnaul, Panipat, and Ambala. The agreement will come into effect once commercial operations at the airport begin. Noida International Airport, located in Jewar, Uttar Pradesh, is expected to commence flight operations by the end of April 2025. Strategically positioned near Delhi, Haryana, Rajasthan, and Uttarakhand, the airport is anticipated to cater to a significant number of passengers from the Delhi-NCR region. A Haryana Roadways official highlighted the importance of the partnership, stating, "By connecting our road network with the growing air traffic, we aim to provide faster and more reliable travel options, further promoting tourism, economic growth, and convenience for all." Noida International Airport CEO Christoph Schnellmann emphasized the significance of this collaboration in improving accessibility. "By ensuring convenient ground transportation to

major destinations, we are connecting people to opportunities and enhancing access to key markets," he said. "This partnership reaffirms our commitment to boosting regional connectivity, facilitating tourism, and driving economic growth while delivering a world-class travel experience."

In addition to the Haryana Roadways MoU, the Uttar Pradesh State Road Transport Corporation (UPSRTC) had earlier announced plans to launch bus services connecting Noida International Airport with nearby districts. A dedicated committee is conducting surveys to finalize routes, with services set to commence following government approval. Once operational, Noida International Airport will initially feature one runway and one terminal, capable of handling 12 million passengers annually. Upon full completion in its fourth phase, it is projected to accommodate up to 70 million passengers per year, solidifying its position as a major aviation hub in North India. The airport has been assigned the International Air Transport Association (IATA) code DXN.

Authorities are also working with government agencies to facilitate smooth access for private vehicles while expanding public transportation options, ensuring comprehensive connectivity for passengers.

## 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.

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



TPN Correspondent | 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 juvenile accused through CCTV foot-

age 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.

## Kathputli Colony Residents Hope for Permanent Homes Under New Govt

TPN Correspondent | New Delhi

For the residents of West Delhi's Kathputli Colony, the swearing-in ceremony of Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) leader Rekha Gupta as Delhi's new Chief Minister brought a renewed sense of hope. Over 50 members of the community, known for their traditional art forms, gathered at Ramlila Maidan on Thursday, playing nagadas (drums) and shehnais (oboes) in celebration, believing that the change in government might finally fulfill their 15-year-long wait for permanent homes. Kathputli Colony, the Capital's first in-situ slum rehabilitation project, saw over 2,800 families—mostly puppeteers, ma-

gicians, acrobats, and musicians—being relocated to temporary camps in Anand Parbat and Narela in 2009. Initially promised new pucca houses within a year or two, their hopes have remained unfulfilled for over a decade.

"We have seen governments come and go, but our situation has not changed," said Suresh Bhatt, 37, a nagada player. "Several promises were made, but we are yet to see a single resident get a permanent home. We are hopeful that Modi ji and the BJP will finally make this happen."

For those gathered at Ramlila Maidan, the day was not just about political change but also about a long-standing

aspiration. "Like the rest of Delhi, we too are celebrating today. We believe things will change for the better," said one resident.

At Anand Parbat, where many Kathputli Colony residents were shifted, challenges persist. "Even clean drinking water is scarce," said 13-year-old Aadil, who has spent his entire life in the makeshift camp. Others pointed to missing voting rights. "Our names were removed from Shadipur's voter list after relocation, but we were never registered at Anand Parbat," said Sushil Kumar, 37, a dhol player. "We are Indian citizens, and we should have the right to vote."

## Charcoal Traders Challenge Mumbai Ban, Cite Delhi's Approval

TPN Correspondent | New Delhi

Mumbai's charcoal traders have moved the Bombay High Court against the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation's (BMC) recent ban on using charcoal and wood as fuel in eateries and bakeries, arguing that Delhi continues to permit its use despite higher pollution levels.

The BMC issued the prohibition on February 13, following a directive from the Bombay High Court on January 9, banning polluting fuels in traditional cooking methods, citing air pollution concerns. However, the Bombay Charcoal Merchants' Association (BCMA) contends that a Delhi Pollution Control Committee notification dated April 3, 2023, lists charcoal as an approved fuel for tandoors and grills in restaurants, hotels, and dhabas.

"Even in Delhi, where air quality is worse, charcoal is permitted. Charcoal-fired tandoors enhance nutrition and taste, and banning them would severely impact the entire value chain, including thousands of

traders," said Prerak Choudhary, the advocate representing BCMA. He stressed that traders were not given a chance to present their case before the ban was enforced. The BCMA has also urged the Indian Hotel and Restaurant Association (AHAR), which represents 8,000 eateries in Mumbai, to delay converting charcoal-fired tandoors to electric or gas for at least a month, pending court intervention. In a letter dated February 18, the BCMA argued that the restaurant industry was being unfair-



ly targeted while major pollution contributors, such as industrialization, vehicles, and construction, remained unaffected. Meanwhile, AHAR president Sudhakar Shetty stated that the organization is seeking legal clarity. "The high court's January 2025 order restricts new restaurants from using wood or charcoal tandoors but does not explicitly ban existing users. This lack of clarity is our primary concern," he said. Shetty further highlighted that the hospitality industry falls under the 'orange zone' and not the 'red zone' of high-pollution industries, as per the Maharashtra Pollution Control Board (MPCB). He also pointed to the unregulated use of charcoal by street vendors and food trucks, questioning why enforcement was not uniform.

As legal proceedings unfold, Mumbai's eateries and charcoal traders await clarity on whether they can continue traditional cooking methods or must transition to alternative fuels.

## Delhi Police Bust Inter-State Drug Syndicate, Seize ₹50 Crore Heroin



TPN Correspondent

| New Delhi

In a major crackdown, the Delhi Police Special Cell arrested three men from Manipur and seized 10 kilograms of high-grade heroin worth over ₹50 crore in an inter-state drug bust.

The arrested individuals—Mital Khatiwoda alias Manoj (45), Krishna Neopani (21), and Akash Karki (25)—were part of a narcotics syndicate smuggling heroin from Myanmar into India via Manipur, police said.

Deputy Commissioner of Police (Special Cell) Amit Kaushik revealed that the syndicate had been under surveillance for over four months. Investigators tracked their movements across Manipur, West Bengal,

Uttar Pradesh, and Delhi-NCR, gathering intelligence before executing the operation.

Acting on a tip-off, police formed a raiding team and apprehended the trio in Delhi's Mangolpuri Industrial Area while they attempted to deliver a consignment. A search led to the recovery of heroin hidden in their belongings.

Interrogation revealed that the drugs were processed in Manipur's Thoubal district before being transported through Nagaland, Assam, and West Bengal, ultimately reaching Delhi-NCR. The traffickers used hidden truck compartments to evade detection.

Police have launched a deeper probe into the network's links and supply chain.

# Punjab Congress to Field 60-70 New Faces in 2027 Elections: Amrinder Singh



TPN Correspondent | Chandigarh

The Congress party in Punjab is set to introduce a fresh wave of leadership ahead of the 2027 Assembly elections. Amrinder Singh Raja Warring, the state unit chief of the Congress, announced on Thursday that the party would field at least 60-70 new faces as candidates for the upcoming elections.

Speaking at the Punjab Youth Congress' state executive meeting in Chandigarh, Warring emphasized the importance of rejuvenating the party's leadership by selecting dynamic and committed individuals who can truly represent the people of Punjab. "The Punjab Congress is determined to bring at least 60-70

new faces to represent the state as MLA candidates in the 2027 Vidhan Sabha elections. This will be a landmark step towards revitalizing our political leadership and ensuring that the aspirations of Punjab's people are represented by leaders who are in tune with the state's needs," said Warring.

The decision to introduce new faces is seen as a response to the growing demand for change and a reflection of the party's desire to connect more closely with the aspirations of the younger generation. Warring further stated that these new candidates would not just represent change but also symbolize the trust and hopes of the youth and common people of Punjab.

He also called on Youth Congress members to embrace this opportunity with dedication and enthusiasm, stressing that their efforts would be crucial in building a stronger, more inclusive, and united Punjab. "Your efforts will play a pivotal role in laying the foundation for a future where Punjab thrives with a new vision and leadership," he urged.

This announcement signals Congress' commitment to addressing the evolving political dynamics in the state, with a focus on ensuring that the upcoming elections bring forth a new wave of leadership to tackle the challenges of modern Punjab.

- Warring aims to rejuvenate party leadership
- Focus on youth, fresh vision for Punjab's future

## Protests Erupt in Manipur After Arrest of Village Volunteers in Kakching District

TPN Correspondent | Manipur

Protests broke out across Manipur's Imphal valley on Friday, with locals burning tyres on the roads in response to the arrest of village volunteers in Kakching district. The unrest follows the detention of over 10 village volunteers during an early morning operation in Panjao Pallumda, officials reported. The arrested individuals were later taken to a security forces camp at Phundrei in Thoubal district.

The arrests occurred just a day after Governor Ajay Kumar Bhalla urged the people of Manipur to voluntarily surrender looted and illegally held weapons within a week, warning that "strict action" would be taken once the deadline expired. This call for surrender came amid ongoing tensions in the strife-torn state, where violence and

unrest have been ongoing for months.

The protests, which took place in multiple districts, including Imphal East, Imphal West, Thoubal, and Kakching, saw demonstrators blocking roads



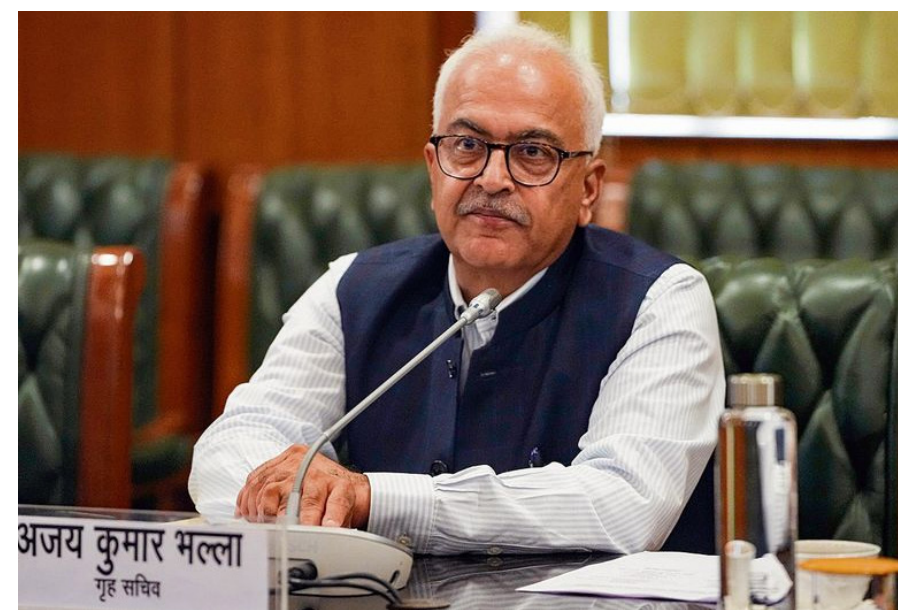
and forcing the closure of shops and markets in Wangkhei, Uripok, Thangmeiband, and Khurai areas of Imphal. Locals expressed their anger over the arrests and the broader security measures that have been implemented by

authorities in response to the ongoing violence.

The situation in Manipur remains tense, with protests and security operations continuing to unfold in various regions of the state. As the deadline for weapon surrender approaches, the state government has warned of further action to address the ongoing conflict and bring stability to the region.

The protests highlight the deep-rooted grievances of the local population, as well as the challenges the state faces in navigating its complex security situation. As tensions escalate, it remains to be seen how the government will respond to the growing unrest and whether peace can be restored in the region.

## Manipur Governor Urges Youth to Surrender Looted Arms to Restore Peace



TPN Correspondent | Prayagraj

Manipur's newly appointed Governor, Ajay Kumar Bhalla, has called on the state's youth to voluntarily surrender looted and illegally acquired weapons within a seven-day period, starting February 20. This appeal comes nearly two years after the eruption of ethnic violence that devastated the region and led to widespread unrest.

Governor Bhalla made a public statement urging people from all communities, especially the youth, to return weapons and ammunition that were looted from police and security posts during the ethnic violence in May 2023. The looting of nearly 4,000 sophisticated firearms and lakhs of rounds of ammunition had severely escalated tensions across the state. Bhalla emphasized that no punitive action would be taken if the weapons were surrendered within the seven-day deadline, however, he warned of strict legal consequences for anyone who retains the arms after the deadline.

He stressed the importance of re-

storing peace and normalcy in the region, encouraging all communities to come together to end hostilities and ensure that order is maintained. "For the greater good of restoring normalcy and enabling people to resume their daily lives, all communities must come together to end hostilities and uphold peace and order," Bhalla stated in his appeal.

The Governor specifically urged youth from both the valley and hill regions of Manipur to cooperate with law enforcement and return the looted arms to police stations, outposts, or security camps. His statement reflects an urgent call for peace after the ethnic violence which has left deep scars on the social fabric of the state.

Bhalla, who was serving as the Union Home Secretary when the violence broke out, has now taken on a pivotal role in efforts to resolve the crisis and restore stability in the state. His appeal highlights the need for collective action and cooperation from the community to bring an end to the conflict and allow the people of Manipur to rebuild their lives.

## Ranveer Allahbadia, Ashish Chanchlani, Rakhi Sawant Summoned By Maharashtra Police

TPN Correspondent | Delhi

The Maharashtra Police's Cyber Cell has summoned prominent YouTubers Ranveer Allahbadia, Ashish Chanchlani, and actor Rakhi Sawant following a controversy surrounding Allahbadia's comments on the YouTube show "India's Got Latent," hosted by comedian Samay Raina. Allahbadia and Chanchlani have been summoned for questioning on February 24, while Sawant has been asked to appear on February 27. Sawant appeared as a guest on one of the episodes of the show.

The controversy stemmed from Allahbadia's remarks about parents and sex during the show, which led to multiple FIRs being lodged against him. In response, the Supreme Court granted Allahbadia protection from arrest and further FIRs earlier this week, although it strongly criticized his comments, stating that they reflected a lack of respect for societal values and describing



them as the "dirt in his mind that he vomited out."

Alongside Allahbadia's petition, Chanchlani's petition was also taken up by the Supreme Court, which sought a response from the Maharashtra and Assam governments regarding an FIR registered in Guwahati, accusing Chanchlani of promoting obscenity during the show. The bench of Justices Surya Kant and N Kotiswar Singh also tagged Chanchlani's plea to trans-

fer the case to Mumbai. The Gauhati High Court had granted interim bail to Chanchlani earlier this week while hearing his anticipatory bail plea. The court directed him to appear before the investigating officer within ten days.

The summonses to the three individuals are a part of the ongoing investigation into the controversial show and its content, which has sparked debates about obscenity and public decency on digital platforms.

## Himanta Sarma Asks Gaurav Gogoi to Defend Father Amid Cash-For-Job Scam Report



TPN Correspondent | Delhi

Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma has urged Congress MP Gaurav Gogoi to publicly defend his father, former Chief Minister Tarun Gogoi, in light of a controversial report on the 2013-2014 Assam Public Service Commission (APSC) cash-for-job scam. Sarma, during a discussion in the Assam Assembly, criticized Gaurav Gogoi for remaining silent on the matter for three days after accusations were leveled against his father in the report. Sarma emphasized that the Congress leader, as the son of Tarun Gogoi, must take responsibility for defending his father.

The report, which investigates the recruit-

ment irregularities in the APSC, highlighted Tarun Gogoi's role in appointing Rakesh Kumar Paul as a member and then chairman of the commission. The report noted that Paul's appointment was made without a formal selection process, leading to widespread corruption. Additionally, the report mentioned that Paul had gifted gold jewellery to Gaurav Gogoi during his wedding. Sarma criticized Gaurav for not declaring the expensive gift to the Income Tax Department, pointing out discrepancies in his 2014 election affidavit.

While Sarma's remarks have sparked debate, it's important to note that at the time of Gaurav Gogoi's wedding, Rakesh Kumar Paul was not yet chairman of the APSC, nor

was any investigation into his actions underway. Sarma has also expressed his intent to eventually compare the Congress party's alleged corruption with the BJP's transparent recruitment processes in the state.

In addition to the cash-for-job scam controversy, Sarma also raised concerns about Gaurav Gogoi's wife, Elizabeth Colburn's alleged ties to Pakistan. Sarma claimed that Colburn's past association with Pakistani national Ali Tauqeer Sheikh, a former adviser to the Planning Commission of Pakistan, would be thoroughly investigated. This issue, Sarma stated, would significantly damage the Congress party's credibility in the coming days.

## 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's 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 VILINJAM port. NHPC shares have gained 10% over the past three sessions, and metal stocks such as Hindalco, Nalco,

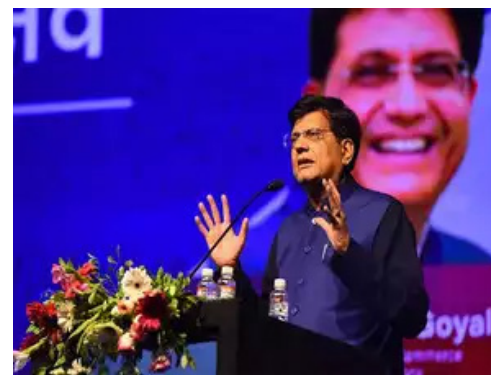
and Vedanta recorded weekly gains of 7-10%.

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

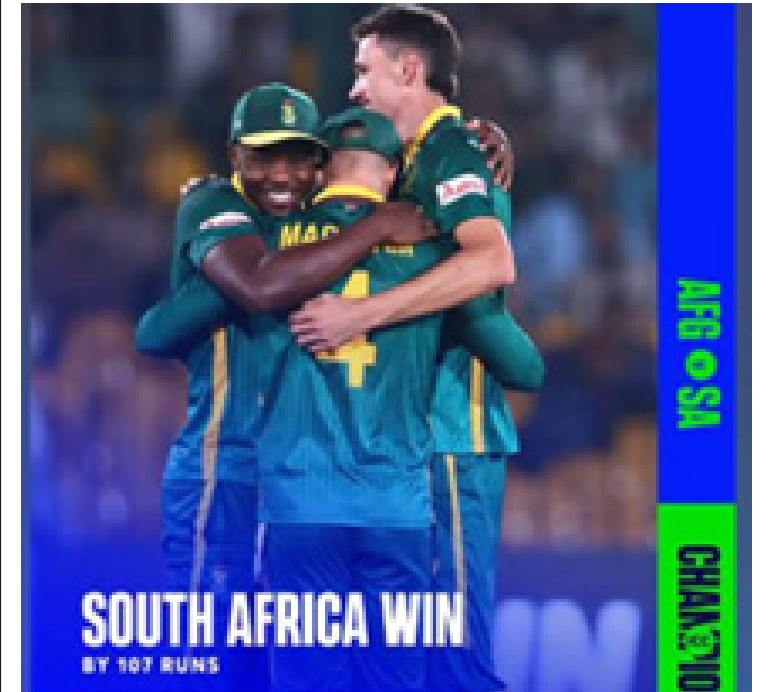


## PCB Seeks Explanation from ICC Over Omission of Pakistan's Name in Champions Trophy Branding



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 Yerneni, 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.



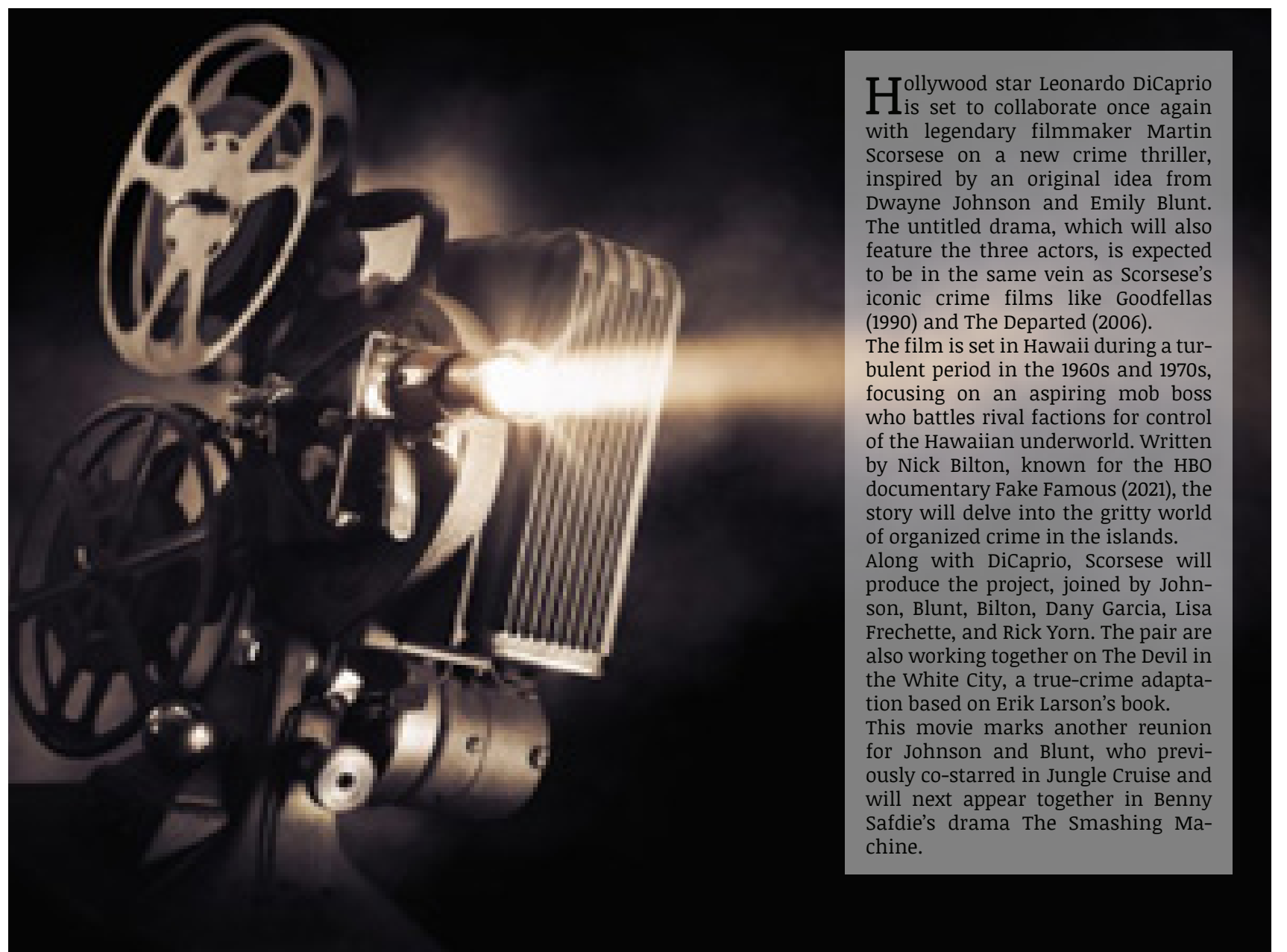
## Kangana Ranaut's 'Emergency' to Stream on Netflix from March 17



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.

