

**Weather Forecast**

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



**Karnataka proposes a second airport near Bengaluru**

**Template model to categorize airports, including cargo hubs**

**India needs 30,000 pilots in the next 15-20 years**

## KARNATAKA PLANS 'TEMPLATE MODEL' FOR MORE AIRPORTS: K RAMMOHAN NAIDU

**TPN Correspondent | New Delhi**

The Union Civil Aviation Ministry is working on a 'template model' for setting up more airports across India to meet the growing air traffic demand, Civil Aviation Minister K. Rammoohan Naidu said on Tuesday. This comes days after the Karnataka government submitted a proposal to the Airport Authority of India (AAI) identifying three locations for a second airport near Bengaluru.

Naidu stated that the ministry is focused on developing different categories of airports, including passenger airports, cargo terminals, and Flying

Training Organisations (FTOs). He emphasized that land availability remains a major challenge, but the government is exploring solutions, such as smaller airports for ATR aircraft in regions with limited space.

Currently, India has 159 operational airports, with domestic airlines having placed orders for over 1,700 new aircraft. The domestic air passenger traffic in 2024 was over 16.13 crore, and the country's current airline fleet stands at more than 800 planes.

On the need for skilled manpower, Naidu noted

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## CM Siddaramaiah Seeks Central Govt Intervention Over Red Chilli Price Crash

**TPN Correspondent | Bengaluru**

Chief Minister Siddaramaiah has written to Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Union Agriculture Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan, urging them to implement the Price Deficiency Payment (PDP) scheme under the Market Intervention Scheme (MIS) for red chilli farmers in Karnataka.

Expressing concern for lakhs of farmers, especially in the drought-prone Kalyana Karnataka region, he highlighted the severe financial crisis caused by a drastic fall in red chilli prices.

Siddaramaiah noted that the Centre had already implemented the scheme for red chilli farmers in Andhra Pradesh, setting the Minimum Intervention Price (MIP) at ₹11,781 per quintal with 25% coverage. However, he argued that Karnataka's farmers were being neglected despite facing similar challenges. The cost of production in Karnataka is ₹12,675 per quintal, but farmers are forced to sell at distress prices as low as ₹8,300 per quintal. To address this crisis, Siddaramaiah demanded:

- Increasing MIP to ₹13,500 per quintal to account for higher input costs.
  - Expanding coverage to at least 75% of production instead of the current 25%.
  - Shifting the entire financial burden to the Union Government, as red chilli prices are influenced by national policies.
- He emphasized that Karnataka farmers deserve the same support as their counterparts in Andhra Pradesh and urged immediate intervention to prevent further economic distress.



**CM urges Centre to implement price support for Karnataka farmers**

**Calls for higher Minimum Intervention Price and increased coverage**

**Demands full financial burden to be borne by the Union Government**

## Central Govt Sanctions ₹18.37 Crore for Renuka Yallamma Temple Development

- Project approved under PRASHAD scheme
- Funds to enhance infrastructure and pilgrim amenities
- Focus on improving religious tourism experience

**TPN Correspondent | New Delhi**

Union Tourism Minister Gajendra Singh Shekhawat announced on Tuesday that the Ministry of Tourism has sanctioned ₹18.37 crore for the development of Sri Renuka Yallamma Temple in Saundatti, Belagavi, under the Pilgrimage Rejuvenation and Spiritual Augmentation Drive (PRASHAD) scheme.

Shekhawat shared the update on X, stat-



ing that the funds will be used to build modern amenities such as a pilgrim arrival centre, cafeteria, first aid centre, and other essential facilities to accommodate the large number of devotees visiting the temple.

The PRASHAD scheme is a centrally sponsored initiative aimed at boosting religious tourism by enhancing infrastructure at pilgrimage and heritage sites. The project will focus on improving cleanliness, security, accessibility, and overall service delivery at the temple.

This development is expected to significantly enhance the religious tourism experience, benefiting both devotees and the local economy.

## Dy CM DK Shivakumar Dismisses Ministers' Link to Gold Smuggling Case

**Calls reports 'political gossip' and denies ministerial involvement**

**States that central agencies are handling the investigation**

**Affirms government's non-involvement in the case**



**TPN Correspondent | Bengaluru**

Karnataka Deputy Chief Minister D K Shivakumar dismissed reports alleging that two state ministers have links to the gold smuggling case involving Karnataka actress Ranya Rao. He termed the claims as "political gossip" and stated that the state government has no role in the investigation. Speaking to the media, Shivakumar asserted, "No minister is involved. We don't

know anything about this. It is all political gossip. Investigating officers will handle the case as per the law, and we have nothing to do with it."

He further emphasized that the central government is leading the investigation, and the state administration will not interfere.

Actress Ranya Rao was arrested by the Directorate of Revenue

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## Karnataka Govt Cracks Down on Black Money in Microfinance with Stricter Law



- New bill targets black money in microfinance
- Punishment increased to 10 years imprisonment
- Over ₹40,000 crore transactions lack accountability

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## Karnataka Govt Orders Probe into DGP-Rank Officer Ramachandra Rao In Gold Smuggling Case



- Actor Ranya Rao arrested for smuggling gold worth ₹12.56 crore
- Stepfather, DGP-rank officer K. Ramachandra Rao, under investigation
- ACS Gaurav Gupta to submit a report within a week

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## KARNATAKA PLANS 'TEMPLATE MODEL' FOR MORE AIRPORTS: K RAMMOHAN NAIDU

that India requires 30,000 pilots in the next 15-20 years to meet the aviation sector's expansion. At present, only 6,000-7,000 pilots are working in the country. Regarding privatisation, he clarified that while some airports may be privatised, the government's priority is to create new airports rather than focus solely on privatisation. The proposal for a second Bengaluru airport comes amid concerns over increasing air traffic congestion and is expected to improve Karnataka's aviation infrastructure.

## Dy CM DK Shivakumar Dismisses Ministers' Link to Gold Smuggling Case

Intelligence (DRI) on March 3 upon her arrival at Kempegowda International Airport from Dubai, where gold bars worth ₹12.56 crore were seized from her. Subsequent searches at her residence led to the recovery of gold jewellery worth ₹2.06 crore and ₹2.67 crore in cash. Ranya is the stepdaughter of K Ramachandra Rao, a DGP-ranked

officer currently serving as the Chairman and Managing Director of the Karnataka State Police Housing and Infrastructure Development Corporation Ltd. The Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) has officially registered an FIR in the case, marking the beginning of a broader probe into the smuggling operation.

## Karnataka Govt Cracks Down on Black Money in Microfinance with Stricter Law

TPN Correspondent | Bengaluru  
The Karnataka Assembly has passed the Karnataka Micro Loan and Small Loan (Prevention of Coercive Actions) Bill, 2025, aimed at curbing black money circulation in microfinance and money-lending institutions. Law Minister H.K. Patil stated that such institutions have been misused to convert black money into white, leading to unchecked financial transactions exceeding ₹40,000 crore. Speaking in the Assembly, Patil questioned the source of these funds, pointing out that they do not come from government grants or banking institutions. He warned that money lenders not only amass wealth but also gain political power, posing a risk to society's stability. Highlighting the urgency for stricter regulations, he said that existing laws impose minimal penalties of ₹1,000 to ₹10,000 and short jail terms of up to six

months, allowing offenders to easily secure bail. The new legislation increases penalties to ₹5 lakh and imprisonment up to 10 years, ensuring stricter enforcement. Patil also emphasized that both registered and unregistered lenders have used coercive methods to collect repayments, leading to suicides and displacements among borrowers. The government aims to instill fear in violators while protecting loan takers' interests, he said. MLAs from various parties supported the bill, with Turuvekere MLA T. Krishnappa advocating for income tax scrutiny of these financial operations, alleging that many officials secretly own microfinance firms. The bill is expected to bring transparency and accountability to Karnataka's microfinance sector while preventing financial exploitation.

## Karnataka Govt Orders Probe into DGP-Rank Officer Ramachandra Rao In Gold Smuggling Case

TPN Correspondent | Bengaluru  
The Karnataka government has ordered an investigation into the possible involvement of DGP-rank officer K. Ramachandra Rao in the gold smuggling case linked to his stepdaughter, Kannada actress Ranya Rao. Chief Minister's Office confirmed on Tuesday that Additional Chief Secretary Gaurav Gupta has been appointed as the Investigating Officer. The order was issued on Monday night, directing Gupta to examine whether Rao misused his position to facilitate Ranya Rao's illegal activities. Ranya Rao was arrested at Kempegowda International Airport for smuggling gold bars worth ₹12.56 crore from Dubai. Subsequent searches at her residence led to the seizure of gold jewellery worth ₹2.06 crore and cash

amounting to ₹2.67 crore. The government order stated that Ranya allegedly used airport protocol facilities meant for high-ranking officials to evade customs checks. It also pointed out reports that she misused the privileges granted to her by her stepfather. Ramachandra Rao, currently serving as Managing Director of Karnataka State Police Housing and Infrastructure Development Corporation, is now under scrutiny. The DGP and IG of Police, along with the Personnel and Administrative Reforms Department, have been instructed to provide all necessary documents to the investigating officer. The probe has been expedited, with the investigation report expected within a week.

## ED Appeals Karnataka HC Ruling Declaring MUDA Scam Raid Illegal

- ED challenges HC's order on MUDA scam raid
- Court adjourns hearing to April 8
- Allegations involve illegal site allotment linked to CM's wife

TPN Correspondent | Bengaluru  
The Enforcement Directorate (ED) has appealed against the Karnataka High Court's ruling that declared its raid on the residence of former MUDA Commissioner Natesha D.B. as illegal and an abuse of law. The division bench of Chief Justice N.V. Anjaria and Justice M.I. Arun admitted ED's appeal, granting it time to seek interim relief while adjourning the hearing to April 8. The single-judge bench had ruled that ED's search and seizure in the MUDA site allotment scam were unwarranted, also allowing Natesha the liberty to take legal action against ED officials



under Section 62 of the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA). However, Natesha's senior counsel Dushyant Dave assured the court that no action will be taken against ED officials until the appeal is decided. Additional Solicitors General S.V. Raju and K. Aravind Kamath urged the court to issue an interim stay on the single judge's order, arguing that it was obstructing ED's investigation. Dave

opposed the stay, pointing out that ED's appeal did not formally request interim relief. The court granted ED time to file an application, which Kamath confirmed would be submitted on Tuesday.

The case stems from an Enforcement Case Information Report (ECIR) registered on October 1, 2024, based on a Lokayukta FIR alleging illegal allotment of 14 MUDA sites, including commercial plots, to B.M. Parvathy, wife of Chief Minister Siddaramaiah. The raid at Natesha's residence, conducted under Section 17 of PMLA, led to the seizure of his mobile phone and data transfer to a hard disk. The single judge had previously observed that mere possession of an allegedly illegally allotted site does not automatically constitute an offence under PMLA unless the essential ingredients under Section 3 are met.

## Karnataka Govt Advances Drug Recall Policy: Minister Dinesh Gundu Rao

- Shortage of life-saving medicines in government hospitals
- Patients forced to buy medicines from outside
- Government pushing for a drug recall policy

TPN Correspondent | Bengaluru  
Karnataka Health Minister Dinesh Gundu Rao acknowledged a shortage of essential medicines in state government hospitals, forcing patients to purchase them from outside. Speaking in the Council, he stated that the government is moving ahead with a drug recall policy to address this crisis. Rao admitted that some medicines are not supplied due to a lack of bidders, leading to supply gaps. While suppliers inform the government about the quality of medicines, the health department still conducts lab checks before distributing them. The minister emphasized that an inspection of supplied medicines is underway to ensure quality. He reiterated that all essential medicines should be available to people free of cost and pointed to Tamil Nadu's healthcare system as a model for improvement. Additionally, Rao has written to the Centre regarding the issue of substandard drugs, stressing the need for central cooperation in implementing the drug recall policy. He also noted that the government is taking maternal deaths seriously and has introduced several measures in the recent budget to prevent such tragedies. The move towards a drug recall policy aims to strengthen Karnataka's healthcare system and ensure better access to quality medicines for all.



## Karnataka HC Stays Consumer Court Order Against PVR INOX

- Consumer court had ordered compensation for delayed screening
- PVR INOX challenged ruling in Karnataka High Court
- HC stays directive; further hearing awaited

TPN Correspondent | Bengaluru  
The Karnataka High Court has stayed a consumer court order that directed PVR INOX to compensate a Bengaluru resident for delaying a movie screening with prolonged advertisements. The case has drawn attention to the ongoing debate about multiplex practices and consumer rights. Abhishek MR, a Bengaluru-based moviegoer, had filed a complaint against PVR Cinemas and INOX (now merged as PVR INOX) after experiencing a delay in the screening of Sam Bahadur on December 26, 2023. He alleged that extended advertisements caused the delay, leading to frustration among audiences. The Bengaluru District Consumer Disputes Redressal Commission ruled in his favor, stating that PVR INOX must compensate the consumer and ensure that movie tickets display the actual film start time rather than the beginning of advertisements. The commission criticized the practice of inserting long com-



mercial ads in the time slot meant for the movie. However, PVR INOX challenged this ruling in the Karnataka High Court, arguing that advertisements are a standard industry practice and a major revenue source. The company contended that the consumer court's directive would disrupt existing business models and create operational challenges for theaters nationwide. After reviewing the appeal, the High Court granted a stay on the consumer court's order, temporarily halting the compensation directive. The matter is now under judicial review, and further hearings will determine whether multiplexes need to revise their advertising policies. The case has sparked a larger discussion on consumer rights, transparency in movie screenings, and corporate practices in the entertainment industry. The final verdict is expected to set a precedent for multiplex operations across the country.

## Karnataka Govt Enforces Strict Work Hours, Bans Private Practice for Doctors

- Doctors must work from 9 AM to 4 PM
- Private practice strictly prohibited
- Biometric attendance system implemented

TPN Correspondent | Bengaluru  
Karnataka Medical Education Minister Dr. Sharan Prakash Patil announced that government doctors must strictly adhere to work hours from 9 AM to 4 PM and will not be allowed to engage

in private practice. Addressing the Council, he stated that a notification has been issued to all government hospitals to enforce these rules. To ensure compliance, doctors must mark their attendance four times a day—at 9 AM, 2 PM, 3 PM, and 4 PM—through the biometric system, with salaries linked to attendance. Patil warned that strict action will be taken against those violating these regulations, empha-

sizing that the government's top priority is providing timely and proper treatment to patients. During the session, MLC Umashree highlighted the increasing number of cancer cases among children aged 0-14 years, stressing the need for better healthcare facilities in North Karnataka. In response, Patil assured that cancer treatment services will be expanded to Hubballi, Mysuru, and Kolar.

Additionally, the government will provide financial support under various health schemes, including ₹15 lakh for lung transplants, ₹18 lakh for heart transplants, and ₹21 lakh for bone marrow transplants. The new measures aim to improve healthcare efficiency and curb doctors' absenteeism while ensuring better medical services for Karnataka's citizens.

## In Hampi Rape Case, Accused Are Habitual Offenders, Say Karnataka Police

- Victims include an Israeli tourist and a homestay owner
- Karnataka gov't strengthens security at tourist sites

TPN Correspondent | Koppal  
Karnataka police have confirmed that the three accused in the Hampi rape and murder case are habitual offenders with a history of criminal activities. The horrific incident on March 6 involved the rape of two women, including an Israeli tourist, and the attempted murder of three male tourists, who were pushed into the Tung-

abhadra canal. One of them, 29-year-old Bibhas Nayak from Odisha, tragically lost his life. The third accused, Sharana Basava (30), a tile fitter, was arrested in Chennai after evading the police for days. Authorities recovered the two-wheeler used by the accused on the night of the crime, which was hidden near the canal. The other two suspects, Mallesh and Chetan Sai, were arrested earlier, leading to Basa-



va's capture. The police revealed that the trio had a history of theft, assault,

and harassment, and had previously been arrested for petty crimes like stealing chickens and robbing grocery stores.

In response to the incident, the Koppal police have increased security measures at tourist accommodations, including inspecting CCTV footage and verifying government-issued certifications. Superintendent of Police Ram Arasiddi stated that Form C is now mandatory

for all foreign tourists visiting Koppal, ensuring their details are registered

with local authorities. Night patrolling has also been intensified in tourism zones to prevent further crimes. Karnataka's Law and Parliamentary Affairs Minister H.K. Patil assured that the government will strengthen security for tourists, calling the incident "unfortunate." He also announced that the matter will be discussed with Home Minister Dr. G. Parameshwara to reassess the state's security policies. Meanwhile, the Opposition BJP is set to raise concerns over the law and order situation in the Assembly on Tuesday.





## Special Trains Announced from Bengaluru to Bihar for Holi

TPN Correspondent | Bengaluru

The Indian Railways has announced special trains between SMVT Bengaluru and Danapur (Bihar) to accommodate passengers traveling during Holi. The extended services will operate from March to May 2025.

Train number 03251 Danapur-SMVT Bengaluru Bi-Weekly Express Special will make 24 additional trips from March 9 to May 26. Its return service, train number 03252 SMVT Bengaluru-Danapur Bi-Weekly Express Special, will run 24 extra

trips from March 11 to May 28.

Similarly, train number 03259 Danapur-SMVT Bengaluru Weekly Express Special will operate 12 additional trips from March 11 to May 27, while train number 03260 SMVT Bengaluru-Danapur Weekly Express Special will run 12 extra trips from March 13 to May 29. These special services aim to meet the increased demand for travel between Bengaluru and Bihar during the festival season. Passengers are advised to check railway booking platforms for schedules and availability.



## Bengaluru Police Solve Murder Case, Arrest Accused After Four Months

TPN Correspondent | Bengaluru

The Kothanur police have solved the mystery behind the murder of a 50-year-old woman, Mary, whose body was found in a garbage dumping yard. After four months of investigation, the police arrested the accused, Lakshman, who had been missing since the incident.

Mary, a resident of Nagenahalli Slum Board, went missing on November 26, 2024. Suspiciously, Lakshman, a fellow resident, had also disappeared, prompting the police to register a missing person case. After an extensive search, Lakshman was finally tracked down and confessed to the crime.

During interrogation, he revealed that he was inspired by a Kannada movie and planned the murder to steal 50 grams of gold from Mary. Struggling with a ₹2 lakh debt, he devised a scheme to kill her after watching the film.

Well-Planned Murder and Disposal of Evidence

Lakshman attempted to lure Mary by cutting off her electricity, expecting her to call him for help. However, when she called someone else instead, he proceeded with his plan the next day.

On November 26, he murdered her, transported the body in an auto at 3 PM, and dumped it in a garbage yard. To mislead investigators, he discarded multiple SIM cards at a different location and fled with the stolen gold.

The police initially did not suspect Lakshman, as his mobile location indicated he was in DJ Halli on the day of the murder. However, a breakthrough came when investigators tracked his recent contact with his girlfriend. Upon questioning, he confessed to the crime, and police recovered Mary's decomposed body on March 9.

With Lakshman's arrest and confession, the case has been officially solved, bringing closure to a crime that had puzzled investigators for months.

## CID Officer Detained in Bhovi Scam Suspect's Suicide Case

- SIT detains CID DSP Kanakalakshmi
- Allegations of bribery and mistreatment
- Suicide note accuses officer of misconduct

TPN Correspondent | Bengaluru

The Special Investigation Team (SIT) has detained CID Deputy Superintendent Kanakalakshmi in connection with the suicide of Jeeva S, a suspect in the Karnataka Bhovi Development Corporation scam. The arrest follows serious allegations of bribery and mistreatment during interrogation.

Jeeva S (33) was found hanging at her residence in Padmanabhanagar in November 2024, just days after being questioned by Kanakalakshmi. She left behind an 11-page sui-

cide note alleging that the officer demanded a ₹25 lakh bribe, stripped her naked, and questioned whether she was carrying cyanide.

Following Jeeva's death, her sister, Sangeetha S, filed a complaint at the Banashankari police station. An FIR was registered under Section 7 of the Prevention of Corruption Act and Section 108 of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS) for abetment of suicide. Initially handled by the Central Crime Branch, the case was later transferred to a three-member SIT appointed by the Karnataka High Court.



A police source confirmed that Kanakalakshmi's detention followed a review of interrogation footage, which reportedly aligned with the contents of Jeeva's suicide note. Investigators also found procedural lapses in Kanakalakshmi's reports, including an incorrect

site inspection and omissions in her findings.

The SIT is expected to present Kanakalakshmi in court and recommend her suspension from the CID. Authorities continue to investigate her role in the alleged Bhovi scam and Jeeva's death.

## ICMR Backs IISc's Ageing Research Initiative

TPN Correspondent | Bengaluru

The Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) has extended its support to the Longevity India Initiative at IISc, Bengaluru, for establishing a Centre for Advanced Research in Ageing. The announcement was made by IISc Director Govindan Rangarajan during the Longevity India Conference 2025 at JN Tata Auditorium.

The research center will focus on India-specific ageing biomarkers, organ-specific ageing models, and the gut-brain connection to develop strategies for healthy ageing through biology, data science, and clinical studies.

The three-day conference at IISc brought together scientists, researchers, and industry lead-



ers to discuss ageing at macro and micro levels. With the theme 'Biological Foundations and Mechanisms of Ageing,' the event featured sessions on ageing research, biological mechanisms, lifestyle medicine, and holistic health.

Health Minister Dinesh Gun-

du Rao, MLC Manjunath Bhandary, and IISc Director Govindan Rangarajan were among the key dignitaries present. Speaking at the event, Gundu Rao emphasized that longevity should focus on living healthier and staying active, rather than just increasing lifespan.

Deepak Saini, Convener of Longevity India, explained in his keynote address that ageing occurs when DNA damage leads to dysfunctional cells, which, over time, release inflammatory chemicals and accelerate systemic ageing. He noted that while the immune system clears damaged cells in youth, its efficiency declines with age. Brian Kennedy, Director of the Centre for Healthy Longevity at the National University of Singapore, highlighted resilience as a key marker of ageing, defining it as the ability to adapt and recover from physical and mental challenges.

The research center aims to advance India's understanding of ageing and develop innovative solutions for a healthier, longer life.

## Coffee Growers Strengthen Security as Police Arrest Four in Theft Case

TPN Correspondent | Madikeri

With global coffee production declining and prices rising, coffee growers in Kodagu are facing a surge in thefts, forcing them to enhance security measures.

At Siddapura, coffee grower Hussain reported a theft of 800 kg of Robusta coffee beans from his estate storage on January 26. After a month-long investigation, the Siddapura police arrested four suspects—KB Shafiq (36), TJ Francis (29), MG Anees (24), and MB Yasin (28), all residents of Kodagu district.

During the probe, police found links between the ac-



cused and other coffee theft cases in Virajpet limits. Authorities seized 51 bags of stolen coffee beans, weighing

approximately 2,550 kg, from the suspects. Investigations are ongoing to identify further thefts connected to the arrest-

ed individuals.

Despite completing coffee picking, many growers fear losing their harvest to thieves. Wildlife movement at night makes it challenging for growers to guard their estates.

Vethan, a coffee grower in Biligeri, confirmed installing solar-powered CCTVs with night-vision near his drying and storage yards to counter thefts.

Meanwhile, SP K Ramarajan has urged coffee growers to install CCTV cameras and instructed coffee trading centers to follow stricter guidelines when purchasing beans to prevent illegal sales of stolen produce.

## BBMP Civic Workers Cheated with False Promises of Permanent Jobs

- ₹5,000 collected from Pourakarmikas for job regularization
- Contractors and masons allegedly involved in scam
- Workers plan complaint with Lokayukta, demand strict action

TPN Correspondent | Bengaluru

A fresh controversy has erupted in Bengaluru after allegations surfaced that BBMP Pourakarmikas were forced to pay ₹5,000 each with the false promise that they would receive permanent job appointments from Chief Minister Siddaramaiah on April 3. A video showing masons collecting money from workers has

caused outrage among civic workers and their leaders.

For years, BBMP Pourakarmikas have been demanding regularization of their jobs, staging protests and appealing to the government. However, it is now alleged that certain contractors and members of the Safai Karmachari Commission exploited the situation by collecting money from workers under false pretenses.

According to Pourakarmika leader Thyagaraj, Mysuru Narayana, chairman of the Safai Karmachari Commission, along with some masons, collected ₹5,000 from workers in every ward, assuring them that they would be made permanent employees. Workers who questioned the payment were allegedly threatened with removal from the permanent job list if they refused to comply.

With thousands of Pourakarmikas working across eight BBMP zones, the government had earlier promised to regularize select workers. However, even before an official announcement was made, the accused took advantage of the workers' desperation and collected money, raising serious concerns about corruption.

Furious over this exploitation, Pourakarmika leaders have urged the BBMP Commissioner to investigate the matter and take strict action against those responsible. They also plan to file a formal complaint with the Lokayukta, demand-



ing accountability for the scam that has deceived vulnerable civic workers. With growing pressure from workers and

activists, all eyes are now on the authorities to see how they will address this serious case of fraud within BBMP.





## Karnataka BJP Women General Secretary Manjula Dies by Suicide

TPN Correspondent | Bengaluru

Karnataka BJP Women General Secretary Manjula was found dead at her residence in Mathikere, Bengaluru, on Tuesday. The leader died by suicide, hanging herself at home. Upon receiving information, the Yeshwantpur police rushed to the scene and began their investigation.

A death note was recovered from the residence, in which Manjula stated that she alone was responsible for her death. However, the exact reason behind her drastic decision remains unclear. The police

are analyzing the note and speaking to family members, friends, and party colleagues to gather more information.

As news of her death spread, BJP leaders and supporters expressed their shock and grief. Many have called for a detailed investigation into the circumstances leading to her suicide.

Authorities are now examining her call records and recent activities to determine if there were external pressures or other factors involved in her decision. The Yeshwantpur police have registered a case and are expected to release further details following their inquiry.

## Renukacharya, Who Previously Criticized Yatnal, Now Praises Him

TPN Correspondent | Bellary

Former MLA MP Renukacharya, who had previously criticized Vijayapura MLA Basangouda Patil Yatnal, made a surprising U-turn on Tuesday by calling Yatnal his leader. Speaking in Bellary, he stated that Yatnal is an important leader of their community and a former Union Minister, who is now being targeted by certain forces.

Renukacharya claimed that "evil forces" were attempting to manipulate Yatnal for their own political gains. "Some people are trying to use him for their agenda, but my only intention is to prevent him from becoming a victim," he said. However, when asked who

these forces were, he refused to disclose any names, adding that he would reveal them at the right time.

This sudden change in stance has raised political speculation, as Renukacharya was known for his past harsh criticism of Yatnal. His unexpected endorsement of the Vijayapura MLA has led to discussions about internal power struggles within the BJP and the shifting political alignments within the party.

## Tejaswi Surya's Wife Shivasri Skandaprasad Credits Musical Success to Raghavendra Swami



TPN Correspondent | Bengaluru

Renowned Carnatic singer and Bharatanatyam dancer Shivasri Skandaprasad, who hails from Tamil Nadu, has recently married Bangalore South MP Tejaswi Surya. Shivasri, praised by Prime Minister Narendra Modi for her musical talent, spoke about her journey in a YouTube interview on 'Gold Class with Mayura'.

Coming from a musical family, Shivasri was immersed in music and dance from a young age. Her father, who had a home studio, enforced a strict practice routine. "If I didn't practice music for an hour in the morning, my father wouldn't give me breakfast. Since I love food, I never missed

my practice," she recalled.

Initially, her primary focus was Bharatanatyam, but during the COVID lockdown, she shifted her focus to music on social media. Regular live performances helped her gain popularity, and post-lockdown, she pursued music more seriously.

A devotee of Raghavendra Swami, Shivasri attributes her success to his blessings. "My first concert was in front of Raya's Brindavan in Hanumanthapura.

Since then, I have performed over 200 concerts in four years," she shared. She believes that music and spirituality are deeply connected and that her musical journey is a form of devotion.

# Congress MLAs Express Discontent as Ministers Clash Over Transfers

TPN Correspondent | Bengaluru

The Congress Legislative Party (CLP) meeting held, turned chaotic as MLAs vented their frustration over ministers being inaccessible and unresponsive. The meeting, which was meant to strategize for the budget session, instead became a battleground of accusations and counter-accusations between MLAs and ministers.

Several MLAs complained that ministers are avoiding them and failing to address constituency-related issues. They alleged that even when they manage to meet the ministers, their concerns are not taken seriously. Some demanded the removal of such ministers from the cabinet, arguing that ineffective governance is weakening the party's standing.

Adding to the tensions, MLAs also called for an end to the transfer process conducted through counseling, arguing that it limits their ability to appoint officials of their

- Congress MLAs allege ministers are inaccessible
- Ministers Sharan Prakash Patil and NS Bhosaraju clash over transfers
- Demands to remove unresponsive ministers from the cabinet



choice in their constituencies. They requested CM Siddaramaiah to intervene and scrap the current transfer policy.

The situation escalated when Ministers Dr. Sharan Prakash Patil and NS Bhosaraju engaged in a heated argument

over the transfer of officials in Raichur district. Bhosaraju, who represents Raichur, objected to Patil's interference in transfer decisions. The verbal exchange nearly turned physical, requiring the intervention of other MLAs to de-escalate

the situation. With the Congress already facing internal challenges over power-sharing and governance, this latest dispute is expected to further deepen the crisis within the party in Karnataka.

## Vijayendra Demands CM to Reveal Ministers' Names on Ranya Rao Gold Smuggling Case



TPN Correspondent | Bengaluru

Karnataka BJP state president B Y Vijayendra has demanded that Chief Minister Siddaramaiah disclose the names of ministers allegedly linked to the Ranya Rao gold

smuggling case. Addressing the media, Vijayendra claimed that influential individuals, including ministers, were involved in the smuggling racket.

"There's credible information that a few ministers are connected to this operation.

- BJP's Vijayendra alleges ministers' involvement
- Claims Ranya Rao received protocol treatment at KIA
- Demands CM to disclose names of those involved

Reports indicate that Ranya Rao traveled to Dubai and other countries over 30 times in recent months. Every time she returned to Bengaluru, she was given full protocol treatment at Kempegowda International Airport, exempting her from security checks," Vijayendra alleged.

He further pointed out that Ranya Rao is the daughter of a senior IPS officer and questioned whether this connection played a role in the alleged preferential treatment.

Vijayendra urged the CM

to reveal the names of hawala operators, gold smugglers, and politicians involved in the case. He also challenged Siddaramaiah to take strict action against those responsible.

The controversy surrounding the Ranya Rao gold smuggling case has intensified, with the opposition demanding transparency and accountability from the Congress government.

Meanwhile, law enforcement agencies continue their investigation into the smuggling network.

## BJP's Sunil Kumar Questions Destination of Smuggled Gold

- BJP MLA Sunil Kumar raises suspicions over ministers' involvement
- Questions why Ranya Rao received government protocol
- Demands clarity on the destination of smuggled gold

TPN Correspondent | Bengaluru

The controversy surrounding the Ranya Rao gold smuggling case continues to escalate, with Karkala BJP MLA Sunil Kumar questioning the role of state ministers in the operation. Speaking to the media, he expressed doubts about how Ranya Rao managed to smuggle gold so frequently without scrutiny.

"Ranya used to travel to Dubai 4-5 times a month, which raises serious concerns. Where did the gold she smuggled into the country go? Did it end up in Chamarajpet or Sadasivanagar? These questions need urgent answers," Sunil Kumar stated.

He further criticized the government for allegedly providing protocol treatment to Ranya Rao, demanding an explanation for why she was exempted from regular security checks. "What special privileges did she have? Why was she receiving protocol from

the government? The people of Karnataka deserve to know the truth," he added. The BJP has been mounting pressure on CM Siddaramaiah to disclose details of the case, alleging high-level political involvement. Earlier, BJP state president B Y Vijayendra also demanded that the Chief Minister reveal the names of ministers allegedly linked to the smuggling racket.



As the investigation into the Ranya Rao case deepens, calls for transparency are growing. With opposition leaders pushing for accountability, the Congress government faces increasing scrutiny over its handling of the case.

## Court Grants Temporary Relief to Ranya Rao's Husband on Gold Smuggling Case

TPN Correspondent | Bengaluru

The gold smuggling case involving Sandalwood actress Ranya Rao continues to shake Karnataka's political circles, with allegations of high-profile involvement. While the CBI and DRI have intensified their investigation, Ranya's husband, Jatin Hukkeri, has temporarily escaped arrest after securing relief from the Karnataka High Court. Fearing imminent arrest, Jatin approached the High Court, arguing that he had fully cooperated with the author-



ities. "I have no connection to my wife's alleged activities, yet I was interrogated twice by the DRI. There is a risk of arrest without following the Supreme

Court's guidelines," Jatin contended. The court, after hearing his plea, ordered that no arrest should be made without proper legal procedure, offering Jatin temporary relief.

Meanwhile, speculation has intensified over the role of a minister in the case. Reports suggest that Ranya Rao frequently traveled between Bengaluru and Dubai, even within months of her marriage, causing a rift in her family. Inves-

tigators suspect that Jatin may have leaked information about Ranya's activities, possibly to a minister who later tipped off the DRI.

Further suspicions have been raised regarding airport staff and customs officials, who may have facilitated the smuggling operation. The involvement of influential figures has made this case a major political controversy. Authorities are now probing whether financial losses suffered by jewelers led to insider information being leaked.





## “Ranya Rao Took Advantage Of VIP Protocol”: Karnataka Orders New Probe

- Inquiry to examine possible role of IPS officer Dr. K Ramachandra Rao
- Accusations over land allotment and political shielding in gold case
- Assures fair investigation as CBI intervention remains a possibility

TPN Correspondent | Karnataka

The Karnataka government has initiated an inquiry into the alleged misuse of VIP airport protocol privileges by actress Ranya Rao, who was arrested in connection with a gold smuggling case. The in-

vestigation will also explore any potential involvement of her stepfather, Dr. K Ramachandra Rao, an IPS officer and the Director General of Police (DGP) in Karnataka.

Ranya Rao was detained by the Directorate of Revenue Intelligence (DRI) for allegedly

smuggling gold bars worth Rs 12 crore from Dubai to Bengaluru. It is claimed that she used VIP airport privileges intended for senior officials to bypass security checks and facilitate her smuggling operations.

Reports suggest that Rao exploited her stepfather's position as the Managing Director of the Karnataka State Police Housing and Infrastructure Development Corporation to gain unauthorized access to restricted areas at the airport. In response, the Karnataka gov-

ernment has issued an order to investigate how these privileges were granted to her and whether Dr. Ramachandra Rao had any involvement.

The state government has appointed Gaurav Gupta, IAS, Additional Chief Secretary, to oversee the investigation, which is expected to conclude within a week.

The gold smuggling case has sparked political controversy in Karnataka. The ruling Congress and the opposition BJP have exchanged accusa-

tions. The BJP claims that the Congress played a role in protecting Ranya Rao from scrutiny, while the Congress has accused the BJP of granting land to a company linked to the actress under dubious circumstances.

BJP Karnataka President Vijayendra criticized the state government on social media, suggesting that a prominent minister in Chief Minister Siddaramaiah's government was involved in the gold smuggling case. He alleged that

such a large-scale operation could not have happened without high-level political backing, warning that attempts to shield the responsible parties could backfire, especially with the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) potentially stepping in.

State Home Minister G Parameshwara confirmed that the investigation was ongoing and emphasized that the government would not interfere until the findings were clear. Karnataka minister MB Patil, in turn, pointed out that during the previous BJP-led government, land had been allocated to a company connected to Ranya Rao.

## Karnataka Police Seize Mobile Phones, Two-Wheelers Worth Rs 5 Lakh In Robbery Bust

TPN Correspondent | Karnataka

Rajagopalnagar Police have successfully solved a mobile phone robbery case, arresting two suspects and recovering 18 stolen mobile phones and two two-wheelers valued at Rs 5,00,000. The suspects have confessed to multiple robberies, and police are continuing their investigation to trace the owners of the stolen items.

The incident that led to the arrests occurred on the night of February 26, 2025, when a complainant from Andrahalli, Kempgowdanagar, reported being robbed while walking on Rajagopalnagar Main Road. The complainant, who worked at a factory on 9th Cross, Rajagopalnagar, was speaking on his mobile phone when two unidentified individuals on a black Pulsar bike approached him from behind. The pil-



lion rider snatched the mobile phone, worth Rs 24,000, before fleeing the scene. The Rajagopalnagar Police registered a case and began their investigation.

With credible information from informants, the police arrested the two suspects on March 2, 2025, near GKW Layout Circle. During their interroga-

tion, the suspects admitted to the robbery and revealed they had stolen the two-wheelers as well. Following their confession, the police recovered another stolen two-wheeler from a factory near Brindavan Road, Peenya 2nd Stage, on March 3, 2025.

In total, the police seized 18 mobile phones and two

two-wheelers worth Rs 5,00,000. The suspects' arrests led to the resolution of multiple cases, including a mobile phone robbery at Rajagopalnagar Police Station, a mobile phone robbery at Peenya Police Station, and two two-wheeler theft cases at Bagalagunte and Vijayanagar Police Stations. Investigations are ongoing to identify the owners of the remaining 16 mobile phones.

The suspects were presented in court on March 3, 2025, and remanded to judicial custody. The operation was carried out under the leadership of Saidulu Adavath, IPS, Deputy Commissioner of Police, North Division, Bangalore City, with guidance from Sadanand A. Tippannavar, Assistant Commissioner of Police, Peenya Sub-Division, and Puneet B N, Inspector, Rajagopalnagar Police Station, along with his



## Gujarat Slums Get 'Cool Roofs' To Combat Extreme Heat

TPN Correspondent | Kolkata

A row erupted at Jadavpur University after graffiti supporting “Azad Kashmir” and “Free Palestine” was discovered on a campus wall, sparking tensions. While classes and exams proceeded as scheduled on Monday, the discovery of the controversial messages fueled protests. The identity of those responsible for the graffiti remains unknown.

The situation was further complicated by reports of plainclothes police personnel entering the campus, coinciding with the arrival of Om Prakash Mishra, a professor with ties to the ruling Trinamool Congress (TMC). This move was met with resistance from students and faculty, particularly those from Left-leaning groups. Mishra's visit came after the March 1 incident in which two students were injured during a protest against state Education Minister Bratya Basu. An FIR has been filed against Basu and Mishra in connection with the violence.

Kishalay Roy, president of the TMC-affiliated Trinamool Chhatra Parishad (TMCP) unit, accused ultra-Left student groups of being behind the graffiti. However, student leader Abhinaba Basu of the

SFI (CPI-M's student wing) clarified that while they opposed secessionist views, they supported the rights of minorities in BJP-ruled states. Mishra also condemned the graffiti and reiterated his opposition to secessionist messages.

As tensions mounted, student activists from SFI, AIDS, and faculty unions such as JUTA and ABUTA voiced concerns over the presence of plainclothes police. The police reportedly arrived shortly after Mishra and stayed until the afternoon. The situation led to chants against the perceived intimidation by the ruling TMC and the state administration.

Mishra, in response, claimed he was unaware of the police presence, asserting that he didn't request any security at his university. The university's General Secretary, Partha Pratim Roy, expressed disapproval of the police's presence on campus, noting that no formal notification was given to the university. Following protests, the matter calmed down after discussions between the administration and the students. A senior official clarified that while police had been stationed outside the campus since March 1, their presence inside was not authorized.

## Wayanad landslides: Foundation stone for rehabilitation township to be laid on March 27

TPN Correspondent | Kerala

After a delay of approximately eight months, the Kerala government is set to lay the foundation stone for a model township in Wayanad on March 27, 2025, as part of its comprehensive rehabilitation project for survivors of the devastating landslides that occurred in July 2024. The announcement was made by Revenue Minister K. Rajan during a session of the Kerala Assembly on March 11, 2025, in response to an adjournment motion raised by Congress legislator T. Siddique regarding the slow progress of rehabilitation efforts.

The Opposition parties strongly criticized the State government for the delay in rehabilitating the affected families, alleging negligence and inefficiency. Leader of the Opposition V.D. Satheesan pointed

out that the government had failed to prepare a comprehensive list of beneficiaries even eight months after the landslides. He also accused the government of being indifferent to the rehabilitation process, citing the late issuance of a government order for assistance to the injured in February 2025.

In response, Minister Rajan explained that the delay was due to ongoing court proceedings related to land acquisition. The final approval for land acquisition was granted only on December 27, 2024, which pushed back the project's timeline.

The debate also highlighted the Centre's lack of timely support. Both the Opposition and the ruling government flayed the Centre for its delayed response, with Kerala's request for ₹12,262 crore in aid being met with a ₹529.5 crore loan



under the Scheme for Special Assistance to States for Capital Investment (SASCI), repayable over 50 years. Minister Rajan criticized the Centre's approach, calling it detrimental to the state's recovery efforts during a national-level emergency.

The Opposition also voiced concerns about the Centre's failure to support Kerala in ad-

ressing the educational needs of landslide-affected students and the financial burden faced by families who had to pay for medical expenses out of pocket.

The Kerala government has committed to proceeding with the rehabilitation process, with the model township construction scheduled to begin later this month.

## Karnataka Imposes Ban on Sale of Soaps and Shampoos Near Water Bodies to Curb Pollution

TPN Correspondent | Karnataka

In a proactive move to protect Karnataka's freshwater resources, Forest and Environment Minister Eshwar Khandre has announced a ban on the sale of soaps, shampoos, and other toiletries within a 500-meter radius of rivers, lakes, and other water bodies. The new directive aims to mitigate environmental pollution, particularly in areas that are vital for religious and

cultural practices, such as pilgrimage sites where devotees traditionally bathe.

Minister Khandre addressed officials, underscoring the ecological damage caused by the disposal of toiletries in these sensitive areas. He criticized the widespread 'use and throw culture,' which leads to discarded shampoo sachets, soap covers, and other waste around water bodies. “Devotees who visit rivers near temples often leave

behind soap wrappers, unused soaps, and shampoo sachets, further contaminating these waters. Therefore, the sale of such items within 500 meters of rivers, lakes, and pilgrimage sites must be restricted,” he said. He also highlighted the need for measures to prevent devotees from discarding clothes into water sources.

Currently, 17 river stretches in Karnataka are classified as polluted, with domestic sewage



being a significant contributor. The surge in tourism, particularly to destinations like Gokarna, has only exacerbated the issue, leading to the degradation

of water quality. Shampoo residues, soap chemicals, and plastic waste pose serious risks to both human and aquatic health. The government's move is part

of an increasing recognition of the need for stringent environmental protection around religious and cultural sites, where unchecked pollution has long been a concern. This new regulation, which aims to reduce pollution and protect water bodies, will be enforced immediately. Authorities have been tasked with ensuring compliance while also educating pilgrims and vendors about the new restrictions. Though the new rules may pose some challenges for vendors and devotees, the government maintains that safeguarding water bodies is a top priority.



# China's Expanding Surveillance on India

## A Cause for Concern?

In recent diplomatic engagements, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi emphasized that India and China should "support each other rather than undermine each other," advocating for cooperation over suspicion. On the surface, these remarks suggest an improvement in bilateral relations, particularly since October 2024, when talks resumed after a four-year deadlock following the Galwan clashes. Discussions on border patrolling and disengagement have restarted, and Beijing continues to insist that the border dispute should not define the entirety of India-China relations. However, behind these diplomatic niceties, China's surveillance and monitoring activities along India's borders tell a different story.

### China's Expanding Influence in South Asia

China's growing strategic footprint in South Asia has been evident for years, largely through its Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), launched in 2013. Using economic leverage, Beijing has established a strong presence across multiple countries, often leaving them in heavy debt. Sri Lanka and the Maldives are two prime examples of how China's economic influence has led to significant security concerns for India.

### Sri Lanka and the Maldives: Beijing's Strategic Docking Points

One of the earliest signs of China's strategic expansion came in 2017 when Sri Lanka was forced to lease the Hambantota Port to China for 99 years after failing to repay its debts. This move immediately raised security alarms in New Delhi, as the port's location holds significant geostrategic importance. In addition to economic control, China has used Sri Lanka as a docking station for its surveillance ships under the pretext of research, allowing it to monitor naval movements in the Indian Ocean. A similar challenge has emerged in the Maldives. Since President Mohamed Muizzu assumed office, Male's growing tilt towards Beijing has been a growing concern for India. Chinese research vessels, including the advanced Xiang Yang Hong 03, have docked in the Maldives, sparking fears that these ships are collecting critical maritime data. Further talks between China and the Maldives about installing Fish Aggregating Devices (FADs) in the Indian Ocean only add to India's security concerns. To counter these developments, India



is strengthening its maritime capabilities. Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to Mauritius on March 11-12 is expected to finalize agreements that will enhance India's ability to monitor Chinese activities in the region. Additionally, India has ramped up its defense presence by establishing INS Jatayu in Lakshadweep's Minicoy island, a strategic naval base aimed at countering China's growing influence in the Indian Ocean.

### Surveillance from the Skies and Across Borders

China's surveillance is not limited to maritime activities. Reports indicate that Beijing has recently deployed a Large Phased Array Radar (LPAR) in Yunnan province, close to Myanmar. With a staggering range of 5,000 kilometers, this radar gives China the capability to monitor significant portions of Indian territory, including critical military movements and missile launches. One of the key threats posed by this development is its ability to detect missile tests from Abdul Kalam Island off the Odisha coast—India's primary launch site for nuclear-capable missiles like Agni V and K4 submarine-launched ballistic missiles. This level of surveillance significantly compromises India's strategic preparedness. To address this, New Delhi is reportedly in discussions with Russia to acquire the Voronezh early-warning radar system, which has an extended range of 8,000 kilometers and would provide India with a much-needed technological edge.

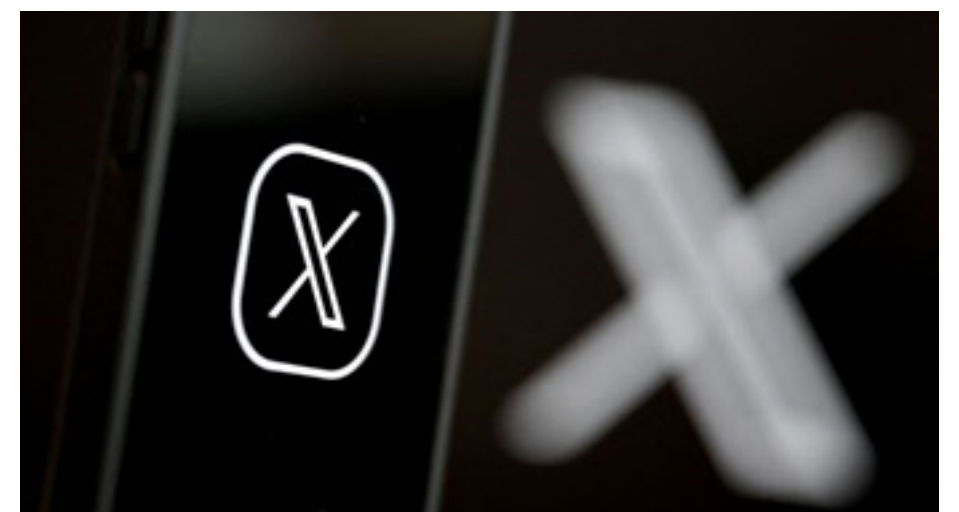
### China's Sophisticated Space Reconnaissance

Beyond ground-based surveillance, China has developed an advanced space-based reconnaissance system. Since

2006, Beijing has launched over 140 Yaogan satellites, which specialize in remote sensing and surveillance. Combined with other satellite programs like Gaofen and Shiyang, China now possesses the capability to track even small objects in the Indian Ocean and beyond. This vast surveillance network places India at a significant disadvantage. Beijing reportedly operates 245 operational reconnaissance satellites, compared to India's modest fleet of 26. The superior range, resolution, and all-weather capability of Chinese satellites give them a major edge in intelligence gathering and military monitoring.

### Can India Trust China's Calls for Normalization?

Despite Beijing's diplomatic overtures, India has ample reasons to remain cautious. China's defense budget for 2025 stands at a staggering \$246 billion, more than three times India's allocation of \$82 billion. While China continues to advocate for better trade ties and people-to-people exchanges, it is simultaneously expanding its surveillance, military, and intelligence-gathering capabilities along India's borders. New Delhi has been consistent in its approach—stating that diplomatic progress must be linked to resolving border tensions. However, China's relentless pursuit of strategic advantages suggests that trust and mutual respect remain elusive goals. As Beijing strengthens its security infrastructure across land, sea, and space, India must remain vigilant and take decisive steps to counterbalance China's growing surveillance network. The question that remains is: Can India-China relations ever be built on genuine trust, or will security concerns continue to dictate their trajectory?



## X Outage: A Cyber Attack or a Convenient Narrative?

THE POINT DESK

The recent cyber attack on X, formerly known as Twitter, has raised serious concerns about digital security, political narratives, and the implications of corporate leadership intertwining with governance. While U.S. officials are still investigating the nature and origin of the attack, Elon Musk's swift assertion that the attackers had "IP addresses originating in the Ukraine area" has fueled speculation, controversy, and political posturing.

### The Attack and the Unanswered Questions

On Monday, thousands of X users reported difficulties accessing the platform. While outages are not uncommon in the digital world, this particular incident was quickly labeled a cyber attack by U.S. officials, triggering an immediate investigation. However, as of now, the authorities have not determined the perpetrators or their motives.

Musk's claim that Ukrainian IP addresses were involved has only added to the confusion. Cybersecurity experts were quick to point out that an IP address does not confirm the geographical origin of an attack. Hackers routinely use VPNs and compromised servers worldwide, making it difficult to trace the actual source. Musk's choice to highlight Ukraine, without presenting concrete evidence, raises questions about whether this was a genuine concern or an attempt to shape a particular narrative.

### Musk's Political Entanglement

Musk's influence in both business and politics has grown significantly, particularly under Donald Trump's administration. His role in the Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE), an agency created by Trump to downsize federal bureaucracy, has placed him in a powerful but controversial position. His ownership of X, Tesla, and SpaceX, combined with his direct advisory role to Trump, creates an unprecedented intersection of corporate power and governance. It is also worth noting that Musk's political leanings have alienated a significant portion of Tesla's consumer base. Traditionally, Tesla has appealed to environmentally conscious consumers, many of whom lean left politically. However, Musk's increasingly vocal support for right-wing policies and aggressive government downsizing has led to protests and even acts of vandalism against Tesla. On Monday, as X suffered its outage, Tesla's stock took a 15% hit, its largest one-day drop since September 2020. This raises an important question: Is Musk's alignment with Trump costing him his customer base?

### Trump's Support and the Narrative Shift

Trump, never one to miss an opportunity for political theater, quickly took to his own social media platform to defend Musk. Announcing his decision to purchase a Tesla, he framed it as an act of solidarity against what he perceives as unjust backlash. "Why should he be punished for putting his tremendous skills to work in order to help MAKE AMERICA GREAT AGAIN???" Trump posted, further tying Musk's struggles to the larger MAGA agenda. This incident highlights how cybersecurity threats are increasingly politicized. The rush to blame Ukraine without conclusive evidence plays into broader geopolitical tensions, particularly given Musk's past controversial comments about Ukraine and Russia's war. Meanwhile, his continued political entanglements are not just shaping his public image but also affecting the businesses he leads. The X outage may have been a cyber attack, but the bigger story is how narratives surrounding it are being crafted to serve political and corporate interests.

## India's Air Pollution Crisis: The Stark Reality of 2024 Rankings

THE POINT DESK

The latest 'World Air Quality Report 2024' by Swiss firm IQAir has once again put India's pollution crisis in the spotlight. A staggering 13 out of the world's 20 most polluted cities are in India, with Byrnihat, a town on the Assam-Meghalaya border, ranking as the most polluted. Surprisingly, Delhi, Mumbai, and Pune were not at the top, though the capital still retained the title of the world's most polluted capital city.

### Byrnihat's Alarming Air Quality

Byrnihat's pollution crisis is a direct consequence of unchecked industrial expansion and heavy vehicular emissions. Its PM2.5 levels reached a hazardous 128 micrograms per cubic meter, making it the worst in the world. The presence of iron and steel plants, distilleries, and a constant movement of trucks between Assam and Meghalaya contribute significantly to its deteriorating air quality.

Despite public protests in January against worsening pollution, authorities have only recently taken action, shutting down seven industrial units in Byrnihat for environmental violations. However, this is merely a band-aid solution to a problem that demands long-term sustainable measures.

### Delhi's Unyielding Pollution Problem

Delhi remains the world's most polluted capital, with its PM2.5 levels rising from 102.4 micrograms per cubic meter in 2023 to 108.3 in 2024. The national capital battles year-round pollution exacerbated by vehicular emissions, industrial smoke, stubble burning, and firecracker use. The winter months worsen the crisis due to stagnant air trapping pollutants.

Efforts to control pollution, such as the implementation of the Graded Response Action Plan (GRAP) and vehicular restrictions, have had limited impact. Without stricter enforcement of policies and a shift towards greener



energy alternatives, Delhi's pollution crisis will persist.

### India's Broader Pollution Problem

India's pollution crisis extends far beyond Byrnihat and Delhi. Cities such as Mullanpur, Faridabad, Gurugram, Ganganagar, Noida, and Muzaffarnagar have dangerously high pollution levels. The country's overall PM2.5 levels saw a slight 7% improvement from 2023, with India dropping from the third to the fifth most polluted nation. However, this progress is minimal, as over 35% of Indian cities still report air

pollution levels exceeding WHO's safety limits by more than tenfold.

The issue is not confined to India alone. Four cities in Pakistan and one in China also ranked among the world's top 20 most polluted cities. However, India's vast industrial and population growth, coupled with weak enforcement of pollution control measures, has made its air quality crisis particularly severe.

### A Call for Action

The dangers of PM2.5 pollution cannot be ignored. These microscopic particles infiltrate the lungs and blood-

stream, leading to severe respiratory diseases, heart conditions, and even cancer. With industrial emissions, vehicle exhaust, and agricultural burning being primary sources, India needs urgent intervention.

Tackling air pollution requires a multi-pronged approach: enforcing stricter industrial regulations, promoting public transportation, transitioning to cleaner energy, and holding local authorities accountable. The government must act decisively, not just for the sake of rankings but for the health and well-being of millions of Indians.



# PM Modi gets 'Order of the Star and Key of Indian Ocean' from Mauritius PM

PM Modi Becomes 1st Indian To Get Mauritius' Highest Honour



TPN Correspondent | Mauritius

Mauritius.

Mauritian Prime Minister Navin Ramgoolam announced on Tuesday that Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi will be conferred with the prestigious "Grand Commander of the Order of the Star and Key of the Indian Ocean," the highest honor of Mauritius. This makes PM Modi the first Indian to receive this distinguished award, recognizing his significant contributions to enhancing bilateral relations between India and

The honor highlights PM Modi's efforts in fostering stronger ties between the two nations, particularly in areas such as trade, culture, and people-to-people connections. The award also emphasizes his leadership in promoting regional cooperation and strategic partnerships in the Indian Ocean region.

This recognition marks the 21st international award that PM Modi has

received from a foreign country, underscoring his global stature and the positive impact of his foreign policy. Ramgoolam also mentioned that PM Modi is only the fifth foreign national to be honored with this award, further highlighting the exceptional nature of this recognition.

The Grand Commander of the Order of the Star and Key of the Indian Ocean is a prestigious award given to foreign dignitaries who have made remarkable contributions to strengthening Mauritius' relationship with other nations. This honor not only celebrates PM Modi's leadership but also serves as a testament to the long-standing friendship between India and Mauritius.

The announcement of this award further solidifies the strong diplomatic ties between the two countries, built on shared values and cooperation in various sectors. PM Modi's recognition will undoubtedly strengthen India's relations with Mauritius and inspire continued collaboration in the years to come.

# Treated like cows, drunkards ruined Iftar: Police complaint against actor Vijay's Ramzan event



TPN Correspondent | Tamil Nadu

A police complaint has been lodged against Tamil film star Thalapathy Vijay following his Iftar event during Ramzan. The Tamil Nadu Sunnat Jamath, a Muslim organization, accused the event's organizers of allowing "drunkards and rowdies" to participate, which they claim insulted the Muslim community. The group also alleged that attendees were treated disrespectfully, likening their treatment to that of "cows."

Syed Kous, the treasurer of Tamil Nadu Sunnat Jamath, voiced his grievances, stating, "Muslims were insulted at the Iftar program organized by Vijay. We believe the presence of individuals with no connection to fasting or Iftar, such as drunkards and rowdies, dishonored the community." He further criticized the presence of "foreign guards," alleging that they disrespected attendees, further fueling the group's anger.

The complaint emphasized that the action taken was not for publicity, but to prevent such incidents in the future.

Kous insisted that legal action should be pursued against Vijay to ensure such behavior does not repeat.

Thalapathy Vijay, who is also the founder of Tamilaga Vetri Kazhagam (TVK), hosted the Iftar event in Chennai on March 7, 2025. During the event, he expressed his gratitude toward the Muslim community for participating and hailed the values of brotherhood and humanism. Dressed in a white shirt, dhoti, and a skullcap, Vijay joined in the prayers with the attendees and broke his fast.

Following the Iftar, the actor-politician appeared from the sunroof of his campaign van and waved at his supporters who had gathered along the streets and on a flyover. A video of the actor praying and breaking his fast quickly went viral on social media. While some praised his display of secularism, others criticized it as mere "appeasement."

As the controversy continues to unfold, both the actor's supporters and critics await further developments.

# Monitoring Situation In Afghanistan, Held Discussions With Taliban: India At UN

TPN Correspondent | United Nations

India has expressed its ongoing engagement with Afghanistan's Taliban regime, focusing on humanitarian aid and potential development projects. During a recent UN Security Council meeting on Afghanistan, India's Permanent Representative to the UN, Ambassador Parvathaneni Harish, highlighted the significance of India's historical and special people-to-people ties with Afghanistan as the foundation for its current engagement.

In January, Indian Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri met Afghanistan's Acting Foreign Minister Mawlawi Amir Khan Muttaqi in Dubai, marking the highest-level contact between India and the Taliban since the latter's takeover of Kabul in 2021. The two sides discussed various bilateral matters, including regional developments and the continuation of India's humanitarian support for the Afghan people. The Afghan side expressed appreciation for India's assistance, particularly in terms of providing ongoing aid.

Harish noted that India remains committed to monitoring Afghanistan's situation closely while working with international partners to ensure stability. India's approach involves providing humanitarian assistance, with an emphasis on health, food security, education, and capacity-building. India has also contributed 27 tonnes of relief material, 50,000 tonnes of wheat, and over 300 tonnes of medical supplies since the Taliban's rise to power.

India has a long-standing partnership with Afghanistan,

including more than 500 projects across the country since 2001. It has also partnered with the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) to support Afghan drug users, particularly women, by providing hygiene kits, food, and medical supplies.

The Afghan authorities, meanwhile, have expressed an interest in further cooperation, including the strengthening of cricket ties, which are highly valued by the youth in Afghanistan. Additionally, the use of the Chabahar port for trade, including humanitarian aid, was discussed as part of the bilateral talks.

India remains committed to working with all stakeholders to promote peace, stability, and prosperity in Afghanistan while continuing to support the Afghan people's welfare.



# India Becomes the Second-Largest Arms Importer After Ukraine

## Global Arms Transfers Remain Stable, India Shifts Focus from Russian Arms

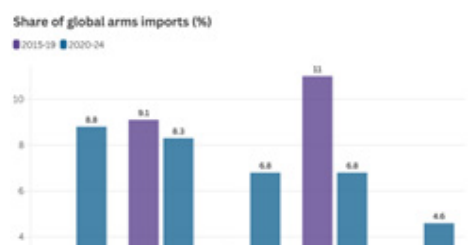
TPN Correspondent | NEW DELHI

India has diversified its arms imports in recent years, with a notable pivot away from Russian military hardware. According to the latest Economic Survey, France has emerged as a key supplier to India, securing major deals including 36 Rafale fighter jets and six Scorpene-class conventional submarines. Additional contracts for 26 Rafale-M jets and three submarines are expected to be finalized soon. France was the second-largest exporter of major arms to India, after the United States.

While the overall volume of global arms transfers remained stable between 2015-19 and 2020-24, it was 18% higher than the 2005-2009 period. Imports in Europe and the Americas increased, offsetting declines in other regions. Italy saw significant progress, jumping from 10th to 6th

place in the arms exporter list, holding a 4.8% share of global sales.

The report also highlighted the global shift in arms imports, with at least 35 countries sending weapons to Ukraine since the war began in 2022. Ukraine received 8.8% of global arms imports in 2020-24, with the United States accounting for 45% of the total arms supplied, followed by Germany (12%) and Poland (11%).



European countries have significantly increased arms imports as part of their rearmament efforts, spurred

by the ongoing conflict with Russia. Despite these increases, some major arms importers, including Saudi Arabia, India, and China, experienced substantial declines in



import volumes. Mathew George, a programme director at SIPRI, noted that the figures reflect the shifting security dynamics, with countries like India looking to reduce their dependence on Russian arms due to changing geopolitical and strategic priorities.

# Airtel Partners with SpaceX to Bring Starlink Satellite Internet to India



TPN Correspondent | New Delhi

Airtel has signed a partnership agreement with SpaceX to introduce Starlink's satellite internet services in India, pending approval from authorities. This collaboration aims to enhance internet access across the country, particularly in remote and rural areas.

The agreement outlines several areas of collaboration. Airtel may sell Starlink equipment through its stores and offer the service to businesses. The two companies also plan to use Starlink to connect rural schools, health centers, and other remote locations, ensuring high-speed internet access where traditional

networks are limited. Additionally, Airtel and SpaceX will explore ways Starlink can support Airtel's network infrastructure, and how Airtel's existing infrastructure can help SpaceX expand its footprint in India.

Airtel already partners with Eutelsat OneWeb for satellite internet, but the inclusion of Starlink is expected to further boost the company's coverage in underserved regions. This will provide businesses and communities in remote locations with better connectivity options, improving access to high-speed broadband.

Gopal Vittal, Managing Director and Vice Chairman of Bharti Airtel, expressed enthusiasm

about the partnership, calling it a significant milestone for the company. He stated, "Working with SpaceX to offer Starlink to Airtel customers in India is a major step in advancing satellite connectivity. This collaboration will help bring world-class, high-speed broadband to even the most remote parts of the country, ensuring reliable internet for individuals, businesses, and communities."

Gwynne Shotwell, President of SpaceX, shared her excitement about the collaboration, highlighting the potential of Starlink to transform lives in India. "We are thrilled to work with Airtel and unlock the transformative impact Starlink can bring to the people of India," Shotwell said. "The Airtel team has played a pivotal role in India's telecom development, making this collaboration a natural fit."

With this partnership, Airtel and SpaceX are set to bring significant improvements in internet connectivity across India, especially in areas that have previously faced challenges accessing reliable broadband services.



# US-Ukraine Peace Talks Begin



TPN Correspondent | Washington

US and Ukrainian officials have initiated peace talks in Saudi Arabia's Jeddah, with discussions led by US Secretary of State Marco Rubio and Andriy Yermak, Head of the Office of the President of Ukraine. The talks are taking place after Ukraine launched its largest drone attack on Moscow, marking a significant escalation in the ongoing war.

Yermak shared on social media that the meeting with the US delegation had begun positively, describing the discussions as "constructive" and reaffirming Ukraine's readiness to work towards peace. "We are ready to do everything to achieve peace," Yermak stated, emphasizing Ukraine's commitment to negotiating an end to the conflict

with Russia.

This meeting follows a strained encounter between US President Donald Trump and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy during their previous White House meeting. Tensions flared when Trump criticized Zelenskyy for not being sufficiently grateful for US military aid, while US Vice President JD Vance also reprimanded the Ukrainian leader, calling him "disrespectful." The meeting's fallout had soured relations between the two countries, prompting Zelenskyy to seek a fresh approach in Jeddah.

In the backdrop of the peace talks, Ukraine launched an unprecedented drone strike on Moscow, deploying 91 drones overnight. The attack killed at least one person, led to air-

- Amid Rising Tensions Following Kyiv's Largest Drone Attack on Moscow
- US Secretary of State Marco and Ukrainian official Andriy lead negotiations
- future US aid and ceasefire terms under discussion

port closures, and caused significant flight diversions, adding pressure to the negotiations.

Secretary of State Rubio acknowledged the importance of understanding Ukraine's position in the talks, noting that both sides would need to make concessions for a ceasefire and an eventual end to the war. A central topic of discussion will be the US's continued support and military aid to Ukraine, particularly in light of Trump's previous comments and the evolving dynamics of international relations.

The outcome of these peace talks is seen as crucial in shaping the future of US-Ukraine relations and the ongoing conflict with Russia.



## India Says "No Commitments" To Tariff Cuts After Trump's Tax Cut Claim

TPN Correspondent | New Delhi

India has refuted claims made by President Donald Trump that it had agreed to significantly reduce tariffs on U.S. products, stating that no such commitment had been made. This clarification comes after Trump's recent remarks about India slashing import duties, which he framed as a positive development in the ongoing trade discussions between the two countries.

In his speech last week, Trump expressed frustration with India's "massive tariffs," calling them "almost restrictive" and accusing the country of unfair trade practices. He claimed that India had agreed to "cut their tariffs way down" in response to global pressure. However, India's government quickly denied these claims, telling a parliamentary panel that no formal commitment had been made to reduce tariffs. Instead, India has requested more time to address the issue, with a deadline set for September.

India's Commerce Secretary, Sunil Barthwal, emphasized that both countries were working towards a mutually beneficial bilateral trade agreement that would prioritize long-term cooperation rather than focusing solely on immediate tariff cuts. This statement signals India's intent to approach the issue carefully, considering its broader trade relationship with the U.S.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who has cultivated a strong personal rapport with President Trump, has also voiced hopes for a trade agreement that would benefit both nations. Following his visit to the White House last month, Modi reiterated that the two countries would soon seal a deal aimed at fostering deeper economic ties.

While the U.S. is a critical market for India's information technology and services sectors, India has also become a significant customer of U.S. military hardware in recent years. This diverse trade relationship could influence the negotiations, as both sides seek to expand their economic and strategic cooperation.

Amidst these discussions, Trump may visit India later this year for a summit involving the Quad nations—Australia, India, Japan, and the United States—which could further shape the future of U.S.-India trade relations.

## Zelenskyy Meets Saudi Crown Prince To Discuss Peace Efforts and Strengthen Bilateral Ties



TPN Correspondent | Ottawa

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy met with Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman during his visit to Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, where they discussed the pursuit

of a "sustainable, fair, and comprehensive" peace in Ukraine, as per a joint statement released by the Saudi state news agency (SPA) on Tuesday.

The meeting, part of ongoing diplomatic

talks, aims to explore ways to end the ongoing conflict in Ukraine. Zelenskyy, along with U.S. officials including Secretary of State Marco Rubio, arrived in Saudi Arabia on Monday for crucial discussions with both Ukrainian and U.S. officials, focused on finding a path towards peace.

In addition to peace efforts, the two leaders also talked about strengthening bilateral relations, particularly in key sectors such as energy, food industries, and infrastructure. They expressed interest in expanding cooperation in areas like oil, gas, and petrochemicals.

The talks highlight the growing partnership between Saudi Arabia and Ukraine, as both nations aim to enhance their investment relations and explore opportunities for mutual growth in these crucial industries.

## Saudi Arabia's Mega-City Faces Mega Problem: The Price Of A Desert Paradise



TPN Correspondent | Saudi

Saudi Arabia's \$500 billion Neom mega-city project, intended to revolutionize urban living, is encountering significant hurdles. Despite an extravagant event to showcase the city's future vision, reports reveal substantial delays, budget overruns, and leadership issues.

The first phase of the project, Sindalah, has been plagued by problems. Originally slated to cost \$1.3 billion, the luxury resort's price tag has surged to nearly \$4 billion, years behind schedule. Notably, Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, the project's mastermind, was absent from the event, and weeks later, Neom's CEO, Nadhmi al-Nasr, was replaced, signaling deeper issues within the project.

Since its inception in 2017, Neom has already consumed over \$50 billion, but its most ambitious concepts, such as a floating business district, a desert ski resort, and a 170-kilometre-long linear city, remain unrealized. A Wall Street Journal report uncovered widespread financial mismanagement within Neom's leadership, revealing that executives, with the help of consultants McKinsey & Co., inflated financial projections to justify escalating costs. An internal audit found evidence of "deliberate manipulation" of figures by senior management.

The project's future appears daunting, with a draft 2023 board presentation estimating that completing Neom by 2080 would require \$8.8 trillion, more than 25 times Saudi Ara-

bia's annual budget. Even the first phase, which is expected to run until 2035, is projected to cost \$370 billion.

Neom's centerpiece, The Line, was envisioned as a futuristic city within two parallel skyscrapers stretching 170 kilometres. However, the scope of the project has proven overwhelming. Initial plans to build 16 km of The Line by 2030 have been revised to a more modest 2.4 km, with only a half-mile section, including a stadium, expected by 2034. The city's ambitious design, which includes towering structures over 1,640 feet tall, has faced engineering challenges, prompting cost-cutting suggestions, including reducing the height to 1,000 feet, though Crown Prince Salman has rejected this idea, insisting on maintaining the original vision.



## US Intel Chief Tulsi Gabbard To Visit India During Multi-Nation Trip To Indo-Pacific

TPN Correspondent | Washington

US Director of National Intelligence (DNI) Tulsi Gabbard announced on Monday that she has begun a multi-nation trip to the Indo-Pacific region, which will include visits to Japan, Thailand, and India. Gabbard highlighted the importance of fostering strong relationships, mutual understanding, and open communication to further the objectives of peace, freedom, and prosperity set by US President Donald Trump.

In a post on X, Gabbard shared her excitement for the trip, stating, "I am #WheelsUp on a multi-nation trip to the Indo-Pacific, a region I know very well having grown up as a child of the Pacific. I'll be going to Japan, Thailand, and India, with a brief stop in France enroute back to DC. Building strong relationships, understanding, and open lines of communication are vital to achieving President Trump's objectives of peace, freedom, and prosperity. First stop: Honolulu where I'll visit IC partners and INDOPACOM leaders, and our troops engaging in training."

This marks the first visit by a senior White House official to India under the Trump administration. Gabbard's visit comes shortly after Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's trip to the United States in February, where he met with Gabbard and praised her as a "strong votary" of the India-US relationship. Gabbard expressed her honor in welcoming PM Modi and reiterated her commitment to strengthening the friendship between the two nations.



# Markets End Flat Amid Volatility Oil Price Drop and Quality Stocks Support Recovery



Domestic stock markets closed flat on Tuesday. Benchmark indices started the morning gap-down on the back of a crash in the US markets and negative signals internationally. Investors bought on the back of falling oil prices, falling dollar index, improving domestic earnings and availability of quality stocks at attractive prices. As a result, the indices recovered their intraday losses. As long as the Nifty is trading above 22,300 and the Sensex above 73,700, there is scope for short-term bullishness.

The BSE Sensex, which closed at 74,115 in the previous session, opened at 73,743 on Tuesday. It touched an intraday low of 73,663. It reached an in-

traday high of 74,195. It finally closed at 74,102, down 12 points. The NSE Nifty, which opened at 22,345, touched a low of 22,314 and a high of 22,522. It closed at 22,497, up 37 points. The Nifty Bank lost 362 points and settled at 47,853.

In the Nifty50, 33 companies gained while 17 lost. Realty, oil and gas, PSE, infra, finance, healthcare, and metal stocks rose. Bank, IT, auto, media, and FMCG stocks faced selling pressure. Trent, BPCL, Sun Pharma, ICICI Bank, Shriram Finance were the top gainers. IndusInd, Infi, M&M, and Ba-



**MURTHY NAIDU PAADAM**  
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jaj Finserv lost the most.

Market breadth turned in favour of sellers on NSE today. 2958 stocks traded while 1850 lost. 1041 gained. 14 shares reached 52-week highs and 200 shares touched 52-week lows. 46 shares reached upper circuit and 205 reached lower circuit.

Poly Medicare gets Medical Device Regulation certification for 54 products in Europe. CG Power signs long-term supply agreement with Kynet Railway Solutions. Godrej Agrovet to acquire 48.06% stake in Creamline Dairy Products for Rs 930 crore. Rupee strengthens 12 paise against dollar to settle at 87.21. HSBC has given a buy rating to SBI Cards with a target price of Rs 1000. It has maintained a buy rating on BPCL, HPCL and IOC. Jefferies has retained a buy rating on Voltas with a target price of Rs 1990. Zydus Life Sciences will acquire French company Medtech Amplitude Surgical for Rs 2447 crore. Hindustan Zinc Board has approved the issue of NCDs worth Rs 500 crore. Anupam Rasayyan signs a ten-year agreement with a Korean multinational company. Bharat Electronics has secured orders worth Rs 843 crore.

#### KSB Ltd

KSB announced a ₹150 crore investment to expand its pump manufacturing facilities, targeting increased demand in infrastructure, agricul-

ture, and water management. The company's robust order book and focus on premium pump solutions ensure steady revenue growth. Analysts maintain a 'Buy' rating with a good target based on its strong fundamentals and expansion strategy.

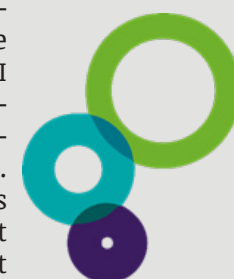
#### BPCL (Bharat Petroleum Corporation Ltd)



BPCL announced a ₹10,000 crore investment to expand refining capacity by 15% over the next two years. Improved refining margins, lower crude oil prices, and stable domestic demand are positive indicators.

#### Laurus Labs

Laurus Labs invested ₹200 crore to expand its API (Active Pharmaceutical Ingredient) production. The company's CDMO (Contract Development



and Manufacturing Organization) segment is showing strong future growth potential despite near-term headwinds. Analysts maintain a 'Hold' rating with a good target price

#### Chennai Petroleum Corporation Ltd.

Chennai Petroleum posted a 20% rise in Q3 net profit, attributed to better refining margins and improved operational efficiency. The company continues to strengthen its presence in the refining sector with increased output and cost control strategies.



#### Tube Investments of India (TII India)

TII India has diversified its business into EV components, enhancing its future growth trajectory. The company's strategic partnerships and investments in innovative technologies are expected to drive revenue growth. Jefferies maintains a 'Buy' rating with a target price of ₹3,600, highlighting the company's strong positioning in the engineering sector.



## India's Coal Imports Drop by 8.4%, Saving Rs 42,315 Crore in Foreign Exchange

India's coal imports witnessed a notable decline of 8.4% in the April-December period of the current fiscal year, reaching 183.42 million tonnes (MT), compared to 200.19 MT in the same period last year. This reduction in imports resulted in significant foreign exchange savings, estimated at approximately Rs 42,315 crore (USD 5.43 billion), according to the Ministry of Coal.

The decline in coal imports was particularly evident in the non-regulated sector, excluding the power sector, which saw a sharper drop of 12.01% year-on-year. Despite this overall decrease, coal-based power generation registered a growth of 3.53% from April to December 2024, compared to the previous year. Notably, imports for blending by thermal power plants saw a sharp decline of 29.8%, reflecting the country's efforts to reduce reliance on foreign coal.

Several government initiatives, such as the commercial mining reforms and the "Mission Coking Coal" program, have contributed to this decline by boosting domestic coal production. These initiatives aim to increase the availability of coal within the country, thereby reducing the need for imports.

Additionally, India's coal output during the April-December period of the current fiscal grew by 6.11%, as compared to the same period in 2023-24. The government's focus on enhancing



domestic production, along with ongoing efforts to reduce imports, has played a key role in this positive shift.

Overall, the reduction in coal imports and the resulting foreign exchange savings reflect India's ongoing commitment to improving energy security and reducing dependency on foreign sources.

## RBI to issue Rs 100 and Rs 200 notes bearing signature of Guv Malhotra

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) announced on Tuesday that it will soon release new banknotes in the denominations of Rs 100 and Rs 200, featuring the signature of the newly appointed RBI Governor, Sanjay Malhotra.

According to the statement issued by the central bank, the design of these new notes will be identical to the Rs 100 and Rs 200 banknotes currently in circulation under the Mahatma Gandhi (New) Series. The RBI assured the public that all previously issued Rs 100 and Rs 200 notes, regardless of the signature, will continue to remain valid and legal tender.

Governor Sanjay Malhotra, who assumed office in December 2024, replaces Shaktikanta Das, whose term as RBI Governor concluded after an extended period. As part of the usual currency replacement cycle, the issuance of these new notes with Malhotra's signature marks a continuation of the central bank's routine process of updating currency designs to reflect leadership transitions.

The RBI's move to issue new notes comes at a time when the Indian economy is closely monitoring various monetary and fiscal measures. This step is expected to have little immediate impact on the everyday circulation of currency, as the new notes will closely mirror the existing ones in terms of design and security features.

While there is no change in the look or feel of the Rs 100 and Rs 200 denominations, the signature update highlights the shift in leadership at the RBI, underscoring the institution's role in managing the country's monetary policy and financial systems.

Overall, the issuance of these new banknotes is part of the RBI's ongoing efforts to ensure smooth currency circulation while commemorating leadership changes at the central bank.



## Rupee gains 1 paisa to 87.30 against US dollar in early trade



The Indian rupee traded almost flat against the US dollar on Tuesday morning, gaining just 1 paisa to reach 87.30. This marginal gain was supported by a weaker American currency and a dip in global crude oil prices. However, the rupee's progress was tempered by ongoing volatility in domestic equity markets, which have been negatively affected by concerns over a potential recession in the United States and uncertain-

ties surrounding trade relations.

Forex traders noted that despite the positive movement from the US dollar's weakness and lower oil prices, investor sentiment remained cautious. Fears of an economic slowdown in the US and the resulting uncertainties in global trade have raised concerns among market participants, contributing to instability in the Indian stock markets. These factors have impacted the rupee's ability to make more significant gains, as traders remain wary of the broader economic environment.

The combination of these global and domestic factors has led to a mixed outlook for the rupee, with investors closely monitoring developments in both the equity markets and international trade negotiations. Although the weakening of the US dollar has provided some short-term support to the Indian currency, the outlook remains uncertain, and much depends on the resolution of key geopolitical and economic challenges.

Overall, while the rupee's small gain on Tuesday was a positive sign, the forex market's volatility suggests that further fluctuations could occur as investors continue to navigate global uncertainties.



## 2025 BYD Seal, Atto 3 Launched in India; Bookings Open



BYD has launched the 2025 models of the Seal electric sedan and the Atto 3 electric SUV in India, marking its first anniversary in the country. The new models come with several feature upgrades, while bookings have officially opened.

### 2025 BYD Seal: Key Updates

The BYD Seal electric sedan receives several enhancements, including:

**New standard features:** Power sunshade, upgraded AC system with enhanced purification, and silver-plated dimming canopy.

**Connectivity:** Wireless Apple CarPlay and Android Auto.

**Suspension Upgrades:** The Performance variant gets BYD's DiSus-C intelligent damping system, while the Premium variant comes with Frequency Selective Dampers for improved ride comfort.

**Battery, Range, and Variants**  
Seal Dynamic – 61.44 kWh battery, 510 km ARAI range.

Seal Premium – 82.56 kWh battery, 650 km ARAI range.

Seal Performance – 82.56 kWh battery, 580 km ARAI range.

The pricing for the Seal sedan is yet to be announced.

### 2025 BYD Atto 3: Key Updates

The Atto 3 electric SUV gets a refreshed feature list, including:

All-black interior for a sportier look.

Ventilated front seats for improved comfort.

Upgraded low-voltage Lithium Iron Phosphate (LFP) battery, claimed to have five times better self-discharge control and a 15-year lifespan.

**Battery, Range, and Variants**

The Atto 3 is available in three variants:

Dynamic – 49.92 kWh battery, 468 km ARAI range.  
Premium & Superior – 60.48 kWh battery, 580 km ARAI range.

**Booking and Pricing**

Bookings for both models are now open.

The BYD Seal requires a booking token of ₹1.25 lakh, with pricing yet to be revealed.

The Atto 3 will be offered at 2024 model prices for the first 3,000 customers, starting at ₹24.99 lakh (ex-showroom).

Would you consider these EVs for your next car purchase?

## SAFF U19 Championship 2025 India Drawn With Nepal, Sri Lanka in Group B

**India's Fixtures**  
May 9: India vs Sri Lanka  
May 13: India vs Nepal  
May 16: Semi-finals  
May 18: Final

The draw for the SAFF U19 Championship 2025 was conducted on Tuesday in Kathmandu, placing defending champions India in Group B alongside Nepal and Sri Lanka. The tournament will be hosted at the Golden Jubilee Stadium in Yupia, Arunachal Pradesh, from May 9 to 18, 2025. Maldives, Bhutan, and Bangladesh have been placed in Group A. The competition format

sees the top two teams from each group advancing to the semi-finals on May 16, with the final set for May 18. The draw was based on the latest FIFA men's rankings as of December 2024.

India won the previous edition in 2023, defeating Pakistan 3-0 in the final held in Kathmandu. In 2024, the tournament was played at the U20 level, where India exited in the semi-finals after a penalty shootout loss to Bangladesh. This will be the fourth time India hosts a SAFF age-group competition, following previous tournaments in Bhubaneswar (U20 men, 2022), Jamshedpur (U18 women, 2022), and Kalyani (U15 men, 2019).



## Lauki for Skin Health The Secret to Naturally Glowing and Hydrated Skin

### THE POINT DESK

Lauki, or bottle gourd, is more than just a common kitchen ingredient—it's a powerhouse of skin-nourishing nutrients. With a high water content (92%) and rich reserves of vitamin C, zinc, iron, and antioxidants, lauki helps maintain clear, glowing skin. From fighting acne to preventing premature aging, this humble vegetable offers multiple skincare benefits.

### How Lauki Boosts Skin Health

- **Deeply Hydrates** – Keeps skin soft and supple by maintaining hydration.
- **Promotes Natural Glow** – Rich in vitamin C, it boosts collagen and enhances

skin elasticity.

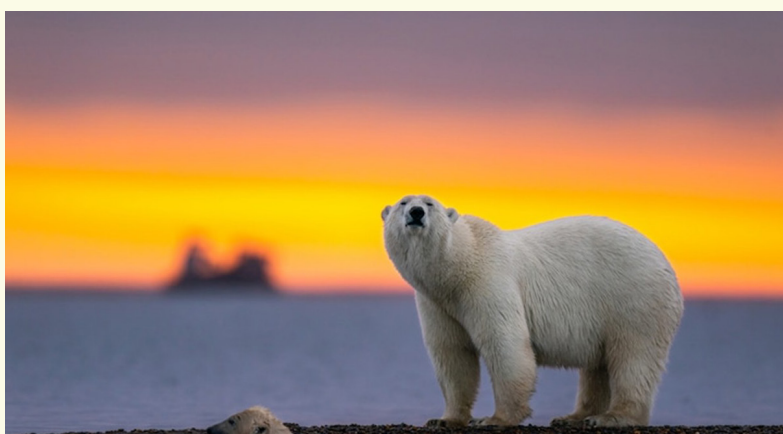
- **Fights Acne & Blemishes** – Its antibacterial properties control oil and prevent breakouts.
- **Detoxifies the Skin** – Flushes out toxins, reducing impurities and inflammation.
- **Reduces Skin Inflammation** – Soothes redness, puffiness, and sunburn.
- **Delays Premature Aging** – Packed with antioxidants that combat fine lines and wrinkles.
- **Evens Out Skin Tone** – Helps lighten dark spots and pigmentation.
- **Heals Sun Damage** – Repairs and

soothes tanned or sunburnt skin.

- **Prevents Dark Circles** – Hydrates and refreshes under-eye skin, reducing puffiness.
- **How to Use Lauki for Skincare**
- **Drink Fresh Lauki Juice** – Detoxifies and enhances skin clarity.
- **Include in Diet** – Add to curries, soups, or smoothies for long-term benefits.
- **Apply as a Face Mask** – Mix lauki juice with turmeric or aloe vera for a soothing skin treatment.
- **A natural skincare secret**, lauki can be your go-to solution for achieving youthful and radiant skin!



## 6 Places Where the Sun Never Sets



Imagine a world where the sun refuses to sleep, where midnight feels like midday, and night is just a concept. Welcome to the land of the midnight sun! In regions near the Arctic and Antarctic Circles, Earth's tilt keeps the sun visible for weeks or even months. If you've ever wanted to experience broad daylight at 2 AM, these destinations should be on your travel list.

1. Tromsø, Norway



From late May to late July, Tromsø enjoys uninterrupted daylight. Locals embrace the sun with late-night hikes, music festivals, and even midnight golf—because why sleep when the sun never sets?

2. Svalbard, Norway

Four months of continuous daylight? Yes, you read that right. From April to August, this Arctic archipelago basks in endless sunshine, making it perfect for glacier trekking and polar bear spotting.

3. Reykjavik, Iceland

Between mid-May and mid-July, Reykjavik experiences nearly 21 hours of daylight, with the sun merely hovering near the horizon. Celebrate with the Secret Solstice Festival or soak in a geothermal lagoon at midnight.

4. Yukon, Canada

In June and July, the Yukon basks in endless daylight. The Midnight Sun Baseball Game, played at 10:30 PM without artificial lights, is a must-see. Road-trippers can also drive through the

Arctic Circle under a never-ending sunset.

5. Finland

Lapland experiences up to 70 days of continuous daylight, known as "yötön yö" or "nightless night." Midnight marathons, sauna sessions, and lakeside parties make the most of this surreal phenomenon.

6. St. Petersburg, Russia

Though not fully sunlit 24/7, St. Petersburg's "White Nights" (late May to mid-July) keep the city glowing. The White Nights Festival transforms the city into a vibrant cultural hub with ballet, opera, concerts, and fireworks.

**How Do People Sleep Here?**

Locals rely on blackout curtains, sleep masks, and sheer exhaustion from taking full advantage of the endless daylight. Some stick to a routine, while others embrace the midnight sun lifestyle.

Would you visit one of these places to experience the magic of a sleepless sun?





## Rohit Sharma Joins Elite Captains' Club After CT Win



Indian skipper Rohit Sharma has etched his name alongside legendary captains after delivering a match-winning performance in the Champions Trophy final against New Zealand in Dubai. Rohit became only the fourth captain and the second Indian, after MS Dhoni, to win the Player of the Match award in an ICC tournament final. Joining an exclusive list featuring Clive Lloyd (1975), Ricky Ponting (2003), and Dhoni (2011), Rohit powered India's chase with a blistering 76 off 83 balls. His aggressive approach dismantled New Zealand's 251-run defense, ensuring India's four-wicket triumph at the Dubai International Cricket Stadium.

Despite wickets tumbling at the other end, Rohit anchored the innings with calculated aggression. His explosive start in the powerplay set the tone, and even after his dismissal, India remained in control. Speaking after the match, Rohit emphasized his consistent approach, saying, "I have not done anything different. I know how important it is to score runs in the powerplay because after 10 overs, it becomes difficult when the field spreads and spinners come into play." His fearless batting and leadership sealed India's dominance, adding another ICC trophy to his captaincy record.

## PCB's Financial Struggles Exposed Amid Drastic Cost-Cutting



The Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) is facing serious financial concerns, as evidenced by a series of cost-cutting measures, including a drastic reduction in domestic match fees and downgraded player facilities. The upcoming National T20 Championship will see player match fees slashed from ₹100,000 to just ₹10,000 per match, with reserve players receiving ₹5,000. According to sources, PCB's domestic cricket head, Abdullah Khurram Niazi, has overseen multiple facility downgrades in recent months. Players who previously stayed in four and five-star hotels are now being accommodated in budget lodgings, and air travel privileges have been reduced. Additionally, outstanding payments from the previous season remain unpaid for players and umpires.

Despite these cuts, the PCB continues to pay hefty salaries to top officials, selectors, and mentors. Misbah ul Haq, Waqar Younis, Shoaib Malik, Sarfaraz Ahmed, and Saqlain Mushtaq—appointed as mentors—are reportedly receiving ₹5 million per month under two-year contracts. Meanwhile, the PCB has spent approximately ₹1.8 billion on stadium upgrades for the upcoming Champions Trophy. The financial strain has also affected former cricketers, with the board yet to implement the promised annual pension increase. The stark contrast between the PCB's cost-cutting for players and its lavish spending on officials has raised serious questions about its financial management.



## Manchester United Plans 100,000-Seater Stadium

Manchester United has announced plans to build a new 100,000-capacity stadium near Old Trafford, with co-owner Jim Ratcliffe calling it the "world's greatest" football ground. The decision follows extensive consultations on whether to upgrade Old Trafford or construct a new venue as part of the Old Trafford Regeneration Task Force. The club estimates that the stadium, expected to cost around £2 billion (\$2.6 billion), will take approximately five years to complete. However, a start date has yet to be confirmed. The project, designed by renowned architects Foster + Partners, aims to transform the surrounding area and potentially contribute £7.3 billion per year to the UK economy while creat-

ing 92,000 jobs. "Our current stadium has served us brilliantly for 115 years, but it has fallen behind the best arenas in world sport," Ratcliffe said. "United is the world's biggest football club, and it deserves a stadium that reflects its stature." The move has received backing from legendary former manager Sir Alex Ferguson, who emphasized the need to "be brave and seize this opportunity to build a new home, fit for the future, where new history can be made." Old Trafford, England's largest club ground with a 74,000 capacity, has been United's home since 1910 but has faced increasing criticism over maintenance issues. The proposed

new stadium will feature an umbrella-like design covering a public plaza twice the size of Trafalgar Square and three towering masts known as "Trident," visible from 40 kilometers away. Concerns remain over funding, with United already burdened by nearly £1 billion in debt. CEO Omar Berrada stated that financing options are being explored, calling it a "very attractive investment opportunity." The Manchester United Supporters' Trust urged the club to involve fans throughout the process, questioning potential ticket price increases, impact on atmosphere, and whether the project would divert resources from squad investments.

## 52nd Senior National Carrom Championship in New Delhi

*Top players to compete in national event from March 17-21*

The All India Carrom Federation (AICF) is set to host the 52nd Senior National Carrom Championship (Men & Women) for 2024-25, from March 17 to 21, 2025, in New Delhi. The event, which will witness participation from top carrom players across the country, promises to be a grand affair, with a strong lineup of officials and umpires ensuring smooth conduct. Key Officials Overseeing the Championship The championship is being organized under the leadership of Mrs. Bharti Narayan, General Secretary of AICF, along with Mr. V. D. Narayan and Mr. Shahid Farooq, General Secretary and Secretary of the Delhi Carrom Association (DCA), respectively. International umpires Mr. Gurinder Singh and Mr. Kashi Ram will be officiating matches, while Mr. S. Shoban Raj, Convener of the Um-

pires Committee, will oversee umpiring responsibilities. Several other senior officials, including Mr. SK. Abdul Jaleel, Mr. J. Srinivasan, and Mr. M. P. Hemantha Kumar, will also play key roles in the tournament's management. The Championship Committee includes several prominent personalities, led by AICF President and Member of Parliament, Mr. Rakibul Hussain. Other notable members include: Mr. Girish Vyas - Patron, AICF Dr. Neeraj Kumar Sampathy - Senior Vice President, AICF Mr. B N Singh - Associate Vice President, AICF Mr. S. Madan Raj - Treasurer, AICF Mr. Prabhjeet Singh Bachher, Mr. Gurinder Singh, and Mr. Vijay Kumar - Vice Presidents, AICF Mr. Nazar Khan, Mr. Khursheed Khan, Mr.



Santhosh Kumar, Mr. Maneksh P.S., and Mr. Sooraj Khatri - Associate Vice Presidents, AICF Participation and Expectations The tournament will bring together top carrom players from across India, competing for national honors. With Delhi hosting the event, anticipation is high for a competitive championship that will showcase the best talent in the sport. The AICF's commitment to promoting carrom at the highest level is evident in the meticulous planning and the presence of experienced officials.

## Satwik, Chirag and Lakshya Sen Drop Out of BWF Top 10

Indian badminton stars Satwik-Isairaj Rankireddy-Chirag Shetty and Lakshya Sen have suffered a major setback, dropping out of the top 10 in the latest Badminton World Federation (BWF) rankings. This marks the first time since November 2021 that the men's doubles duo has fallen outside the top 10, slipping five places to 12th. The decline follows a rough phase for Rankireddy and Shetty, who last played at the Badminton

Asia Team Mixed Championships in February. Their disappointing run at the 2024 Paris Olympics led to significant changes in their training setup, including parting ways with coach Mathias Boe. They are now under the mentorship of Tan Kim Her, the coach who originally paired them together. Despite the drop, they remain India's highest-ranked men's doubles pair. In men's singles, Lakshya Sen has also fallen in the rankings, slip-

ping from 10th to 15th. His early exits at the Malaysia Open and India Open, along with a Round of 16 finish at the Indonesia Masters Super 500, have contributed to his decline. Meanwhile, PV Sindhu has dropped one place to 16th in women's singles but remains the only Indian shuttler in the top 20. In contrast, the women's doubles duo of Treasa Jolly and Gayatri Gopichand continues to hold the ninth spot, keeping India's pres-

ence strong in the category. In mixed doubles, Tanisha Crasto and Dhruv Kapila reached a career-best ranking of 19th, making Crasto the first Indian female shuttler to break into the top 20 with three different partners across categories. Among emerging talents, Ayush Shetty climbed to a career-high 43rd after his semi-final run at the Orleans Masters, solidifying his position as India's fifth-highest-ranked men's singles player.







## Anushka Sen's Beach Look Takes Social Media by Storm!



Bollywood sensation Anushka Sen, known for her vibrant screen presence, is once again in the spotlight. At just 22, she has carved a niche for herself in films, TV shows, web series, and music videos. With a massive fanbase of over 40 million followers on Instagram, every post of hers grabs instant attention.

Recently, Anushka's stunning beach look set the internet ablaze. The actress shared a series of breathtaking pictures from her beach getaway, exuding effortless charm and confidence. Dressed in a chic yet breezy outfit, she perfectly complemented the sun-kissed shores, leaving fans in

awe of her style.

Her post quickly went viral, with fans flooding the comments section with heart and fire emojis, praising her beauty and elegance. Known for her impeccable fashion sense, Anushka continues to be a trendsetter for Gen Z.

From television to digital platforms, Anushka Sen's journey has been nothing short of inspiring. Whether it's her acting prowess or her social media presence, she never fails to make headlines. With several exciting projects in the pipeline, the young starlet is all set to take her career to even greater heights.

## Rajamouli Infuses Mythological Essence Into SSMB 29

Superstar Mahesh Babu's much-anticipated film with master storyteller SS Rajamouli, tentatively titled SSMB 29, has been creating a buzz ever since its announcement. Initially promoted as a high-stakes action-adventure set against a dense forest backdrop, new reports suggest the film carries a deeper narrative rooted in Indian history and mythology.

According to sources, SSMB 29 will unravel an intriguing storyline that originates in the ancient city of Kashi. The film is expected to weave together elements of divinity and history, setting the stage for an intense action saga that unfolds in the present era. Since filming in Kashi poses logistical challenges, the makers are recreating a grand set in Hyderabad to bring the historical elements to life.



These revelations have further heightened anticipation, with Rajamouli reportedly planning to deliver a visually spectacular cinematic experience. The film is set to be shot across breathtaking locations in India, Africa, and other international destinations, ensuring a global scale for its narrative. Currently, the team is shoot-

ing crucial sequences in Odisha. SSMB 29 boasts a stellar cast, with Priyanka Chopra and Prithviraj Sukumaran playing key roles alongside Mahesh Babu. The legendary MM Keeravani is composing the music, promising yet another memorable soundtrack for this ambitious project.

## Vicky Kaushal's Chhaava Overtakes Gadar 2 Becomes 10th-Highest-Grossing Indian Film



Vicky Kaushal and Rashmika Mandanna's historical drama Chhaava continues its strong run at the box office, surpassing Gadar 2 to become the 10th-highest-grossing Indian film. Released on February 14, the film has maintained its momentum, collecting ₹6.25 crore on its 25th day across all languages, as per a report by Sacnilk. With this, Chhaava has amassed a total domestic collection of ₹526.05 crore, overtaking Gadar 2, which had a lifetime collection of ₹525.7

crore.

Following the film's entry into the ₹500 crore club, Vicky Kaushal took to Instagram to express his gratitude. Sharing a poster of the film, he wrote, "What you all have given to Chhaava goes much beyond numbers... you all have made this an emotion." He further thanked audiences for celebrating the legacy of Chhatrapati Sambhaji Maharaj and urged them to continue watching the film.

Directed by Laxman Utekar, Chhaava is adapted from

Shivaji Sawant's Marathi novel of the same name. Vicky Kaushal portrays Chhatrapati Sambhaji Maharaj, while Rashmika Mandanna plays Maharani Yesubai. The film also features Akshaye Khanna as Mughal Emperor Aurangzeb, Diana Penty as Aurangzeb's daughter Shehzadi Zinat-un-Nissa Begum, and Ashutosh Rana as Sarsenapati Hambirao Mohite. The film is produced by Dinesh Vijan under Maddock Films.

## Kim Soo Hyun Denies Dating Rumors With Late Actress Kim Sae-Ron

### Sae-Ron



Kim Soo Hyun has found himself at the center of controversy following allegations about his alleged past relationship with the late actress Kim Sae-Ron. The rumors surfaced after Kim Sae-Ron's aunt made serious accusations in a video posted on the YouTube channel Garosero Research Institute. She claimed that Kim Soo Hyun had been in a six-year relationship with Kim Sae-Ron, which allegedly began when she was just 15. The aunt also accused the actor of distancing himself from her after her DUI incident in 2022 and alleged that his agency, Gold Medalist, played a role in her financial struggles, which she claimed contributed to her tragic passing last month.

In response, Gold Medalist strongly refuted these claims, calling them "baseless and malicious." In an official statement, the agency stated, "The claims made by Garosero Research Institute regarding Kim Soo Hyun on YouTube today are completely false. They alleged that our company and Kim Soo Hyun colluded with YouTuber Lee Jin Ho to ha-

arrass the late Kim Sae-Ron, that Kim Soo Hyun had been dating her since she was 15, that our agency's response to her drunk driving accident was unfair, and that our manager had a close relationship with YouTuber Lee Jin Ho." The agency further stated that they are reviewing legal action against Garosero Research Institute for spreading false information.

Expressing their sorrow over Kim Sae-Ron's passing, Gold Medalist added, "We are deeply heartbroken by the news of the late Kim

Sae-Ron's death, as she was once part of our company, and we mourn her passing. However, the dissemination of such false information directly continues the very same cyber harassment that caused her great distress during her lifetime." The agency also criticized Garosero Research Institute for spreading baseless rumors and condemned the false claims made by Kim Sae-Ron's aunt. They urged fans to refrain from spreading, amplifying, or reproducing false information.

## Why Pooja Hegde Was the First Choice for Suriya's Retro

Pooja Hegde has made a name for herself in Tamil, Telugu, and Hindi cinema, working alongside some of the biggest stars. After her Bollywood debut with Hrithik Roshan in Mohenjo Daro, she is now gearing up for her next Tamil film, Retro, alongside Suriya.

Stone Bench Films, the production house behind Retro, recently

revealed why Pooja Hegde was their top choice for the female lead. They highlighted her dedication and willingness to dub in her own voice for the Tamil film, a first for her.

The team shared that when director Karthik Subbaraj was searching for the lead actress, several names were considered, but Pooja stood out. Even the

film's lead character, Pandiyaa, was convinced she was the perfect fit. The only concern was her fluency in Tamil. However, Pooja assured the team that she would overcome the language barrier.

After an impressive look test, she started daily Tamil training and surprised everyone by delivering

lengthy monologue sequences effortlessly. The team also recalled fun moments on set where they tested her with difficult Tamil words.

Retro features Suriya and Pooja Hegde in lead roles, along with Joju George, Jayaram, and Karunakaran in key supporting roles. The film is set to release in theatres on May 1, 2025.

