



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

CM Rekha Gupta Presents BJP's first Delhi Budget

- ₹1 lakh crore budget, a 31.5% increase from AAP's last budget.
- ₹2,500 monthly aid for women under Mahila Samridhi Yojana.
- ₹9,000 crore for water filtration and sanitation projects.
- Free bus passes for women, installation of 50,000 CCTV cameras.
- ₹6,874 crore allocated to healthcare, including Ayushman Yojana expansion.



TPN Correspondent | New Delhi
Delhi Chief Minister Rekha Gupta on Tuesday presented the BJP-led government's first budget for the national capital in nearly three decades, unveiling a ₹1 lakh crore outlay with a focus on cleaning the Yamuna, improving public transport, women's safety, and infrastructure development.

A 'Historic' Budget with Major Focus Areas

Presenting the budget amid chants of "Modi, Modi" from BJP legislators, Gupta described it as a "historic step" towards Delhi's development, accusing previous AAP governments of financial mismanagement. "This is not an ordinary budget... Delhi was ruined in the last 10 years. Previous governments have looted the people by imposing excessive taxes. Our budget is aimed at rebuilding Delhi," she said. The ₹1 lakh crore budget is a 31.5% increase from AAP's last budget, with ₹28,000 crore allocated for capital expenditure to improve roads, ease traffic congestion, and tackle monsoon flooding.

Women's Welfare and Safety

A key highlight of the budget is the implementation of BJP's pre-poll promise to provide ₹2,500 per month to women under the Mahila Samridhi Yojana, for which ₹5,100 crore has been earmarked.

Additionally, ₹1,000 crore has been set aside to improve connectivity, and free bus passes will be issued for women. To enhance security, 50,000 CCTV cameras will be installed across Delhi.

Cleaning the Yamuna and Water Management

The budget places significant emphasis on environmental initiatives, particularly the cleaning of the Yamuna River. ₹500 crore will be invested in a decentralized network of 40 sewage treatment plants (STPs), while another ₹500 crore has been allocated for upgrading existing STPs. A total of ₹9,000 crore has been set aside for water filtration and sanitation projects, including ₹250 crore for replacing old sewer lines. Addressing Delhi's growing transportation challenges, ₹1,000 crore has been allocated for better connectivity across the city. The government has also promised to improve road conditions and ease congestion, which has been a long-standing issue.

Education Overhaul

Gupta announced the launch of CM-SHRI schools, modeled after the central PM-SHRI initiative, aligning with the National Education Policy (NEP). She also criticized the AAP government for allegedly manipulating exam results by retaining weaker students in lower

classes. As part of an education boost, 1,200 students will receive laptops, with ₹750 crore allocated for education reforms.

Healthcare and Housing for the Poor

The government has allocated ₹6,874 crore to improve healthcare infrastructure. Under Ayushman Arogya Mandir, residents will receive additional ₹5 lakh coverage beyond the existing Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (PM-JAY) limit. ₹2,144 crore has been set aside for this initiative. On housing, Gupta took a swipe at Arvind Kejriwal over allegations of extravagant spending on his official residence. "You built a 'sheeshmahal', we will build homes for the poor," she said, announcing ₹696 crore for slum cluster development and ₹100 crore for 100 Atal Canteens to provide subsidized meals. With air pollution continuing to be a major crisis in Delhi, ₹300 crore has been allocated to combat air quality issues. The government aims to implement measures to reduce pollution levels, which frequently reach hazardous levels during winter months. Gupta's budget is seen as BJP's attempt to stamp its governance model on Delhi after nearly 30 years, marking a shift in priorities with a strong emphasis on women's welfare, infrastructure, and environmental reforms.



"Supari" For Comedy?

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

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 charges, including defamation and making statements conducing 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 Sena workers vandalized the comedy venue,

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"Not Done Any Analysis": Atishi Slams Delhi Government's Budget 2025-26



TPN Correspondent | New Delhi

On Tuesday, Atishi, the Leader of Opposition (LoP) in the Delhi Legislative Assembly, criticized the Delhi government for presenting its Budget for the fiscal year 2025-26 without an accompanying Economic Survey. Atishi questioned the government's approach, pointing out that it had failed to analyze the financial situation of Delhi before drafting the Budget.

She expressed concern, saying, "Is it a good thing that they are admitting to forming a Budget

without reviewing Delhi's financial condition? This means the Delhi government has not conducted any analysis to make this Budget," she told reporters. Atishi also emphasized the unusual nature of presenting a Budget without the customary Economic Survey, which traditionally precedes such announcements.

Despite the criticism, Delhi Chief Minister Rekha Gupta, who presented the Budget, defended it as a "historic" one, describing

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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,

"Action Against Me Illegal, This Is Legal": Kangana

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 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

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Cash at judge’s house: RS Chairman calls meeting of floor leaders

Says it’s time to reiterate NJAC Act

TPN Correspondent | New Delhi

Amid growing controversy surrounding the alleged discovery of unaccounted cash at the residence of Delhi High Court Justice Yashwant Varma, Rajya Sabha Chairman Jagdeep Dhankhar on Tuesday, March 25, 2025, convened a meeting with floor leaders to discuss the issue. The meeting comes after Dhankhar’s discussions with Leader of the House JP Nadda and Leader of Opposition Mallikarjun Kharge regarding the matter.



judiciary, noting that both institutions must work within their respective realms efficiently.

Dhankhar also called for reflection on the role of Parliament, stating, “The NJAC was a visionary step, supported by Parliament and endorsed by state legislatures, and it should have been the legal framework for judicial appointments.” He urged members to consider the significance of the NJAC and its potential to have altered the current

judicial landscape had it been implemented.

While Dhankhar refrained from passing judgment on the ongoing issue, he underscored the importance of upholding the power of Parliament. He asserted that the authority of Parliament and the amendments it makes to the Constitution must be respected, and any failure to implement such amendments would raise questions about Parliament’s relevance and sovereignty.

The meeting was seen as a critical move in addressing issues that transcend the current controversy, focusing on the broader implications for the judiciary, Parliament, and the country’s legal framework.

In his statement, Dhankhar emphasized that this was an opportune time to reiterate the National Judicial Appointments Committee (NJAC) Act, which had been declared unconstitutional by the Supreme Court in 2015. The NJAC Act had been a historic initiative for judicial reforms, with Parliament and state legislatures expressing support for the law, only for it to be struck down by the judiciary.

“I have scheduled a meeting with the floor leaders to discuss the matter in detail,” Dhankhar said, rejecting a notice from Haris Beeran of the Indian Union Muslim League (IUMI) for an immediate discussion on the issue. The Rajya Sabha Chairman stressed the importance of unity between the legislature and

They Think It’s Their Birthright...’: Yogi Adityanath On Kunal Kamra Row

TPN Correspondent | Delhi

Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath criticized comedian Kunal Kamra for his “gaddar” joke about Maharashtra Deputy Chief Minister Eknath Shinde, asserting that freedom of expression should not be used to make personal attacks or divide the nation. In an exclusive interview with ANI, Adityanath emphasized that some people misuse their right to free speech to create divisions in the country, calling it an abuse of the freedom.



The controversy surrounding Kamra’s remark erupted after he referred to Shinde as a “gaddar” (traitor) in a satirical rendition of a Bollywood song during a performance at Mumbai’s Habitat Comedy Club. Kamra has stated he does not regret his joke and will only apologize if required by the court. However, he mentioned receiving 500 threatening calls following the incident. The comedian’s reference to “gaddar” was widely interpreted as a comment on Shinde’s role in splitting the Shiv Sena and aligning with the BJP, leading to the collapse of the Uddhav Thackeray-led government in Maharashtra.

In the same interview, Yogi Adityanath also

targeted the Congress party, accusing them of using foreign influence in the 2024 Lok Sabha elections. He specifically pointed to billionaire George Soros, who had previously announced his intention to bring down Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s government. Adityanath claimed that foreign money, including Soros’ financial support, played a role in attempting to influence the elections, particularly through the Congress and other parties in the opposition-led INDIA alliance. The Chief Minister called this attempt “treason.”

Adityanath further criticized the Congress-led Karnataka government for introducing a four percent Muslim quota, calling it an insult to the Constitution written by Dr. B.R. Ambedkar. His remarks reflected the ongoing political battles as the country approaches the general elections.

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“Supari” For Comedy?

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 Done Any Analysis”: Atishi Slams Delhi Government’s Budget 2025-26

it as a transformative step from a struggling economy to a “Viksit Delhi” (developed Delhi). She proudly stated that the Delhi government’s Budget for 2025-26 amounted to Rs. 1 lakh crore, a 31.5% increase from the previous year’s allocation.

Chief Minister Gupta outlined key allocations in the Budget, including Rs 5,100 crores for the Mahila Samridhi Yojana, aimed at empowering women, and Rs 28,000 crores for capital expenditure in Delhi. Gupta also proposed Rs 1,000 crores for improving connectivity with the National Capital Region (NCR).

Additionally, the Chief Minister announced plans for expanding the Ayushman Yojana with

a top-up of Rs 5 lakh for Delhi residents. A provision of Rs 2,144 crores was allocated for this initiative, alongside a reward of Rs 2,500 for women under the Mahila Samridhi Yojana.

In terms of infrastructure, Gupta allocated Rs 3,843 crores for roads and bridges, with an emphasis on women’s safety by installing over 50,000 cameras. Furthermore, Rs 696 crores were earmarked for improving basic facilities in slums and JJ colonies.

In her speech, Gupta also took aim at the previous AAP government, accusing it of letting government revenue dwindle, allegedly due to corruption involving the liquor mafia and PWD contractors.

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

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 Bombay 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.

BJP Launches Outreach Programme for Eid, Baisakhi, and Easter with “Saugat-e-Modi” Kits

TPN Correspondent| Delhi

The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) is initiating a significant outreach program targeting the Muslim, Sikh, and Christian communities, with festive kits called “Saugat-e-Modi” (gifts from Prime Minister Modi) to be distributed on the occasions of Eid, Baisakhi, and Easter. The distribution is set to coincide with the upcoming festivals, starting with Eid at the end of March, followed by Baisakhi on April 14 and Easter on April 20.



Jamal Siddiqui, BJP’s minority morcha chief, spoke to The Hindu about the programme, emphasizing that the outreach is important given the proximity of these major festivals. The move comes at a time when the government is facing criticism, particularly from sections of the Muslim community, due to the Waqf Amendment Bill. The bill has led to a boycott of Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar’s Iftaar event by key Muslim organizations, raising concerns over the treatment of minority communities.

Despite the political context, BJP officials maintain that the distribution of kits, which includes dry fruits, besan

(gram flour), semolina, sewai (vermicelli), sugar, and a salwar kameez set, is a gesture of goodwill. The kits will be given to 32 lakh individuals from the three communities, with 32,000 volunteers nationwide tasked with reaching out to 100 households each. Volunteers are also encouraged to coordinate with local mosques, gurdwaras, and churches to ensure the outreach is effective.

Mr. Siddiqui emphasized that the initiative is part of the BJP’s broader philosophy of “sabka saath, sabka vikas”

(together with all, development for all) and rejected any connection between the outreach and the Waqf Bill or upcoming Bihar elections. When asked about the cost of the programme, Siddiqui declined to provide specific financial details, stating that “gifts are priceless.”

The “Saugat-e-Modi” initiative reflects the BJP’s ongoing efforts to connect with diverse communities, reinforcing its commitment to inclusivity and development.

Allahabad HC Bar Association Begins Indefinite Strike Over Justice Varma’s Transfer

TPN Correspondent | Delhi

The Allahabad High Court Bar Association initiated an indefinite strike on Tuesday, March 25, 2025, in protest of the proposed transfer of Delhi High Court Justice Yashwant Varma to the Allahabad High Court. The protest, led by Bar Association President Anil Tiwari, began with a gathering of lawyers at gate number 3 of the court, where Tiwari emphasized that the strike was not aimed at any particular judge or court but was in response to a broader issue of corruption and lack of transparency within the judicial system.



“Our fight is against those involved in corruption and a system that lacks transparency,” Tiwari said. He further called for the reconsideration and withdrawal of Justice Varma’s transfer order. The Bar Association had voiced its opposition to the transfer on Monday, March 24, 2025, and made the decision to go on an indefinite strike starting Tuesday.

The protest gained momentum as Tiwari declared the association’s readiness to continue the fight until a resolution was reached. “From the very beginning, there has been an attempt to cover up this matter. Lawyers across India are fighting this battle. Until the issue is resolved, we will not resume work,” he said.

The Supreme Court collegium, on March 24, confirmed

its recommendation to transfer Justice Varma to the Allahabad High Court, following an inquiry into allegations surrounding the discovery of a large amount of cash at his official residence. The cash was found after a fire broke out at Justice Varma’s residence in Lutyens Delhi on March 14, prompting fire officials to intervene.

Justice Varma has strongly denied the allegations, asserting that neither he nor his family members had placed any cash in the storeroom. He has described the accusations as part of a conspiracy to frame and malign him.

Justice Varma, a permanent judge of the Allahabad High Court since 2016, was appointed to the Delhi High Court in 2021.

CM Rekha Takes Jabs at Kejriwal in Budget Speech, Targets 'Sheeshmahal' Controversy



- JP plans to turn Kejriwal’s bungalow into a museum.
- Kejriwal absent as BJP capitalizes on past controversies.
- Revives 'sheeshmahal' row in budget speech.

TPN Correspondent
| New Delhi

Delhi Chief Minister Rekha Gupta used her first budget presentation for the 2025/26 fiscal year to launch sharp criticisms at her predecessor Arvind Kejriwal and the opposition Aam Aadmi Party (AAP). During the address, which outlined a Rs 1 lakh crore budget for the city, Gupta revived the "sheeshmahal" controversy that dominated last month's election campaign, a key issue that helped the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) secure a victory.

Gupta referenced the allegations that Kejriwal misused Rs 45 crore of taxpayer money to refurbish his former residence, a controversy that heavily impacted the AAP's chances. She also accused Kejriwal of failing to fulfill his promises, de-

scribing him as "Delhi's malik (owner)" who had promised to transform the city into "London" but instead left behind traffic jams and unfinished projects.

"The difference between us is clear: you made promises, and we will fulfill them. You built the 'sheeshmahal,' while we will build homes for the poor. You spent on gold toilets, we will make toilets for the underprivileged," Gupta declared during her speech.

Additionally, Gupta announced plans to develop Delhi into a major tourism hub, with the Bharat Mandapam, a trade hall, set to be one of the key attractions. The government plans to allocate Rs 177 crore for this initiative. "We will include the 'sheeshmahal' in the tourism circuit," Gupta quipped. "We will sell tickets

and show it to the people."

Kejriwal, who lost his New Delhi seat in the February elections, was not present in the assembly to respond. The AAP's performance in the election saw a significant decline, with the party securing only 22 seats compared to over 60 in previous years. The BJP's relentless focus on the "sheeshmahal" controversy is widely seen as a significant factor in AAP's poor showing.

Gupta had previously vowed to turn Kejriwal's former residence at 6 Flagstaff Road into a museum, a promise she reiterated as she sought to capitalize on the controversy surrounding the bungalow. Parvesh Varma, who defeated Kejriwal in the New Delhi constituency, also expressed plans to personally conduct tours of the bungalow.

No damage to temple in Old Delhi

Parvesh Assures Protection of Nili Chhatri Temple Amid Anti-Encroachment Drive

TPN Correspondent| Delhi

PWD Minister Parvesh Sahib Singh visited the Nili Chhatri Temple in Old Delhi on Monday, assuring that the BJP government is committed to protecting the city's religious and cultural heritage. His visit comes days after an anti-encroachment drive was carried out in the area, which raised concerns about potential damage to the temple.

During his visit, Singh emphasized that the Nili Chhatri Temple would not be harmed in any way, asserting, "There will be no damage to the temple." This reassurance was made following the demolition drive led by the Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD) on March 17, aimed at clearing unauthorized constructions along the Yamuna riverbed.

The anti-encroachment drive targeted a 1.5-kilometer stretch, during which several illegal structures were dismantled. The MCD also seized 36 articles during the operation, which was part of a larger effort to reclaim and restore the riverbed area.

Singh's visit and statement are seen as an attempt to ease local concerns about the



impact of such drives on religious sites. The BJP government has made it clear that the protection of cultural and religious heritage remains a priority, and no damage will be allowed to any temple or other heritage site during such operations.

The drive, which was part of the ongoing efforts to address unauthorized constructions in flood-prone areas, has sparked debates about balancing development and the protection of heritage sites. The Nili Chhatri Temple, being an important religious landmark, was a point of concern for many locals who feared it might be affected by the demolition activities. However, Singh's visit and assurance have helped calm the situation, reinforcing the government's stance on preserving the city's cultural heritage.

BJP Demands Sonia and Rahul Gandhi's Resignation Over Alleged Bofors Scandal Links

Demand Sonia, Rahul's resignations as MPs



TPN Correspondent | Delhi

The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) on Tuesday intensified its attack on Congress leaders Sonia and Rahul Gandhi, citing a book by journalist Chitra Subramaniam, who is credited with exposing the Bofors scandal, to demand their resignation as Members of Parliament (MPs). The BJP's Gaurav Bhatia alleged that the revelations made in Subramaniam's book Bofors Gate raise serious concerns regarding the Gandhi family's alleged connections to Italian middleman Ottavio Quattrocchi.

Bhatia accused Quattrocchi of using his proximity to then-Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi and his wife Sonia Gandhi to influence defense deals, claiming that Quattrocchi had substantial sway over government decisions during the Bofors gun deal in the late 1980s. According to Bhatia, defense files during Rajiv Gandhi's tenure were allegedly altered at Quattrocchi's behest to benefit certain companies. He further suggested that Quattrocchi's ties with the Gandhi family helped him gain a business advantage in India.

Quattrocchi, who passed

away in 2017, was one of the prime accused in the CBI's investigation into the alleged bribery surrounding the Bofors deal. Subramaniam's investigative reporting exposed how Quattrocchi allegedly played a key role in the scandal. Bhatia pointed out that Quattrocchi's bank accounts, which were frozen by the CBI, were defrozen in 2005 under the Congress-led UPA government, a move he claimed was made at the insistence of Sonia Gandhi.

The BJP spokesperson demanded that Sonia and Rahul Gandhi resign from their parliamentary positions until they provide full disclosure about their family's dealings with Quattrocchi. He also raised concerns about the failed Rafale defense deal negotiations during the UPA's tenure, suggesting that the Gandhi family might have been seeking a personal financial stake in the deal.

Bhatia's comments were met with no immediate response from the Congress party. The BJP's allegations have reignited discussions around the controversial Bofors deal, which continues to cast a shadow over the Gandhi family's political legacy.

"Separatism History In Kashmir": Amit Shah As 2 Hurriyat Groups Severe Ties

Welcomes Hurriyat Conference Constituents' Break from Separatism



TPN Correspondent| Lucknow

Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Tuesday praised the announcement by two constituents of the Hurriyat Conference to sever all ties with separatism, calling it a significant step toward reinforcing India's unity. Shah emphasized that this move was a result of the Modi government's unifying policies, which he said have successfully "tossed" separatism out of Jammu and Kashmir.

In a statement on 'X', Shah wrote, "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." He further noted that the decision marked a victory for Prime Minister Narendra Modi's vision of a developed, peaceful, and unified India.

The Hurriyat Conference, a separatist alliance in Jammu and Kashmir, has long been a focal point of the region's separatist movement. Many of its constituent groups have been banned by the government due to their role in advocating for anti-national activities. The recent move by two of its factions to cut their ties with separatism is seen as a turning point in

the region's political dynamic.

Shah attributed this shift to the policies of the Modi government, which have focused on promoting integration and peace in Jammu and Kashmir. He highlighted that these policies have begun to yield tangible results, including the abandonment of separatist ideologies by groups that were once central to the movement. Shah urged other separatist factions to follow suit and renounce their separatist views, encouraging them to contribute to the region's peace and development.

This development is viewed as a step forward in restoring normalcy to Jammu and Kashmir, a region that has endured decades of conflict. With separatism taking a back seat, the prospect of lasting peace and stability in the region seems more achievable.

tion.

Minister Chattopadhyay confirmed that some MLAs had informed the



TPN Correspondent | Delhi

The ruling Trinamool Congress (TMC) in West Bengal has announced that strict disciplinary measures will be taken against party MLAs who have repeatedly skipped legislative sessions despite receiving a party-issued whip. TMC leaders revealed that the party's Legislative Disciplinary Committee has summoned several lawmakers to explain their absence and has directed them to appear in per-

son later this week.

The decision follows a review of the attendance records in the West Bengal Assembly, chaired by state Parliamentary Affairs Minister Sobhandeb Chattopadhyay on Monday. To monitor attendance, lawmakers are required to sign in three registers — two for ministers and one for MLAs. These records are currently being examined to identify which legislators were absent without a valid explana-

party in advance of their absence due to valid reasons, but others had failed to provide any notice. "We are compiling a list of those absent without valid reasons and will present it to the committee," he told PTI.

According to TMC sources, the party considers consistent absenteeism to be a serious issue. A senior leader stated, "This behavior reflects irresponsibility. Despite the issuance of a whip, several MLAs continue to skip

sessions. The party has decided to take strict action against them."

The issue came to light during the second phase of the budget session when the TMC issued a whip directing its MLAs to be present on March 19 and 20. However, when Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee was present in the House on March 19, many MLAs were notably absent. The following day, March 20, saw only about 90 TMC legislators in attendance.

Delhi Power Minister Hints at Possible Electricity Rate Hike to Recover ₹27,000 Crore Debt



- Discoms authorised to recover ₹27K-cr regulatory assets
- Regulatory body reviewing tariff hike petitions.
- Stakeholders to discuss electricity rates on March 27.

TPN Correspondent| New Delhi

Delhi Power Minister Ashish Sood informed the Delhi Assembly on Monday that power distribution companies (discoms) are authorized to raise electricity tariffs in order to recover ₹27,000 crore in accumulated regulatory assets. This could potentially lead to an increase in electricity prices for consumers.

Sood explained that the debt of ₹27,000 crore had accumulated over the past 10-11 years due to inefficiencies under the previous Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) government. Regulatory assets refer to costs incurred by discoms that can be recovered from consumers through future tariff hikes.

During the assembly session, while responding to a question from AAP MLA Imran Hussain, Sood stated, "The inefficiency of the previous government has burdened the people of Delhi with ₹27,000 crore in regulatory assets. To recover this, the companies are authorized to raise electricity rates." However, he also reassured the public, clarifying that the Delhi government, under Chief Minister Rekha Gupta, would not allow

any additional financial burden on consumers regarding electricity tariffs.

Sood further mentioned that during the previous government's tenure, tariff orders were supposed to be issued based on a High Court order, but the previous administration failed to protect the interests of Delhi's citizens in court. "Electricity prices may rise, but the government is closely monitoring the situation and is in touch with the Delhi Electricity Regulatory Commission (DERC) about the matter," he said.

While addressing the media after the assembly session, Sood emphasized that the BJP-led Delhi government would ensure that no extra financial burden is placed on the people, affirming that the government is committed to controlling electricity rates.

Meanwhile, a government official noted that the DERC has already initiated the annual tariff revision process and is consulting with various stakeholders, including power discoms and consumers. A public hearing on the discoms' petitions for tariff hikes is scheduled for March 27.

Delhi Government Announces Plan to Relocate Tihar Jail to Outskirts for Safety Reasons

TPN Correspondent | Delhi

Delhi Chief Minister Rekha Gupta unveiled plans to relocate Tihar Jail to the outskirts of the city, citing growing safety concerns due to its proximity to residential areas. As part of the 2025-26 budget, ₹10 crore has been allocated for surveys and consultancy services to facilitate the relocation process.

Tihar Jail, established in 1958, is one of the largest prison complexes in India, with nine central prisons spread over more than 400 acres. Located in the heart of the national capital, its proximity to densely populated residential neighborhoods has raised concerns regarding security and the potential risks associated with housing such a large facility in a busy urban area.

In her maiden budget presentation, CM Rekha Gupta emphasized that the move would address these security challenges



while providing better management of

the facility. The decision to relocate Tihar Jail is expected to improve both safety standards and the overall functioning of the prison system.

The ₹10 crore allocated in the budget will cover the cost of conducting surveys and hiring consultants to assist in identifying a suitable site on the city's outskirts for the new prison complex. Once the new location is finalized, the government aims to begin the process of relocating inmates and prison operations.

The proposal is expected to take several years to fully implement, but it marks a significant step toward modernizing Delhi's prison infrastructure and addressing long-standing concerns about the jail's location in a densely populated area. With the relocation of Tihar Jail, the government aims to improve security measures and ensure the safety of both prisoners and residents in the surrounding areas.

Delhi Traffic Police Targets Top Three Violators with Over 2000 Pending Challans



TPN Correspondent| New Delhi

Delhi's traffic police are taking strict action against repeat offenders who have gained notoriety not for their vehicle performance but for their blatant disregard of traffic rules. The top three violators, with over 2000 pending challans, have been identified for reckless driving, especially speeding, and for putting road safety at risk.

Leading the list of offenders is a private cab from Faridabad, Haryana, with 855 pending challans. A staggering 807 of these are for speeding violations (94.3%), while the rest include 43 for red light violations, 4 for stop line breaches, and 1 for improper parking. The second highest violator is another private cab, which has 637 pending challans, with 565 of them (88.6%) related to speeding. The remaining violations include 59 for jumping red lights, 9 for stop line breaches, and 4 for

improper parking. The third offender is a goods carrier, with 596 challans, nearly all of which (590) are for speeding, with the remaining 6 for red light violations.

The rising number of violations, particularly in commercial vehicles, reflects a growing concern over the safety of Delhi's roads. These vehicles, including cabs and goods carriers, are often seen weaving through traffic dangerously, as drivers rush to complete trips or meet tight delivery schedules.

Satya Vir Katara, Additional Commissioner of Police (Traffic), emphasized the importance of identifying and targeting frequent offenders. He noted, "This research is crucial. It's concerning that these drivers show such disregard for rules. A crackdown is imminent, and we are planning further actions against repeat offenders, especially commercial vehicles."

To curb the issue, Delhi Traffic Police has implemented measures such as denying entry to the city for vehicles involved in over 122 accidents in January and February. Additionally, the police have recommended that the Delhi government revoke the licenses of drivers who have been caught for three or more violations, particularly those related to dangerous driving and drunken driving. These steps are part of a larger effort to ensure road safety and hold drivers accountable for their actions.

Delhi's Air Quality Dips to 'Poor' Category, Stage I of GRAP Imposed



TPN Correspondent | Delhi

Delhi's air quality index (AQI), which had remained in the 'moderate' category for the past eight days, deteriorated and plunged into the 'poor' category on Monday. This prompted the Commission for Air Quality Management in NCR and Adjoining Areas (CAQM) to activate Stage I of the Graded Response Action Plan (GRAP), which had previously been suspended when the AQI had shown signs of improvement.

On Monday, Delhi's AQI reached 206, surpassing Sunday's reading of 194. This shift back into the 'poor' category marks the fourth such occurrence this month. In total, Delhi has experienced four 'poor' air days (AQI ranging from 201-300), 19 'moderate' air days (AQI between 101-200), and two 'satisfactory' air days (AQI between 51-100) this month.

Under Stage I of the GRAP, several measures will be implemented to reduce air pollution. These include restrictions on the use of construction

and demolition activities in non-permissible zones, and the use of coal or firewood in hotels and open eateries. The government has also urged industries to follow protocols to minimize emissions during this period.

The rise in pollution levels has been attributed to a combination of factors, including vehicular emissions, stubble burning, and weather conditions. With the onset of cooler weather, stagnant air has contributed to the accumulation of pollutants in the capital, further exacerbating the situation.

Residents have been advised to limit outdoor activities, especially individuals with respiratory conditions or those in sensitive groups, such as children and the elderly. Authorities are closely monitoring the air quality and are ready to implement additional measures if the AQI continues to worsen in the coming days.

Delhi Govt to Limit Frequency of School Uniform Changes Amid Complaints from Parents

TPN Correspondent| Delhi

In response to multiple complaints from parents regarding the rising costs of uniforms and books, the Delhi government is taking steps to address the issue by limiting how often private and aided schools can change their uniforms. Officials announced that the government plans to issue an order by Tuesday evening that will prohibit schools from altering their uniforms more than once every three years.

The decision follows concerns from parents, who have raised issues about the frequent changes in uniforms, which lead to additional financial burdens. Many families have reported that the constant updating of school attire is not only costly but also places an undue strain on their budgets, especially for larger families with multiple school-going

children.

To address these concerns, the Delhi government intends to implement this new directive across private and aided schools, aiming to reduce the financial pressure on parents. The order will require schools to maintain their current uniforms for at least three years before any changes can be made.



Government officials emphasized that the decision is being made to ensure that families are not burdened by unnecessary expenses. The new regulation aims to create a more

predictable and manageable financial environment for parents, while also encouraging schools to adopt more practical and long-term approaches when it comes to school uniforms.

This move is part of the Delhi government's ongoing efforts to address issues related to education and the affordability of schooling. The government has pledged to continue monitoring the situation to ensure that schools are adhering to the new guidelines and to respond to any further concerns from parents.

By limiting the frequency of uniform changes, the Delhi government hopes to alleviate some of the financial pressures on parents, while also promoting fairness and stability in the education system.

Delhi To Host First-Ever Global Investment Summit, Announces CM Rekha Gupta



TPN Correspondent | Delhi

Delhi Chief Minister Rekha Gupta presented the first-ever budget of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) govern-

ment in 27 years, with a total outlay of Rs 1 lakh crore for the fiscal year 2025-26. Describing the budget as "historic," Gupta highlighted ten key focus areas aimed at rejuvenating the

national capital's infrastructure and economy, which she claimed had suffered under the previous government's rule over the past decade.

In her maiden budget speech, Gupta, who also holds the finance portfolio, emphasized that the budget marks a critical step towards restoring Delhi's development after what she described as years of economic deterioration. "This is not an ordinary budget; it is the first step to develop Delhi, which was ruined in the past 10 years," she said, accusing the previous government of undermining the capital's growth.

Industrial Development and Investment Promotion
One of the major components of the budget is industrial development and

investment promotion. Gupta announced initiatives aimed at making Delhi an investment- and innovation-friendly city. Among the plans, she outlined the creation of a Traders' Welfare Board, a new industrial policy, and a new warehouse policy. The budget also includes the launch of Delhi's first-ever Global Investment Summit, which will be held biennially. To support small-scale industries, Rs 50 crore has been allocated for skill development programs, including beekeeping.

Other Key Focus Areas
The budget also places emphasis on the cleaning and rejuvenation of the Yamuna River, with Rs 500 crore allocated for this purpose. This initiative aims to ensure that only treated water enters the river by decentralizing

40 sewage treatment plants (STPs), drawing inspiration from the Sabar-mati riverfront project.

In the health sector, a total of Rs 6,874 crore has been earmarked, focusing on the establishment of health and wellness centers and expanding the Ayushman Arogya Mandir initiative. Furthermore, the education sector sees an allocation of Rs 100 crore for the launch of CM SHRI Schools, which are aligned with the New Education Policy and inspired by the PM SHRI Schools.

The budget aims to address a range of issues including infrastructure, water, roads, and connectivity, marking a significant step in the BJP government's vision for a revitalized Delhi.

Tamil Actor and Karate Instructor Shihan Hussaini Passes Away at 65

TPN Correspondent | CHENNAI

Shihan Hussaini, a renowned Tamil actor, karate instructor, and archery advocate, passed away early on Tuesday, March 25, 2025, at his home in Besant Nagar, Chennai, after a brief battle with blood cancer. He was 65 years old.

Hussaini, who was also the founder and longtime general secretary of The Archery Association of Tamil Nadu (TAAT), is remembered for his significant contributions to the growth of archery in the state. He helped transform the sport from a niche activity into a thriving discipline, training numerous champions who went on to represent Tamil Nadu and India at various levels.

The Archery Association of Tamil Nadu expressed deep grief over his passing, with spokesperson Ashwin Kumar Iyer describing him as an irreplaceable figure in the world of archery. "With profound grief, TAAT announces the passing of Shihan Hussaini. He succumbed to blood cancer after a courageous battle, leaving behind an irreplaceable void," Iyer said in

a statement.

Known affectionately as "Hu," Hussaini was also a multi-talented individual who excelled as a sculptor, painter, and martial arts inspiration. He motivated hundreds of young people to take up karate



and archery. Despite battling leukemia, he made the noble decision to donate his body to medical research, further contributing to his legacy.

His funeral will take place in his hometown of Madurai after his body is kept at his Besant Nagar residence, affectionately known as "The High Command," for students and others to pay their respects. Hussaini's family invited his students to honor him with a special ceremony, where archers will shoot arrows and karatekas will perform katas in his memory.

In addition to his martial arts and archery expertise, Hussaini made his mark in the Tamil film industry, debuting with Kamal Haasan's Punnagai Mannan in 1986. He also appeared in several notable films, including Velaikaran, Bloodstone, Badri, and Kaathuvaakula Rendu Kaadhal.

Hussaini's death marks the end of an era in Tamil Nadu's martial arts and archery communities, leaving behind a legacy of passion, perseverance, and inspiration.

Wayanad landslides: Kerala Govt Clears Way for Township Foundation Stone at Elstone Estate

TPN Correspondent | Kozhikode



The Kerala High Court's decision not to intervene in the state's acquisition of Elstone Tea Estates land in Wayanad has paved the way for the foundation stone laying ceremony of a new township intended to rehabilitate survivors of the Chooralmala-Mundakkai landslides. Kerala Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan is scheduled to lay the foundation stone on March 27, 2025, with Priyanka Gandhi Vadra, Wayanad MP, expected to attend the event at the Elstone Estate.

The township project will be constructed on approximately 65 hectares of land. The Kerala government has proposed compensating the estate owners with ₹26 crore, though the owners had earlier raised concerns, claiming the compensation was too low compared to the current market value of the land. Initially, the government had planned to acquire land from both Elstone Tea Estates and Nedumpala Estate for the township, but the scope was reduced to the Elstone land in the first phase.

Despite the legal challenges from the estate owners, Revenue Minister K. Rajan confirmed in the Assembly that

the foundation stone ceremony would proceed on March 27. While there were concerns about a potential court ruling against the project, the government was prepared to hold a symbolic event if necessary.

The first phase of the rehabilitation will benefit 242 families, with 235 beneficiaries submitting consent letters as of March 24. Among these, 170 families have opted for single-floor houses in the new township, while others have requested financial aid of ₹15 lakh. The township will include essential facilities such as a health center, anganwadi, community center, and a market. The title deeds of the new homes will be non-transferable for 12 years.

However, the acquisition has sparked protests from around 300 laborers employed at Elstone Tea Estates. Led by the Wayanad Estate Labour Union, the workers are demanding fair compensation, highlighting unpaid provident fund contributions since 2014 and unpaid gratuity for 150 retired workers.

Mumbai's CSMIA Sees 19% Increase in Southeast Asia Passenger Traffic in 2024

TPN Correspondent | Mumbai

Mumbai's Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj International Airport (CSMIA) has experienced a significant 19% surge in passenger traffic to Southeast Asia in 2024, following the easing of visa processes in December 2023. Authorities reported that 2.51 million passengers flew to Southeast Asian destinations this year, compared to approximately 2.10 million in 2023, highlighting a growing demand for travel to the region.

According to a CSMIA spokesperson, the most popular destinations for travelers from Mumbai included Singapore, Bangkok, and Kuala Lumpur, all of which saw the highest passenger traffic. The surge in traffic is attributed to the recent improvements in visa procedures, which have made travel to these countries more accessible and convenient for passengers.

Currently, CSMIA provides connectivity to five Southeast Asian countries—Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand, Singapore, and Vietnam—offering 133 weekly flights. This extensive network enables passengers from Mumbai to easily access a variety of destinations across the region.

The rise in passenger traffic underscores the increasing appeal of Southeast Asia as a travel destination for Mumbai's residents. With stronger connectivity and more streamlined visa processes, the region has become an even more attractive option for business, tourism, and leisure travel. Authorities at CSMIA are optimistic that the trend will continue as demand for international travel grows, driven by both tourism and business opportunities in Southeast Asia.

Telangana: Second body found and extricated at SLBC site one month after tunnel collapse



TPN Correspondent | Bahraich (UP)

More than a month after the partial collapse of the Srisailem Left Bank Canal (SLBC) tunnel, rescue teams on Tuesday (March 25, 2025) recovered the remains of one of the missing workers. The body was extricated from the accident site and identified as Manoj Kumar, a Project Engineer from Uttar Pradesh.

The recovery operation continues, with officials reporting that another body is be-

ing brought out from the site. According to a senior officer, the body was found near a stuck loco bogie in the muck between the end point of the loco and D2. The remains were sent to Nagarkurnool district headquarters hospital for a post-mortem examination. Following identification, the body will be handed over to the family for final rites in Uttar Pradesh.

This marks the second body recovered in the wake of the tragic accident. The first body, identified as Gurpreet Singh, a Tunnel Bore Machine (TBM) operator from

Punjab, was found earlier on March 9. With these two bodies found, six more workers remain missing, and rescue efforts are ongoing.

The Telangana government has pledged to continue the search for the remaining workers. Chief Minister A. Revanth Reddy recently held a high-level review of the operation, urging that the efforts continue until all the missing personnel are located. The government has appointed Shiva Shanker Lotheti as a special officer to oversee the ongoing rescue efforts and has formed an expert committee to provide guidance.

In total, more than 700 personnel from 25 agencies, including 11 from the Government of India, have been involved in the rescue operations, which have already required over 105,000 man-hours. The last 30 meters of the tunnel are considered particularly hazardous, and experts have recommended a scientific study by the Geological Survey of India (GSI) and the National Geophysical Research Institute (NGRI) to determine the best approach for safely accessing this portion.

Meanwhile, the family of Manoj Kumar will receive an ex-gratia payment of ₹25 lakh from the government as part of the support for the deceased worker's relatives.

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"

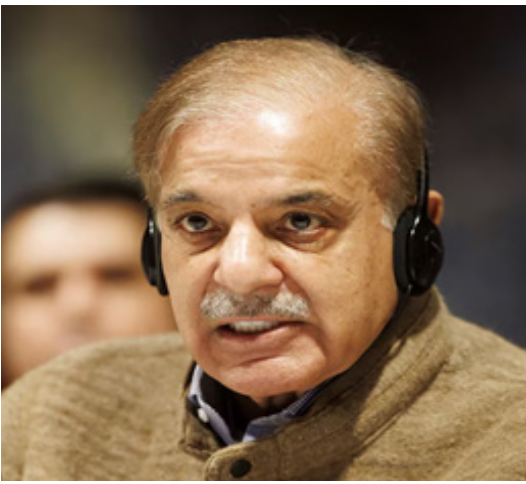


and clapping as part of her fitness routine. This moment resonated with her health-conscious approach, having previously jogged in a saree and slippers during her official visit to Spain in 2023. Her message, "Stay fit, stay healthy," continues to inspire others to adopt a fitness-friendly lifestyle.

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

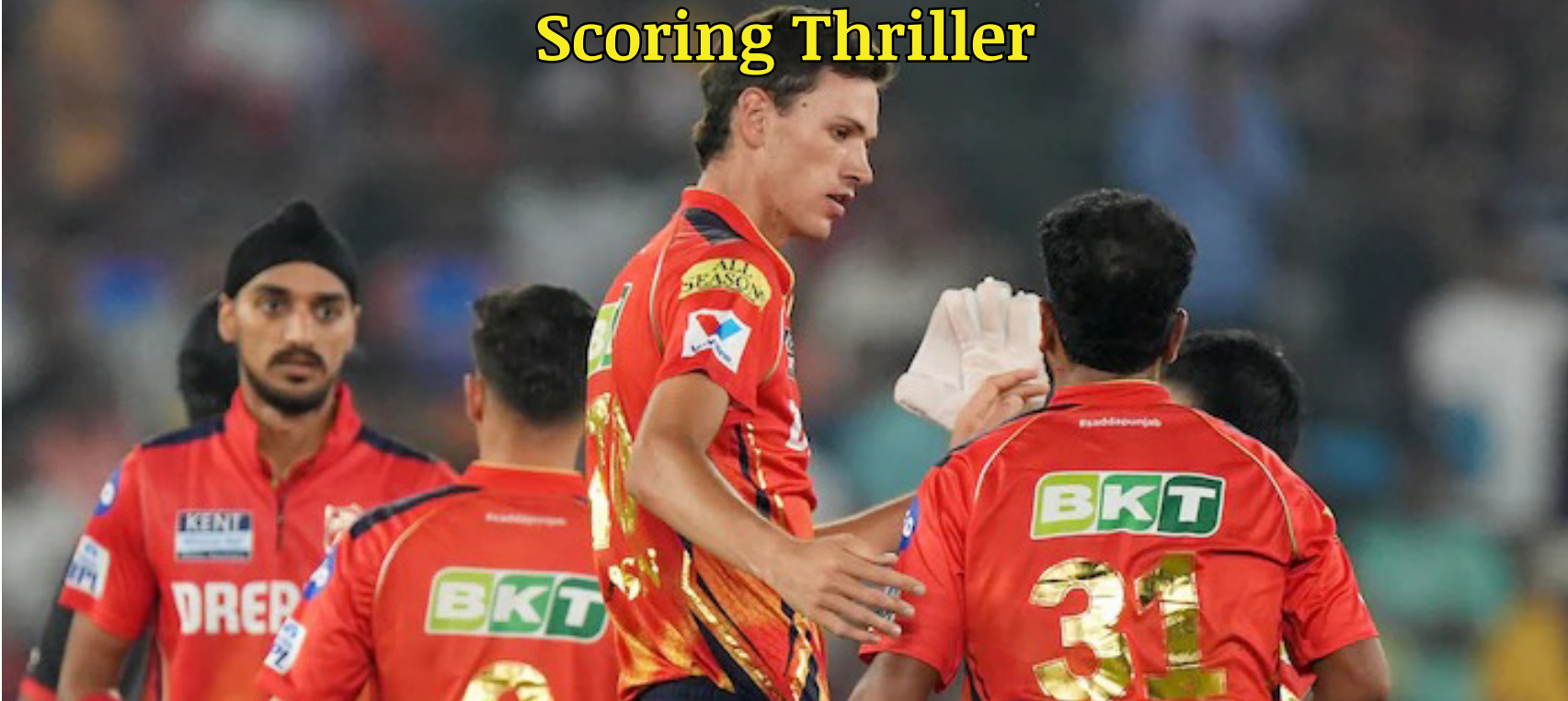
Bethesda has officially announced that Indiana Jones and the Great Circle will launch on PlayStation 5 on April 17, with pre-orders now live. The announcement was made through an elaborate promotional video featuring voice actors Troy Baker, who plays Indiana Jones in the game, and Nolan North, the iconic 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, Sathiyaraj, 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.

