

Weather Forecast

HYDERABAD

t°

H 33° C

L 25° C

VIJAYAWADA

t°

H 35° C

L 26° C

TIRUPATHI

t°

H 36° C

L 26° C



Cabinet to Decide on Milk Price Hike, Says CM Siddaramaiah

CM met KMF officials and milk union representatives in Bengaluru.

KMF has proposed a price hike of ₹3 to ₹5 per litre.

The final decision will be made in the Cabinet meeting on Thursday.

TPN Correspondent | Bengaluru
Karnataka Chief Minister Siddaramaiah on Monday stated that the decision on increasing milk prices will be taken after discussing the proposal in the Cabinet. He emphasized that the primary objective of milk unions is to support farmers rather than generate profits. During a meeting with representatives of various milk unions and Karnataka Milk Federation (KMF) officials, Siddaramaiah stressed that profits must be directed toward farmers. “This is the government’s stand,” he asserted. He also instructed unions to curb excessive administrative expenses and avoid unnecessary hiring on contract. “Such

expenses are pushing unions toward financial losses,” he warned. Currently, three milk unions are running at a loss, and the CM has set a three-month deadline for them to bring down their expenses, ensuring that administrative costs do not exceed 2% of their total expenditure. Meanwhile, KMF Chairman Bhima Naik revealed that the federation has already decided to increase milk prices, though the exact hike—whether ₹3 or ₹5 per litre—will be determined by the Cabinet. He added that Karnataka’s milk prices remain lower than in other states. The final decision on the price revision is expected to be made on Thursday.

CM to Implement Internal Quota After Panel’s Interim Report

CM Siddaramaiah met SC ministers and Justice Nagamohan Das to discuss reservation.

The committee’s interim report is expected within a week.

Govt is committed to implementing internal reservation as per its manifesto.

No backlog posts, promotions, or appointments will be made until the policy is executed.

TPN Correspondent | Bengaluru
Karnataka Chief Minister Siddaramaiah will begin implementing internal reservation for Scheduled Castes soon after the Justice Nagamohan Das committee submits its interim report in a week, Home Minister Dr. G Parameshwara announced on Monday. The chief minister held a crucial meeting at his residence with ministers including Parameshwara, KH Muniyappa, RB Timmapur, Shivraj Thangadgi, Dr. HC Mahadevappa, Priyank Kharge, and Justice Nagamohan Das. Following the meeting, Parameshwara reaffirmed the



Congress government’s commitment to internal reservation. “We have promised it in our election manifesto, and empirical data will provide a clear direction,” he stated. Justice Nagamohan Das, who heads the panel, also emphasized the importance of data-driven decision-making. Addressing the controversy surrounding Deputy CM DK Shivakumar’s reported remarks on modifying the Constitution for reservation in government contracts, Parameshwara said, “Our party and government are committed to the Constitution. We have even organized the ‘Jai Babu, Jai Bhim, Jai Constitution’

convention in Belagavi to uphold these values.” Social Welfare Minister HC Mahadevappa provided an update on the committee’s progress, stating that discussions were held based on the data collected from various departments. “Justice Nagamohan Das will submit an interim report within a week, and the government will act accordingly while ensuring adherence to Supreme Court guidelines,” he added. Until the internal reservation policy is formally implemented, the state government has decided to put all backlog posts, promotions, and new appointments on hold.

‘Not Yet’: Legislative Council Chairman Denies Resignation Reports

Horatti confirmed he is contemplating his decision. An unsigned resignation letter was leaked from his office.

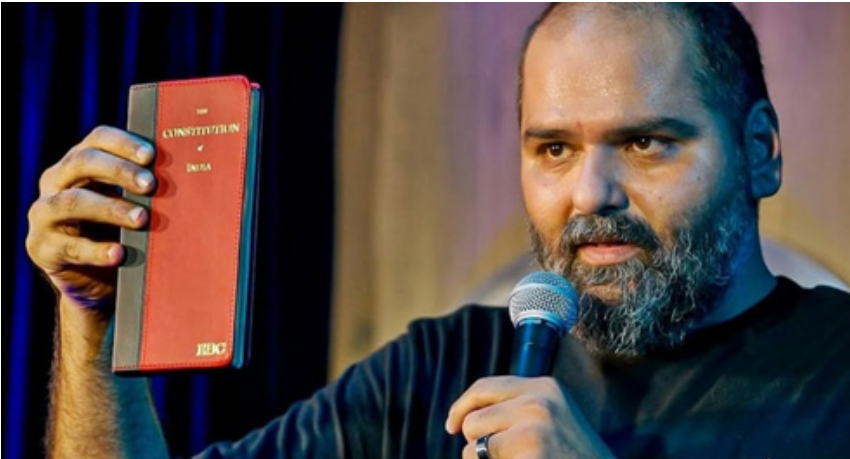
Concerns over the deteriorating decorum in the Legislative Council.



TPN Correspondent | Hubballi
Karnataka Legislative Council Chairman Basavaraj Horatti has dismissed reports of his resignation, stating that while he has considered stepping down, no formal decision has been made yet. His clarification comes amid speculation fueled by a letter that went viral on social media. Horatti addressed the media on Monday, clarifying that he has signed a resignation letter but has not submitted it.

“The letter is with me, but an unsigned version was leaked and is being circulated on social media. I have not resigned yet, but I am considering it and will take a decision in the next three to four days,” he said. Expressing dissatisfaction with the current state of affairs in the Upper House, the eight-time MLC lamented that respect for senior members has diminished. “The Legislative Council has

“Supari” For Comedy?



TPN Correspondent | Mumbai

Mumbai Police have launched a probe into whether stand-up comedian Kunal Kamra’s satirical remarks on Maharashtra Dy CM Eknath Shinde were part of a larger conspiracy. Officials are investigating if Kamra received financial backing or external assistance to mock the Shiv Sena leader, sources revealed. A police team from Khar station visited Kamra’s Mumbai residence, where his parents reside, to serve a summons, directing him to appear for questioning. Since he is reportedly out of state, the summons has also been sent via WhatsApp. Kamra faces multiple

Police Probe Conspiracy Angle in Kunal Kamra’s Satire on Eknath Shinde

Comedian faces defamation, public mischief charges

Shinde’s remarks trigger Sena workers’ vandalism at studio

Kamra questions selective law enforcement

Uddhav Thackeray backs Kamra

charges, including defamation and making statements conducive to public mischief. Police sources indicate they may examine his phone and other electronic devices as part of the probe. The controversy erupted after Kamra performed a parody of the song Bholi Si Surat at Mumbai’s Habitat studio, in which he used the term gaddar (traitor) to refer to Shinde. The satire alluded to Shinde’s 2022 rebellion against Uddhav Thackeray, which led to the collapse of the Shiv Sena-led government and a party split. Following the performance, irate Shiv

“Action Against Me Illegal, This Is Legal”: Kangana

TPN Correspondent | New Delhi

BJP MP and actor Kangana Ranaut has weighed in on the controversy surrounding comedian Kunal Kamra, asserting that the legal action against him is justified, unlike the civic action taken against her in 2020 under the Uddhav Thackeray-led Maharashtra government. Speaking to the media outside Parliament, Kangana said she does not want to draw direct comparisons between her case and Kamra’s, but emphasized that mocking a leader for his humble origins is inappropriate. “That was illegal; this is legal. Insulting a man whose respect is everything, disregarding his work—this is not comedy,” she remarked, referring to Kamra’s parody of Eknath Shinde. Kangana further questioned Kamra’s credibility, stating, “Who are these people who haven’t achieved anything in life but make a living out of abusing in the name of comedy? They mock religious texts, our mothers, and sisters, all for a few



minutes of fame. Where is our society headed?” Defending the Maharashtra government’s stance, she echoed CM Devendra Fadnavis’ remarks, stating that people must take responsibility for their words and actions. “Do not link what happened to me with this. That was illegal, and this is legal,” she reiterated.

Kangana vs Shiv Sena in 2020

In 2020, the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) demolished a part of Kangana’s office in Mumbai’s Pali Hill, citing

All Corporators of Karnataka’s Vijayapura Corporation Disqualified



- All 35 corporators, including BJP, Congress, JDS, MIM, and independents, disqualified.
- Disqualification due to non-submission of asset declarations.
- Fresh elections likely after the court-directed government action.

TPN Correspondent | Vijayapura
In a major development, all 35 members of the Vijayapura City Corporation have been disqualified following an order issued by Belgaum Regional Commissioner Sanjay Shettennavar on Monday. The move comes after the corporators failed to submit their mandatory asset declaration forms. The disqualified members include 17 from BJP, 10 from Congress, one

from JDS, two from MIM, and five independents. They were all elected in the 2022 municipal elections. The issue arose when none of the members submitted their asset declaration forms after the mayoral elections held on January 9, 2024. Congress leader Mehejabin Horti was elected as Mayor, while Dinesh Halli secured the Deputy Mayor position. The lapse led former corporator Prakash Mirji Mainuddin Bilagi to approach the Kalaburagi High Court, demanding action against the elected representatives. Following a court directive, the government conducted an inquiry, leading to the disqualification of all 35 members. With the corporation now dissolved, fresh elections are likely to be announced soon to reconstitute the civic body.

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“Supari” For Comedy?

Sena workers vandalized the comedy venue, though Shinde later distanced himself from the violence, remarking, “Every action has a reaction.” Adding to the backlash, civic officials conducted a demolition drive at the studio, citing building law violations. The venue subsequently announced its temporary closure, stating that it does not control the content of performers’ acts. Responding to the situation, Kamra issued a statement emphasizing that his comedy is his responsibility alone. “A venue is merely a platform. Attacking it for a comedian’s words is as absurd as overturning a lorry carrying tomatoes because you

disliked your butter chicken,” he remarked on X. He further stated that he is willing to cooperate with the police and courts but questioned whether similar legal scrutiny would be applied to those involved in the vandalism. The issue has taken a political turn, with Opposition leaders, including Uddhav Thackeray, backing Kamra. Thackeray asserted that the comedian merely spoke the truth, stating, “This wasn’t satire. Those who betray are gaddar. There is no freedom of expression for traitors.” As the controversy unfolds, the police inquiry into the alleged conspiracy and Kamra’s forthcoming response to the summons are being closely watched.

‘Not Yet’: Legislative Council Chairman Denies Resignation Reports

turned into a platform for chaos and controversies, including issues like honey traps. There is no dignity left, and this has made me reconsider my position as chairman,” he remarked. Despite his growing frustration, Horatti revealed that several close associates have urged him not to

step down. “Many have advised me against resigning, and I am taking their opinions into account before making a final decision,” he added. The controversy has triggered political discussions, with leaders closely watching Horatti’s next move.

“Action Against Me Illegal, This Is Legal”: Kangana

encroachment violations. The move, however, came in the midst of a heated feud between Kangana and the Shiv Sena after she criticized Mumbai’s law and order situation following actor Sushant Singh Rajput’s death. She had controversially likened Mumbai to Pakistan-Occupied Kashmir, sparking backlash. At that time, the Uddhav Thackeray-led Shiv Sena controlled both the state government and the BMC. Kangana moved the Bom-

bay High Court against the demolition and won the case, with the court questioning the timing and intent of the BMC’s action. With the Kamra case now escalating, the Opposition’s support for the comedian has drawn accusations of hypocrisy. Critics argue that the same party that targeted Kangana for her statements is now defending Kamra in the name of free speech, exposing double standards in political discourse.

Minister Suggests Awarding Kannada Rajyotsava Honours Without Applications

TPN Correspondent | Bengaluru

Kannada and Culture and Backward Classes Welfare Minister Shivaraj S Tangadagi has proposed a new approach to conferring Kannada Rajyotsava awards by eliminating the application process and directly recognising deserving individuals based on their achievements.

Speaking at the Karnataka Sahitya Academy awards distribution ceremony on Monday, Tangadagi stressed that true recognition should come unprompted rather than being requested. He suggested that delivering the awards directly to recipients’ homes would en-



hance their prestige and value. “I will discuss this with the CM and DyCM,” he stated, indicating that the government is considering implementing the change. The minister noted that many literary figures across Karnataka have ex-

pressed support for this idea but emphasized the need for further discussions. “There must be a public debate on this matter,” he added. During the event, the Academy presented its 2023 Honorary Awards to Dr. C Veeranna, Dr. Sriram Ittannanavar, Janagere Venkataramayya, AM Madari, and Dr. Sabiha Bhoomi-gowda. Additionally, ten individuals received the Sahitya Shri Awards for their contributions to literature and culture. The proposal has sparked discussions in literary and cultural circles, with many awaiting the government’s final decision on the matter.

Cloud Strength Influences Rainfall and Movement, IISc Study Finds

TPN Correspondent | Bengaluru

A study by researchers at the Indian Institute of Science (IISc) has revealed that the strength of cloud bands plays a crucial role in determining the movement of clouds and the intensity of monsoon rainfall. The research indicates that while winds and local convection remain important, the density of clouds originating from the oceans is a key factor influencing rainfall patterns.

Professor PN Vinayachandran, Chair of the Centre for Atmospheric and Oceanic Sciences (CAOS) and co-author of the study, stated that cloud band strength not only influences rainfall distribution but also affects the intensity of short bursts of rain. While the movement of clouds has remained relatively stable, the increased moisture-holding capacity of clouds due to climate change has resulted in heavier rainfall over the years. The study, titled “Equatorial Convection Controls Boreal Summer Intraseasonal Oscillations in the Present and Future Climates,” was published in the NPJ Climate and Atmospheric Science journal in February. It highlights the role of Boreal Summer Intraseasonal Oscillations (BSISO) in controlling wet and dry spells during the monsoon season. These oscillations help transport clouds from the equator to the Indian subcontinent, significantly influencing India’s monsoon patterns. According to the study, India receives approximately 80% of its annual rainfall between June and September. The wet



spells within this period are determined by the size and strength of cloud bands. Researchers found that if a cloud band originating at the equator is weak, it fails to propagate northward effectively, contradicting earlier assumptions that cloud bands always move toward the Indian subcontinent. Aditya Kottapalli, a PhD student at CAOS and co-author of the paper, explained, “We have shown that if the cloud band in the equator is weak to start with, then it cannot propagate northwards, unlike what previous literature stated.”

The IISc team identified gaps in current climate models and used advanced projections to better understand the factors driving BSISO movement. Their findings suggest that robust northward propagation of BSISO occurs only when the equatorial cloud band is strong. A strong cloud band enhances atmospheric moisture levels over the subcontinent, driven by intensified winds, and triggers more intense wet spells. “It was found that the air-sea interaction in the equatorial Indian Ocean played a major role in driving wet spells in India. This is likely to change in the future because the atmosphere would be warmer,” Vinayachandran added. The findings underscore the impact of climate change on monsoon rainfall, with increasing atmospheric temperatures expected to alter cloud dynamics and potentially intensify rainfall patterns. The study provides crucial insights for improving monsoon predictions and climate adaptation strategies in India.

Power Demand in Karnataka Crosses 18,000MW

TPN Correspondent | Bengaluru

Karnataka’s power demand has surged past 18,000MW in the past two months, with peak demand reaching 18,350MW in February and 18,395MW on March 7. Officials expect this upward trend to continue, touching 18,500MW in April as summer intensifies.

Karnataka Power Corporation Limited (KPCL) Managing Director Pankaj Kumar Pandey attributed the increase to a 15% rise in agricultural power consumption. He noted that due to heavy rainfall, farmers have opted for additional cropping, significantly impacting demand. Over the past few years, power consumption in the state has steadily risen. Maximum demand stood at 14,367MW in 2020-21, 14,818MW in 2021-22, 15,828MW in 2022-23, and 17,220MW in 2023-24. This April, the estimated demand is 18,294MW, compared to 16,985MW last year, while May’s projec-



tion is 17,122MW, up from 16,826MW in May 2024. To meet the rising demand, Karnataka has entered into power exchange agreements with Punjab and Uttar Pradesh, securing between 100MW and 1,400MW. Additional Chief Secretary (Energy) Gaurav Gupta stated that from March 1-15, the state procured 310MW from NTPC, with another 100MW added from March 15. Under the fuel security policy, PSCKL will receive 1,000MW of electricity monthly from other states until May. With rising temperatures and increased agricultural activities, Karnataka is gearing up to ensure uninterrupted power supply in the coming months.

HC Directs Advocates’ Associations to Implement Women’s Quota



TPN Correspondent | Bengaluru

The Karnataka High Court has ruled that all advocates’ associations in the state must implement the Supreme Court’s directive on reserving positions for women in Bar Association elections. Justice M Nagaprasanna delivered the order on Monday while allowing a petition filed by women members of the Tumakuru District Advocates’ Association. The petitioners had sought the creation of an additional post of joint secretary and two executive committee member positions reserved for women. They had earlier written to the Returning Officer and Association president on March 5, requesting 33% reservation for women in the association’s governing body. Referring to the Supreme Court’s recent order directing the Advocates’ Associa-

tion of Bengaluru (AAB) to earmark the post of treasurer for women candidates, the high court emphasized that all Bar Associations must follow the same precedent. It added that reserving posts for women should not be a temporary measure but a permanent practice to ensure fair representation. The court further stated that women lawyers cannot be denied their right to reservation, as Articles 14 and 15 of the Constitution guarantee equal rights and prohibit discrimination. It stressed that excluding women from reserved positions in Bar Association elections would be unconstitutional. Observing that providing equal representation to women is both a legal necessity and a moral obligation, the court ruled that all Bar Associations in Karnataka must adopt gender-inclusive policies in their electoral process.



‘Quota Should Be Based on Foundation of Social Justice’: HDK

TPN Correspondent | Bengaluru

Union Minister for Steel and Heavy Industries HD Kumaraswamy on Monday reaffirmed his party JDS’ stand on reservations, emphasizing that quota policies should be based on social justice rather than religious appeasement. He dismissed speculation about differences between his party and its alliance partner BJP over the issue of minority reservation in government contracts.

Speaking to reporters, Kumaraswamy clarified that all communities that are educationally, economically, and socially weaker must be given equal opportunities and benefits. “However, appeasement of one particular community while neglecting multiple others is unfair and unconstitutional. This is an insult to the Constitution,” he said.

He reiterated that the JDS has always stood for social justice and will continue to support policies that uplift weaker sections of society. “Reservation is

not religion-based. It stands on the foundation of social justice and must continue that way. This is JDS’ unwavering stand,” he asserted.

Kumaraswamy also criticized the Congress government, accusing it of distorting the principles of social justice for political gains.

He alleged that the ruling party was using reservation as a tool to mislead people and create division. “Congress is creating reservation anarchy across the country. They are manipulating the system for their own political benefits rather than ensuring fair distribution of opportunities,” he charged.

Despite differences in political ideologies, Kumaraswamy said the JDS and BJP have come together for pro-people struggles and will continue their partnership in the future. The statement comes amid ongoing debates over the implementation of internal reservations and quota policies in Karnataka.

Karnataka DyCM DKS’ Remark Reflects Congress Mindset: BJP

TPN Correspondent | Belagavi

BJP state president BY Vijayendra and Leader of Opposition in the Assembly R Ashoka on Monday criticized Karnataka Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar for his statement on granting 4% reservation to Muslims in contracts for government civil works. The BJP leaders alleged that Shivakumar’s remarks revealed Congress’ intention to amend the Constitution for minority appeasement.

Addressing reporters in Kalaburagi, Vijayendra accused the Congress leadership of attempting to modify constitutional provisions to benefit certain communities for political gains. “Chief Minister Siddaramaiah and Shivakumar are resorting to unconstitutional methods to appease the Muslim community,” he alleged.

R Ashoka further attacked Shivakumar, stating that his remark reflected the mindset of Congress leader Rahul Gandhi and CM Siddaramaiah. “Where are the so-called constitutionalists and Ambedkarites of @INCKarnataka hiding? KPCC President and DCM @DKShivakumar says ‘CONSTITUTION WILL CHANGE’,” Ashoka posted on X.

He went on to highlight that the Congress government, during its 55-year rule, made 77 amendments to the Constitu-

tion, including four controversial amendments during the Emergency. “The first amendment was introduced by Jawaharlal Nehru even before the first General Elections in 1952. Shame on Congress and its hypocrisy,” Ashoka added.

The BJP leader also claimed that the Congress’ move to provide 4% reservation to Muslims was purely driven by vote-bank politics and aimed at creating divisions between communities. He accused the Congress government of failing to address key concerns raised by BJP legislators during the recent Assembly session.

Meanwhile, JD(S) also came down heavily on Shivakumar, demanding that he step down as Deputy Chief Minister. The party, in a social media post, urged AICC president Mallikarjun Kharge to seek Shivakumar’s resignation if the Congress high command truly respected Dr. BR Ambedkar and the Constitution.

The controversy has sparked a political storm in Karnataka, with the BJP and JD(S) mounting pressure on the Congress government over its approach to reservations.

his stepdaughter and actress Ranya Rao. The findings of the report remain undisclosed.

The state government had ordered the inquiry on March 10 to assess whether Rao misused his protocol privileges to facilitate gold smuggling. Ranya is alleged to have bypassed

• **BJP’s R Ashoka claims Opposition leaders’ phones have been tapped for two years.**

• **Union Minister HDK had previously raised concerns over phone tapping.**

• **HM Dr G Parameshwara denies allegations, says no complaints received.**

TPN Correspondent | Bengaluru

Leader of Opposition in the Karnataka Assembly R Ashoka on Monday accused the Congress-led state government of tapping

BJP Accuses Govt of Tapping Opposition Leaders’ Phones

the phones of Opposition leaders for the past two years. He alleged that the government is using phone surveillance as a tool to target political opponents, including members of the ruling party.

Speaking to the media in Bengaluru, Ashoka stated, “All Opposition leaders’ phones are being tapped. There is no doubt. The government is involved in phone tapping. It is 100%.” He further claimed that even a ruling party legislator had confirmed his phone was tapped.

Responding to these allegations, Karnataka Home Minister Dr G Parameshwara dismissed the claims, stating that no official complaint had been received regarding phone tapping. “If complaints are filed, appropriate action will be taken. We have not given permis-



sion for any phone tapping,” he said.

Ashoka also targeted Cooperation Minister KN Rajanna and his son, alleging that they had discussed a honey trap case with Chief Minister Siddaramaiah’s approval. He further claimed that the con-

versation exposed the masterminds behind the controversy. Additionally, Ashoka remarked that AICC President Mallikarjun Kharge had recently held discussions with Siddaramaiah, indicating an ongoing power struggle within the Congress party.

Disha Salian Death Case

Aaditya Thackeray, Bollywood Actors, and Ex-Top Cop Named in New Complaint

TPN Correspondent | Mumbai

The father of late celebrity manager Disha Salian has filed a fresh complaint with the Mumbai Police Commissioner and Joint Commissioner, alleging the involvement of former Maharashtra minister Aaditya Thackeray, Bollywood actors, and ex-top police officials in her 2020 death.

According to advocate Nilesh Ojha, who filed the complaint on behalf of Salian’s father, Aaditya Thackeray played a role in the alleged cover-up of the case. The complaint also names former Mumbai Police Commissioner Parambir Singh, actors Dino Morea and Suraj Pancholi, as well as Sachin Vaze and Rhea Chakraborty,



accusing them of suppressing the truth.

“Today, we have submitted a written complaint at the CP office, which has been accepted by the Joint Commissioner of Crime. Aaditya Thackeray,

Dino Morea, Suraj Pancholi and his bodyguard, Parambir Singh, Sachin Vaze, and Rhea Chakraborty have been named in this FIR. Parambir Singh was the mastermind behind the cover-up, fabricating lies

in a press conference to shield Aaditya Thackeray. The FIR includes details from the NCB investigation, which allegedly links Thackeray to the drug trade,” Ojha told ANI.

The complaint calls for a fresh probe into Salian’s death and demands that Shiv Sena (UBT) leader Aaditya Thackeray be interrogated.

Meanwhile, regarding the CBI’s recent closure report on actor Sushant Singh Rajput’s death, Ojha asserted that it holds no legal weight and does not prevent further investigation. He emphasized that a court can still take cognizance of the matter, issue an arrest warrant, or order additional inquiry, similar to past cases like Aarushi Talwar’s.

Bengalureans Seek Practical Reforms in BBMP Budget, Oppose Costly Projects

TPN Correspondent | Bengaluru

Residents of Bengaluru have laid out their expectations for the upcoming Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike (BBMP) budget, urging authorities to scrap costly projects like tunnel roads and skydecks while prioritizing waste management, road repairs, and encroachment removal.

Kathyayini Chamaraj, Executive Trustee of CIVIC, highlighted the need for decentralized waste management instead of spending ₹500 crore annually on garbage transportation.

She suggested that every household in Bengaluru could be provided with compost bins for ₹1,200 each, while the remaining funds could be used to establish biomethanation plants in every ward. Providing free biogas to nearby residents, she said, could help ease opposition to such plants.

On tackling traffic conges-



tion, she proposed a two-way Bus Rapid Transport System (BRTS) on arterial roads to encourage public transport use. “If buses become the fastest mode of travel, more commuters will switch, saving the city ₹1 lakh crore on tunnel roads that won’t deliver results for at least a decade,” she stated. Additionally, she recommend-

ed revamping roadside drains with stormwater tunnels and adding percolation pits every 100 meters to recharge groundwater.

Sandeep Anirudhan, Convenor of Citizens’ Agenda for Bengaluru, stressed the importance of fixing potholes and removing encroachments. With demolition of illegal structures

stalled for over a year, activists are demanding a dedicated demolition team equipped with funds, manpower, equipment, and explosives to systematically clear unauthorized buildings and layouts. Residents hope BBMP will prioritize these practical and sustainable solutions over expensive infrastructure projects.

Gold Smuggling Probe : Gaurav Gupta Submits Report on DGP Rao’s Role

TPN Correspondent | Bengaluru

Additional Chief Secretary Gaurav Gupta has reportedly submitted his inquiry report to the Karnataka government regarding the involvement of DGP K Ramchandra Rao in the gold smuggling case linked to

his stepdaughter and actress Ranya Rao. The findings of the report remain undisclosed.

The state government had ordered the inquiry on March 10 to assess whether Rao misused his protocol privileges to facilitate gold smuggling. Ranya is alleged to have bypassed

security checks at airports using privileges granted to Rao. Following this, the government sent Rao, Managing Director of Karnataka State Police Housing and Infrastructure Development Corporation, on compulsory leave from March 15.

Meanwhile, the Karnata-

ka High Court has directed the Centre to take steps against media outlets broadcasting defamatory content about Ranya and her father. The family contends that some media houses have engaged in character assassination rather than objective reporting.

The case stems from an incident at Kempegowda International Airport, where authorities seized gold bars worth ₹12.56 crore from Ranya. A subsequent search at her residence reportedly uncovered gold jewelry worth ₹2.06 crore and cash amounting to ₹2.67

crore. On March 12, a civil court had already restrained the media from making statements against Ranya until June 2, a directive later reinforced by the High Court.

The court issued an emergent notice to media houses violating these orders, granting interim relief to Ranya by reinforcing restrictions on defamatory coverage.

“Bengaluru Police Bust Fake Marks Card Racket, Three Arrested”

TPN Correspondent | Bengaluru

Bengaluru police have busted a fake marks card racket, leading to the arrest of three individuals involved in producing and distributing fraudulent SSLC and PUC certificates. The arrested suspects have been identified as Prashanth Gundumi, 41, from Chaitanya Nagar in Dharwad; Monish KJ, 36, from Banashankari in Bengaluru; and Rajashekhar H, 41, from Vinayaka Nagar in Gadag. The accused charged between Rs 5,000 and Rs 10,000 for providing fake SSLC and PUC marks cards without requiring candidates to take any written examinations. Investigations have so far revealed that over 350 fake marks cards were issued.

Bengaluru Police Commissioner B Dayananda confirmed during a press conference that some individuals had used these fraudulent documents

to secure jobs in various government departments and even submitted them during passport verification processes. The Central Crime Branch (CCB) of Bengaluru initiated an investigation after receiving a complaint about a student who had received a PUC marks card a few days after enrolling in the Mercury Academy Distance Education, a learning center owned by Monish in Bengaluru. The marks card was printed on computers in Bengaluru and Dharwad and falsely issued under the name of the “Karnataka State Council of Intermediate and Higher Education,” a non-existent government entity. The case was officially registered on December 2, 2024, prompting a detailed investigation led by Deputy Commissioner of Police (Crime), Akshay M Hakay. On the same day, Monish was arrested, and during interrogation, he revealed that Prashanth and another individual, Darshan alias

Gopal Shedbalkar from Belagavi (who is currently at large), were responsible for procuring the fake marks cards. Monish admitted to having obtained fraudulent certificates for over 25 students. The police arrested Prashanth from Dharwad, who was running a learning center called Sunrise Career Academy in Bengaluru’s Srinagar area. During the investigation, authorities seized his phone, which contained over 300 soft copies of fake marks cards bearing the bogus issuing authority’s name. Further inquiries uncovered that the Transport Department and other government agencies had contacted the accused for document verification, to which they falsely affirmed the legitimacy of the certificates. Over 50 fake documents were recovered from Prashanth’s learning center. Additionally, Rajashekhar, who worked on a commission basis



at Prashanth’s learning center, was also arrested. Authorities found over 50 fake marks cards on his phone. It was revealed that he received Rs 250 per student from Prashanth for facili-

tating the fraud. The police are now conducting further investigations to track down other individuals possibly linked to the racket, including Darshan alias Gopal Shedbalkar, who

remains at large. The authorities have urged institutions and employers to be vigilant in verifying academic credentials to prevent similar frauds in the future.



Bengaluru Woman and Mother Arrested for Husband’s Murder

TPN Correspondent | Bengaluru

In a shocking murder case in northwest Bengaluru’s Soladevanahalli, the police have arrested a 19-year-old woman and her mother for allegedly killing her husband. The victim, Lokanath Singh, a 37-year-old realtor, was found murdered near an under-construction building in BGS Layout near Bilijaji village on March 22 around 5:30 pm. A passerby alerted the authorities, leading to an investigation.

The police arrested Singh’s wife, Yashasvini, and her mother, Hema Bhai, on Monday, charging them with his murder. According to investigators, Yashasvini had married Singh a few months ago against her parents’ wishes. However, she later became suspicious of her husband’s fidelity and discovered that he was having an affair. The couple had frequent arguments, lead-

ing Yashasvini to move back to her parents’ house. On March 22, Yashasvini contacted Singh and arranged to meet him near Bagalur. After a discussion, the couple drove to Soladevanahalli, where she allegedly offered him food laced with sleeping pills. As Singh became drowsy, Hema, who had been following them, joined her daughter in executing the attack. The police reported that the two women used a knife to slash the back of Singh’s neck, leading to his death before he could receive medical attention. The police charged Yashasvini and Hema Bhai under sections of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS) related to murder. The case highlights the fatal consequences of personal conflicts and has left the local community in shock. Authorities continue to gather evidence to build a strong case against the accused as they remain in custody.

TPN Correspondent | Bengaluru

Indian technology conglomerate Advance Mechanical Services Pvt Ltd (AMS-India) has signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with Israel’s Xtend AI to jointly design, develop, manufacture, and deploy autonomous robots in hospitals and clinics across Karnataka. This collaboration is part of a bilateral R&D and manufacturing initiative supported by the Government of Israel and the Karnataka Digital Economy Mission (KDEM). Highlighting the importance of the partnership, Karnataka’s IT-BT Minister Priyank Kharge stated, “This partnership with Xtend AI and AMS-India marks a significant step towards transforming Karnataka’s healthcare ecosystem through cutting-edge robotics. By leveraging technology and innovation, we are committed to enhancing healthcare accessibility, especially in underserved areas.”

The initiative is expected to bring advancements in medical robotics, improve healthcare service efficiency, and contribute to skill development in the sector. According to Kharge, this collaboration will create high-skilled jobs and strengthen Karnataka’s position as a leader in digital health and medical robotics.



CEO of Xtend AI Inc., emphasized the potential benefits of the company’s service robots and telemedicine kiosks, which can bridge gaps in healthcare services. These innovations are expected to enhance medical training, skill development, infection control, and pandemic preparedness. Additionally, the integration of smart urban infrastructure with autonomous healthcare solutions will further contribute to the state’s digital transformation. As part of the initiative, a delegation from AMS-India and Xtend AI met with Manoj Kumar H V, Director and Dean of Shri Atal Bihari Vajpayee Medical College and Research Institute. Discussions focused on launching a pilot project at Bowring Hos-

pital to streamline patient registration, pre-discharge procedures, and casualty management. The pilot aims to demonstrate how autonomous robots and telemedicine kiosks can improve hospital workflow and patient care.

This partnership aligns with Karnataka’s broader efforts to integrate artificial intelligence and robotics into its healthcare sector. With the state emerging as a hub for technology and innovation, the government continues to encourage collaborations that drive digital healthcare advancements. The use of AI-powered autonomous solutions is expected to revolutionize patient care, making medical services more accessible and efficient. In-

dustry experts have lauded the initiative, noting that such collaborations can significantly enhance healthcare delivery, particularly in rural and underserved regions. The deployment of AI-driven solutions is expected to reduce hospital workloads, increase operational efficiency, and improve overall patient outcomes. By combining AMS-India’s expertise in mechanical services with Xtend AI’s cutting-edge artificial intelligence capabilities, the partnership aims to set a benchmark for the future of digital healthcare in India. The MoU represents a significant step toward building a more resilient, technology-driven healthcare infrastructure in Karnataka.

Karnataka Sees Rise in Divorce Cases, Experts Urge Preventive Measures

TPN Correspondent | Bengaluru

Karnataka has experienced a significant surge in divorce cases since the COVID-19 pandemic, with experts attributing the rise to changing societal values, financial stress, and evolving family dynamics. Although the number of divorce filings peaked in 2022, there was a decline in the following years, only for cases to surge again in early 2025. Bengaluru is among the top three cities in India witnessing the highest divorce rates this year. During the budget session, Mandya MLC Madhu G Madegowda raised concerns over the trend,

prompting Law and Parliamentary Affairs Minister H.K. Patil to reveal that Karnataka recorded 66,863 divorce petitions in 2022, the highest in five years. The number of cases dropped to 41,234 in 2023 and 36,952 in 2024. However, the concern remains as 5,576 divorce applications were filed in just the first two months of 2025. Government data indicates that divorce cases rose steadily from 20,454 in 2020 to 24,141 in 2021 before the



major spike in 2022. Experts believe the pandemic disrupted relationships, with financial instability, job losses, and prolonged proximity during lockdowns exacerbating tensions

in many marriages. Professor Komala M from the University of Mysore noted that India’s divorce rate has doubled in the past two decades, with young adults aged 20-35 driving the trend. She explained that while court closures and economic hardships delayed separations during COVID-19, many couples acted on postponed decisions later, leading to the sharp rise in cases. Additionally, evolving relationship expectations and weakening family bonds have played a role in this phenomenon. Dr. Raveesh B.N., head of psychiatry at Mysuru Medical College, believes the shift toward materialistic love

over value-based relationships is straining marriages. He warned that misconceptions about family sacrifices compromising personal values could be damaging. Furthermore, the psychological impact on children caught in family disputes is another major concern, as it may lead to behavioral issues. Legal professionals have also pointed out the increasing burden on family courts. Advocate Prathapa Rudra Murthy highlighted the situation in Mysuru, where the number of family courts has doubled from two to four in just four years due to the rising caseload. He emphasized that most divorc-

es occur within the first five years of marriage, often due to ego clashes, lack of elder guidance, nuclear family stress, social media influences, and career pressures. Experts suggest that preventive measures could help mitigate the rising divorce rates. Strengthening family bonds, encouraging emotional intelligence training, and promoting premarital counseling are some of the proposed solutions. By fostering healthy relationships and providing adequate support systems, it may be possible to address this growing issue and reduce the strain on family courts across Karnataka.

Bengaluru Woman Alleges Cab Driver Extortio

TPN correspondent | Ban-
galore

A Bengaluru woman has alleged that a cab driver extorted ₹3,000 from her 18-year-old brother in the middle of the night and that the police refused to help him. The woman, Mrinali Priyadarshni, shared the ordeal on LinkedIn, expressing her anger and frustration over the incident.

According to Priyadarshni, her younger brother arrived at Bangalore International Airport around midnight and faced difficulties booking a cab through ride-hailing services like Ola, Uber, and Rapido. Left with no choice, he opted for an airport taxi to Yelahanka, agreeing to pay approximately ₹800 as displayed on the Rapido app. However, once inside

the cab, the driver reportedly started questioning him about whether he was a local and deliberately took a longer route, increasing the distance from 19 km to 24 km.

Things took a terrifying turn when the driver suddenly stopped the cab in an isolated area, stepped out, and started threatening him. Priyadarshni claimed that the driver demanded ₹3,000 and warned her brother that if he refused to pay, he would be taken to the driver's friends, who could harm him. The frightened teenager pleaded with the driver, asking why he was being forced to pay extra, to which the driver allegedly responded, "Because I want it. If you don't pay, I will take you to my friend's house, and then you'll

see what happens."

Desperate for help, the teen spotted two police officers patrolling on scooters and ran towards them, hoping for immediate assistance. However, the police reportedly refused to intervene. Instead of taking action against the driver, they told the teenager that he would have to go to the police station with the same driver who had just threatened him. Feeling unsafe, he requested to accompany the police officers instead, but they refused and left the scene. With no other option, the scared teenager gave in to the driver's demands and paid ₹3,000 before being dropped at his destination. Though physically unharmed, he was left shaken and disturbed by the experience.



Tamil Nadu Opposes Karnataka's Mekedatu Project, Plans Legal Action

TPN correspondent | Tamil-
nadu

Tamil Nadu has firmly stated that it will not allow Karnataka to proceed with the Mekedatu dam project and is prepared to take all necessary legal measures to stop its construction. This announcement comes shortly after Karnataka sought clearance from the Union government for the project.

Placing the policy note for 2025-2026 in the Assembly, Tamil Nadu Water Resources Minister Durai Murugan revealed that the Union government had informed the state that Karnataka had not yet submitted the final detailed project report. Despite this, Tamil Nadu remains strongly opposed to the reservoir's construction, arguing that it would obstruct the natural flow of water from Karnataka into Tamil Nadu.

Karnataka plans to build the Mekedatu reservoir with a storage capacity of 67.16 tmcft, primarily to provide drinking water to Bengaluru. However, Tamil Nadu contends that Karnataka cannot proceed with the project without its consent as the lower riparian state. The Tamil Nadu government has cited the final order of the Cauvery Water Disputes Tribunal and the Supreme Court



judgment as legal grounds to prevent Karnataka from going ahead with the dam.

Durai Murugan reiterated that Tamil Nadu is closely monitoring the situation and taking proactive measures to ensure Karnataka does not violate legal provisions. "The government of Tamil Nadu is taking all necessary action, including legal action, to prevent Karnataka from constructing a dam at Mekedatu or any other place in the Cauvery basin of Karnataka," he said.

This statement follows Karnataka Deputy Chief Minister D K Shivakumar's request last month to the Union Ministry of Jal Shakti, urging the Central Water Commission to clear the Mekedatu project as a priority. The Karnataka government argues that the reservoir is crucial for Bengaluru's water security, while Tamil Nadu insists it will disrupt water availabili-

ty for its farmers.

In the 2024-2025 irrigation year, Tamil Nadu released 159.184 tmcft of water from the Mettur dam for irrigation in the Cauvery delta region. The Tamil Nadu government has also raised concerns over industrial and sewage effluents from Bengaluru and nearby areas being discharged into the Cauvery and Pennaiyar rivers. The Tamil Nadu Pollution Control Board is actively monitoring the water quality near the inter-state boundary to assess pollution levels.

With tensions escalating, the dispute over the Mekedatu project is set to continue, with Tamil Nadu determined to block the project and Karnataka pushing for its approval. The legal and political battle between the two states remains unresolved, with both governments sticking to their positions on the contentious issue.

Ex-Bigg Boss Kannada Contestants Booked for Brandishing Fake Machete

TPN correspondent | Ban-
galore

Two former contestants of the Kannada reality show Bigg Boss have been booked by the Bengaluru police for displaying weapons on social media. The accused, Rajath Kishan and Vinay Gowda, both residents of Bengaluru, were arrested by the Basaveshwaranagar police after their video featuring a machete went viral.

According to the police, the video, which surfaced online, showed the two men holding a machete in a manner that appeared to threaten or intimidate. Concerned about the possible influence such visuals could have, law enforcement took action and issued notices to both individuals, summoning them for questioning.

However, during the investigation, it was discovered that the machete seen in the video was not a real weapon but a fibre replica. This revelation changed the course of legal proceedings, as possessing or displaying a fake weapon does not necessarily warrant judicial custody. DCP West Bengaluru confirmed this while speaking to ANI, stating that since the object was not a real weapon, the suspects could not be sent to judicial custody.

"The right steps were taken," the DCP assured, address-



ing concerns about how the case was handled. The police emphasized that while the intention behind the video is still being examined, legal action was necessary to discourage the promotion of violent imagery on public platforms.

Social media has increasingly become a space where influencers, celebrities, and public figures showcase dramatic or controversial content to attract attention. However, authorities have warned against the misuse of such platforms, stating that even staged violence or intimidation could lead to legal consequences.

Rajath Kishan and Vinay Gowda, both well-known in Kannada entertainment circles, have not issued any public statement regarding the case.

However, sources suggest that they have cooperated with the police investigation and clarified that the video was meant for entertainment purposes.

This incident has sparked discussions about the responsibilities of public figures and the impact of social media trends. While the use of props or staged weapons is common in movies and scripted content, legal experts argue that the context matters. If such videos create panic or promote a culture of violence, they may be subject to legal scrutiny.

For now, both Kishan and Gowda remain under police monitoring, and further legal proceedings will depend on whether their actions violated any specific laws related to public safety and order.

Chaos in Odisha Assembly as Congress MLAs Beat Gongs



TPN correspondent | Odis-
ha

The Odisha Assembly descended into chaos on Tuesday, March 25, 2025, as opposition MLAs from the Congress and Biju Janata Dal (BJD) staged protests against the BJP-led state government. The lawmakers played gongs, raised slogans, and disrupted proceedings, leading Speaker Surama Padhy to adjourn the

House twice until 12:01 pm. The opposition parties accused the BJP government of failing to ensure the safety of women and justice for Scheduled Tribes (ST), Scheduled Castes (SC), and Other Backward Classes (OBC). Congress and BJD members demanded immediate action on these issues, intensifying their protests during the Budget session. With tempers running high, the Assembly floor turned

into a battleground as MLAs refused to back down, making it impossible for the session to continue. The Speaker's repeated attempts to restore order failed, forcing the adjournment. The ruckus highlights the growing tensions between the ruling BJP and the opposition, with critical social and governance issues taking center stage in the state's political discourse.

Karnataka HC Halts Action Against Kumaraswamy in Land Case Till March 27

TPN correspondent | Kar-
nataka

The Karnataka High Court has directed the state government not to take any coercive action against former Chief Minister H D Kumaraswamy until March 27 in a land encroachment case. The ruling came after Kumaraswamy filed a petition challenging an eviction notice issued by the tahsildar regarding alleged clearings on government gomala (grazing) land.

Justice N S Sanjay Gowda, while hearing the case, passed the interim order restraining authorities from proceeding against Kumaraswamy until further legal examination. The eviction notice accused the former Chief Minister of encroaching on government land, prompting legal action. However, Kumaraswamy's legal team argued that the notice was issued without following due process and sought judicial relief.



The case has triggered a political stir in Karnataka, with Kumaraswamy alleging that the accusations are politically motivated. His supporters claim that such actions are part of an ongoing attempt to target opposition leaders. The government, on the other hand, maintains that the action is based on legal grounds and that all procedures have been followed.

With the High Court's directive in place, the state gov-

ernment is temporarily barred from taking any immediate steps against Kumaraswamy. The matter is set for further hearing, where the court will decide the legality of the eviction order. The case is being closely watched, as it could have significant political and legal implications in Karnataka. The ruling could influence similar cases related to alleged land encroachments and government action against political figures.

Trump’s New Social Media Policy

- **Indian Green Card Holders may have to disclose social media handles**
- **Policy extends existing visa scrutiny to permanent residency seekers**

THE POINT DESK

Green card holders in the United States may soon be required to submit their social media account details to the government under a new policy proposed by President Donald Trump's administration. While visa applicants applying from outside the country already need to provide their social media handles, this policy seeks to extend the requirement to those living in the US legally and applying for permanent residency or asylum.

The move has sparked concerns, particularly among Indian immigrants, many of whom are vocal about political issues in both India and the US. Critics argue that this increased scrutiny could discourage open expression on social media due to fear of government action. The policy could potentially be used to deny immigration benefits to individuals based on their online activity.

Purpose of the Policy

A notice issued by the US Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) on March 5 outlined the administration's rationale for the proposal. According to the notice, USCIS has identified a need to collect social media handles and platform names from applicants as part of national security and identity verification measures. The agency claims that monitoring social media activity is crucial for vetting individuals and ensuring public safety.

“The vetting of social media accounts is necessary for enhanced identity verification, vetting, and national security screening,” the document states. The government is currently



seeking public feedback on the policy before finalizing its implementation.

Impact on Green Card Holders

Currently, social media screening applies only to visa applicants outside the US. However, this proposed change will bring green card applicants and asylum seekers under the same level of scrutiny. Individuals already residing in the US on valid visas but seeking permanent residency will need to disclose their social media activities, allowing authorities to monitor their online presence. This could have significant implications, particularly for Indian immigrants who use social media to engage in discussions about US and Indian politics. Experts fear that this increased surveillance might push people to self-censor their views due to concerns about how their online activity could be interpreted by immigration officials.

Part of Trump’s Broader Immigration Crackdown

Since returning to the White House,

Trump has taken a hardline stance on immigration. On his first day back in office, he signed an executive order directing federal agencies to take aggressive action against illegal immigration, describing it as an “invasion” threatening national security. His administration has ramped up enforcement efforts, with federal law enforcement agencies conducting widespread raids and arrests.

Trump has frequently claimed that undocumented immigrants are responsible for crime and economic instability, although these assertions are not fully supported by government data. His administration’s immigration policies have drawn sharp criticism for being overly harsh and targeting legal residents as well. The proposed social media scrutiny policy is seen as an extension of this broader crackdown. While the government argues it is a necessary security measure, critics warn that it could be used to suppress free speech and silence dissent among immigrants hoping to settle permanently in the US.

From June, UPI and ATM to Enable Provident Fund Withdrawals

THE POINT DESK

In a major reform aimed at enhancing financial flexibility for India's workforce, the Employees' Provident Organisation (EPFO) will soon enable Provident Fund (PF) withdrawals through Unified Payments Interface (UPI) and ATMs. This significant initiative, approved by the Labour and Employment Ministry, is expected to be rolled out by the end of May or June this year, providing seamless and instant access to PF savings.

Sumita Dawra, Secretary of the Ministry of Labour and Employment, announced the development, stating that the integration of UPI with the EPFO system would allow members to instantly withdraw up to ₹1 lakh. Additionally, the introduction of ATM-based withdrawals will offer another convenient mode of accessing funds, reducing the dependency on traditional claim processes. With this upgrade, PF account holders will be able to check their balance directly via UPI, transfer funds to their preferred bank accounts, and execute instant withdrawals. This initiative is in line with Prime Minister Narendra Modi's vision of "ease of living," aiming to simplify social security procedures for employees and employers across the country.

Expanded Withdrawal Options for Members

The EPFO has expanded the scope of withdrawals beyond retirement benefits. Members can now withdraw funds for various purposes such as housing, education, and marriage, in addition to the existing provisions for medical emergencies. These changes provide much-needed financial flexibility, allowing workers to access their hard-earned savings when re-



quired without lengthy bureaucratic hurdles.

“The EPFO has significantly strengthened its digital infrastructure, integrating over 120 databases to streamline the withdrawal process. As a result, the claim processing time has been reduced to just three days, with 95% of claims now being processed automatically,” Dawra said. She further added that the government is actively working to further simplify the withdrawal process, ensuring that members receive their funds with minimal delay. The integration of digital payment platforms like UPI will eliminate unnecessary paperwork and speed up transactions, making EPFO services more accessible to millions of contributors.

Improved Pension Withdrawal System

Apart from PF withdrawals, pensioners have also benefited from recent reforms introduced by the EPFO. Since December, nearly 78 lakh pensioners have gained increased flexibility in accessing their funds. Previously, pension withdrawals were restricted to select bank branches, causing inconvenience to many retirees. However, with the latest reforms, pensioners can now withdraw their funds from any bank branch across the country, removing geographical

restrictions. These measures are part of the government's broader agenda to modernize social security mechanisms and improve the financial convenience of employees and pensioners alike. The reforms also reflect the government's commitment to leveraging digital technology to enhance service delivery in the financial sector.

Massive Scale and Growing Membership

The scale of EPFO's operations highlights the importance of these reforms. With over 7.5 crore active members, the organization continues to expand, adding 10-12 lakh new members every month. Operating through 147 regional offices across India, the EPFO is a vital institution ensuring financial security for millions of employees. Implementing UPI and ATM-based withdrawals will further strengthen the EPFO's role in providing accessible and efficient financial services to India's workforce. The move also aligns with India's push toward digital financial inclusion, reinforcing the country's status as a global leader in digital payments.

A Landmark in Digital Financial Transformation

The introduction of UPI and ATM-based PF withdrawals marks a historic moment in India's financial landscape. With instant withdrawals, reduced processing time, and increased accessibility, the initiative will significantly improve the ease of managing PF accounts. For employees across industries, this reform will provide a seamless and efficient way to access their savings without the delays associated with traditional banking channels.



Is the Government Considering Bringing Back NJAC?

TPN | G Avinash

Hyderabad, March 26: The controversy surrounding Delhi High Court Judge Justice Yashwant Varma and the discovery of burnt cash at his residence has brought the issue of judicial appointments and accountability back into focus. While the immediate fallout centers around the credibility of Justice Varma and his involvement, the bigger picture is about the integrity and transparency of India's judicial system. This raises an important question: is it time for the government to revive the National Judicial Appointments Commission (NJAC) and replace the existing collegium system?

The Background of NJAC vs Collegium

In 2015, the Supreme Court struck down the National Judicial Appointments Commission (NJAC) Act, which sought to replace the collegium system of judicial appointments with a body consisting of both judiciary and executive representatives. The Court argued that NJAC violated the Constitution's basic structure and undermined judicial independence. This ruling entrenched the collegium system, in which a group of senior judges, without any direct electoral mandate, decides the appointment of judges to the highest courts in the country. The NJAC, introduced through the 99th Constitutional Amendment, was designed to ensure a balanced, transparent, and democratic approach to judicial appointments. The idea was to bring accountability and prevent allegations of nepotism or favoritism within the judiciary. However, the Supreme Court's verdict left the power of judicial appointments entirely within the hands of the judiciary, effectively sidelining the executive's role in the process.

Is the Collegium System Truly Democratic?

The collegium system, while championed for its focus on judicial independence, also raises critical concerns about accountability. The primary issue lies in the fact that the people, through their elected representatives, do not have a say in selecting the judges who will interpret laws, make decisions on public policies, and influence governance. The judiciary's actions have a profound impact on the lives of ordinary citizens, yet those sitting in judgment are not directly accountable to the public.

The collegium system, without any checks from the legislative or executive branches, creates a scenario where a group of unelected judges appoints their peers. This setup not only perpetuates an insular and self-reinforcing system, but it also makes it difficult to address concerns about transparency and fairness. As we've seen in the case of Justice Varma, the discovery of cash raises questions about the accountability of judges in the absence of external scrutiny or oversight.

The Case for Bringing Back NJAC

The case for bringing back the NJAC is compelling, particularly in light of recent events. If we look at the Justice Varma controversy, the judicial system has once again shown the limitations of an unaccountable body of unelected officials. The centre's decision to convene an all-party meeting on this issue reflects growing concerns about transparency and judicial oversight, but the root issue remains: the judiciary operates in a vacuum, with limited external accountability. A reformed NJAC could serve as a safeguard against the kind of problems that have plagued the collegium system. A body that includes both judiciary and executive members, with clear procedures for selection and monitoring, would ensure more public transparency and offer a mechanism to address grievances. Elected representatives, accountable to the people, could play a role in judicial appointments, creating a more democratic system in which the judiciary remains independent but not entirely isolated.

A System of Balance and Accountability

In a democracy, elected representatives should have a role in law-making, policy decisions, and, to some extent, judicial appointments. A system that prioritizes judicial independence must still strike a balance with accountability. The judicial branch must not be an isolated fortress immune to oversight and scrutiny. The NJAC, with proper checks and balances, offers a solution to this dilemma, ensuring the judiciary can function without fear or favor but within the boundaries of the democratic system.

India's legal system must evolve with the times, and reviving a form of NJAC could be the way forward. It would empower the people through their representatives, ensuring that the judiciary remains independent yet accountable. The current status quo—where a group of unelected judges governs judicial appointments—no longer seems sustainable in a democratic framework that values transparency and fairness.

The recent events surrounding Justice Varma and the public outcry over the discovery of cash raise critical questions about judicial accountability. The government's engagement with political parties on the issue indicates a growing concern for a system that can balance judicial independence with transparency and public trust. If the judiciary is to retain its credibility, it must operate within a framework that includes checks and balances, and that framework may very well involve reviving the National Judicial Appointments Commission (NJAC). It is time to reconsider the collegium system and bring accountability into the heart of the judiciary.

New Income Tax Bill to Be Discussed in Monsoon Session: Nirmala Sitharaman



Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman announced on Tuesday that the new Income Tax Bill will be taken up for discussion in the monsoon session of Parliament. The bill, which was introduced in the Lok Sabha on February 13, is currently under review by the Select Committee. While addressing discussions on the Finance Bill 2025 in the Lok Sabha, Sitharaman confirmed that the Select Committee has been directed to submit its report by the first day of the upcoming session. "...We will take it (new income tax bill) up in the monsoon session," she stated. The monsoon session of Parliament typically begins in July and continues through August. The new Income Tax Bill aims to bring about a simplified tax structure by reducing complexities and eliminating ambiguities in the existing law. The Income Tax Department previously

highlighted that the revised legislation seeks to provide tax certainty while minimizing litigation and the scope for fresh interpretations. One of the major highlights of the proposed bill is its concise structure compared to the existing Income Tax Act of 1961. The new bill contains 2.6 lakh words, significantly less than the 5.12 lakh words in the current Act. Additionally, it has 536 sections, down from the 819 effective sections in the current law. The number of chapters has also been streamlined from 47 to 23. The revised legislation introduces 57 tables, an increase from the 18 found in the existing Act, but has removed 1,200 provisos and 900 explanatory notes, thereby simplifying legal provisions. These changes aim to create a more comprehensible and user-friendly tax regime for taxpayers and tax professionals alike. The move to re-

vamp the Income Tax Act is seen as a significant step in modernizing India's tax framework, ensuring greater efficiency and transparency in tax administration. The government hopes that the new law will reduce tax disputes and enhance compliance by making the provisions clearer and more structured. The Select Committee's review and recommendations will be crucial in shaping the final version of the bill before its discussion in Parliament. With its reduced complexity and restructured format, the proposed Income Tax Bill 2025 is expected to be a landmark reform in India's taxation system. Stakeholders, including businesses and tax professionals, are keenly watching the developments surrounding the bill, as its implementation could have a significant impact on the country's economic and taxation landscape.



Separatism in Kashmir Ends as Two Hurriyat Groups Sever Ties

- Hurriyat factions sever separatist ties.
- Amit Shah calls it historic.
- Govt policies credited for shift.
- Article 370 abrogation played role.
- Kashmir moving toward unity, peace.

Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Tuesday announced a significant political shift in Jammu and Kashmir, stating that two factions of the separatist Hurriyat Conference have officially severed ties with separatism. He asserted that this move is a testament to the success of the Modi government's policies aimed at fostering national unity and eliminating separatist tendencies in the region. Hurriyat Conference, an amalgamation of various separatist groups in Jammu and Kashmir, has played a pivotal role in advocating for the region's separation from India for decades. However, recent developments indicate a departure from this ideology, marking what Shah described as a "historic victory" for Bharat's unity. Taking to social media platform 'X', Shah welcomed the decision and urged other separatist groups to follow suit, emphasizing that abandoning separatism is the only path toward peace, development, and progress. "Two organizations associated with the Hurriyat have announced the severing of all ties with separatism. I welcome this step towards strengthening Bharat's unity and urge all such groups to come forward and shed separatism once and for all," Shah posted. The Home Minister further highlighted that the government's strategic policies, including the abrogation of Article 370, development initiatives, and stringent security measures, have played a crucial role in dismantling separatist sentiments in the valley. He credited Prime Minister Narendra Modi's leadership for fostering a sense of belonging and integration among the people of Jammu and Kashmir. Shah reiterated that the government remains committed to transforming the region into a peaceful, developed, and unified part of India. He stated that the latest move by the Hurriyat factions is proof that separatist ideology is losing its ground and that more groups are realizing the benefits of aligning with the national mainstream. The announcement comes in the wake of a series of measures undertaken by the central government to curb separatist activities in Jammu and Kashmir. Over the past few years, authorities have cracked down on terror financing, taken legal action against separatist leaders, and promoted economic development to ensure stability in the region. With this latest development, political analysts believe that the separatist movement in Kashmir has suffered a significant blow. The disintegration of Hurriyat factions from their separatist stance signals a new chapter in the region's history, aligning with the Modi government's broader vision of a peaceful and prosperous Jammu and Kashmir within a unified Bharat.

"India, China Discuss LAC, Strengthen Ties"

India and China held a high-level meeting in Beijing today, marking the 33rd session of the Working Mechanism for Consultation and Coordination (WMCC) on India-China Border Affairs. The discussions primarily focused on reviewing the situation along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) and exploring ways to improve diplomatic and military coordination. Both sides emphasized the importance of maintaining stability and ensuring the early resumption of cross-border cooperation, including trans-border river management and the Kailash-Manasarovar Yatra. The Indian delegation was led by Gourangalal Das, Joint Secretary (East Asia) in the Ministry of External Affairs, while the Chinese delegation was headed by Hong Liang, Director General of the Boundary and Oceanic Affairs Department of the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The meeting was described as "positive and constructive," with both nations reaffirming their commitment to strengthening diplomatic channels and enhancing mechanisms for border management. A key outcome was the agreement to make "substantial preparations" for the next meeting of the Special Representatives (SRs) on the boundary question, which is scheduled to take place in Delhi later this year. The Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) stated that the discussions covered various proposals and measures aimed at implementing the decisions made during the 23rd meeting of the Special Representatives on the India-China boundary issue, which was held in Beijing in December 2024. Both nations acknowledged the need to advance effective border management while preventing escalations along the LAC. Additionally, they agreed to strengthen existing diplomatic and military mechanisms to ensure quick resolution of any disputes. Following the meeting, Gourangalal Das paid a courtesy visit to China's Assistant Foreign Minister, Hong Lei, signaling continued diplomatic engagement between the two nations. The discussions are part of broader efforts to return to a pre-2020 status quo along the LAC and improve bilateral ties. This initiative gained momentum after Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Chinese President Xi Jinping met in October 2024 on the sidelines of the BRICS Summit in Kazan, Russia. He stressed the need to rebuild trust and maintain a constructive relationship. Modi also acknowledged the ancient civilizational ties between India and China, emphasizing that the two nations had historically coexisted peacefully for millennia. He advocated for a spirit of healthy competition rather than conflict. China responded positively to Modi's remarks, with the Chinese Foreign Ministry stating that cooperation between the two nations, referred to as a "dragon-elephant dance," was the best path forward. The spokesperson reiterated that in over 2,000 years of interaction, India and China had maintained friendly exchanges and contributed to human progress. The latest diplomatic engagements indicate a continued effort to resolve border tensions and strengthen bilateral cooperation.

Top Maoist with ₹25 Lakh Bounty Killed in Chhattisgarh Encounter"

- Maoist leader killed in encounter.
- ₹25 lakh bounty on head.
- Security forces intensify operations.
- 116 Maoists killed this year.
- Government vows Maoist-free India.

A Maoist carrying a reward of ₹25 lakh on his head was among three insurgents killed in an encounter with security forces in Chhattisgarh's Dantewada district on Tuesday, police said. The gunfight took place at around 8 am in a dense forest area along the border of Dantewada and Bijapur districts. Security personnel were conducting an anti-Maoist operation based on intelligence reports about Maoist presence in the forests surrounding Girsapara, Nelgoda, Bodga, and Ikeli villages under the Geedam police station limits, according to Superintendent of Police Gaurav Rai. The operation involved personnel from the District Reserve Guard (DRG) and Bastar Fighters, both special units of the Chhattisgarh state police, known for their expertise in counter-insurgency operations. As the security forces reached the targeted location, a fierce exchange of fire broke out between the two sides. After the gunfight subsided, the security personnel recovered the bodies of three male Maoists from the site, along with an Insas rifle, a .303 rifle, explosive materials, and other items used in their daily activities. Among the three slain Mao-



ists, one was identified as Sudhir, also known as Sudhakar or Murlu, a resident of Warangal in Telangana. He was an active member of the Dandakaranya Special Zonal Committee, the most powerful faction of Maoists operating in the region. Authorities had placed a bounty of ₹25 lakh on his head due to his involvement in multiple attacks on security forces and civilians. The identities of the other two deceased Maoists are yet to be confirmed, officials said, adding that search operations are still ongoing in the area to trace any remaining insurgents or hidden weapon caches. Chhattisgarh, particularly the Bastar division, has been a stronghold of Maoist insurgents for decades. However, security forces have intensified their operations in recent years, leading to a significant number of encounters and Maoist casualties. Just a few days prior, on March 20, security forces carried out two major operations in Bijapur and Kanker districts, killing 30 Maoists.. Union Home Minister Amit

Shah recently reaffirmed the government's aggressive stance against Maoist insurgency, stating that the Narendra Modi-led administration is implementing a "zero-tolerance policy" against Maoists who refuse to surrender despite multiple opportunities and rehabilitation offers. He asserted that the government is committed to eradicating Maoism from the country and aims to make India completely Maoist-free by March 31, 2026. The growing success of anti-Maoist operations in Chhattisgarh reflects a shift in the balance of power in favor of security forces. The use of specialized units like the DRG and Bastar Fighters, combined with improved intelligence and coordination, has significantly weakened Maoist influence in the region. However, sporadic attacks by Maoists indicate that the insurgency is not completely dismantled. Authorities remain vigilant, continuing operations to eliminate the remaining Maoist factions and restore lasting peace in the region.



India may interfere in General Election on April 28: Canada

TPN Correspondent | Ottawa

Canada's national security agency has raised concerns over possible foreign interference in the upcoming general election, scheduled for April 28, 2025. According to the Canadian Security Intelligence Service (CSIS), both China and India, alongside Russia and Pakistan, are likely to attempt to influence the election.

The warning comes amid growing tensions between Ottawa and both Beijing and New Delhi. Vanessa Lloyd, deputy director of operations at CSIS, highlighted that hostile state actors are increasingly utilizing advanced tools like artificial intelligence to meddle in democratic processes. "The People's Republic of China is highly likely to use AI-enabled tools to attempt interference in Canada's election," Lloyd stated at a press conference.

Canada's relations with both India and China have been strained in recent years. Beijing retaliated against Canada's tariffs on Chinese electric vehicles and steel by imposing tariffs on over \$2.6 billion worth of Canadian agricultural and food products. Additionally, Canada condemned China's execution of four Canadian citizens on drug smuggling charges.

Relations with India have also deteriorated, with Canada expelling six Indian diplomats last year, including the head of mission, after allegations of involvement in a plot against Sikh separatists in Canada.

Despite previous concerns over election interference during the 2019 and 2021 federal elections, an official investigation concluded that the results were not affected by foreign influence. However, the CSIS emphasized that while it may be challenging to directly link foreign interference activities to electoral outcomes, such actions could undermine public confidence in Canada's democratic systems.

Lloyd also cautioned that Russia and Pakistan have the potential to engage in interference activities, further complicating Canada's efforts to safeguard its elections.

The CSIS comments serve as a reminder of the growing risks posed by foreign interference in democratic processes and the increasing use of advanced technology by hostile actors.

Starlink Poised for Major Expansion in India, Boosting Ambitions for Global Growth

For Musk's Starlink, India Approval Could Unlock Emerging Markets

TPN Correspondent | Bengaluru

As Starlink nears regulatory approval for satellite broadband services in India, analysts believe this move could significantly boost the company's global expansion, especially in emerging markets. A successful entry into India could potentially add \$25 billion in revenue, reshaping the country's satellite broadband industry and attracting interest from other developing markets.

However, despite the promising outlook, Starlink faces legal hurdles and stiff competition from players like Eutelsat and China's SpaceSail, which is expanding into Brazil, Malaysia, and Kazakhstan. Additionally, SpaceX contends that U.S. regulations place it at a disadvantage compared to foreign rivals.

Starlink, owned by Elon Musk's SpaceX, has been waiting for licenses to operate commercially in India since 2022. The company has been embroiled in a regulatory standoff over spectrum allocation, with debates on whether India should auction satellite broadband spectrum, benefiting telecom giants like Mukesh Ambani's Reliance Jio



and Sunil Mittal's Bharti Airtel, or allocate it administratively to newer players like Starlink. In October, India opted for administrative allocation, giving Starlink a potential edge.

This month, both Reliance Jio and Bharti Airtel signed separate agreements with SpaceX, signaling that regulatory challenges may soon be resolved. Analysts suggest this development indicates that Starlink is closer to entering the Indian market.

The entry into India is a strategic move for Starlink, which operates in over 120 markets globally. Goldman Sachs forecasts a significant drop in

prices for low Earth orbit (LEO) broadband services, projecting a reduction from \$148 per month in 2023 to just \$16 by 2035. With India being one of the largest potential markets, analysts expect Starlink to add 3 million global subscribers in 2025, with India being the leading contributor.

Starlink's pricing strategy will be crucial for success, with some experts predicting competitive plans starting at \$15 per month. As the satellite internet market in India grows, Starlink's entry will offer employment opportunities and fuel competition within the sector, enhancing India's global space industry competitiveness.

Mamata Banerjee's "Warm-Up" Jog in Saree and Slippers at London's Hyde Park

TPN Correspondent | Islamabad

Mamata Banerjee's "Warm-Up" Jog in Saree and Slippers at London's Hyde Park

West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee was recently spotted jogging in London's Hyde Park, dressed in her signature white saree with a green border and white slippers, showcasing her usual simplicity. The "warm-up" was part of her visit to the UK, where she was seen strolling around from Buckingham Palace to Hyde Park, soaking in the city's charm. In addition to her saree and slippers, Ms. Banerjee wore a black cardigan and shawl to stay warm amidst London's chilly weather.

Trinamool Congress (TMC) leader Kunal Ghosh shared pictures and videos from the occasion, including a post on X (formerly Twitter), where he quoted the Chief Minister saying, "Today it is not a walk, but a warm-up." Ms. Banerjee was also seen engaging in some "back-walking"

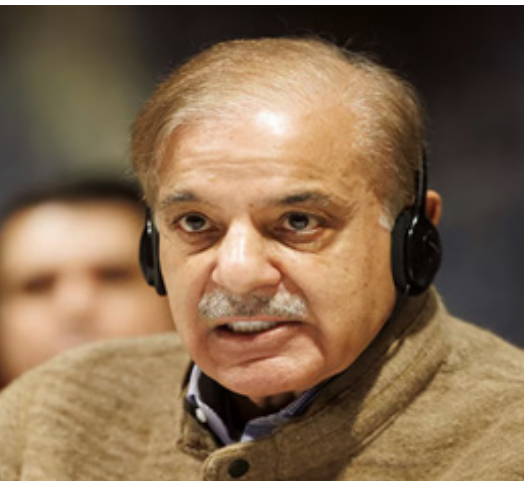


and clapping as part of her fitness routine. This moment resonated with her health-conscious approach, having previously jogged in a saree and slippers during her official visit to Spain in 2023. Her message, "Stay fit, stay healthy," continues to inspire others to adopt a fitness-friendly lifestyle.

Mamata Banerjee arrived in London on Sunday for an official visit, which aims to strengthen Bengal's historical and cultural ties with Britain. Reflecting on the shared history of both regions, she remarked, "As we landed in London yesterday, we

stepped into a city that, much like Kolkata, carries the weight of its past while embracing the dynamism of the present." She highlighted the enduring relationship between Bengal and Britain, rooted in history, culture, and commerce.

The Chief Minister's visit underscores her desire to deepen Bengal's engagement with Britain, reinforcing the longstanding bond between the two regions. Her "warm-up" in Hyde Park, however, offered a lighter moment during her diplomatic trip, blending fitness with international diplomacy.



Canada Cites "India's Growing Global Influence" In Allegation Against Pak

TPN Correspondent | New Delhi

Canada has raised concerns over potential foreign interference in its upcoming April 28 general election, warning that Pakistan, India, China, and Russia could be involved in attempts to sway the democratic process. Vanessa Lloyd, Deputy Director of Operations at the Canadian Security Intelligence Service (CSIS), highlighted that Pakistan may conduct interference activities to counter India's growing global influence. She explained that Pakistan's actions could align with its strategic aims to maintain political and economic stability while curbing India's rise on the world stage.

Lloyd also addressed the possibility of Indian interference, stating that the Indian government has both the intent and capability to influence Canadian communities and the election process. This builds on similar allegations made last year, which India firmly rejected.

In a 2024 report, CSIS detailed "clandestine" foreign interference by both India and Pakistan during Canada's 2021 and 2019 general elections. The agency accused India of targeting electoral districts with large Indian-origin populations, particularly those sympathetic to the Khalistani movement, and alleged the use of illicit financial support to sway candidates. Similarly, it claimed that Pakistan tried to influence federal politics in 2019 to further its interests.

Tensions between India and Canada have escalated in recent months, particularly following allegations from former Prime Minister Justin Trudeau about India's involvement in the killing of Khalistani terrorist Hardeep Singh Nijjar, which India denied as "absurd."

In addition to Pakistan and India, Canada's security agency also warned that China and Russia might attempt to interfere in the election. Lloyd stated that China could use AI-enabled tools and social media to target Chinese-Canadian communities with favorable narratives. Russia, according to the report, may amplify Kremlin talking points via social media and news websites, attempting to manipulate information to influence Canadian voters.

The Canadian government is committed to safeguarding its electoral process and ensuring that foreign interference does not disrupt its democracy.

Malaria Confirmed as Cause of Fatal Outbreak in Northwest DR Congo

TPN Correspondent | Kinshasa

Late on Monday, the National Public Health Institute (INSP) of the Democratic Republic of Congo confirmed that an outbreak in the northwest of the country, which claimed the lives of more than 50 people, was caused by malaria. The illness, which primarily affected Equateur province, resulted in 943 reported cases and 52 deaths at the beginning of the year.

The symptoms, which included fever, fatigue, vomiting, and weight loss, initially led health officials to suspect food poisoning or malaria as the potential cause. However, following laboratory tests on samples from affected individuals, malaria was de-

finitively identified as the culprit.

Christian Ngandu, coordinator of the INSP, confirmed the results of the tests over the phone, reassuring the public that the outbreak was now understood. Despite the confirmation, the health institute continues to await the results of additional tests on water, drinks, and food samples sent abroad to further investigate whether there was any potential contamination involved.

This recent outbreak follows a similar occurrence in December, where an unknown illness initially puzzled health authorities before being traced back to malaria. These outbreaks have prompted increased vigi-

lance and ongoing monitoring in the region.

Health officials have stressed the importance of public awareness regarding the symptoms and prevention of malaria, which is a major health concern in many parts of sub-Saharan Africa. With the confirmation of malaria as the cause, authorities are focusing on controlling the spread of the disease and providing support to affected communities.

As the investigation continues, the INSP has urged the public to seek medical help promptly if they experience symptoms, especially in malaria-prone areas, to prevent further fatalities.



Markets Take a Breather After Six-Day Surge; Profit Booking and Global Factors Limit Gains



The six-day streak of gains came to an end. The bull run slowed down today. Domestic stock markets ended flat on Tuesday. The indices, which had aggressively reached intraday highs within an hour of opening, then suddenly collapsed. They reached their lowest from their daily highs. The reasons for this are Trump's announcement of a 25% tax on countries buying oil from Venezuela, negative signals from global markets, and investors taking profit booking. Overall, the Nifty settled at 23,668 and the Sensex at 78,017. There is a strong resistance at the crucial 23,600 level for the Nifty. It is important for the index to consolidate at this level for a few sessions.

The BSE Sensex, which closed at 77,984 in the previous session, opened at 78,296 on Tuesday. It touched an intraday low of 77,745. It reached an intraday high of 78,741. It ended at 78,017, up 32 points. The NSE Nifty, which opened at 23,751, touched a low of 23,601 and a high of 23,869. It closed at 23,668, up 10 points. The Nifty Bank lost 97 points and settled at 51,607.

In the Nifty50, 19 companies gained and 30 lost. Consumer, PSU bank, media, realty, metal, energy, oil, PSE, pharma, auto, commodities stocks rose. Ultratech Sem, Trent, Bajaj Finserv, Grasim, Infy were the top gainers. IndusInd Bank, Dr. Reddy's, Adani Enterprises, CoalIndia, Adani Ports were the biggest losers.

Market breadth turned in favor of sellers on the NSE today. Of the 2998 stocks traded, 674 gained. A total of 2258 lost. 30 stocks hit 52-week highs and 96 stocks hit 52-week lows. 105 stocks crossed the upper circuit and 157 stocks crossed the lower circuit.

Rupee weakened by 13 paise to settle at

85.76 against the dollar. Wari Energies to set up additional module manufacturing unit at Gujarat plant. Punjab and Sindh Bank shares rose 6% after QIP price was announced at 40.38. UBS has given a buy rating to Dalmia Bharat with a target price of Rs 2100. Jefferies has maintained a buy rating, reducing the Infy target from Rs 2150 to Rs 1835. S&P has reduced India's GDP forecast for FY26 to 6.5%. Motilal Oswal has given a buy rating to Suzlon Energy with a target price of Rs 70. CLSA expects Bandhan Bank shares to rise by up to 50%. Bansal Wire Industries signs a MoU with the Steel Ministry. IR-DAI finds some irregularities in StarHealth Insurance settlement practices. 10 lakh shares changed hands in Delhivari. Nee-la Infra wins an order worth Rs 63 crore. Bazel Projects wins an EPC order worth Rs 100-200 crore.

UltraTech Cement Ltd.



UltraTech Cement is India's largest cement manufacturer, with a dominant market presence. The company has consistently expanded its production capacity and is investing in green energy initiatives. Strong demand from the housing and infrastructure sectors, coupled with cost-efficiency measures, supports its long-term growth. Despite raw material cost fluctuations, UltraTech remains a resilient player due to its pricing power and extensive distribution network.

Grasim Industries Ltd.

A flagship of the Aditya Birla Group, Grasim Industries operates in diversified sectors, including cement (via UltraTech),



chemicals, and textiles. The company is venturing into the paints business, which could drive future revenue growth. Strong balance sheets, expansion plans, and steady performance in core businesses make Grasim an attractive long-term investment.

Coforge Ltd.

Coforge, a mid-cap IT services company, has grown significantly with a strong presence in digital transformation, cloud



computing, and automation. With a focus on key sectors such as banking, insurance, and travel, the company is well-positioned to capitalize on IT spending trends. Strategic acquisitions and high client retention add to its long-term potential.

Polycab India Ltd.

Polycab is India's leading manufacturer of



wires, cables, and electrical goods. With the push towards electrification, infrastructure development, and increasing consumer demand for premium electrical products, Polycab has strong growth prospects. Its expansion into FMEG (Fast Moving Electrical Goods) and rising exports further strengthen its outlook.

JB Chemicals & Pharmaceuticals Ltd.

JB Chemicals is a growing player in the Indian pharmaceutical space with a strong portfolio in cardiovascular, gastrointestinal, and dermatology segments. The company's expansion into the US and emerging markets, coupled with increasing domestic demand, supports its long-term prospects. Cost efficiencies and new product launches add to its growth momentum.



New Income Tax Bill To Be Introduced In Monsoon Session: Nirmala Sitharaman

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman announced on Tuesday that the new Income Tax Bill will be taken up for discussion during the upcoming monsoon session of Parliament. While responding to the debate on the Finance Bill 2025 in the Lok Sabha, Sitharaman clarified that the bill, which was introduced in the House on February 13, is currently under review by the Select Committee. The committee is expected to submit its report by the first day of the next parliamentary session.

"The new income tax bill will be taken up in the monsoon session," said Sitharaman. The monsoon session is typically held from July to August, marking the period when the government expects to finalize discussions on the bill.

The proposed Income Tax Bill aims to simplify the country's taxation system. The new bill, which is significantly shorter than the current 1961 Income Tax Act, seeks to reduce the complexity of tax laws and improve tax certainty. The bill has been designed to minimize the scope for litigation and reinterpretation, a key objective for streamlining the tax process.

The new bill is approximately half the size of the existing law, with a word count of 2.6 lakh compared to 5.12 lakh in the current Act. The number of sections in the bill has also been reduced, from 819 to 536. Additionally, the number of chapters has been halved from 47 to 23, while the number of tables has increased to 57 from the 18 present in the existing Act. The new bill has also removed over 1,200 provisos and 900 explanations, further simplifying the language and structure of tax regulations.

This overhaul of the Income Tax Act is seen as a significant step towards creating a more transparent and efficient taxation system in India, ensuring easier compliance and reducing unnecessary litigation.



India slaps Samsung with tax demand of ₹5,156 crore for telecom imports

India has directed Samsung and its executives to pay \$601 million in back taxes and penalties for allegedly evading tariffs on the import of key telecom equipment. This marks one of the largest tax demands in recent years, according to a government order.

The \$601 million demand represents a significant portion of Samsung's net profit in India for the previous year, which was reported at \$955 million. As one of the largest players in India's consumer electronics and smartphone market, the company's operations are under close scrutiny from local tax authorities.

Samsung has the option to challenge the tax demand through a tax tribunal or in the courts. The case is related to allegations that the company avoided paying the necessary import tariffs on certain telecoms equipment. This tax dispute could have significant financial implications for the company, considering the substantial penalty involved.

As the dispute unfolds, Samsung will likely consider its legal options while continuing to operate in one of the world's largest markets for consumer electronics. The outcome of this case could set a precedent for other multinational corporations operating in India and could influence future tax regulations and enforcement practices.



S&P Cuts India's GDP Growth Forecast to 6.5% for FY 2025-26



S&P Global Ratings has revised India's GDP growth forecast for the fiscal year 2025-26, reducing it to 6.5%, down from an earlier projection of 6.7%. The global credit rating agency cited external

factors, including rising US tariffs and a broader pushback against globalization, as key reasons for the downward revision in its Economic Outlook for the Asia-Pacific (APAC) region.

Despite these external headwinds, S&P expects strong domestic demand to drive growth in most emerging-market economies, including India. The revised forecast reflects the agency's belief that the Indian economy will maintain momentum, aided by factors such as the expectation of a normal monsoon season and softening commodity prices, particularly crude oil.

S&P highlighted several domestic factors that could support India's economic growth. These include cooling food inflation, tax benefits introduced in the national budget for FY 2025-26, and lower borrowing costs, which are anticipated to boost discretionary consumption. The ongoing economic recovery in

India is also expected to benefit from government policies designed to stimulate growth, despite the global uncertainties.

The agency also noted that central banks across the APAC region, including the Reserve Bank of India, are likely to continue cutting benchmark interest rates throughout the year, providing further support to the domestic economy.

Although the forecasted 6.5% growth is consistent with the previous fiscal year's outcome, it reflects a more cautious outlook given the global challenges. The revised growth projection underscores the balancing act facing India's economy—navigating external pressures while maintaining robust internal demand.

Boat Storm Infinity Smartwatch Launched in India With Bluetooth Calling and 15-Day Battery Life

Boat has introduced its latest smartwatch, the Boat Storm Infinity, in India, promising an extensive battery life of up to 15 days under heavy usage and up to 20 days with regular use. Launched on Tuesday, the smartwatch comes with a range of advanced features, including Bluetooth calling, an inbuilt speaker and microphone, and multiple health monitoring options. The Boat Storm Infinity is priced at ₹1,299 and is now available for purchase through Amazon, Flipkart, and the Boat Lifestyle website. It is offered in multiple band color options, including Active Black, Brown, Cherry Blossom, Deep Blue, Jade Gold, Silver Mist, Sports Black, and Sports Green. The smartwatch features a 1.83-inch rectangular display with a resolution of 240x284 pixels and a brightness level of 500 nits. It also supports a Flick-to-Wake gesture and is designed with a functional, rotating crown on the right side of the watch body. The watch has an IP68 rating, making it resistant to dust and water. One of its key highlights is Bluetooth calling support, allowing users to make and receive calls directly from the smartwatch. It also features an SOS mode to alert emergency contacts



and a Find My Device function to locate misplaced smartphones. The Boat Storm Infinity offers more than 100 preset sports modes, along with health tracking features such as heart rate monitoring, SpO2 tracking, sleep and stress monitoring, and menstrual cycle tracking. It also includes a sedentary alert and guided breathing exercises. Additional features include an alarm, stopwatch, weather updates, flashlight, games, calendar, cal-

culator, as well as music and camera controls. With a 550mAh battery, the smartwatch is claimed to provide up to 15 days of battery life with intensive use and up to 20 days with moderate usage. It supports ASAP Charge technology, which can fully charge the device in just 60 minutes. Weighing 45 grams, the Boat Storm Infinity aims to offer a blend of style, utility, and performance at an affordable price.

BYD Unveils Megawatt EV Charging System

Chinese EV giant BYD has introduced a megawatt fast-charging system, claiming it can charge electric vehicles as quickly as refueling traditional cars. With plans to establish a vast charging network across China, BYD is entering a competitive space dominated by existing fast-charging providers. Fast-charging technology has become crucial in addressing EV users' concerns about battery range and charging time, particularly for long-distance travel. Chinese automakers have been leveraging such innovations to boost EV adoption, with Tesla and other brands also offering ultra-fast charging solutions. BYD's "Super E-Platform" boasts a peak charging capacity of 1,000 kilowatts (kW), enabling vehicles to gain a 400 km (249 miles) range with-



in just five minutes. This is made possible through advanced 10C charging multiplier batteries, high-power motors, and fast chargers supporting 1,000 kW of power. In comparison, Tesla's 400-volt system caps at 250 kW for most vehicles, with exceptions like the Cybertruck and Semi, which support higher voltages. Other Chinese brands,

including Zeekr, Li Auto, and Xpeng, have also introduced fast-charging technologies that provide over 400 km of range within 10 minutes. Despite its dominance in EV sales, BYD has relied on third-party charging networks until now. With its new system requiring specialized chargers, the company plans to build over 4,000

charging stations across China. BYD founder Wang Chuanfu has also invited external investors to participate in the expansion. However, BYD faces stiff competition. Nio leads China's charging infrastructure with nearly 2,700 fast-charging stations, followed by Tesla, which has built over 2,000 sta-

tions. Li Auto, Xpeng, and Zeekr are rapidly expanding their networks, while Huawei has also entered the space with ultra-fast liquid-cooled charging piles supporting up to 600 kW. As BYD accelerates its charging infrastructure, the battle for the fastest and most accessible EV charging network in China is heating up.

Cocoa's Role in Muscle Strength The Science Behind Its Health Benefits



Cocoa is often associated with indulgent treats like chocolate cake and hot cocoa, but emerging research suggests that it offers more than just a delightful taste. According to nutritionist Michael Greger, natural, non-alkalised cocoa contains flavonoids that significantly improve blood circulation and reduce inflammation, both of which play a crucial role in muscle recovery and strength. Highlighting the benefits of cocoa for muscle health, Greger noted that older adults who consumed a tablespoon of unprocessed cocoa daily for 12 weeks saw a notable improvement in their muscle mass index. This has sparked interest in the potential of cocoa to enhance physical performance, particularly in endurance and muscle recovery. One of the key components in cocoa, a flavonoid called epicatechin, has been linked to improved blood circulation. Better circulation ensures efficient oxygen and nutrient delivery to muscles, aiding in growth and reducing fatigue. Additionally, flavonoids in cocoa contribute to enhanced mitochondrial function in mus-

cle cells, which supports muscle mass and grip strength. Beyond muscle health, cocoa is also known to benefit skin hydration. Experts suggest that less than a tablespoon of cocoa can increase circulation within the skin by 70% within two hours. Regular consumption for six months can lead to visible improvements in skin elasticity, density, and hydration, further underscoring its potential health benefits. Incorporating cocoa into a daily diet can be simple and enjoyable. From blending cocoa powder into smoothies and shakes to consuming dark chocolate with at least 70% cocoa content, there are multiple ways to harness its nutritional benefits. Hot chocolate made with minimal sugar and spices or even a healthy cocoa-based cake can serve as delicious yet beneficial options. While cocoa has shown promising results in muscle health and overall well-being, experts emphasize the importance of moderation. A balanced diet that includes all essential macronutrients and micronutrients remains crucial for maintaining long-term health.

Indiana Jones and the Great Circle Set for PS5 Release on April 17

Bethesda has officially announced that Indiana Jones and the Great Circle will launch on PlayStation 5 on April 17, with pre-orders now live. The announcement was made through an elaborate promotional video featuring voice actors Troy Baker, who plays Indiana Jones in the game, and Nolan North, the iconic voice behind Nathan Drake in the Uncharted series. The game will be available in multiple editions, including a Standard Edition, a Premium Edition, and a Collector's Edition. The Premium Edition will offer players early access starting April 15, along with exclusive content such as The Order of Giants sto-

ry DLC, a Temple of Doom outfit, a digital artbook, and a Last Crusade pack as a pre-order bonus. For collectors, the Indiana Jones and the Great Circle Collector's Edition will come with an 11-inch Great Circle globe featuring a plane magnet, an adventure journal, an Allmaker relic replica, and a Jumbo SteelBook display case. The collector's bundle will also include the Premium Edition disc and all its associated benefits. The release date trailer, which was teased by Bethesda on Sunday, featured North welcoming Baker to the "club," referencing their shared history of voicing legendary adventurers in gam-

ing. The Uncharted series, inspired by Indiana Jones films, has now come full circle with The Great Circle drawing influence from PlayStation's signature action-adventure franchise. Set between the events of Raiders of the Lost Ark and Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade, Indiana Jones and the Great Circle follows a first-person perspective, allowing players to wield the whip and take on dangerous factions in pursuit of a mysterious global power. The game originally launched on PC and Xbox Series S/X on December 9, 2024, and will now make its way to PS5 starting April 15 for Premium Edition owners.



Punjab Kings Secure 11-Run Win in a High-Scoring Thriller



Punjab Kings clinched a thrilling 11-run victory against Gujarat Titans in a high-scoring encounter, where 244 runs were piled up in an entertaining display of power hitting. While GT started cautiously, their approach seemed well-calculated, keeping wickets in hand for a late assault. However, a series of tactical errors in the death overs cost them dearly. After a steady start, Sai Sudharsan and Jos Buttler built

a strong platform, almost taking the game away from PBKS before Arshdeep Singh broke their stand by dismissing Sai. Sherfane Rutherford then took charge, accelerating the scoring rate with quick runs. But his struggles against a consistent off-side ploy proved decisive. PBKS bowlers stuck to their plan—bowling wide outside off, out of Rutherford's hitting zone—and the left-hander failed to adapt.

Despite GT needing just a few big hits to tilt the game in their favor, Rutherford repeatedly chose to slice or loft through the off-side, even though the on-side field was wide open. The absence of a deep square leg, backward square leg, and fine leg offered ample opportunities to exploit the leg-side, yet he hesitated until the very end. Looking back, that phase proved to be the turning point, as GT let a

winnable game slip away. On the bowling front, PBKS executed their strategies flawlessly. After three 17-run overs post the 10th over, Vyshak Vijaykumar stepped up and set the tone for a disciplined bowling effort. Marco Jansen followed suit, and the duo, despite not taking many wickets, applied immense pressure. Their precision with wide yorkers, even under dewy conditions, made all the difference.

BCCI Central Contracts Shreyas Iyer Set for Return Debate Over Senior Players' A+ Retention

The Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) is yet to finalize its central contracts for men, amid discussions on key changes in the A+ category following the retirement of stalwarts Rohit Sharma, Virat Kohli, and Ravindra Jadeja from T20 Internationals. The delay has sparked speculation about possible reshuffling, with differing opinions among stakeholders on the retention of senior players in the top category.

The A+ grade, offering a ₹7 crore retainer-ship, is traditionally reserved for players active across all formats. With Kohli, Rohit, and Jadeja now playing only Tests and ODIs, Jasprit Bumrah remains the lone all-format certainty. While some in the BCCI favor retaining the trio in A+, others argue for a revision based on current format participation.

In the A category (₹5 crore retainership), Ravichandran Ashwin's retirement means his exclusion is certain. Axar Patel, a key all-rounder and vice-captain for the England T20I series, is a strong contender for promotion from Grade B.

Shreyas Iyer, who missed out last season, is set to return after featuring in 11 ODIs this



year. Young talents like Yashasvi Jaiswal, Akash Deep, and Sarfaraz Khan are likely to be inducted, with their performances meeting the selection criteria. Nitish Kumar Reddy, having played the full Border-Gavaskar series and multiple T20Is, is also expected to be included.

Meanwhile, players like Shardul Thakur and Rituraj Gaikwad may miss out, as they

do not currently meet the required match count. However, the selection committee, in consultation with the head coach and secretary, retains the discretion to make exceptions.

The final contract list, expected soon, will reflect BCCI's strategic decisions regarding player retention, promotions, and future squad planning.

Chelsea Eye Permanent Jadon Sancho Deal Despite Cancel Clause

Chelsea are reportedly set to proceed with Jadon Sancho's permanent signing from Manchester United, despite having a £5 million (\$6.4 million) clause that could allow them to cancel the deal. The winger joined Chelsea on loan last August in a deal that included an obligation to buy him for £25 million.

Sancho, 24, made a promising start at Stamford Bridge but has struggled for consistency, scoring just twice in all competitions and failing to find the net since December. His lack of impact has led to speculation that Chelsea could invoke the clause to back out of the deal.

However, reports indicate the club remains committed to signing

him, believing he can recapture the form he showed during his Borussia Dortmund spell, where he played a key role in their Champions League final run. Chelsea manager Enzo Maresca has publicly praised Sancho's progress, stating he has been impressed by his performances despite his struggles.

Sancho's move to Chelsea followed a fallout with Manchester United boss Erik ten Hag, which saw him frozen out of the squad before being loaned to Dortmund in January 2024. Meanwhile, Chelsea were linked with United winger Alejandro Garnacho in January and could still look to reinforce their attacking options in the summer, even if Sancho stays.



Pant-Goenka Chat After LSG's Loss to DC Sparks Meme Fest



Delhi Capitals pulled off a thrilling one-wicket victory over Lucknow Super Giants in their IPL 2025 clash on Monday, thanks to an explosive 66-run knock from Ashutosh Sharma. However, the post-match focus shifted to an intense conversation between LSG captain Rishabh Pant, head coach Justin Langer, and team owner Sanjiv Goenka. The interaction quickly became a talking point on social media, with fans drawing parallels to Goenka's viral chat with KL Rahul after a heavy defeat in IPL 2024. Memes flooded the internet, with some jokingly speculating about Goenka's disappointment over LSG's failure to defend 210 runs. Ashutosh, making his

debut for Delhi, turned the game around after DC struggled at 65-5. His power-hitting, combined with a crucial 39-run cameo from Vipraj Nigam, guided DC to victory with three balls to spare.

Lucknow had a chance in the final over with six runs needed, but a stumping opportunity against Mohit Sharma went begging as Pant failed to collect the ball cleanly. Ashutosh capitalized on the miss, smashing a six off Shahbaz Ahmed to seal the win.

After the loss, LSG players looked dejected, while DC captain Axar Patel cheekily remarked, "Be prepared for it now. It's going to be like this only under my captaincy—things will be up and down a little."

Australia Unveils Plans for New Stadium for 2032 Olympics



Australia has announced plans for a new 63,000-seat stadium and an indoor aquatic centre as part of preparations for the 2032 Olympic Games in Brisbane. Queensland Premier David Crisafulli revealed the updated infrastructure strategy, emphasizing long-term benefits over short-term spending. "Finally, Queensland has a plan. The time has come to just get on with it. And get on with it we will," Crisafulli stated, confirming that the new stadium would be a permanent world-class venue for future sporting events. The aquatic centre, with temporary seating increasing capacity to 25,000, will host swimming, diving, water polo, and other aquatic sports. The main athletes' village will be constructed at

the Brisbane Showgrounds, with additional accommodation hubs on the Gold Coast and Sunshine Coast.

This new plan replaces an earlier proposal by the previous Labor government, which aimed to renovate the historic Gabba cricket ground and build a 17,000-seat indoor stadium. Crisafulli scrapped those ideas, arguing that billions would have been wasted on temporary venues that lacked lasting value.

In addition to the new stadium and aquatic centre, authorities have earmarked funds for upgrading smaller venues, including the Queensland Tennis Centre and the Gold Coast Hockey Centre. While specific costs have not been disclosed, Australia has set aside approximately \$4 billion for Olympic infrastructure.



With just three days left for the release of Robinhood, starring Nithiin and Sreeleela, the film's promotional campaign is in full swing. Directed by Venky Kudumula, the action-comedy has already built strong anticipation among fans. Speaking about her character Neera Vasudev, Sreeleela shared, "Neera is a girl who has returned to India from abroad and believes everything revolves around her. It's a cute, bubbly character, and I'm sure audiences will love her energy and innocence." This marks Sreeleela's second film with Nithiin, and she is excited about their on-screen chemistry. "Nithiin is down-to-earth and leads a calm, peaceful life. We've worked

hard to make sure the film connects with audiences. I believe our chemistry will make a lasting impact, and Robinhood will establish us as a hit pair." She also recalled the fun she had while filming with Vennela Kishore and Rajendra Prasad. "We couldn't stop laughing during scenes with Vennela Kishore. His comedy timing is impeccable, and those moments will be a treat for the audience. Rajendra Prasad sir is a legend—his humor adds so much to the film." With high expectations and a blend of action, comedy, and romance, Robinhood is set to hit the big screens soon, promising an entertaining ride for moviegoers.

Fans Demand One More Movie with Ram Charan; Samantha Responds!



Samantha Ruth Prabhu's career soared to new heights with Rangasthalam, where her chemistry with Ram Charan captivated audiences. Even years after its release, fans still reminisce about the duo's on-screen magic, sparking ongoing speculation about their possible reunion. During a recent event in Sydney, enthusiastic fans demanded that Samantha work with Ram Charan

again. Flashing a bright smile, she responded, "I will make that call." Her words immediately fueled excitement, adding weight to the rumors about her involvement in RC17, Ram Charan's upcoming film with Sukumar. Currently, Ram Charan is filming RC16 alongside Janhvi Kapoor, directed by Buchi Babu Sana. Following that, RC17 will mark Charan's reunion with Suku-

mar, and industry buzz suggests the director is keen on bringing Samantha back as the leading lady. After Kushi, Samantha has been focusing on her production venture Ma Inti Bangaram but has not signed any new Telugu projects as an actress. With fan demand at an all-time high, it remains to be seen whether this much-anticipated reunion will become a reality.

Aamir Khan vs Salman Khan – Who Is the Real Sikandar?

Ahead of the highly anticipated release of Sikandar, the makers surprised fans with a unique promotional stunt featuring Bollywood superstars Salman Khan and Aamir Khan. Salman Khan shared a teaser of the video, where Aamir Khan playfully asks director A R Murugadoss to decide who is the bigger "Sikandar" between the two Khans. Murugadoss' expression in response left fans intrigued. Sharing the teaser, Salman Khan wrote, "Amar Prem ka Andaz with AR Murugadoss! #SikandarMeetsGhajini." The video instantly went viral, drawing excited reactions from fans. One user commented, "Salman and Aamir. Baap of Bollywood and Mr. Perfectionist," while another called it an "unexpected collaboration." A third fan declared, "Real Sikandar Apna Bhai." Meanwhile, during the trailer launch event on Sunday, Salman Khan addressed criticism



regarding the 31-year age gap between him and his co-star Rashmika Mandanna. Responding in his signature style, he said, "If the heroine doesn't have any problem, or her father doesn't have any problem, then why do you have a problem?" His remark left the audience in splits. Not stopping there, Salman humorously added, "And when Rashmika gets married, has a

daughter, and she becomes a big star, we will still work together. We will get the mother's permission for sure." Apart from Salman Khan and Rashmika Mandanna, Sikandar also stars Kajal Aggarwal, Sathyaraj, and Sharman Joshi in pivotal roles. The film, directed by A R Murugadoss, is slated for a grand theatrical release on March 30.

Anchor Anjali Unveils the Teaser of "Lopaliki Ra Chepta"

Some films begin their journey quietly, without much hype, but manage to capture attention through unique promotional strategies after completion. "Lopaliki Ra Chepta" is one such film that is now generating buzz with its intriguing concept and fresh publicity approach. Produced under the banner of Mass Bunk Movies, the film features Konda Venkata Rajendra, Manisha Jashnani, Susmitha Anala, and Sanchirai in lead roles. Directed by Konda Venkata Rajendra and Lakshmi Ganesh, "Lopaliki Ra Chepta" is a horror-comedy entertainer. The film's teaser was unveiled today by renowned anchor Anjali, marking a significant moment as it is the first time a female anchor has launched a movie teaser. Speaking at the event, Anchor Anjali expressed her excitement, stating, "I am happy to unveil the traditional teaser of Lopaliki Ra Chepta. This is a film couples should watch together. I can assure you that the movie is perfect for both youth and family



audiences." Director Konda Venkata Rajendra conveyed his gratitude, saying, "We are delighted that senior journalist Anjali, with her kind heart, has unveiled our teaser. Our film Lopaliki Ra Chepta is crafted to entertain all sections of the audience. We will soon announce a grand pre-release event after finalizing the date and are aiming for an April release."

The film also stars Ajay Karthik, Praveen Katari, Ramesh Kaiguri, and Vani Aida in key roles. The technical team includes music by Davzand, cinematography by Revanth Levaka and Aravind Ganesh, editing by Vamsi, and PRO services handled by B. Veerababu. The film is produced by Lakshmi Ganesh Chedella and Konda Venkata Rajendra, with the story, screenplay, and direction by Konda Venkata Rajendra.

Barun Sobti Not Replacing Ankit Gupta in Terre Ho Jaayein Hum

Rumors have been rife about Ankit Gupta's exit from Terre Ho Jaayein Hum, the upcoming romantic drama produced by Ravi Dubey and Sargun Mehta. Speculation intensified after reports of Ankit's alleged breakup with Priyanka Chahar Choudhary, who was cast alongside him in the show. Addressing his exit, Ankit earlier told Bollywood Bubble, "I walked out of the project with Ravi-Sargun. I don't think I'd be able to contribute to that project

right now. Perhaps I need some time to recover and recharge myself." Soon after, reports surfaced that Barun Sobti was being considered as Ankit's replacement. However, sources close to the actor have now dismissed these claims. "These rumours are completely baseless. Barun was never approached for the role, nor will he be a part of it. He is currently occupied with his next big project with a well-known

filmmaker," the source confirmed. Barun Sobti, who has made a mark with projects like Asur, Raat Jawan Hai, and Kohrra, is also gearing up for Kohrra Season 2, set to release later this year. While fans of Priyanka and Ankit are disappointed that the duo will not be reuniting on-screen, the search for a new lead actor continues. However, all reports linking Barun Sobti to the show have been denied.

